

## Globalisation and Nationalism: The Need to Solve an Insoluble Problem

Gavin Kitching

My book, *Capitalism and Democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, is the kind of speculative essay that an academic can only get away with at the end of his/her career. For firstly, it adds nothing substantive to the literatures it surveys, says nothing *factual* - about capitalism, globalisation or democracy – that has not been said by many people before, including myself. But secondly, and even more problematically, the book undertakes, quite openly and unapologetically, to do something which is massively and manifestly question-begging. It outlines a major economic and political problem faced by the contemporary world then offers an institutional/policy ‘solution’ to that problem whose only merit is logical. That is, the solution *might* ‘work’ (logically speaking) *if* it could be brought about, but the book offers no suggestions as to how to do that. Indeed, it infers (at least) that the chances of it happening in the world as it currently is, are effectively zero. In other words, the book outlines a real ‘present’ problem and a (speculative) ‘future’ solution,<sup>1</sup> but offers no suggestions (no matter how tentative) as to how to get from one to the other.

So what is the point of that? What is the point of engaging in an exercise in speculative logic that ignores the massive real-world obstacles to the realisation of that logic? For me the point was/is twofold. Firstly, I wanted to emphasize that the main problem with which the book is concerned – the massive gap between an ever more globalised economics and a still overwhelmingly national politics – is a problem that needs to be solved. That is, it is (a) not going to go away in any foreseeable future, and (b) if it is not solved it will produce ever worsening problems and dangers for humanity as a whole. But if it is a problem which *needs* to be solved, then simply asserting that ‘practically’ it ‘cannot’ be solved, does nothing to gainsay that logical necessity or the reasons for it.<sup>2</sup>

But secondly, if the problem is not solved along the lines that the book suggests (some kind of global regulatory agency for a globalised capitalism) then – in my view at least – *there is no other solution*. That is, if the problem is an ever-growing disconnect between the world’s globalised economics and its nationalist politics, then trying to solve it by corralling capitalism

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<sup>1</sup> Although I try to weaken the force of this contradiction by allowing a century or so for the solution to be found!

<sup>2</sup> The idea that long term historical processes have a *logic* to them is one I got from Hegel. See Appendix 1 to *Capitalism and Democracy* for some further implications of this idea.

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back into a nation-state framework will not work. By that I mean that even attempting this ‘nationalist’ solution will be to the material detriment of everyone in the world in the longer run, whatever its ‘short term’ benefits for some sub-group or groups of the world’s population.

You may or may not agree with these propositions, but even if you do there is a further massive problem. For even if we need a globalised politics to match our globalised economics, and even if the nationalist alternative (‘de-globalising’ our economics to fit our nationalist politics) would be “to the material detriment of everyone in the world in the longer run”, there is currently no effective institutional embodiment or expression of this ‘everyone’<sup>3</sup>. That is, there are no power holders in our world beholden to “humanity as a whole”, no policy-makers who are responsible for, or answerable to, this entity. And just for that reason “humanity as a whole” can seem (indeed usually is) the most abstract and empty of categories. It is the kind of phrase that turns up in academic books and articles, and perhaps in debates in the UN General Assembly, but most of the time it either has no politically effective meaning at all, or only acquires such a meaning if/when some powerful or hegemonic group of nation-states gives it (a generally partial or self-interested) one.

To this point my argument might seem quite familiar, because, at first sight, it overlaps markedly with a tradition of neo-classical economic theorising. In this tradition (of which there is also a Marxist variant<sup>4</sup>) capitalism becomes a ‘globalised’ primarily because of its

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<sup>3</sup> I do not consider the UN, or its component agencies, to be ‘effective’ in this sense

<sup>4</sup> The variant found in the ‘globalisation’ sections of the *Communist Manifesto*. “The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.” “The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all the preceding generations put together...” (And perhaps most tellingly and ironically for today’s audience.) “The bourgeoisie by the rapid development of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls...” (!)

However historically prescient these remarks may be, they are obviously culturally Eurocentric, and, perhaps less obviously, heavily *Class-centric*. “The bourgeoisie” is the *only* historical actor or subject here, with nations appearing only as passive objects transformed by that - apparently *nationless* - class. This is most marked in the section concerned with the “political centralisation” of states. “The bourgeoisie” having “agglomerated property, centralised means of production and...concentrated property in a few hands” produces (somehow) “political centralisation” as a “necessary consequence” of these economic processes. And thus, “*Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation, become lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier and one customs-tariff.*” It hardly needs saying how many specifically *political* struggles and processes the phrase ‘becoming lumped together’ occludes here. Certainly, this passage perfectly exemplifies the chronic underestimation of nationalism which has long been a weakness of the Marxist tradition.

