

Chan Obe, Stephen

**Working Paper**

## Mercy and the structures of the world: Third Hans Singer Memorial Lecture

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Deutsches Institut für  
Entwicklungspolitik



German Development  
Institute

Discussion Paper

14/2011

# Mercy and the Structures of the World

*Stephen Chan OBE*

Third Hans Singer Memorial Lecture on Global Development



# Mercy and the Structures of the World

Stephen Chan OBE

Third Hans Singer Memorial Lecture on Global Development  
Conference Proceedings

7 November 2011

German Development Institute /  
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Sir **Hans W. Singer**

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## Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Sir **Hans Wolfgang Singer**

(born 29 November 1910 in Wuppertal; deceased 26 February 2006 in Brighton),

a renowned international economist and one of the most influential development practitioner of the 20th century has studied in Bonn and graduated from the Economics Department of the University of Bonn in 1932. Being Jewish, he fled the Nazi terror in 1933 and settled in the United Kingdom.

After World War II, in 1947, he became an influential development scholar with the United Nations (UN) for two decades. During his time at the UN Hans Singer was a significant driver of establishing important organisations like UNDP, UNICEF and the World Food Programme. The main scientific finding of Hans Singer is the Singer-Prebisch Thesis, which states that the terms of trade for commodity exporting developing countries tend to deteriorate over time. From 1969 until his death he joined the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex.

In commemoration and in honour of Sir Hans Singer the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS, University of Sussex) have established the “Hans Singer Memorial Lecture on Global Development”. The Lecture alternates between Bonn and Brighton on an annual basis. The first Memorial Lecture was given 2009 in Bonn by Prof. Dr. Paul Collier, CBE, University of Oxford on “Hans Singer's Legacy: The Problem of Commodity Exporters Revisited” (see: Discussion Paper 15/2009). The second Memorial Lecture took place 2010 in Brighton and was given by Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant Secretary General, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) on “Hans Singer, Economic Development, Crisis, Recovery and the United Nations”. The Third Memorial Lecture was given by Professor Dr. Stephen Chan of the School of Oriental & African Studies at University of London on 7 November 2011 in Bonn.



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## **Hans Singer – one of the 20th century’s outstanding development researchers**

*Dr. Thomas Fues*

The “Hans Singer Memorial Lecture on Global Development” is a joint initiative of the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) and the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex) to honour one of the twentieth century’s most influential European development researchers, whose academic career began at the University of Bonn. It was in Bonn that he was to acquire his first academic degree, in economics, in 1931. He had already gained the support of Joseph Schumpeter, at that time a professor of political economics in Bonn, for his planned doctoral studies. However, Schumpeter, who was later to achieve eminence in his field, soon left Bonn for a position at Harvard University. Singer was in the midst of writing a new dissertation when he was forced to flee the National Socialist terror regime because of his Jewish background. In 1934 he arrived, by a roundabout way, in the UK, where he was soon to become a member of the group of Cambridge scholars around John Maynard Keynes.

Since World War II, Sir Hans Singer – he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1994 – shaped, in key ways, both the academic debate on the countries of the South and the practice of development policy. From 1947 to 1969, Hans Singer held a number of prominent posts in the United Nations’ development sector. From 1969 to 2006, the year of his death, he was a member of the teaching and research staff of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in Brighton. Hans Singer devoted the better part of his life to efforts to give the economic sciences a new, emphatically moral orientation geared to practical applications and advisory work. That may be the reason why he has, until today, received relatively little recognition in his own discipline, that is, outside the field of development studies.

It was at the United Nations that Hans Singer developed his widely acclaimed theory on the long-term deterioration in the terms of international trade for developing countries specialised in the export of primary products, the so-called Prebisch-Singer Thesis, a hypothesis that has since become a core element of international economics. According to the Prebisch-Singer Thesis, integration into the world economy on the basis of exports of agricultural and mineral commodities works to the detriment of this group of countries, while at the same time the industrialised countries stand to benefit, disproportionately and systematically, from international trade. Hans Singer identifies the root structural cause of this interdependency, with its alarming implications for development policy, in institutional disparities in the labour markets of developing and industrialised nations. In connection with a mission to Kenya in the early 1970s that he headed, together with the renowned development scientist Sir Richard Jolly (IDS), on behalf of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Hans Singer also published some pioneering findings with immediate relevance for development practice. Together, the two development researchers developed the innovative idea of redistribution with growth, a concept that involved a reassessment and acknowledgement of the informal productive sector.

Alongside the theoretical impulses he provided for development research, Hans Singer published a number of key conceptual contributions bearing on the development and qualification of international institutions, most of them part the United Nations system, including the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme

(WFP), the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD).

The prodigious list of Hans Singer's publications bears witness to an extraordinary creative power and at the same time serves to document the breadth of the interests that accompanied him in the course of his scholarly career, encompassing a period of over 70 years. He held his last lecture, on the origin of the 0.7 percent goal set for development policy, one week before his ninety-fifth birthday. It was no doubt his own biography that induced Hans Singer to work unceasingly for social justice, human development, and poverty alleviation, which he saw as the central concerns of scholarship and politics. He furthermore trusted in the ability of international institutions, and the United Nations in particular, to create and sustain peace.

Hans Singer received broad international recognition and was honoured on numerous occasions; a total of five commemorative publications were dedicated to him in his lifetime. In Germany, the University of Freiburg awarded him an honorary doctorate in 2004.

## **Hans Singer –the Gentle Giant**

*Sir Richard Jolly*

Hans Singer was a gentle giant. His intellectual leadership and extraordinary energy issued from a small man, of modest appearance and mild-mannered stance, head often cocked to one side, bushy eyebrows with a friendly but questioning smile. He was loved and deservedly feted for his visionary and creative thinking, bold, innovative and positive in contrast to his gracious and unassuming style and total disregard for outward appearances. When he was preparing to receive his knighthood from the Queen, he considered for several weeks whether he should wear his old suit or buy a new one. In the end, he bought a new one – from Marks and Spencer!

In the UN he was widely known and admired for his outstanding professional qualities, his ready willingness to help and his scrupulous avoidance of gossip and infighting. The old guard of the UN remembered Hans as one who had maintained his integrity even while he was singled out for personal attack by Senator McCarthy (for his work on SUNFED, the proposed Special UN Fund for Economic Development). Indeed, because of these pressures on him, Hans Singer resigned from the UN in 1953 and was on the point of leaving when Dag Hammarskjöld, newly appointed as the Secretary-General, directly appealed to Singer to stay which, fortunately for the UN, he did.

I was privileged to know Hans for over 42 years – from 1963, when, as a graduate student collecting data for my thesis, I shared a house with Hans for two months in Addis Ababa. In 2005, a week before his 95th birthday, I chaired his last lecture in IDS, when he spoke to some 60 or 70 graduate students.

In 1936, when he had just obtained his doctorate and been part of the outer circle round John Maynard Keynes in Cambridge, Hans was asked to undertake the study of unemployment in Britain – which later was published as *Men without Work*. For this, Hans lived for some months with unemployed families in six towns of Britain, learning informally in the evening the human costs of unemployment. I wonder how many students would do this today, after they had studied under one of the most famous economists of the century?

In 1947–1948, after Hans had started work on the terms of trade, he was asked by Maurice Pate, the Executive Director of UNICEF, to write a paper on Economic Development and Children. Hans Singer put aside his trade work for several months to write what became UNICEF's first report on *The Role of Children in Economic Development*. Many times over his lifetime, Hans came back to issues of children – opportunities for improving nutrition in Kenya and Young Human Resources in Korea in the 1970s, the Impact of World Recession on Children in the 1980s. Hans gave advice when in UNICEF we published *Adjustment with a Human Face* in 1987. It was typical for Hans to drop work on the conventional for what he considered more important – though unconventional.

