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The need to rethink a hospitable world

Maxime Lallement

Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

ABSTRACT

This contribution investigates the crisis in meaning affecting the concept of globalisation today. It argues that globalisation and the globalised world refer to distinct notions and examines the need to question the meaning of the latter again. It contends it is necessary to problematise the global economy as that which should allow a common world of sense. Doing so requires reconsidering hospitality: not merely as that which welcomes global citizens but also as that which creates a hospitable environment by taking ecological issues into account.

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Problematizing the globalised world in an age of crises

Today more than ever, it is common to argue that one lives in a globalised world. This idea often refers to the fact that the better part of the populated portion of the globe is relatively unified from the point of view of the economic rationality to which it is subjected (Tassin 2003). This means that the type of organisation which structures our world both economically and politically (often called capitalist, liberal, or even neo-capitalist or neo-liberal) is regulated by finance and the rationality of the global market (Duménil and Levy 2002).

However, in an age where a number of crises (relating to climate change, the availability of resources, and migration to name a few) seem to threaten the very movement by which neoliberal rationality constituted itself, I would like to take this opportunity to step back and ask whether a philosophical questioning of the concept of the world might help us recontextualise some of the global issues that present and future generations are and will be facing.

As noted by Tassin (2003, 64):

The economic unification of the world expected from the globalisation of financial and economic markets is accompanied by its political division attested by the inability of international organisations to have a cosmo-political law accepted and respected. Such is the chiasmus that characterises the world at the dawn of the 21st century: far from giving birth to a common world, the economic unification of the world reveals itself on the contrary to be literally 'worldless' [my own translation].

CONTACT Maxime Lallement  m.lallement@mmu.ac.uk  Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University, Geoffrey Manton Building, 2.10, Rosamond Street West, Manchester M15 6EB, UK

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The paradox stressed above is the increasingly sensitive and divisive character of a world which, although underpinned by a relatively uniform economic rationality, suffers from the lack of a binding common fabric. In other words, and as also famously remarked by Arendt (1998), the global scale of travel, relations and exchange does not go hand-in-hand with the constitution of a common world, understood as the possibility to think of the world as a common horizon of sense. Tassin argues that by the same move through which a homogenous unification of the global economy was realised, the sense of belonging to a common and meaningful world deteriorated.

One might argue that these initial reflections are commonplace and, to an extent, futile. As we are reminded by Hobbes (2012) and Kant (2018), the history of humankind is also the history of wars and conflicts of all kinds which have placed communities of individuals against one another. As Stiegler, influenced by a reading of Carl Schmitt (2006, 68), writes: 'there is no law without *nomos* being founded on taking possession of land, that is, on conquest' (Stiegler 2018, 131).

Therefore, the role of politics is often thought to have been the possibility to produce a contractual space suspending the immediate threat of others. In a similar fashion, Clausewitz (2007, 7) tells us that 'war is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means' and Foucault rightfully demonstrated that, in the era of bio-power and biopolitics, politics itself should be understood as the continuation of war by other means (Foucault 2003, 15). What all these successive political theories argue is that individual freedom has often been seen as that which should be controlled in order to preserve the existence of the political community. As early as Plato (1993), one finds that the role of philosophy is to organise the *politeia* according to the truth and the idea of the Good, which amounts to a reduction of plurality into universality.

However, the multiplicity of crises humankind faces today forces us to rethink the metaphysical underpinnings of historical political rationality. It is the ever-growing prospect of our own finitude which we are being reminded of when facing the question of climate change and of the scarcity of resources. As Foucault (1998) tells us, and as the still recent Covid pandemic reminded us (Balibar 2021), in today's globalised world, one exists as a member of a biopolitical species. This means that it is our survival as a living species which has become, with modernity, the centre of gravity of politics.

Overcoming the metaphysics of conflict

Although accurate, I contend this picture is yet still underpinned by an essentially antagonistic metaphysics which cannot but produce a reduction of alterity to sameness: this is exemplified by the proliferation of resilience discourses which encourage us to either be resistant, adaptable or flexible (Reghezza-Zitt et al. 2012), by discourses which only present the environment as a resource to be sustainably managed, or migration as flux to either be limited or controlled. In all these cases, unpredictability must somehow be controlled and managed.

One might argue that the answer will be technological in nature. Whilst various more efficient and less polluting technologies might improve the overall sustainability of the economic model existing in the Western world, it is uncertain whether a mere technological answer will allow us to bridge the gap between our globalised reality and the horizon of a common world as described by Arendt (1998) and Tassin (2003). As Heidegger (1967)

tells us, a technological way of thinking is embedded in the way the Western metaphysical tradition historically developed, and this is the tradition which one still finds at work in anthropocentric discourses (Foucault 2001) that more recent thinkers (Stiegler 2018) have renamed the Anthropocene and presented as a horizon to overcome.

