



AIVARAS STEPUKONIS

Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, Lietuva
Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, Lithuania

VAKARŲ CIVILIZACIJOS RAIDOS PERSPEKTYVOS: DĖL KO (NE)SUTARIA EUROPIEČIAI IR AMERIKIEČIAI?

The Development Perspectives of Western Civilization:
What Do Europeans and Americans (Dis)Agree About?

SUMMARY

The West, primarily the European Union and the United States of America, have shown a remarkable unity and cohesion in their response to the Russo-Ukrainian War (2014–), upholding the right of Ukraine as a sovereign democratic state to defend its independence and territorial integrity. However, this civilizational unity in the West may be short-lived. There are pressing reasons for the hypothesis that Europe and North America are at structural odds concerning the current state and future course of human history, including the international political mechanisms by which that course should be implemented. If this divergence is not managed on a timely basis, it may fracture Western civilization into two. Will the West be preserved? The article argues that it may be preserved by unraveling two paradoxes: one for the European Union and one for the United States.

SANTRAUKA

Vakarai, visų pirma Europos Sąjunga ir Jungtinės Amerikos Valstijos, atsiliepdami į Rusijos ir Ukrainos karą (2014–), parodė nepaprastą vienybę ir sanglaudą, remdami Ukrainos, kaip suverenios demokratinės valstybės, teisę ginti savo nepriklausomybę ir teritorinį vientisumą. Vis dėlto ši civilizacinė vienybė Vakaruose gali būti trumpalaikė. Esama svaraus pagrindo kelti hipotezę, kad Europą ir Šiaurės Ameriką skaldo pamatiniai nesutarimai tiek dėl dabartinės žmonijos istorijos būklės, tiek dėl jos ateities raidos, įskaitant tarptautinius politinius mechanizmus, kuriais ta raida turėtų būti įgyvendinama. Jei ši takoskyra nebus laiku suvaldyta, Vakarų civilizacija gali skilti į dvi dalis. Ar galima išsaugoti vieningus Vakarus? Straipsnyje argumentuojama, kad įmanoma tai padaryti, išspręsdus du paradoksus: vieną tektų spręsti Europos Sąjungai, o kitą – Jungtinėms Valstijoms.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: Vakarų civilizacija, Europa, Amerika, vienybė, skilimas.

KEY WORDS: Western civilization, Europe, America, unity, division.

INTRODUCTION: QUESTIONING OCCIDENTAL UNITY

The Russian–Ukrainian military confrontation since its beginning in February 2014 has been understood and approached by the West as a *local* crisis¹. The US president Barack Obama made this very clear during the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague on March 25, 2014, by calling Russia a “regional power that is threatening some of its immediate neighbors, not out of strength but out of weakness” (Borger 2014). The unity of the West in its commitment to support Ukraine’s efforts to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity has been celebrated as a strong collective reaffirmation of fundamental Occidental values—notably, those of self-determination and democracy—but also as the biggest miscalculation of the Russian

State in its perpetration of aggression against Ukraine (see, for example, Lohse 2022; Khalaf 2022).

Much of what is described as the *unity* of the West, in particular with respect to the circumstantial alignment of interests in the European Union and the United States of America, however, may turn out to be a short-term *convergence* of measures against a common problem and may dissipate as soon as the problem gets solved because the current-day Occident in fact constitutes less and less of a real civilizational unity and instead is on the verge of undergoing a systematic reconfiguration in the form of civilizational bifurcation. Let’s explore the deeper philosophical reasons for this hypothesis.

SYMPTOMS OF CULTURAL ALIENATION ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

For a long time, scholars in Europe and North America, including proponents of social conflict theory (*cf.* Huntington 1993; 1996), took the West’s civilizational unity as a given. However, in recent decades, political scientists have begun to seriously question the unity of Western civilization, the core of which comprises Europe and North America. The unity of this political, cultural, and military tandem reached its peak during the Cold War. It was particularly consolidated against the hostile bloc of communist countries behind the Iron Curtain. However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, this camaraderie, which guaranteed the political integrity of the West, began to falter.

Today, European countries form a multilateral, interstate union called the European Union. According to Robert Cooper, it is a completely new kind of formation “in that it is historically unprecedented and also because it is based on new concepts” (Cooper 2003: 75). The first of these *new* concepts, directed at foreign policy, is the refusal to manage international relations based on the principle of the balance of power, according to which states resolve international affairs by opposing each other with equal military capabilities and internal affairs by following only their own will without the slightest external regulation. The European nation-states, which survived two

world wars, finally—even if very cruelly—convinced themselves that this principle does not work. Without knowledge of what is happening in the neighboring countries, the states get suspicious, anxious, and, in the fear of possible, but more often only imagined, external attacks, strengthen their armaments. A bad beginning makes a bad ending: the neighboring countries respond in kind. The race for military capabilities eventually becomes uncontrollable and fatal, resulting in a bloody cataclysmic explosion, just as the previous two world wars did.