Thirdly, Hans was never one to pontificate on developing countries at a distance. Alec Cairncross, at one time the head of the UK's Government Economic Service, commented as follows: *“Hans's life has been anything but cloistered. He has made frequent journeys half around the world. There are few of the developing countries that he has not visited*

*and still fewer that he has not advised. He must have addressed a wider variety of academics in a wider variety of places about a wider range of subjects than any other economist, living or dead. He has moved from continent to continent, expounding, advocating, and devising strategies of economic development. His influence has been felt as much by word of mouth in the succession of countries where he has lectured as through the pile of working documents and published reports that survive like spoor from his travels.”*

Finally, as adviser or consultant, Hans’s strength was his willingness to listen and his total concentration on the problem and needs as felt by the agency or group he was advising. It was this which made him the economist of choice of so many parts of the UN – UNICEF, WFP, ECA, UNRISD, UNIDO, ILO and many others. My former colleagues in UNICEF always thought that Hans was special consultant to them – unaware that half a dozen other UN agencies were thinking the same.

How does one assess the longer term impact of a person like Hans Singer? In the UN Intellectual History Project, we have identified four ways in which ideas and their originators have impact:

- By influencing the ways that issues and situations are perceived;
- By defining agendas for action;
- By helping build alliances for change, which help mobilize NGOs and other groups to press for action;
- By becoming embedded in some new or existing institution, which is given the mandate to carry forward the ideas into action.

In all these ways, Hans Singer’s life as a development economist had real impact. But there is a fifth way, as John Shaw has made clear in his excellent biography<sup>1</sup>:

- By inspiring the next generation to emulate his example.

Hans Singer has provided more than enough stepping stones to help all of us along the path.

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1 D. John Shaw, *Sir Hans Singer: The Life and Work of a Development Economist* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan) 2002

## **Mercy and the Structures of the World**

*Professor Stephen Chan OBE*

This lecture is an effort to sketch a moral equivalent to the broad thrust of the Singer-Prebisch approach to the economic universe.<sup>2</sup> It cannot be as elegant or exact. There is no successful modelling of a moral universe that has been contentious since its first imagination. That last word is itself key: the economic universe has a conception, and the moral universe is imagined – even if afterwards rendered in conceptual languages.

The lecture proceeds by way of four propositions:

1. What might, in this argument, be called ‘poor’ countries cannot assert the value of their philosophies, religious and political beliefs, or thought processes when, all the time, the response of ‘rich’ countries – ‘rich’ being applied to both economic and geopolitical structures of dominance – is to retain and expand the hegemonic nature of their own philosophies and beliefs.
2. There is an irony here in that, very often, the philosophies of ‘poor’ countries are richer in history, generations of re-imagination and refinement, with multiple paradigm shifts and complex contentions, than those of ‘rich’ countries – and have, in some cases, been the guardians and transmitters of what the ‘rich’ now take as their own. The philosophies of the ‘poor’ have more ‘manufacture’ within them than those of the ‘rich’ whose dominance is set within a project of increase.
3. However, even so, precisely because there is contention and identifiable histories – not sufficient to render the fabled ‘clash of civilisations’, but sufficient to render perceptible differences which require transaction by debate without the guarantee of agreement – it may be argued that the moral universe, albeit with one dominant structure, has within it several discrete and contentious structures.
4. The dominant structure nevertheless seeks to marshal differences according to its own preferences and convenience and, in a world of great economic and social inequalities, hegemonically rations mercy. The enlightened struggle of those within all structures is to work towards the equality of different philosophical and cultural structures, while seeking to ‘manufacture’ as many interim mercies of as comprehensive and unrationed a nature as possible.

What is profoundly required in views of the world, and actions in the world today is, therefore, the moral duty of imagination to seek equality without uniformity, commonality without universalism, and mercy without preconditions.

Firstly, however, note should be taken of Edward Said’s critique of Samuel Huntington’s contention that there looms a clash of civilisations.<sup>3</sup> Said made the point that Huntington

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2 See John Shaw, *Sir Hans W. Singer: The Life and Work of a Development Economist*, London: Palgrave, 2002.

3 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. See Stephen Chan, *Too Neat and Under-Thought a World Order: Huntington*

had taken a generalisation, a ‘civilisation’, as an iron-cast and differentiated given; and had ignored a long and rich world history of inter-permeations, cultural influences, adoptions and adaptations, and common heritages. Everything, in Said’s view, has been sufficiently and comprehensively penetrated by several ‘others’ to render the idea of a discrete ‘civilisation’ merely notional.<sup>4</sup> I shall return to this, but make the point at this stage that Said misdiagnosed the audience for whom Huntington wrote. Huntington sought a realignment of foreign policy emphases. He wrote for policy-makers and those interested in foreign policy not as a philosophical, historical, global socio-anthropological investigation – as a genealogy – but as an instrumental and ideological device. Within the methodologies of this device, a ‘civilisation’ fitted the same rubric as an oppositional superpower, as a writ-large state, as a unit within a dyadic formulation, as something able to be weighted in a calculation, in a game of probabilities and predictions.

How such probabilities are weighed and how predictions are made is the subject of a vast literature. Allison proposed three models of foreign policy formulation, but what was common to them all was particularly so as he was studying an episode in US policy, and that was a common starting point in US interests.<sup>5</sup> Granted that in Allison’s key example of the Cuban missile crisis the US invoked its interests since it felt it was threatened, but it is rare even today in Washington DC for any think-tank to propose a world view anchored on a global commons; US interests are still the key and weighty anchor. Huntington’s thesis was an interesting variation of a ‘splendid isolation’ policy, where core homeland US interests could be safeguarded, if need be, by circling the wagon train and deeming the horsemen on the plains wild Indians, or, following only slightly earlier US intellectual conceits, ‘First Men’ of wild and antagonistic dispositions. There was no proposal to seek to understand, engage with, interact with, learn from – empathetically comprehend – the wild men of bestial *thymos*.<sup>6</sup>

The vast conceit of almost fundamentalist rigour that US interests are paramount, eliding into an assertion of the primacy also of US values, has dominated the world. The marginalisation of the rest of the world, unless it subscribes also to these values, and its diminution in scales of moral and political culture if it doesn’t, is a remarkable phenomenon. Alexander at least allowed himself to be conquered by the cultures of those he conquered only militarily.<sup>7</sup> It is a most mono-self-conscious Roman *imperium* that seeks to bestride the world today.

Precisely, however, of this mono-mania, I wish to propose an interesting variation of the Singer-Prebisch theory. The theory said that those rich countries that dealt in manufactures were finally triumphant because manufacture accorded them greater flexibilities in economic policy than those dependent on unprocessed commodities. In my suggested moral equivalent, the philosophies of the ‘poor’ have histories and recent conditions of

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*and Civilizations, Millennium*, 26(1), 1997, 137–40; and Huntington’s response, ‘The Clash of Civilizations: A Response’, in the same issue, 141–2.

4 Edward Said both wrote and lectured against a clash, and the lecture was caught on a series of *Youtube* fragments. For the complete lecture text, see [www.mediaed.org/assets/products/404/transcript\\_404.pdf](http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/404/transcript_404.pdf)

5 Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision*, Boston: Little Brown, 1971.

6 A term borrowed by Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, London: Penguin, 1992.

7 While furthering his Aristotelian scientific experiments dressed in full ‘native’ regalia. See Miskin’s 1595 painting of Alexander in a submarine in Roy C. Craven, *Indian Art*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1997, 205.

greater flexibility than those that look at the world only through their own eyes and the lenses of their own interests.