One of the important points raised by Arendt (1998) is that the globalised world has lost a common measure within a place inhabited by citizens engaged in the *vita activa*. It is easy to see these conclusions still fully apply in today's world. As she puts it, the search for the 'Archimedean point' concomitant with the development of scientific knowledge since the Copernican revolution divorced us from the political and ethical reality of the world we inhabit.

One might ask whether, from the most advanced experiments in the field of quantum physics to the transhumanist dream of finding shelter on Mars, these are but the fabric of post-Cartesian rationality, and attempt to find an inexhaustible source for objective knowledge in the activity of the knowing subject (Arendt 1998, 279). However, it is also the fascination for the infinite horizon promised by the possibility of this knowledge which, as argued by Nietzsche (1977), alienates us from the world we inhabit. If scientific progress is not the only answer we need, where are we to find solace?

The world as common home

Thinking of the world as the common home we inherited might be a good place to start. It is an aspect rightly identified by Marion (2020, 70), who asks: '[w]ho does not see that green technology mainly makes technocracy greener, far from slowing it down, much less surpassing it?' (my own translation). The technological mode of thinking is inadequate when seeking to understand the concept of world beyond a realm of usable and disposable objects. Future technology might well become greener, more sustainable, and more resilient, yet this will not suffice to address the nexus of worldwide challenges currently at play. What we can learn from Arendt (1998) and Tassin (2003) is the need to rethink the world as a common good, not in the sense of consumable good, but rather in the sense of that which may serve the common interest of the home that global citizens share.

Marion (2020) also tells us that this implies rethinking the relationship which unites humankind and its environment to retrieve how humankind – as a finite reality – is linked to the finite world of nature. We see that the notion of 'habitable earth' Marion alludes to derives from the influence of Christian theology. Becoming once again aware of the co-substantial finitude of humankind and the earth can help in producing the realisation that, just like us, the Earth is a creature. This view implies that our environment be not merely understood as that which surrounds us and is at our disposal but rather as that which shares the same kind of finitude as ours. Like Marion (2020) and Derrida et al. (2023), Stiegler (2018) argued that the hegemony of the concept of efficient cause found in modern physics (Quay 1995) led to produce a nihilistic objectification of life.

However insightful, Marion's conclusion is not as helpful as one might hope. The question I would like to ask is the following: how can we, in today's globalised world, think and care for the future of our planet – our home – as well as for the future of humankind in general? The route Marion opens will be limited if what unites moral agents to our 'environment' is merely the awareness of an understanding of a shared finitude.

However, to do full justice to Marion's argument, one must also acknowledge that the criticism of an excessive reliance on the concept of efficient cause may bear some fruits. Indeed, as we are told by Aristotle (1995, 1600), the efficient cause is 'that from which the change or the freedom from change first begins'. In other words, the efficient cause is that which causes something to be and become what it is. Of course, reintroducing God into the picture does not free it from the reliance on the concept of efficient cause. According to Aristotle, the Unmoved Mover is responsible for the being and becoming of all that is in the cosmos. However, as argued by Marion (2020, 72) in a rather Aristotelian fashion, with modern physics and biology one must accept the paradigm according to which the living is and becomes what it is through the expression of its own nature.

This is the reason why Marion (2020) may claim that this paradigm is determined by an understanding of causality which divorces us from our finitude: the expression of universally calculable natural laws puts one in a position to think that the living expresses its own making as if it were produced from itself. This brings us closer to the Archimedean point Arendt (1998) describes: the same objective physical laws might allow us to describe everything from the infinitely small to the infinitely big, but this does not tell us how to inhabit the world in a way which does not subject it to technological mastery and predictable exhaustion.

Thinking hospitality

I contend that rather than using the theological viewpoint to remind humankind of its humble and finite status in order to argue that the existence of the earth we inhabit is consubstantial with the gift of life, one should seek the help of philosophers who have sought to rethink transcendence as a way to react to the threat of the metaphysical (and therefore technological) reduction of being as a mere technological resource (Heidegger 1967). Furthermore, I argue that Levinas' and Derrida's accounts of the dwelling (Levinas 1979) and hospitality (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 1998; Still 2022) may help us, if not to achieve, to at least think about economy in a way which thinks of the world as a habitable realm for present and future generations. In other words, the ecological question must be thought with the view of a hospitable world in mind. In the globalised world of today and tomorrow, we will face the requirement to make the world a hospitable place in both senses of the term: a welcoming place for global citizens as well as a favourable environment where these citizens will be able to live.

