

Philosophy Salon at Schloß Wartin

Hans Köchler

Professor emeritus of Philosophy, University of Innsbruck, Austria
President, International Progress Organization, Vienna

DIALOGUE OR COEXISTENCE?

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Summary

In a global environment increasingly characterized by confrontations over basic issues of human dignity and the meaning of life, talk about “dialogue among civilizations” appears to have become non-consequential, almost irrelevant. When states or non-state actors resort to the use of force to establish their own version of the virtuous society, whether at home or in distant regions of the globe, they reintroduce **ideological** discourse in their conduct of power politics, reviving memories of the cold war. The “dialectics of cultural identity,” meaning that self-understanding is only possible in interdependence with other cultures, are more and more ignored. The new fault lines between cultures and civilizations, at the regional and global level, threaten political stability and social cohesion in many states. The total alienation – and mutual incomprehension – between regional actors such as the “Islamic State” and secular Western societies is just the latest, and most drastic, evidence of this development (that was also triggered by the political vacuum created by armed intervention). The deep crisis of multiculturalism, a doctrine viewed with suspicion by a majority of the populations in an increasing number of European countries, also testifies to the erosion of a dialogical approach. Whatever may be said about universal values (human rights, democracy, rule of law) and their defense, dialogue and war are incompatible. Under the present global circumstances, the meaning and sustainability of dialogue will thus have to be reassessed, and a balance will have to be found between the **idealist** project of global understanding and mutual enrichment between cultures and civilizations (dialogue) and the more modest, **realist** approach that aims at finding a *modus vivendi* on the basis of mutuality and reciprocity (coexistence).

Questions

1. Is “dialogue” compatible with normative universalism (whether religious or secular)?
2. Has the “clash of civilizations” (Huntington) become a self-fulfilling prophecy?
3. How can commitment to an “Alliance of Civilizations” (United Nations), which implies a dialogical approach, be reconciled with an agenda of “régime change”?
4. Is “multiculturalism” a failed project (re. Merkel, Sarkozy, Cameron) or can it be adapted to the realities of today’s immigration societies?
5. Can the cold war doctrine of “peaceful coexistence” (between rival, incompatible ideologies) also serve as a model for relations between competing civilizations (religions)?
6. Is there a way to rationally deal with the mutual exclusion of secular and strictly religious worldviews (within and between states)?