*Proceeding by propositions: One*

When one looks at the 2011 Freedom House divisions of the world into ‘Free’, ‘Partly Free’, and ‘Not Free’, one is struck that apart from those countries that were once part of the Soviet Union – Russia and the now independent eastern European republics and those in the Transcaucasia – every single ‘Not Free’ country is populated by non-white communities;<sup>8</sup> a majority of them are not Christian and, of those who are Christian (mainly in Africa), many have significant non-Christian communities or prominent systems of syncretic and charismatic belief. In fact, most of the ‘Not Free’ countries are indeed not free in terms of citizens being able to express and organise themselves and change their governments. In some cases – Egypt before 2011 being a prime example – the ‘Not Freeness’ was actively and financially supported by the United States. The interesting cases are in the ‘Partly Free’ category. Most of South America is in this category, and certain parts of Africa – including Zambia, notwithstanding its historical struggle against white racism in its southern neighbours,<sup>9</sup> its pioneering path in establishing multi-party elections in 1991,<sup>10</sup> its regular conduct of elections, its robust independent press, its regular publication of political satire<sup>11</sup> and burgeoning publication of didactic novels which are thinly-disguised political programmes,<sup>12</sup> and its recent history of (albeit largely unsuccessful) efforts to prosecute a former President for corruption. One of the curious aspects of Zambian political life is a political vocabulary which crosses-over into the born-again, charismatic, Pentecostal-style Christian vocabulary.<sup>13</sup> It’s as if the US House of Representatives was the site of a Southern Baptist revival. But it also makes the nature of political discourse opaque. One is excused from public wickedness because one is privately in communion with God. One is wicked but one is exonerated. One is not wicked because one deserves the fruits of wickedness because one is blessed by God. If not a self-deceit, it is certainly a public deceit which acts against equity and transparency and public responsibility by way of probity and example. In this way – with political discourse, even at highest levels, opaque - Zambia is indeed only partly free; its political processes are only partly transparent; but, despite being ostensibly a Christian country, it is not understood by the US and the Freedom index. The array of cultural factors I have briefly mentioned cannot be itemised and quantified for the Index. I labour this example to ask the question as to how much more misunderstood, or not understood, are non-Christian countries.

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8 Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2011*, Washington, DC, 2011.

9 Stephen Chan, *Kaunda and Southern Africa: Image and Reality in Foreign Policy*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1992.

10 Stephen Chan, *Prospects for the 1991 Elections in Zambia*, Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs, 1991; John M. Mwanakatwe, *End of Kaunda Era*, Lusaka: Multimedia, 1994.

11 Roy Clarke, *The Worst of Kalaki*, Lusaka: Bookworld, 2004.

12 Ranka Primorac, ‘The Modern City and Citizen Efficacy in a Zambian Novel’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 44(1), 2008, 49–59.

13 Ranka Primorac, ‘Cosmopolitan and Social Change in a Zambian Thriller’, *Research in African Literature*, 41(3), 2010, 49–61.



So that, when the Cairo Spring of 2011 began, the US administration had no initial idea as to how to understand it and how to deal with it. In part, this lay in its deep but un-nuanced view of the Muslim Brotherhood. Ostensibly, the Egyptian army was a sworn enemy of the Brotherhood, but this was as much the antipathy one national institution feels against another as anything else. It was a bitter rivalry, not necessarily a hatred, and it now seems the Brotherhood and the army may co-exist in a negotiated amity. But the US and general Western view of the Brotherhood was based on an early stage of its formation, when it did clash violently with the militarised state. In the decades since then, it has evolved and, albeit conservatively, partakes in a wider discourse than ‘fundamental Islam’ would by itself (if ever such a thing existed by itself) allow. It has its own factions and derivatives, and is cousin to other movements that also began years ago, and in all of them theological questions are asked and debates on liberalism and on the mix between secular and religious conducted.<sup>14</sup> So that the Brotherhood is more prepared to be part of a secular government than many expected. Antipathy arises from the young more purely secularist protesters in the Cairo Spring who view the Brotherhood as benefitting from their courage and defiance – but the young protesters themselves benefitted from the example of opposition long established by the Brotherhood. Like Turkey, Egypt promises to be a shifting mix of secular, non-secular, civilian and military, under a secular constitution with democratic provisions that may or may not be fully enacted. What has been introduced into Egyptian politics is the need for greater flexibility and public accommodations on the part of all interested players. That kind of mix, with its confessional element, never featured in a Western outlook for Egypt – and was not desired, the confessional element making predictability difficult. The West is declarative about the need for secular democracy, but it plans on the basis of maintaining what it sees as desirable ‘certainties’.

This is not to disclaim genuine elements of concern about the Brotherhood, nor to give them a place by right – their place is essentially being negotiated with the military – but it is to say that we are seeing the emergence of something complex and something that will be tested over time and continue to change. It might be accommodated in policy minds as a ‘fixed variable’, but not again as something simply ‘fixed’. The word ‘variability’ and the flexibility it connotes is what concerns us here, as well as its emergence from definitional fixedness.

*Propositions: Two*

It is not just the US and the West that has had difficulty with shifting variables in foreign policy and its predictive capacity. China, a self-declared friend of the emerging world, has also sought to see that world through singular lenses. Since the Bandung Conference of 1955 it has continually expressed a doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of what became the non-aligned world. In the 1970s, China sought, through its ‘Three World Theory’, to assume a leadership position of the emerging world, premised on the assumption that there was an overriding commonality based on resistance to US and other superpower hegemony.<sup>15</sup> But the division of the world into three blocs, three ‘worlds’, only served to consolidate variabilities within three definitional matrices. It was not

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14 Raymond William Baker, *Islam Without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003.

15 Stephen Chan, ‘China’s Foreign Policy and Africa: The Rise and Fall of China’s Three World’s Theory’, *The Round Table*, 296, 1985, 376–384.

dyadic, except insofar as it proposed the protection of Chinese interests in the face of the globe, but it was curiously tryadic – a complicated improvement on a world of dyads – but one where every state in the ‘third world’, whether Afghanistan or Vietnam, had an ascribed commonality. When, in 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, and the Chinese were powerless to intervene, and China itself invaded Vietnam, the assumption of commonality fell away.

China has to this day not fully developed its capacities for judgement and assessment of variabilities. Its investment profile in Africa is hazardous and takes long-term risks over which it has no control, and which it has not actually researched. A single macro-analysis of overall profitability covers all of Africa. But that means Chinese panic when China itself becomes an election issue in Zambia; it means unreadiness when the Angolan Government seeks to renegotiate loan repayments with the trump card of its petroleum resources as a decisive factor in inducing (reluctant but inevitable) Chinese agreement;<sup>16</sup> it means a lack of understanding of Islamic revivalism, of the Egyptian Brotherhood, and it means a lack of appreciation – much as in the US – of the intellectual currents within the Iranian revolution.

Those currents, though perverted in the power struggles that followed closely upon the deposition of the Shah, and interpreted in a narrow way by the triumphant clerical faction, were nevertheless extraordinarily rich. They prefigured the huge, if brief, Tehran Spring of debate and creativity in the revolution’s wake. They derived in large part from the work of Ali Shari’ati – whose huge opus (still largely untranslated from the Farsi) combined calls for an Islamic revivalism based on mystic poetry; clerical reorganisation, based on the model of the Church of England; a muted (because of huge antipathy from the Shah’s regime) programme for a Marxist political economy; and a significant infusion of Parisian existential thought (Shari’ati had taken his doctorate at the Sorbonne and had become a familiar of Sartre).<sup>17</sup> It was in parts an inchoate, and in its fullness a richly manufactured philosophical opus. It combined two religious histories (Iranian and English), a Marxism (to which Ayatollah Khomeini himself was exposed during his own Parisian exile<sup>18</sup>) and an Islamicism, and a mysticism alongside the romantic individualism and phenomenology of French thought. It is not a coherent philosophy. The claim I make for it is two-fold: firstly, that it was rich; secondly, that its philosophy-by-*melange* was understood by its target audience of young Iranian intellectuals.

The idea and practice of philosophy-by-*melange* was part of Persian intellectual history. The 11th century epic poem, the *Shahnameh*, looked back to a Zoroastrian past but contains amazingly ecumenical passages. One involves the defeated Roman emperor, Vespasian, being lectured by a Persian sage on the ethics of the world’s religions. The sage ranges over Hindu, Chinese and Christian ethics – and, finally, asks the emperor

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16 Lucy Corkin, *Uncovering Agency: Angola’s Management of Relations with China*, PhD of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2011.

17 Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari’ati*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.

18 Nikki R. Keddie, ‘Iranian Revolution in a Comparative Perspective’, in Albert Hourani, Philip S. Khoury, Mary C. Wilson (eds.), *The Modern Middle East*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, espec. 617–18.

why, in his campaigns of conquest and despoilation, he follows none of them, and Christian ethics least of all.<sup>19</sup>

As it was, by the time of Vespasian, Christian belief in the Roman empire had been imbued with pre-Christian Zoroastrian motifs – probably introduced to Rome by returning legionnaires who had adopted the Zoroastrian cult of Mithras – and these included the dualism that was later declared the Manichean Heresy in the theological wars within the church, and the accounts of a messiah, his virgin birth and his subsequent persecution.