Cross-border conflicts in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries flared up due to ignorance of what was happening beyond the borders—an ignorance that fueled mistrust between states and thus the inability to cooperate for long-term harmony. For many centuries, Europe experienced either wars or interwars, but not real peace. Together with the unfortunate principle of the balance of power, the states that joined the European Union also gave up traditional absolute sovereignty, which required the separation of domestic and foreign policies. In its place, a new, almost opposite principle was installed, which obliges the countries of the European Union to disclose, open-up their internal politics, and become transparent; also, if necessary, to allow member states to intervene in domestic affairs if their peers deviate from commonly accepted guidelines. Member states create unified political, economic, legal, and administrative norms, which each individually implements in its territory. This makes the strategies of states interdependent and consciously coordi-

nated, and there is no need to guess about them from a distance. In the European Union, international relations are based on active mutual acquaintance, which promotes the trust of nations, *a priori* dispels imagined but unwarranted political phobias. Cooper, I think only rhetorically, asks, “What is the origin of this change?” and immediately answers:

The fundamental point is that ‘the world’s grown honest’. Many the most powerful states no longer want to fight or to conquer. [...] France no longer thinks of invading Germany or Italy, although it has nuclear weapons, which should theoretically put it in a position of overwhelming superiority. Nor does it think of invading Algeria to restore order. The imperial instinct is dead, at least among the Western powers. [...] Acquiring territory is no longer of interest. Acquiring subject populations would for most sates be a nightmare (*ibid.*: 32–33).

Of course, the open European space expands not only from “historical fatigue,” but also from ardent enthusiasm, inspired by the factual realization that the new way of interaction among states is crystallizing into a stunningly successful peace mechanism and a hope no past generation in the West or anywhere else could have nurtured—to see the vision of sustainable coexistence of peoples. In the name of this grand vision, which is becoming a reality, the members of the European Union are determined to undergo essential reforms and establish a system of “postmodern states.”² The European Union hopes to have discovered the path to perpetual peace predicted by Immanuel Kant (see Kant 1795) and to have arrived at the stage of political de-

velopment that Robert Kagan refers to as the European “paradise” and contrasts with the “power” of the United States of America (see Kagan 2004). For Washington still communicates—‘communicates’ indeed is not the right word—still fights with the rest of the world by means of a modern state. In international relations, North America tends to distrust and suspect everyone. And it has no reason to trust, because the global situation and tense interstate relations, especially with non-Western countries, are approached in advance according to the traditional canons of the balance of power. The United States hides domestic politics as much as possible. Its potential enemies respond in kind. The behavior is usual: to try by all possible means to be more powerful and capable, to surpass in weaponry, intelligence, and, of course, economic indicators. It would be ignorant to blame North America for such behavior. There are too many intertwined geopolitical circumstances in the history of this glorious land to attempt to untangle them here. However, it would be just as lighthearted to overlook the opening and ever-widening fissures in the supposedly solid monolith of Western civilization.

The European Union understands its mission towards the rest of the world as follows: to spread ideas and ways in other civilizational regions on how to implement the peace project that Europe has already succeeded in implementing. The European Union is convinced that it is much more effective to use international law and legislation than military means to reinforce national aspirations—no one says that states must abandon

them. This is what makes the European Union postmodern. According to Cooper,

internationally the emphasis [of postmodern European states] has shifted from the control of territory and armies to the capacity to join international bodies and to make international agreements. Making peace is as much a part of sovereignty as making war. For the postmodern state, sovereignty is a seat at the table (Cooper 2003: 44).

Roman Prodi, the president of the European Commission, believes Europe’s special role in world governance is to replicate the European experience on a global scale. “By making a success of integration, we are demonstrating to the world that it is possible to create a method for peace” (Prodi 2001). Chris Patten, the EU commissioner in charge of external relations, claims that “European integration shows that compromise and reconciliation is possible after generations of prejudice, war and suffering” (Patten 2002). This is the evangelical message that the European Union wishes to convey and demonstrate to the rest of the world through its concrete example.