Addressing both questions means rethinking the implications of the global economy. As Tassin (2003) reminds us, there is no correspondence between the relative geographical hegemony of the world economy and the constitution of a meaningful world. This does not necessarily imply that a meaningful globalised world can and should be constituted against a notion of continued economic growth and therefore does not mean that the global world of the future should develop upon the idea of economic sobriety as several thinkers of the ecological question have previously argued (Healy, Martinez-Alier, and Kallis 2015; Klitgaard and Krall 2012; Parrique 2019).

Rather, this means that the meaning of economy itself should be rethought. Tassin (2003, 69) reminds us that our environment is a historically constituted world through 'the whole of the works made by the hand of man, which transform the Earth into a

world' (my own translation). In a similar fashion, according to Levinas (1979), the notion of home as dwelling derives from a concept of world which must always already be hospitable. This kind of hospitality comes before and cannot be reduced to the realm of economic exchange of objectified goods.

Levinas tells us that the hospitality of the home, which is also the possibility of welcoming the other, is a condition of representation itself for the possibility of representation presupposes the presence of a home. As he puts it, 'the subject contemplating a world presupposes the event of dwelling' (Levinas 1979, 153). What makes Levinas' point particularly interesting is that the hospitality of the home which presupposes the realm of objects and intersubjective relationships is not the negation of economy. Rather, it is economy itself. Any encounter taking place in the world implies a certain kind of economic relationship to others.

The home becomes the point of emergence of economy in a world which, being a dwelling, remains hospitable. The kind of epistemic twist this reading offers is the dissociation of the notion of economy from one implying an instrumental relationship to things and to others. This does not amount to arguing that the globalised world of the future should not take advantage of the benefits that technological efficiency might produce for the sake of ecology. Rather, the argument is that the point of emergence of economy – i.e. the point of emergence of what becomes the binding element between the geographical world and the world of sense – is no longer strictly linked to the exploitation and exchange of resources as problematised by traditional economic theories.

The home as economy

The notion of economy thus redefined now designates the political and communal space which allows humankind to coexist (Tassin 2003). If the task of philosophy for today and tomorrow is to problematise the globalised world as world of sense, it is indeed from this space–time perspective, once pointed out by Heidegger (1967), that one should start thinking. This space is indeed not merely spatial (it is not simply geographical), it is also not merely the world of manufactured objects, or the world of the *homo faber*, as Arendt (1998) described it. It is the world of action which ties people together towards shared existence.

This interpretation may lead us in a variety of directions, and it is unclear which existing political account might help us approach it. On the one hand, we might ask whether Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics (Raworth 2017) offers a suitable way to address cosmopolitanism from the very fabric of that which relates people together: the idea that capabilities must be fostered in relation to functionings that individuals determine for their own well-being. In this case, the issue of aligning economic development to the fostering of these functionings must also be addressed, and this is an issue Stiegler (2018) also problematised. However, the articulation of individual to social or communal interests remains a real issue, and it is not surprising that Marion, resorting to a theological perspective, avoids the problem. One might then ask what kind of moral and political philosophy should follow from the conception of the Earth as a shared gift upon which we are all dependent. Lebre's concept of integral human development (Villas Boas and Folloni 2021) prioritising human needs over economic growth might also be a suitable candidate.

Another avenue not to neglect is Beck's insistence on the idea that the scale of environmental threats we face inevitably transcends national boundaries (Beck and Cronin 2006; Sørensen and Christiansen 2013). His concept of globalism might offer an interesting alternative to the one of globalisation: since the threats mentioned above are global in nature, it is within a federated global view that these challenges should be faced. However, the problem previously encountered remains intact: how are we to understand the fabric of the economy which should bind people together? There is a danger that Beck's line of thought might just reproduce an international Leviathan.

I contend that a concern for the hospitality of the globalised world should be the point of departure. As previously mentioned, this approach forces us to care for the world as a hospitable place from the point of view of the environment and of its inhabitants at the same time. If we want this to be the case for future generations, it is unlikely we will have the luxury to bypass the need of developing an economy understood as the *nomos* of the *oikos*. As argued by Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000) following Levinas (1979), this *nomos* is not merely positive law, but a care for justice which places hospitality at its centre. Although for Derrida hospitality transcends previous deontological accounts of cosmopolitanism (Kant 2018) because it cannot be conditional, it is within the space opened by the constant revaluation of the relationship between global law and justice that the care for others (from which the care for the environment inevitably follows) might grow.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Maxime Lallement is a Lecturer in Philosophy at Manchester Metropolitan University. His research interests include contemporary French philosophy, bio-power and biopolitics and the philosophy of Michel Foucault and Georges Canguilhem.

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