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competitive superiority to all other modes of production. In the neo-classical version of this view, the ‘market mechanisms’ of comparative and absolute advantage will produce a ‘Pareto optimal’ world economy of maximum benefit to everyone *if* (and only if) its ‘efficient’ market functioning is not ‘impeded’ or ‘undermined’ by the ‘political interference’ of a state or states.

However, this is *not* what I am arguing, or what *Capitalism and Democracy* argues. On the contrary, while capitalism *may* be the most economically efficient form of economic production and distribution, it only globalises (or rather it has only been globalised) because the leaders of several/many nation states recognised this efficiency, or potential efficiency, and acted politically upon it. In other words, far from believing that capitalism has globalised or is globalising despite state action (through ‘market’ means), I believe it has globalised primarily by state action, with market mechanisms being manipulated as policy tools. The internationalisation of the capitalist mode of production was initiated by state action in the past (by Germany, Japan etc.) and its continuing globalisation is the result of state action in the present (by China, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Mexico, Turkey etc.)<sup>5</sup>

But if that is the case then it only piles contradiction on contradiction. For it implies that (a) the present globalised economy is itself a product of nationalist economic policy-making (past and present) and, more importantly (b) that the human or social merits (or demerits) of that globalisation are themselves always *assessed* nationalistically.

This latter is just the familiar point that everybody in the world judges the globalised (or ‘world’) economy by nationalist criteria.

**[Is ‘it’? (or is ‘it not’?) working “for the benefit of”:**

**America (and we Americans)**

**China (and we Chinese)**

**Mexico (and we Mexicans)**

**Germany (and we Germans)**

**India (and we Indians)?**

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<sup>5</sup> I also believe, contrary to the neo-liberal view, that the state played an important part in the development of capitalism even in ‘free market’ Britain and the USA.

**[Insert any other national categories you wish.]**

This also implies that the globalised (or ‘world’) economy will generally be lauded by the leaders of a state - any state - so long as it is seen to be working well for that state and its people. And it will be questioned or criticised as soon as that is no longer so. (*Capitalism and Democracy* is especially concerned with the destructive implications for western democracy of the contemporary global economy working in ways which damage the economic welfare of many western citizens.)

So, the contemporary globalised economy has only come into existence through nationalist policy-making (past and present) and, for the same reason, its functioning is always and everywhere assessed nationalistically. But none of that alters the fact that if states now respond nationalistically to domestic economic and social problems created by globalisation, they will damage the welfare both of their own citizens and of many/most other human beings more than they would be if they did not respond in that way.

In other words, and to put the matter as forcefully as I can, *the fact that a global economic interest has been created nationalistically does not alter the fact that there is (now) such an interest and that in important ways it does (now) transcend national interests.*

I hope that the meaning and significance of this paper’s title is now clear. If there is now a genuinely global economic interest, then there is an ‘all-human’ need to have that interest institutionalised and politically articulated. But if that interest is itself the outcome of nationalist policy-making, and if what it is (i.e. what it consists in) is ‘always’ and ‘everywhere’ *understood* nationalistically, then, in our world, it cannot be non-nationalistically institutionalised or articulated. Human beings have a problem that *needs* to be solved in all their interests, but which *cannot* be solved given their current forms of political organisation. ‘We’ (in the largest possible sense of ‘we’) really do need to solve an insoluble problem, and that need is not the less real because we cannot meet it.

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So what do we do? We do what human beings always do when they are required to solve an insoluble problem. We proceed piecemeal and incrementally. We address, not the problem ‘as a whole’, but some *parts* of it that are more susceptible to solution (or at least mitigation) in our current circumstances. And then, if we succeed in such ‘partial’ solutions, we may hope to create more propitious circumstances for addressing more intractable dimensions of ‘the problem’ later.

What do I mean by this? I mean that we must focus on some specific dimensions or aspects of the functioning of our globalised economy that we can *all* now agree (whatever our national perspectives) are problematic. Such dimensions might include:

- (1) The environmental costs of some current forms of energy generation.
- (2) The environmental costs of some current forms of international travel and tourism.
- (3) The pandemic dangers inherent in human mass movement across the planet, and means to mitigate such risks.
- (4) The ‘waste’ and ‘pollution’ effects of some current forms of mass production and consumption.