So that Edward Said was correct in his critique of Samuel Huntington: the notion of discrete civilisations is fallacious. The assumption of many who agree is nevertheless that the learning of the West permeated the ‘East’ when, as often as not, it was the other way around. Both ‘civilisations’ are built upon rich manufactures. The test in today’s world is whether such richness is any longer recognised and encouraged, or whether fundamentalisms work to excluding agendas and, when not excluding, work to a more pernicious agenda of reductionisms and commodifications.

*Propositions: Three*

There is a further agenda, one of competitiveness of doctrine – so that there is a parallel between the enthusiastic Western reception of Fukuyama’s crypto-Hegelian and Nietzschean formulation of an end of history and last men on the one hand, and President Ahmedinijad’s restatement of belief in the end of the Hidden Iman’s occultation and the renewal of history in an era of just men. Here the contestation is over no less than ownership of history. The Mandate of History becomes, in today’s use of what are essentially metaphysical tropes, an equivalent of the Chinese search for the Mandate of Heaven.

The mere assertion of Mandate becomes, simultaneously, the vehicle which atrophies the richness of *melange*, of miscegenation, of equal contestations. The assertion of Mandate as Interest, state or national interest, to be prosecuted by power or force, or hegemonic leverage and influence, is an agenda of propagation to be sure – but one also of a curatorial nature. Something is to be preserved, and the formaldehyde of curatorial preservation freezes a body of thought as if it were an anatomical specimen, a dead athlete’s body with its muscle lines apparent, posed and supported on a petard, in a simulacra of life and dynamism. Curation and the artefacts of curation become a fundamentalism in that life, never mind an afterlife, become both assertions and impossibilities. By contrast, the Edward Saidian diagnosis of a world history of multiculturalisms has an implicit prognosis that this inter-permeation can never stop – because history itself then stops.

The morbidity of dead bodies of thought being proposed as contestants in a clash of Interests and Mandates has, however, a wormhole back to life and dynamism, and this is when humanitarianism and mercy are recognised and prosecuted as ‘greater’ than Interest and Mandate. Every simulacrum of a dynamic athlete needs a normative shadow. Interest is paralleled by benefactions – or, at least, the showering of controlled benefactions on others helps to justify the interests of oneself. The conjoining of greater power with

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19 Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Epic of Kings*, Tehran: Yassavoli, 2001, Chapter XXXIV, 181.

greater moral purpose is manifest in great moral acts. Here, all use vast deployments of philosophical, ethical and theological apparatus. God wishes it so, being a particular variant of considerable force in itself. Thus, in the Islamic injunction to give alms, in the Christological injunction to treat all strangers as if they were Christ, in the purely agnostic impulse towards pity, there are multitudinous avenues by which a national interest can be justified. Power allows pity and enables mercy. And, in particular, the *depiction* of suffering by increasingly powerful media encourages the industrial facilitation of mercy. The picture holds us captive even more than the Christological injunction. But the thoughtful and ethical formulation of mercy, and the command of mercy, are always implicit. We must do something. We **can** do something. Here is how we **will** do it. We have done it because we are greatly merciful and greatly powerful. Insofar as a virtuous circle is proposed and completed, mercy becomes a pictorial and powerful self-enclosure in a world where suffering is objectified as an ingredient of power and pity's expression. How one expresses this, and how one constructs a virtuous circle, become an aspect of international relations not contemplated by Edward Said, and allows us to offer a variation of the direction of the Singer-Prebisch theory.

*Propositions: Four*

Belief in one's virtues facilitates a belief in one's judgements (and censures, even punishments). The Freedom House Index in the US is a secular measuring device for judgements and implicit censures. Calling the US in turn 'the Great Satan' is a term of judgement, reproach, and associates the speaker with the inevitable triumph of God over Satan. The conjoining of virtue and judgement can be broken if there are many contradictory, even if cohabitating virtues. In a way, some of this was possible in the Ottoman Empire where, albeit under governmental absolutism, culture was largely a free space and, if not 'free', within a realm of tolerations.<sup>20</sup> In what Europe calls the medieval period (some call it the Dark ages), the territories outside Europe in Asia Minor and Arabia preserved and developed neo-Platonic and neo-Aristotelian thought and, within Persian memory, encompassed vast multiculturalisms – the sermon of the Zoroastrian sage to Vespasian being only one example. What was called the Thought of Alexander was a constant reference point in discourse and debate.<sup>21</sup> Saladin, in the wars for Jerusalem, was reputed even by Christians to have performed more acts of mercy towards Christians than Christians would have performed towards Saracens. The legend was that, as he was clearly more Christian than Christians themselves, he must have been a secret Christian<sup>22</sup> (which rather removed a key justification for the Crusades of that period). The point is to do with what philosophies, ethics and thoughtful compassions compose a proper cosmopolitanism – and how many of them – and the extent to which such a cosmopolitanism might establish conditions for a global future and a global commons.

Certainly, the former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, in one of his many erudite essays (which his own party members found esoteric), lamented that Europe was wrong to construct itself as a fortress, determined to exclude African migrants. Implicit in his essay was a wistful scenario of what would have been if Hannibal had indeed conquered

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20 Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1998, 11–13.

21 E.g. throughout Faridu'd-Din Attar, *The Speech of the Birds*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1998.

22 Karen Armstrong, *Holy War: The Crusades and their Impact on Today's World*, London: Macmillan, 1988, 185.

Rome.<sup>23</sup> What would European ‘civilisation’ have then become, miscegenating the most advanced thoughts and practices of North Africa as well as Europe? Tariq Ramadan has written of a European Islam, by which he means both an Islam that adapts itself to Europe **and** a Europe that adapts itself to Islam. Effectively, in Ramadan’s words, Europe becomes, and indeed must become, more Islamic.<sup>24</sup> These are propositions for a cosmopolitanism **that would make it more difficult to censure the world in the name of a single set of virtues**. Simultaneously, it would allow mercies to be shown, irrespective of the beliefs and virtues of the recipients.

Mercy is in itself a problematic concept, and it is one that has developed in the Christian tradition into two key strands – corporeal mercy, in which one feeds the hungry, etc; and divine or spiritual mercy in which one both prays for the souls of others, and forgives others. It is the second strand that is more problematic. Praying for others presupposes a starting point for prayer in which the righteous pray for the unrighteous – so mercy proceeds from a judgement of unrighteousness. However, forgiving others requires an act of acceptance and toleration. There are limits to corporeal mercy: even Jesus exhausted himself in his healing work. There are limits to prayer, as in Jesus’s parable of the self-righteous Pharisee whose prayer was a paean to God in thanks for God’s having made him righteous and therefore unlike others. It is the act and condition of acceptance that concerns us here, and the conditionalities involved. Ideally, there should be no conditionalities at all. Portia’s speech in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* describes an ideal:

*The quality of mercy is not strain'd, It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest; It blesseth him that gives and him that takes: 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes The throned monarch better than his crown; His sceptre shows the force of temporal power, The attribute to awe and majesty, Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings; But mercy is above this sceptred sway; It is enthroned in the hearts of kings, It is an attribute to God himself; And earthly power doth then show likest God's When mercy seasons justice.*<sup>25</sup>

This speech is itself problematic. It reveals a divine origin and divine example. It proposes mercy, because divine, as greater than temporal and governmental power. All notions of justice are subsumed by mercy.

Of course, in *The Merchant of Venice* Portia orates in terms of grand supervening principle but then elides her argument immediately into legalistic particularity and exactitudes. In a way, her entire performance as a lawyer in the Venetian court demonstrates the huge disjuncture in character and quality between divine mercy as concept, and mercy in practical application. There is an additional problem in that, by proposing mercy as supervening and all powerful, Portia would also have to subsume human rights under mercy. In a way, this is a most Kantian proposition: nothing is a right on earth if it goes against a universal condition of *recht*, and it is this predisposition towards being part of a universal condition that makes humanity a moral and worthwhile species.

