

Project Earth: The Aim and Effects of Globalization

by

Andrew Webb

Canyon High School, New Braunfels, Texas

Kathy Simmons, Teacher

Six billion, six hundred ninety-eight million, two hundred thousand, two hundred eleven people; over 4,000 religions; 193 independent nations; six inhabited continents—and just one Earth to share among them. One finite, limited, irreplaceable oblong ball of hope that must be farmed on, dug into, flown over, shipped across, driven on, sold, bought, renovated, traversed, cut, diced, and distributed by every entity on the planet—and the question at hand is “How?” From ambitious corporations to government agencies, from stockholders to servicemen, from producers to planters, from homebuilders to homemakers—every conceivable aspect of humanity is affected by the governance of the planet’s resources, and it is our job to find the most efficient means of distributing them.

One method that seems to be gaining momentum in the electronic age is globalization, and the debate over its many roles is one of the most pressing within the international community. Although there is a consensus that the world has moved closer and will continue toward a global economy, there are still many questions that remain to be definitively quelled. What control, if any, should governments have over its processes—and if so, which governments? As you will see, the complexity of globalization yields no concrete, solves-all kind of answer. (Rosenberg)

Globalization is not in itself a specific term; rather, it is a broad term that encompasses the “increased global interdependence in the economic, social, technological, cultural, political, and ecological spheres.” (Wikipedia) It is extremely difficult to categorize proponents of globalization because the effects of the phenomena are so expansive; for example, globalization is often advocated by free-marketers but not social conservatives, thus dividing the mainstream “Right-wing” camp. Likewise, neo-liberals might support the humanitarian benefits of interdependence, while ecologically concerned liberals might fear the misuse of resources, thus dividing much of the Left. In order to coherently demonstrate these conflicting perspectives, I will begin at the more fundamental levels of society and build to the more complicated ones.

On a cultural level, globalization encourages a shift away from nation-specific practices towards a universal culture. As free markets and open borders allow people to emigrate, immigrate, and travel, bits and pieces of one’s native culture collide with others’ until they are more or less undistinguishable. The first stages of this are already taking place, as demonstrated by the spread of McDonald’s golden arches to 120 countries around the world and the near-global recognition of the Coca-Cola logo. As infrastructure and communication systems are developed in previously isolated regions, cultural trends such as music, fashion, visual art, and language reach new audiences and further the effects of globalization. When this shift toward a universal culture becomes more noticeable, there are questions about different societies’ reactions to it; some say that globalization must be monitored and regulated to accommodate or preserve independent cultures, while others believe in assimilation into one “mixing pot” culture. Opponents of cultural globalization, such as paleoconservatives, reactionaries, nationalists, and non-evangelical religious groups argue that nothing should cause a people to sacrifice their unique way of life. On the other hand, cultural progressives and universalists maintain that an

interdependent culture would promote civil relations between otherwise hostile groups, and therefore traditionalism is a small price to pay for unity and peace.

On a technological level, globalization aims to promote the exchange of property, both physical and intellectual. This approach encourages technological development in two different ways: (1) by promoting international efforts on larger-scale technological projects (such as the International Space Station), and (2) by creating new markets for technological infrastructure (such as telecommunications, data storage, and appliances) in underdeveloped regions of the world. These new markets provide a massive increase in international demand for tech goods, like computers/hardware, and related services, like tech support/maintenance. In turn, this increased international demand would yield profits for corporations that cyclically boost investment, either by the corporation back into product research and development or by private investors seeking returns from stock holdings in a company they expect to perform well. Few oppose basic technological globalization, as it provides profits for suppliers and raises the standards of living for underdeveloped countries, but after the attacks of September 11, 2001, many developed nations are having to monitor the sale of military-related goods to buyers that they view as suspect. More recently, the fear has been that terrorist groups would be able to obtain the materials to manufacture weapons of mass destruction, and international organizations like the United Nations have made attempts to regulate and sanction behavior they feel jeopardizes global security. (Hawkins) In this sense, neoconservatives and military advisers often oppose technological globalization, as they feel it is too prone to be a market for groups like Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah to acquire dangerous weapons.

The environment is also a factor in the globalization issue. With the development of Third World countries into improved industrial regions, there is the threat of increased emissions, both from vehicles and factories. These emissions are pivotal in the debate over climate change, and many argue that without some form of regulation—most recently, in the form of international carbon taxation—globalization would fuel global warming and increase the rate of climate change. Another argument against globalization is the misuse of resources due to increased raw materials trade. Many argue that developed nations would use their economic strength to extract inequitable amounts of natural resources from Third World countries, which are eventually left with nothing to mine, grow, or harvest for profit. Globalists counter this by saying that such a trade would bring new job markets to such countries, and that by the time the developing country's resources were extinguished, it would have grown so much that the emphasis on the agricultural sector will have been replaced by services and technology.

Political globalization is yet another hitherto unresolved aspect. If markets, cultures, and people are suddenly converging into a lone society—who should run the show? Some extremist anarcho-capitalists oppose any form of regulation, stating that private enterprise should be the only rule of law; others call for international agencies (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Federal Reserve) to act as governing forces to slow or promote globalization, depending on the economic environment. Economic globalists maintain that free markets mean free people, and point to the link between laissez-faire economies and democratic governments. Likewise, more statist political systems—communism, Stalinism, or totalitarianism—are seen as incompatible with globalization.

Finally, the global movement has more economic facets than can be sufficiently detailed in a hundred pages, but there are some prominent trends and aspects that guide the process as a whole. To begin with, economic globalization aims to capitalize on “comparative advantages”—conditions where entities benefit mutually by distributing jobs/markets in a way that maximizes

efficiency; the idea of comparative advantage would say that countries should specialize in producing whatever goods or services they are best at providing, while minimizing the industries that they are weakest in due to political, geographic, environmental, or economic disadvantages. (Liberty Fund) The result of this system would be specialization, while product diversity would be acquired via free trade. Free trade is the general term used to describe trade in the absence of government-induced barriers (such as tariffs, subsidies, and isolationist policy) and is argued by many to provide the most efficient distribution of jobs and capital goods. Free trade also leads to the outsourcing (and insourcing) of jobs, as demonstrated by the removal of mohair subsidies by the Clinton administration during the mid-1990s. As government subsidies are removed from the agricultural sector, it becomes unprofitable for farmers and ranchers to produce goods, as overseas competition has a comparative advantage in the form of cheaper labor and less regulation. (Columbia) Thus, outsourcing can leave domestic workers unemployed, which is a major complaint by fair trade advocates, unions, paleoconservatives, and the mainstream Left. Economic globalists, such as libertarians, classical liberals, and capitalists argue that the sacrifice of inefficient domestic jobs serves the greater good by moving a society towards its comparative advantage. The free market also provides a price system, where goods are issued values according to the quantities supplied by producers/manufacturers and demanded by consumers. Globalization encourages competition between producers, decreasing prices to an equilibrium that is lower than before, which makes goods available to more consumers in larger quantities, while companies receive access to a wider variety of markets. (Shah)

Considering these arguments, I believe that globalization is a natural process that serves the greater good. The benefits of free trade can provide higher standards of living for impoverished nations, while mutually benefiting developed ones; however, if left completely unchecked—that is, without overseeing institutions of some kind—the unrestrained market is prone to run its course too violently. There is a need for a gradual approach, political oversight, law and order, international inflation controls, and humane working conditions. Without some form of government to perform these tasks, I see the capitalist model failing, as unchecked specialization, outsourcing, and misuse of natural/human resources tend to benefit the few at the expense of many.

Everything in moderation, as too much of a good thing isn't necessarily good.

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