But more importantly, all agreements to address such problems must be non-nationalistically monitored (by global inspectorates of various kinds) empowered to sanction any state found to be infracting them. In other words, they must contain monitoring and enforcement mechanisms which *significantly impact the sovereign rights of states*. They must embody ways of assessing whether states are meeting their agreed commitments which are institutionally *independent of* and *go beyond* those offered by such states themselves

One final point. Whatever one may make of the argument of this paper in general terms, it may seem particularly hopeless and utopian at the present time given the strident nationalism (and overt hostility to multi-nationalist agencies and initiatives of all types) increasingly manifested by the current leaderships of several major nation-states. I am thinking of President Trump here of course, but not only of him. And this raises the question of whether this nationalistic, even xenophobic, trend, is *itself* connected to, or a response to, globalisation. In *Capitalism and Democracy*, I argue that it is, at least in the case of western democracies, who see global

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economic power shifting away from them. However, at the moment this trend also extends *beyond* the West, to encompass places and regions where it cannot (can it?) be explained as a response to relative economic decline or loss of power.

I would be very interested to hear what colleagues have to say about this global rise in nationalist sentiment and what explains it. But *whatever* explains it, the gap between the political leadership which the world currently possesses and the leadership it urgently needs has never been wider. In my 74<sup>th</sup> year I can only hope that I live long enough to at least see the gap narrow, which I suppose means - to see the major states of the world led by enlightened rather than unenlightened nationalists.

GNK  
Sydney,  
Sept 8<sup>th</sup> 2020

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## 全球化与民族主义：解决“无解问题”的必要性

加文·基钦

我写的《二十一世纪的资本主义与民主》<sup>6</sup>这本书主要是一些推测和猜想。学者只有在学术生涯快结束时，写这种书才可能安然无事。因为对现有文献而言，它没有增添什么实质性的内容，也没有关于资本主义、全球化、民主等议题的事实性材料。这些事实性材料，很多学者包括我自己，之前已经说过很多了。其次，这本书更大的问题在于它公然地大范围地使用了未经证实的假定，而且作者对此毫无悔意。该书指出了当代社会面临的主要经济政治问题，并提供了制度的/政策的“解决方案”。或许全书的唯一优点在于它符合逻辑。如果该方案得以实施，那逻辑上而言问题就能得到解决。但书中也没讲应该怎么去实施这一方案。而且该书字里行间表明，该方案在现实中发生的几率基本为零。换句话说，这本书勾勒了一个真实存在的“当代”问题，推测出了一个“未来的”解决方案<sup>7</sup>，但没有（甚至都没有尝试）给出从问题到解决方案的路径。

那写这本书有什么意义呢？为什么要去假象出一个逻辑，而不顾现实中有无数的障碍让这个逻辑无法实现？于我而言，这样做的意义（曾经）在于两个方面。第一，我想要强调指出，这本书所关注的主要问题需要得到解决。这个主要问题就是日益全球化的经济与仍然占主导的国家政治之间的巨大鸿沟。这一状况在可以预见的未来不会发生改变，而如果持续下去，它将为整个人类带来更大的问题和危险。如果这确实是一个需要解决的问题，那简单断定“实际上”它“不可能”得到解决，是无法否认我们有从逻辑上推理它的解决方案的必要性的<sup>8</sup>。

第二，若这一问题没有沿本书所建议的路线得到解决（建立规制全球资本主义的全球机构），那在我看来，就没有其他解决方案了。如果问题在于全球化的经济与民族主义的政治日益脱离，那把资本主义再赶回民族国家的围栏里显然不是问题的解决

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<sup>6</sup> 译者注：在下文中多以《资本主义与民主》为标题出现。

<sup>7</sup> 尽管为了缓解这种矛盾，我已经把人们找到解决方案的时间拉长到了一个世纪！

<sup>8</sup> 关于漫长历史过程自有其逻辑的观念源自黑格尔。参见《资本主义与民主》一书的附录 1，其中有关于这一观念的进一步解释。

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方案。哪怕只是尝试这种“民族主义”的解决方案，那长期来看每个人的物质利益都有可能受损，不管这一方案“短期内”如何有利于世界人口的某些群体或亚群体。