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23 Thabo Mbeki, ‘Is There Anybody There?’ *The Post* (Lusaka), 14 Oct 2005.

24 Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

25 William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 4 Scene 1, from line 180.

Certainly neither Portia nor anyone else shows much mercy towards Shylock, who is simply claiming his due – albeit in a merciless and therefore inhumane and bestial way. So that in one of English literature's greatest works, mercy as an enacted quality is problematic; and in ideal philosophical terms the concept of mercy both justifies and makes just the human species. The problem comes when mercy is simultaneously a quality, a concept, a universal drive – and a measure. The tendency in international politics is to show great acts of corporeal mercy (disaster relief, development assistance), and to assert 'divine' or 'spiritual' **rectitude** as justification of judgement against others. One part of 'divine' mercy is practised, precisely so that the other part is not.

If mercy is used as part of an apparatus of justification, and not as the high animation of what is just, it may be that we should look at Simone de Beauvoir's casual, throwaway but illuminating phrase, 'interim mercy'.

*The Phenomenologically Humane*

It is almost impossible to trace the exact formulation of de Beauvoir's phrase, except that *TIME* magazine attributed it to her in a short feature in the late 1960s, but did not identify where and when she used the term. I simply recall reading it as a teenager and being struck. I wish therefore to use the term within a reconstruction of the contexts in which she would have used it by way of commentary rather than philosophical proposition. But I do wish, by the end of this paper, to have sketched it in both philosophical and philosophically ethical terms.

De Beauvoir, like Sartre, is often singled out but was part of a circle. It was a formative circle and featured a certain triune character. The philosophical/phenomenological/existential grouping of friends (and foes) would have been impossible without the symbolists around Andre Breton, and both were influenced in turn (though this is under-sung or sung simplistically) by foreign intellectuals in Paris – Senghor from what became Senegal,<sup>26</sup> Shari'ati from Iran. So it was not simply a Husserlian/Heideggerian influence wrought upon Paris. It is possible to add a fourth component, and that is the psychoanalytic/linguistic/philosophical crossover that was epitomised by Ricoeur,<sup>27</sup> made famous or infamous by Lacan,<sup>28</sup> immersed of course in Freudian thought and its discourses of drives and impulses, and which included Fanon.<sup>29</sup>

However, the central motif of absurdity was important. If nothing made sense, everything was futile, and each moment had equal emotional and moral weight. French existential thought had as much an emotional response to absurdity as it had German influences. Its phenomenology swung between everything having the possibility of no moral weight at all, or having, in a moment, all possible moral weight. In a way, it didn't matter which. But the possibility of a sudden lurch/elision from one to the other meant a moment of

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26 Leopold S. Senghor, *Negritude et Humanisme*, Paris: Seuil, 1964.

27 See Stephen Chan, 'A Problem for IR: How Shall we Narrate the Saga of Bestial Man?' *Global Society*, 17(4), 2003, 385–414.

28 See Stephen Chan, 'A New Triptych for International Relations in the 21st Century: Beyond Waltz and Beyond Lacan's Antigone, with a Note of the *Falun Gong* of China', *Global Society*, 17(2), 2003, 187–208.

29 See Stephen Chan, 'Fanon: The Octogenarian Of International Revenge and the Suicide Bomber of Today', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 42(2), 2007, 151–168.

transfiguration whereby something moral and morally-accomplishable was brought into view. Transfiguration, apotheosis, *satori*, transcendentalism, transformative epiphany – and then it disappears again. I think De Beauvoir meant to seize those transient moments when an act of mercy becomes possible – both personally and to make the weight of absurdity more humane for other persons. Both she and Sartre gravitated towards forms of idealism and humanism in their later careers. But the seizure of the moment when morality becomes possible, and even possibly momentarily fulfilling, is reminiscent of the Sufi transcendental moment of sudden union with the divine. Commentators have often lamented that Shari'ati's writings lurch from existential thought from his Paris days to sudden illuminations based on Rumi's poems,<sup>30</sup> and view this as a lapse in thought's logic. It is precisely, however, a device which renders the emotional necessities of certain thought possible. I shall propose that the cultural environment that allows **both** the individual drive towards mercy for its own sake – even if meaningless in any logical configuration of possibilities – and a philosophical/psychological/theological tapestry/context that prioritises mercy as a key indicator and expression of humanity and the humane linkage with an ideal form (a God, a *recht*, something out there); the environment that both knows when things are absurd but, simultaneously, necessary – is an environment of rich manufacture.

The idea that morality and moral acts of mercy can be spontaneous in an environment, a context, a structure of despair and absurdity is a key assertion of subjectivity and independence in a hesitant and human impulse to recovery and reclamation of moral context after great violence and trauma. Horkheimer and Adorno wrote of Odysseus arriving home after being storm-tossed, waylaid and ship-wrecked by the gods. They wrote of him as the first man of legend to recover his subjectivity.<sup>31</sup> The gods, despite acting upon him, could not finally overcome him. And yet Odysseus was a most unsympathetic, rapacious and duplicitous person. He knows this. In fact, in a passage not noted by Horkheimer and Adorno, where he complains of the human need to feed itself and stuff itself full before any good manners, thought or action become possible, he seems to assert that the base of subjectivity is in fact baseness.<sup>32</sup> In a very real way he doesn't recover his subjectivity in any grand sense at all. He escapes the gods' objectification of him, certainly. But what he recovers is access to the moral perseverance of Penelope. What De Beauvoir is writing is that an interim mercy, an act of kindness, an extension of one's subjectivity towards others, is a higher gratuitous act. It goes beyond seizing food for oneself. It goes beyond killing the suitors of a patient wife who, while plying their suit, seize and consume all of Odysseus's household food for themselves. It is a phenomenological act – something done, something momentary and gratuitous because done outside of externally-decreed need to do it, something transient – and, precisely because of that, something highly moral because done and unthought. The combination of the thought and unthought as part of emergence from trauma and depredation, the assertion of subjectivity while extending subjective action to an otherwise meaningless objectified world is a rich moral manufacture. It stands against the defence of well-

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30 The best study of Rumi is Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2000.

31 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1972, 57.

32 Homer, *The Odyssey* (trans. Robert Fagles), New York: Viking, 1996, 186.

established, well-thought-out, well-settled interests – including national interests. The following points of speculation/heuristic thought are put forward:

1. Settled national interests inhibit new spontaneities, even if older spontaneities have become institutionalised in the culture of these interests.
2. It is the lack of new and unconventional thought, not the comparative lack of economic dynamism and its manufactures that helps predict the rise and fall of great powers.
3. However, even those with extremely rich histories, e.g. Iran, if drawn into games of power and interests, establish limits to themselves, **despite** moments of immense progress, power and transnational influence.
4. It is to those areas where things remain inchoate but dynamic that we must look, and what seems a melange from the outside is often a rich propelling mixture from within: evangelism, slum-based fusions, magical realism, local efforts at a global ecumenicalism – the range of great vibrancies seems outside the settled West.
5. There remains the highly problematic position of the West within global capital. But increasingly it is the locus for the **circulation** of capital and not the geographical location for the **generation** of capital. The recent (if it may be said to be recent and not ongoing) banking crisis revealed the phenomenon of derivatives of capital that imagined themselves as actual capital, so that manufacture as a driver for the generation of capital became (outside Germany at least) eclipsed by degenerated capacities for manufacture and heightened dependency on capital derived from capital, rather than capital derived from manufacture.

The increasing drive to shift locations of manufacture to developing countries, where vibrancy of ideas has not yet reached settled and sedimented conditions, suggests a new world structure-in-the-making, or at least an amelioration or nuancing of the existing structure. The question here is the extent to which in the emerging structure there may be defining instances of spontaneous and interim mercy as a quality in itself, and something that cannot be foresworn.