The United States also desires peace, or rather security, but it is not going to place its security—at least for now—in the hands of the international legal order and international organizations. Washington is not an ardent supporter of multilateral agreements between states. Its methods are more traditional, or, in the words of Cooper, “modern.” The White House tends to decide on its own—hence, more or less unilaterally—when and against whom it is time to defend its homeland (usually by pre-emptive attack). The approval of other nations is

preferable but not necessary. The behavior of the United States on the world stage is more accurately described as “dominance” than “accommodation.” It is true that the United States cherishes the ideals of liberal democracy based on a kind of practical rationality that makes its actions understandable and predictable, just as the behavior of a reasonable person is understandable and predictable. This, however, does not equate to the transparency of European integration. In addition, the United States suffers from the “only child syndrome”: it does not properly understand, and sometimes it seems it fails to even imagine, that the worldview it paints is *only* one of the possible civilizational worldviews and that the superiority of such a worldview should not be taken for granted; on the contrary, it must be reinterpreted every time and proven in the company of other competing worldviews, respectfully, not by coercion but by spiritual means.

Imposed liberal democracy will be understood in the world as it should be understood—as coercion and evil-doing. The United States, in dealing with other countries, behaves too insensitively and uncritically, absolutizes its view as the only right view, and provokes—very often unjustified but emotionally completely understandable—hatred towards itself. Benjamin Franklin once proudly cited that “our Cause is *the Cause of all Mankind*” (Franklin 1984: 6–7). Americans believe this statement and believe that such an identification is noble and humane. But it is also very treacherous. After all, the goal of all mankind is not the goal of America, but the other way around! Franklin’s citation would, of course, jus-

tify even the most selfish actions of the United States, because no matter how egotistically it behaves, it would still have “a second-order effect” that “benefits all humanity” (Rice 2000: 47). No one else knows what other nations need as well as the Americans; such an attitude will rather blind than open one’s eyes. As Kagan candidly observes, “They will defend the townspeople, whether the townspeople want them to or not” (Kagan 2004: 95). In other words, the United States saves the world even when the world does not want it. And this makes us question whether what is called “salvation”—often very painful—is really salvation.

With the end of the Cold War, the main battlefield in the world shifted from territorial struggles to ideological ones. It is true that blood is still being shed and national borders are still being (re)erected, but views, thoughts, and visions are being talked about a lot more. The war is not about lands but about how the world should be run. From the Western point of view, it is about the establishment of a liberal democratic system on a global scale. The views of the European Union and the United States on international relations and world governance are increasingly diverging. The two parties, once the guarantors of Western unity, are beginning to disagree, declaring an ideological and even moral war. Perhaps the ideological divides I will discuss shortly are not dangerous to peace in either the European Union or the North American dominions. But it seems that they are dangerous for the civilizational unity of the West. I will quote a longer passage from Kagan’s³ *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Or-*

der, which casts bleak doubts on the prospect of a united West:

Today a darker possibility looms. A great philosophical schism has opened within the West, and instead of mutual indifference, mutual antagonism threatens to debilitate both sides of the transatlantic community. Coming at a time in history when new dangers and crises are proliferating rapidly, this schism could have serious consequences. For Europe and the United States to decouple strategically has been bad enough. But what if the schism over “world order” infects the rest of what we have known as the liberal West? Will the West still be the West? [...] For it is precisely the question of legitimacy that is at issue today between Americans and Europeans—not the legitimacy of each other’s political institutions, perhaps, but of their differing visions of “world order.” More to the point, it is the legitimacy of American power and American global leadership that has come to be doubted by a majority of Europeans. America, for the first time since World War II, is suffering a crisis of international legitimacy (Kagan 2004: 107–108).

It is important to understand not so much the physical nature of this divide—although the latter is also present in transatlantic relations—but the spiritual one. Legitimacy is related to the ability to mentally coordinate actions, the ability to communicate, and the ability to be guided by similar assumptions; all these mental processes are accompanied by a legacy of common historical and cultural categories—that is to say, civilization. The Old and New Continents enjoyed this legacy for several centuries; they were connected by the common heritage of Judeo-Greek Christian

tradition, which is now dangerously disappearing and already showing the first signs of crisis. If Samuel Huntington is correct (*cf.* Huntington 1993; 1996) and his geological metaphor is apt, a deep, ever-expanding fault line in the plane of Western civilization will split the former civilizational unit into two—and not necessarily friendly ones.

Kagan is keen to observe that the internal tension in the West is exacerbated by

a philosophical, even metaphysical disagreement over where exactly mankind stands on the continuum between the laws of the jungle and the laws of reason. Americans do not believe we are as close to the realization of the Kantian dream as do Europeans (Kagan 2004: 91).