你们或许赞同这些论断，也或许不赞同。但即便是赞同，这一判断还是有很大的问题。因为哪怕是我们需要一个全球化的政治来匹配我们全球化的经济，哪怕是民族主义的替代方案（即，将经济“去全球化”以匹配民族主义的政治）“有损于每个人的长远的物质利益”，我们目前也没有一个有效的机构实体来代表“每个人”<sup>9</sup>。这就是说，世界上没有哪位当权者对“全体人类”负有义务，也没有哪位政策制定者对全体人类负责。因此，“全体人类”可以被看作（实际上通常也是）最抽象的最空洞的范畴。这种表述可能出现在学术文章和书籍之中，可能出现在联合国大会的讨论中，但绝大多数时候，它没有任何政治上的实际意义。只有某个民族国家的强权或霸权集团赋予它政治上的意义时，它才具有意义，而这种意义往往是出于私利，而且是不完整的。

就此而言，我的观点似乎有些耳熟，因为乍一看，它与新古典经济学的理论传统有很大部分的重叠。在这一传统中（马克思主义学说中也有类似的观点）<sup>10</sup>，资本主义之所以“被全球化”，是因为它比其他任何生产方式都要优越。新古典主义经济学的此类观点认为，只要（只有）市场按“效率”运作的过程不被国家（或多个国家）所“阻碍”或“破坏”，那么比较优势和绝对优势作用下的市场机制将产生“帕累托最优”的世界经济，所有人的利益都将得到最大化。

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<sup>9</sup> 我并不认为联合国及其组成机构，从“代表每个人”的意义上说是“有效的”。

<sup>10</sup> 这一观点出现在《共产党宣言》的“全球化”部分。“不断扩大产品销路的需要，驱使资产阶级奔走于全球各地。它必须到处落户，到处开发，到处建立联系。”“资产阶级在它的不到一百年的阶级统治中所创造的生产力，比过去一切世代创造的全部生产力还要多，还要大。”（或许这是对今天听众来说最具冲击力和讽刺意味的一点）“资产阶级，由于一切生产工具的迅速改进，由于交通的极其便利，把一切民族甚至最野蛮的民族都卷到文明中来了。它的商品的低廉价格，是它用来摧毁一切万里长城、征服野蛮人最顽强的仇外心理的重炮。”（！）

但是，不论这些论述如何在历史上有先见之明，它们在文化上显然依旧以欧洲为中心，并且以阶级为中心（这一点或许不那么明显）。“资产阶级”是唯一的历史行动者或主体，国家只是被这一显然无国家的阶级所改变的被动的客体。这在《宣言》中国家“政治的集中”这一小节最为明显。“资产阶级日甚一日地消灭生产资料、财产和人口的分散状态。它使人口密集起来，使生产资料集中起来，使财产聚集在少数人的手里。由此必然产生的结果就是政治的集中。各自独立的、几乎只有同盟关系的、各有不同利益、不同法律、不同政府、不同关税的各个地区，现在已经结合为一个拥有统一的政府、统一的法律、统一的民族阶级利益和统一的关税的统一的民族。”无需多言，“统一在一起”这样的表述背后，省略了多少特定的政治斗争和过程。当然，这一段话也完美地诠释了马克思主义传统中一直存在的一个弱点，即对民族主义习惯性地低估。



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但是，这不是我要讲的，也不是《资本主义与民主》这本书要讲的。相反，尽管资本主义也许是最有效率的生产与分配形式，它之所以将一切全球化（或说它之所以被全球化）是因为某几个/某一些民族国家的领导人认识到了它的效率或潜在的效率，因此采取了政治行动。换言之，我不认为资本主义是脱离了政府行为、通过“市场”手段将其他领域全球化的，相反，我坚信资本主义全球化的首要原因在于政府行动，市场机制只不过是政策的工具。在过去，资本主义生产方式的国际化最初是国家推动的（如德国，日本等），现在它的持续国际化也是国家行为的结果（如中国，印度，泰国，印尼，墨西哥，土耳其等）<sup>11</sup>。

但若果真如此，那这只不过是矛盾的现实之上又增添了矛盾之处。这意味着（1）目前全球化的经济本身不过是（过去以及现在的）国家经济政策的产物，而且更重要的是，（2）全球化为人类和社会所带来的益处（或害处）也是在国家范围内被品评的。

第二点更为常见的表达是，每个人都在用民族主义的标准在评价全球化的（世界）经济。

【它是不是/】“有利于”

美国（和我们美国人？）

中国（和我们中国人？）

墨西哥（和我们墨西哥人？）

德国（和我们德国人？）

印度（和我们印度人？）

或者【难道它不是】“有利于”