There are dangers in such speculative exercises: the ‘West’ is not moribund; it contains great vibrancy even within its settled interests, and procedural approaches to the world; this vibrancy can sometimes be more original and profound than in any other part of the world; it certainly rises to the occasion every time there is a disaster or humanitarian crisis in the non-Western world; it has been written off many times before, and always come back stronger. However, the previous times of writing off were in the absence of a capitalist competitor of some comparability in terms of economic and manufacturing weight – but there is now China lurking on the world stage. Yet China is intent on suppressing exactly those spontaneities of which I have been speaking, and has been seeking to project itself as weighty precisely because its values have had such a long cultural and temporal history – longer, in this description (and justification) of itself, than anyone else’s. In fact those whose histories were actually longer even than that of the Chinese – the Sumerians (Iraqis in today’s terms) and Egyptians – are still seeking to escape being immured in their histories and more modern degenerations and difficulties.



There is no single once or current candidate to bear the flag I have sewn. Even the once great Persian empire, which rivalled Rome as it once threatened Greece, is – despite its Zoroastrian antecedents to Christianity, its neo-Platonic and neo-Aristotelian curatorial and developmental work – is today a site of restrictions and confinements; and the fusion work of Shari’ati is transformed into part of the justification for a mono-theological discourse that justifies its current battles with the West.

So the purpose of what we are doing this evening is not to replace one thing with another – as if the world proceeded by moving from one dyad to its opposite number. There is no opposite number in any formed manner, and any future formation is unlikely to be regular and neat. However, just as the Singer-Prebisch theory was more an observation than an actual theory, this is to establish a suggestion as to what we should observe. I suggest that we should seek to observe what in the everyday are feats of heroic mercy of which we have no knowledge or interest because all is shrouded by wilfulness or neglect or stereotyping in darkness. I am going to suggest an unlikely, if inchoate, possibility within what is now occurring in Africa.

Despite being overtrumpeted as a means to justify tyrants, the accomplishment of Africa in decolonisation was significant. Likewise, the movement towards forms of (often imperfect) democracy was impressive. The streets of Kabwe in Zambia in 1990, just one year after the fall of the Berlin Wall, full of demonstrators demanding the standing-down of President Kaunda, is noteworthy partly because no television cameras were there – as they were in Berlin – and no one in the West knows anything about a triumph that changed the history of an African state, echoes of which were still rumbling in the democratic outcome of Zambian elections held barely two months ago.

What we see in Africa, now that the cameras do go there, is war and pestilence and we hear ourselves demanding the West do more. But I wish to relay a story which features the West not at all; and I wish to do so without the false and sentimental iconography the West has constructed around Nelson Mandela – the man of grace, mercy and forgiveness. We construct this iconography mawkishly in large part to excuse ourselves. Forgive us. We did not know he was a saint. It was we who allowed him to rot in prison 27 years. Now that we realise the error of our ways we very visibly, on every possible occasion, prostrate ourselves before him as, shortly, we shall go to extreme lengths to prostrate ourselves before his memory. We shall ensure the transfiguration of Saint Nelson.<sup>33</sup>

There are many candidates for the story. One, simply because I enjoyed the mountain air, came about in the high Kingdom of Lesotho in Southern Africa. There, both because of necessity and by emulation of the Canadian Mounties, there was a mounted police. The officers gave me a huge black stallion to ride and laughed that I held the reins in the English style – rather than the North American or, more pointedly, the Wild West fashion. We rode for hours away from the valley town, named Roma, that housed the university. But it was in those mountains that, today, one finds hundreds of families in frozen little houses where the family heads are children. The parents have died of HIV and, every day, the oldest feed and clothe the youngest and send them to school, and then, having sacrificed their own education, and rejected the chance simply to escape and live for themselves, go off to scavenge or beg or do whatever menial work they can find so that

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33 The latest in a long line being Peter Hain, *Mandela*, Johannesburg: Penguin, 2010.

there will be food on the table later that night. This is so heartbreaking a spectacle that the Princes of England come here to build schools for the destitute pupils – but forget the wizened youngsters, barely older than the pupils in their new stone schools, who in an act of mercy towards their siblings labour for the crumbs of the world.

But the story I want to relate occurred in Addis Ababa, with the great urban eagles who fly overhead like our sparrows. I had allowed myself to be adopted by a street teenager. They prowl outside all the hotels where foreigners stay. He offered to show me the city and I gave him my spare suit so we could both eat lunch at the grand new Sheraton where he would otherwise have been refused admission. His task was always to be outside looking in, but I wanted to take him in. I was happy to take him, despite the risk he would lead me into a trap where I would be assaulted and robbed by his friends. I was happy because I was recovering from having been attacked by scorpions and was too weak to wander the city by myself. But I have a compulsion to wander cities on foot. He took me to the cathedral, under whose floor Haile Selassie is buried, and showed me the Renaissance portrait which, as Ethiopian legend has it, was a gift from Michaelangelo and was carried from Italy to Ethiopia by a great flamingo. Joseph, for that was the name we agreed for my friend, found ingenious stories to entertain me as we slowly walked. He showed me the lines of pilgrims coming in from the countryside, dressed in white, and carrying tall silver crucifixes. “This is why I am here, Mr Stephen. One day, my mother just left to join the pilgrims. She became one of those you see. And I had to serve strangers in order to eat.” He took me to a suburb of Somali mechanics who could replicate, and heat-treat any Toyota car part, and where fake antiquities were manufactured. “You see, these old goat and cow-skin tapestries with the tales of Solomon and Sheba. We call her Magda, of course. These are fake, but we sell them for high prices. These goat-skin Bibles with the ancient Geez language, our equivalent of your Latin, these are real. But visitors do not appreciate them. You can have this for no more than ten US dollars.” My question about the monasteries from where the Bibles had been looted led to a discussion of the Ark of the Covenant. “The priests who guard the Ark have become blind because they have been exposed too long to the light of heavenly glory that shines from the ark. This film the Westerners like, Indiana Jones, the real Ark is not like the Ark in that film.” But, by that time, Joseph was trying to tell me stories that would seem special to me because they included motifs from what he took to be my culture. “In the hills around the Ark it is easy to get lost. The Ark radiates a climate that allows a tropical jungle to grow for a mile around the Ark. Tigers live in that jungle because it is a South East Asian climate. And those who are lost or who fear the tigers are sometimes rescued by Buddhist priests who wear robes of yellow.” He saw I was politely sceptical but then he said, “We have what we call the Way of Kings. A King cannot return the way he came. Let me take you back to your hotel by a different route from the one we took to this place.” By which I understood he was not, after all, going to deliver me to the gang of youngsters we had passed earlier, and that I was not going to be robbed. “Did you think I was too weak to fight your friends?” I asked. He smiled. “You yourself know the answer. The Way of Kings is not just a road. It is how the road is travelled. The Way of Kings, Mr Stephen, is the path of mercy.”



## **Revitalizing the United Nations: Five Proposals<sup>34</sup>**

*Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Sir Hans W. Singer*

### **1 Relations between the Bretton Woods institutions and the UN**

This question is specifically referred to in the General Assembly resolution requesting the Secretary-General to submit his report on an Agenda for Development and also in the draft report itself. It clearly has important institutional implications and is likely to be an important area of discussion during the coming years.

Legally the IMF and World Bank are specialized agencies of the UN and their Terms of Agreement provide for guidance by the UN General Assembly and ECOSOC. However this has clearly become realistic. The current practice of distinguishing a 'Bretton Woods system' from the UN System, although legally incorrect, reflects reality. The main reason why the financially powerful countries have shifted their support to the Bretton Woods (BW) System, and why their support for the UN system has eroded, lies in the different voting methods governing the two Systems. The Bretton Woods system is essentially based on the principle of one dollar one vote - voting proportionate to financial support - whereas the UN system is based on one country one vote. This gives the financially powerful countries control of the Bretton Woods institutions which they therefore consider as 'their own'. The UN system, after the first few years, now has a built-in majority of developing countries.

The preference for the BW system is rationalized on the grounds that these institutions are more effective and have recruited more skilled and competent staff. But, to the extent that this is true, it may be taken as a consequence of lack of support and lack of resources for the UN system. This creates a vicious circle: Alleged lack of competence leads to withholding of resources which in turn makes it more difficult to recruit and keep competent staff or undertake effective action which will then be taken as a reason – or pretext – to withhold resources. By Contrast, the BW System can be said to benefit from a benevolent circle.