The different evaluations of the spiritual development of humanity alienate the countries of the European Union and the United States; both sides diverge in their assessments not only of global threats but also of the ways to eliminate such threats. The first side emphasizes the creation and observance of international agreements, while the second does not trust such ideological ties and therefore relies on force, threats of war, and war itself.

Europe and North America, like all other civilizations, live in the same world and in the same global age, in which, according to Cooper, “no continent is an island and the key question for Europe has ceased to be how it can end its fratricidal conflicts and become instead, how it can live in a world where conflicts, missiles and terrorists ignore borders [...]” (Cooper 2003: 6). The future of the world is drawn not only by different

colors but also by different means—some with a pen on paper, some with fighter jets in the sky. The torn West may not yet be completely split; there is no abyss yet, but spiritual estrangement is growing and mutual understanding is waning, and with the latter crumbles the basis for hoping that the West will preserve its civilizational unity.

The dangers of the present transatlantic predicament [...] lie [...] in the inherent moral tension of the current international situation. As is so often the case in human affairs, the real question is one of intangibles—of fears, passions, and beliefs (Kagan 2004: 99).

I agree with every word Kagan is saying here about the psychology of nations and states, but doesn't that mean that intangibles determine most of the turns in international relations? Determine the very essence of Western civilization? Even if there is no greater material gap, the increased spiritual gap will be enough for the West to split into European civilization and North American civilization.

Politicians on both sides of the Atlantic are well aware of this threat, understand it, and are trying to eliminate it. There are many conscious efforts to preserve Western unity. These efforts, of course, begin where there are the fewest disputes: both sides are brought together by a shared desire to defend and spread the ideals of liberalism and de-

mocracy across borders. The Americans, despite their enormous military power, still need the support of the Europeans, without which no significant legitimacy is possible when operating on an international scale.

The NATO bloc is undoubtedly an instrument of power, but it is quite possible that this is only its secondary function and that its primary one is to act as a "massive intra-Western confidence-building measure" (Cooper 2003: 34–35).⁴ This deliberate attempt to exercise and reinforce civilizational cohesion within the West is evident in practice. In Kosovo, faced with the indecisiveness of the Europeans, the Americans could have proceeded unilaterally and would have managed on their own: they certainly did not lack economic resources or military equipment, which far surpassed their European counterparts in terms of quantity and quality. In the Balkans, however, the United States fought primarily to preserve the West. According to Kagan, precisely "that goal determined American military strategy" (Kagan 2004: 50). In the words of General Wesley K. Clark, "no single target or set of targets was more important than NATO cohesion" (Clark 2001: 430). Needless to say, the cohesion of the alliance here ought to be understood as the cohesion of the West—the European Union and the United States of America.

CONCLUSION: THE TWO PARADOXES

Will these two powers come to an agreement in the future? Will the West be preserved? This can only be answered

by unraveling two paradoxes. The European Union must resolve the paradox of double standards, the implementation of

one type of international relations internally and another externally. It must also respond to the question of what to do when other civilizations refuse to cooperate in the legal forms offered by it, the European Union, and instead believe in the magic of atomic weapons, as the United States does. Is it legitimate to communicate with such neighbors—in this world, after all, all countries have become neighbors—using the old means of the modern state and simultaneously entertain postmodern ideals? Is it possible to descend to a lower level without abandoning a higher one?

The paradox of the United States: is it possible to have authority in a community of nations waving weapons and persuading by force? Is it possible to be

a political moral example and spread the values of justice, welfare, and democracy by coercion? Is it wise to seek democracy in undemocratic countries through dictatorship? America does not yet know how to negotiate; it is still in a daze, intensified by its economic and military capacities, as though it does not need to negotiate. Meanwhile, non-Western civilizations, which have been exploited, humiliated, and misunderstood for centuries and therefore are angry, are gaining power. It is not a miracle at all if soon we no longer have the West, and then the decisive question will arise: who will inherit most of the hostility and hatred towards the West—the European Union or the United States of America?

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Endnotes

- ¹ Despite the known potential for escalation, particularly in light of Russian President Vladimir Putin's multiple and explicit nuclear threats (see, for example, Khalaf 2022).
- ² To the extent to which, according to Cooper's classification, the postmodern state differs from its modern and pre-modern counterparts (see Cooper 2003).
- ³ An American historiographer and foreign policy commentator (husband of the US Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland—the same

one who in 2014, speaking on the phone with the US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt about the Ukraine crisis, uttered the famous "Fuck the EU," to which the ambassador enthusiastically responded, "Exactly." See Chiacu, Mohammed 2014).

- ⁴ Huntington leaves no room for hesitation on this point: "In the post-Cold War world, NATO is the security organization of Western civilization" (Huntington 1996: 161).