美国（和我们美国人吗？）

中国（和我们中国人吗？）

墨西哥（和我们墨西哥人吗？）

德国（和我们德国人吗？）

印度（和我们印度人吗？）

【你可以继续加你想要加的任何国家】

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<sup>11</sup> 与新自由主义的观点相反，我还认为，哪怕在“自由市场”国家如英美，国家也在资本主义的发展中起了重要作用。

这也意味着全球化的（“世界”）经济通常会得到国家（任何国家）领导者的赞美——只要它看上去对国家和人民有利。而一旦它不再有利，则立即会被质疑或批判。（《资本主义和民主》特别关注当代全球经济对西方民主带来的破坏性影响，因为它损害了许多西方公民的经济福利）。

因此，当代全球化的经济只有通过（过去和现在）国家的政策才能（继续）存在。同理，无论何时何地，对它的运作的评判也只能在民族主义的框架内进行。但这些都改变不了这个现实：如果国家以民族主义的方式回应全球化带来的国内经济与社会问题，那它将对本国国民和大部分其他公民造成巨大的伤害，远甚于不以这种方式回应造成的后果。

换言之，用我最有力量的语言来讲，尽管全球经济利益是在民族国家框架内实现的，但这种利益及其重要程度（如今）已经超出了国家利益的范畴。

我希望到这里，我已经把我演讲的标题的意义和重要性阐述清楚了。现在真实存在着全球经济利益，所有人类都需要将这种利益制度化并建立政治上的关联。但是，如果这种利益本身就是民族国家政策的产物，如果它（比如它所蕴含的内容）无论“何时”“何地”都在民族国家的框架内被解读，那我们的世界中就不可能出现与它对应的非民族主义的制度化机构或联合体。人类面临一个需要解决的关乎其共同利益的问题，如今在既有的政治机构中却无法解决。“我们”（最大意义上的“我们”）确实需要解决一个无解之题。该问题的真实性并不因为我们无法解答而消减。

那我们怎么办呢？人类碰到一个无解之题时一般都这么做：一点点做，一步步来。我们并不把这个问题当作“一个问题”来解决，而是在现有条件下，先处理一部分更有可能解决（或缓解）的问题。如果我们成功地“部分”解决了该问题，那我们就有了更好的条件，着手处理“这个问题”中更难解决的部分。

这么说是什么意思呢？我的意思是，我们必须集中精力处理全球化经济中我们全都认为出现了问题的方面或维度，不管我们从哪个国家的视角来看。这些维度可能包括：

- (1) 目前某些形式能源生产方式的环境代价
- (2) 目前某些形式的国际旅游的环境代价

- (3) 人类大规模全球流动带来的的流行病风险，以及抵抗这些危险的手段
- (4) 目前某些形式的大规模生产和消费的“浪费”和“污染”

但更重要的是，所有处理这些问题的协议都必须是非民族国家的实体（类似于全球视察员）来监管执行，他们有权制裁违反协议的任何国家。换言之，他们需要具备监督和执行机制，能够有效地对主权国家施加影响。他们必须成为评价体系的代表，能够判定国家是否实现了应允的承诺。这些承诺在制度上是独立于国家之外，并且超出了国家范畴的。

最后一点。鉴于目前几个主要大国的领导人表现出来的甚嚣尘上的民族主义（公然反对多国联合机构或任何类似的倡议），无论是谁对本次演讲所论及的议题作总体性论述，似乎都难免特别绝望，或者特别乌托邦。现在出现在我脑海里的当然有特朗普，也当然不只是他。问题在于，这种民族主义甚至恐外主义，是否本身就是对全球化的一种反应，或者与全球化相关。在《资本主义和民主》一书中，我指出至少对西方的民主国家而言是如此。因为全球化的经济力量已经于彼不利。但是目前，这种民族主义或恐外主义的趋势似乎超出了西方国家的范围，波及到了一些无法用经济相对衰退或权力相对丧失来解释这种趋势的地区和国家。

我特别想听到各位对这种民族主义情绪全球高涨的看法，想知道各位是怎么去解释它的。但不论作何解释，世界现有的政治格局和世界亟需的政治格局之间的差距从未如此之大。我已是耄耋之年，希望我还能活着看到这个差距缩小。我希望还能活着看到，这个世界的主要大国是被开明的而不是愚昧的民族主义者来领导。

加文·基钦，2020 年 9 月 8 日写于悉尼

汪淳玉 译