We must assume that the unequal distribution of support and resources between the two systems will continue as long as this difference in voting systems persists. It is therefore suggested that thought be given to ways of moving the two voting Systems closer together, i.e. moving the BW voting system in the direction of the UN system, while moving the UN system in the direction of the BW system. It is realized that the UN system of one country one vote is embodied in the UN Charter and greatly treasured by the developing countries. But what is suggested here is not a unilateral abandonment of this voting system but a package: what the developing countries lose in the UN they would gain in the BW institutions. But the main point is that a rapprochement of the two voting Systems would induce the financially powerful countries to distribute their support and resources more evenly.

It is often claimed that the UN voting system is 'more democratic' than the BW system, but this is not entirely clear. The system of one country one vote gives equal voting powers to very large countries and to tiny countries, and thus discriminates against people in the larger countries. The

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34 "Revitalizing the United Nations: Five Proposals" was originally published in 1995 in the special edition of "ids bulletin" "Fifty years on: The UN and economic and social development", 26(4), Oct 1995. Reprint by generous permission of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

UN Charter begins with the words: 'We the peoples...', not 'We the countries' or 'We the governments...'

There are some precedents for voting Systems which represent a compromise or combination of the UN and BW Systems. One example is in the Global Environmental Facility (GEF); another example is the proposed voting system in the World Trade Organization (WTO). In both these cases, the essential feature is a requirement that a majority both of member countries and of financial contributions is required. While this carries a danger of more frequent stalemates, it emphasizes the need for compromise between North and South and should give all concerned confidence that their interests are safeguarded.

It may seem Utopian to propose such a far-reaching change involving changes in the Charter and Terms of Agreements of the various institutions. However, the Suggestion is put forward here in the belief that without a change in the direction here proposed the present unsatisfactory distribution of support and the erosion of UN support is likely to continue.

Meanwhile, a number of smaller and readily implementable suggestions can be made to mitigate the erosion of the Status of the UN in relation to the BW institutions. It is clearly an anomaly that while the President of the World Bank and Managing Director of the IMF address the ECOSOC there is no reciprocity: the Secretary-General is not represented at the annual meetings of the World Bank and IMF and does not bring the views of the UN to the attention of the Directors of the Bank and Fund. There is no reason why the Secretary-General or President of ECOSOC should not be the voice of the UN heard at the annual meetings of the Bank and Fund and why in the documentation for these meetings the UN should not bring relevant decisions of the General Assembly and ECOSOC to the attention of the Directors. Moreover, the Bank and Fund might well be requested to submit an annual report to the General Assembly and ECOSOC to explain what attention they have paid to the resolutions of the General Assembly and ECOSOC, in accordance with their Terms of Agreement. The present Speeches by the President and Managing Director to ECOSOC do not fulfil this function -they are more in the nature of expressing their views about the current Situation and action required. There is no reason why they should not continue to have this opportunity, but it is suggested that the UN should have the same opportunity at the annual meetings of the Bank and Fund.

What is said above about the Bank and Fund would equally apply in future to the World Trade Organization.

## **2 A new integration of peace and development**

The old dichotomy of emergency (largely connected with conflict today) and development becomes more and more questionable. The roots of conflict are not only military and political (within the man-date of the Security Council), but also (and more fundamentally) economic and social. This raises questions of preventive action (already touched upon in **Agenda for Peace**) and of the proposal to create an Economic Security Council contained in the 1994 issue of the UNDP Human Development Report and possible alternatives.

The proposal for an Economic Security Council would raise difficult questions, since it would create a new principal organ of the UN, it would require a change in the Charter, It would also raise questions of size and membership (although such questions might have to be faced anyway in connection with the present Security Council). Presumably there would be no veto in an

Economic Security Council. Given the difficulties of creating an entirely new organ, perhaps priority should be given to considering alternatives. The simplest alternative would be to extend the mandate of the present Security Council to deal with 'threats to peace' also preventively and in the form of economic and social emergencies – before they erupt into actual military conflict. In fact this may not need a new mandate at all, but could be treated as a clarification of the present mandate – in that case it would not need any legal change at all. However it may be considered that such an extended mandate should not be subject to the present veto and non-military (not-yet military) threats to peace might be dealt with by a separate committee of the Security Council - a parallel to the present Military Committee.

The other alternative – also discussed in the **Human Development Report 1994** – would be to strengthen the capacity of ECOSOC to deal with such non-military threats to peace. For this purpose a special new high-level segment of ECOSOC could be created, with smaller membership than the present ECOSOC, and meeting in continuous session with periodic high-level meetings.

Whatever solution is adopted there is now a consensus that there is a gap to be filled. Agenda for Peace has drawn attention to the opportunities and need for preventive action in the case of tensions (often triggered by economic and social emergencies) which can be foreseen to carry acute dangers of military conflict. There is also a present gap in dealing with the other end of the development/emergency continuum. The question of reconstruction and rehabilitation after conflict should also be tackled by an Economic Security Council or whatever alternative is preferred. This may involve new relations with the Bretton Woods institutions, especially the World Bank. As indicated by its official title – International Bank for Reconstruction and Development – the World Bank was expected to be strongly involved in post-war reconstruction. In the event, this function did not develop, largely as a result of being overtaken by the Marshall Plan, and then withered away as a result or preoccupation of the World Bank first with specific development projects and later with structural adjustment programmes and debt collection. Perhaps the time has come to restore the reconstruction functions of the World Bank in close collaboration with whatever UN mechanism carries out the functions proposed for the Economic Security Council.

A special concern of the Economic Security Council (or its alternatives) should be the question of food security. The abolition of the World Food Council has created a gap and the problem is further accentuated by the GATT Agreement and the creation of the WTO. By general consensus, this will lead to a rise in international food prices and a reduction in food surpluses. Thus the need for food aid or other forms of providing food security for poor food-importing countries, especially in Africa, will increase, while at the same time the cost to donors of giving food aid will increase and surpluses will diminish, thus reducing the willingness to give food aid. This creates a Situation calling for inter-national vigilance and action which should be the concern of the UN in collaboration with the new WTO. Among the actions required would be the activation and enlargement of the International Emergency Food Reserve, including the pre-positioning of food Stocks in danger Spots in advance of actual conflict.

### **3 The need for global economic management**

In the original Bretton Woods proposals global economic management was assumed to be in the United Nations (General Assembly and ECOSOC), Although at the time of Bretton Woods the UN did not yet exist (being created a year later at San Francisco) its creation had already been announced and the broad outlines of its organization were under negotiation. This impending arrangement was also reflected in the Terms of Agreement of the actually and World Bank which

made them specialized agencies of the UN and provided for guidance by the General Assembly and ECOSOC. The IMF was visualized, with much larger resources than actually materialized, as a powerful instrument of dealing with financial, monetary, and balance of payments disequilibria, with an overriding objective of full employment, and with many of the functions of a world central bank. The World Bank was established on a project basis and not visualized as being involved with macroeconomic policies or structural adjustment problems.

In the event today, whatever macroeconomic global management exists has been moved out of the multilateral System altogether and is now in the hands of the G7. This cannot be acceptable as a satisfactory solution of the problem: the G7 represents little more than 10 per cent of mankind and even with the possible future addition of Russia it would still only represent a small minority. Moreover it is clear that the G7 – quite apart from insufficient attention being paid to the implications of macroeconomic measures for the rest of mankind, especially the developing countries - has not even proved able to promote satisfactory coordination among the 7. There is now spreading acceptance of the fact that global economic management must be made more democratic and move back in some way and to some extent to the multilateral framework visualized at Bretton Woods and San Francisco.

Simple measures have been proposed which would not directly involve the UN institutionally although they would be clearly welcome to the UN. The principal such measure is an enlargement of the G7 to make it more representative and effective, and to include such developing countries as Brazil (for Latin America), Nigeria (for Africa), India (for Asia), and Eastern Europe, perhaps on a rotating basis. The inclusion of Russia is already on the agenda.

There are however other proposals which would concern the UN more directly. One suggestion would be for the Secretary-General or his appointed representative to participate in the discussions of the G7, more or less as a spokesman for the majority of mankind now excluded and as a guardian of their interests. Another proposal is for the UN Secretariat to be involved in the preparation of documentation and agendas for the meetings of the G7, with a view to drawing attention to neglected areas, urgent problems, and particularly problems concerning the developing countries (such as the debt problem, deteriorating terms of trade, etc). Mr Sutherland, the then Director General of GATT, in a letter to the **Financial Times** (7 June 1994) has proposed that the new WTO, jointly with the World Bank and IMF, should 'evolve a single coherent Statement on issues of economic concern for the G7. It may be suggested that this would be a proper task for the UN (which need not exclude submissions by the IMF, World Bank or WTO, and should certainly involve consultation and collaboration with these institutions). The restoration of the objectives of growth and full employment, as well as the newly prominent objective of poverty reduction, should be the special task for the UN to keep in the forefront of the G7 discussions. The Implementation of decisions at the recent Social Summit should be brought by the UN to the agenda of the G7 and firmly kept there. The creation of an Economic Security Council (or the alternatives suggested above) would in itself serve to bring global coordination back to the multilateral forum where it was intended to be, at least in the area at the cutting edge of development and emergency.

#### **4 Strengthening the resources of the UN**

As previously explained, the question of resources is closely intertwined with questions of political support and competence. In the case of the UN this intertwined complex threatens to take the form of a vicious circle. This circle could be broken by reviving political support from powerful

countries, perhaps at the price of a change in the UN voting system. Another way of breaking (the vicious circle is by giving the UN independent resources which would enable it to tackle the problem for which it has responsibility more effectively and promptly (and perhaps in doing so then elicit further support and contributions, thus breaking the vicious circle). In this connection, the possibility of providing resources for the UN from some form of international taxation is now increasingly raised and is now firmly on the international agenda.

Various forms of international taxation have been mooted. Perhaps a leading candidate for consideration is the proposal for a tax on international currency transactions. This has been supported most recently by the Nobel Laureate, James Tobin, in the **Human Development Report 1994**. Given the current huge volume of foreign exchange transactions, a very small tax rate would yield a large revenue – for example a tax of 0.05 per cent would yield \$150 billion a year. Such a tax rate would be too small to deter genuine trade or capital movements, but it would have the merit – in addition to providing resources for international purposes – to deter disruptive speculative movements and to restore greater autonomy both to national monetary policy makers and also to the IMF. This could be expected to result in greater weight being given to economic fundamentals and less to personal enrichment by functionless gambling. Other international taxes have been proposed including taxes on air travel exploitation of common re-sources such as the Arctic Seas, etc. A system of tradable permits for pollution would also lend itself well to help to finance international purposes including the UN (although the basic purpose of such proposals is to provide funds to compensate victims of pollution). This last proposal of tradable permits has the advantage of applying market principles ('the polluter pays'), thus helping to 'get prices right' by internalizing the cost of pollution. Given the present support for market orientation in important quarters, this idea should have some appeal and deserves serious consideration.

The idea of international taxation is by no means new. In his original memoranda in preparation for the Bretton Woods Conference, Keynes had proposed a tax on balance of trade or balance of payments surpluses, at the rate of 1 per cent a month. His idea was that this would be an inducement to surplus countries to increase their Imports thus helping in the achievement of the full employment objective. At the same time, the yield from this tax would provide resources for deficit countries enabling them to maintain their Imports, further contributing to full employment. At the time, this proposal vanished without a trace, but the present recurrence of unemployment, balance of payments disequilibria, and the need for finding resources for international purposes might serve to revive interest in this proposal.

Even without such novel instruments, UN resources could of course be increased if member countries paid contributions more promptly, if international commitments such as the 0.7 per cent aid target, commitments as a result of the Rio Conference resolutions, contributions to the International Emergency Food Reserve, etc were more fully and more promptly discharged. This would require concerted action by the contributors since otherwise we would face a 'prisoners dilemma' Situation, with each country waiting for the others to contribute.

There are also other latent international resources which could be activated and used for the benefit of international action, specifically of UN action. There is the power, unused since 1981, to issue Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) through the IMF. The Managing Director of the IMF is himself on record as advocating an issue of SDRs to the extent of \$36 billion. If part of this issue could be reserved for international purposes, or alternatively if the richer member countries of the IMF could forego their quota of SDRs for the benefit of the UN or for other agreed international purposes, the problem of resources would be that much nearer to a solution. Similarly, there is



latent international capital available in the gold reserves held by the IMF – the sale of some of these reserves is also increasingly suggested. Ultimately this comes back to the question of political will. Once the principle of International taxation or tapping of latent inter-national resources is accepted, the detailed forms of such taxation or mobilization should be amenable of international agreement.

## 5 Specific roles for the UN

The present role of the UN system in the narrower sense – excluding the Bretton Woods system – is now often defined as looking after the 'soft' parts of development: social factors, poverty reduction, employment, vulnerable groups, women, children, refugees, war victims, health, etc, while the Bretton Woods system would look after the 'hard' facts of development, i.e. money, finance, trade, as well as macroeconomic policies, dealing with debt problems etc. Such a division of labour between 'hard' and 'soft' areas is also mentioned in the Secretary-Generals Report on an **Agenda for Development**. There would be a great deal of scepticism among development professionals about such a division of development issues into 'hard' and 'soft' issues. Moreover, the implication that the hard issues are more important and the real core of development and require greater competence to deal with is out of tune with more recent insights into the development process. These recent insights tend to place increasing emphasis on human capital and human resources – presumably in the soft area – as distinct from physical Investment and financial resources presumed to be in the hard area. From that point of view, the UN system could be quite satisfied with responsibility for the allegedly soft part of development, provided that both parts were taken equally seriously and equally supported with resources. That however is not the case. Insofar as the soft parts of development - poverty reduction, health, education, etc - are taken as seriously as they should be, they are then undertaken by the Bretton Woods institutions which command the necessary support and resources and are presumed to have competence derived from their experience of dealing with the hard parts of development.

A good example is the field of technical assistance. Under the 'Kennedy Compromise' of around 1960, soft financial aid was allocated to the World Bank (IDA) while technical assistance and food aid were allocated to the UN (UNDP and WFP). The UNDP was supposed to be the chief funding agency and coordinating agency for technical assistance through-out the UN system. Yet today the World Bank gives as much or more technical assistance than the UNDP and the IMF is rapidly expanding its technical assistance operations without having to rely on funding from the UNDP. In an effort to restore the role of the UNDP, attention is now focused on enhancing the role of the UNDP resident representatives to that of UN coordinators or even UN ambassadors. Similarly, there is a parallel effort to place the technical assistance activities of UN agencies into a country-programming framework, devised and negotiated by the UNDP. All such proposals may improve the efficiency and coherence of UN technical assistance and enhance the role of the UNDP, but they do not solve the problem of relationship with the Bretton Woods system. To give the UNDP or UN representative the enhanced role aimed at, the Suggestion may be made that the UN coordinator should take part in the discussion of stabilization and structural adjustment programmes; perhaps representatives of specialized agencies should also participate. Some of these programmes have a crucial impact say on agriculture and health, and presumably the field officers of the FAO and WHO have more concrete country knowledge and competence than Washington-based macro-economists. (Similarly on the governments' side, one would wish for these negotiations not to be limited to ministries of finance and central bank officials but to include

representatives of the ministries of agriculture, health, etc – but that is a matter for governments rather than the UN system.)

In pursuit of this greater coordination of technical assistance and operational programmes by the UN at the country level it has been proposed that all these programmes (UNDP, WFP, UNICEF, HCR, etc) should be merged into a single Institution. However, this proposal ought to be resisted. It could make matters worse by depriving UN operations even of some of the support which they now enjoy. Organizations like WFP, UNICEF, and others have established a clear identity of their own, their concrete purposes attract both political and financial support; they have backing in public opinion which in the long run may influence governments of contributing countries. It would be counterproductive to throw all this away by a merger into one large omnibus institution without the distinctive identity and distinctive appeal of the present agencies.



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### External publications

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