

Sajay Samuel

De-Linking Peace and Globalization

Speech delivered at the meeting for the inauguration of the Ivan Illich Center for Intercultural Documentation, at Lucca, Italy: June, 13th-15th 2003.

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For further information please contact:

Silja Samerski
Albrechtstr.19
D - 28203 Bremen
Tel: +49-(0)421-7947546
Fax: +49-(0)421-705387
e-mail: piano@uni-bremen.de

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Laudatio

On October 4, 2002 I arrived in Lucca. I was accompanying Ivan Illich on his first visit here. On that day we talked hopefully of coming back again and again to Lucca. On that late summer day I could not imagine a summer without him. On that day, close to the end of a year, I imagined sitting where you are sitting listening to my master in this, a new year. That day has passed, as have many others. Yet I cannot forget that day. It remains radiant in my memory like few others. I remember him sitting on this table: white shirt and dark blue tie slightly askew, a sheaf of papers by his side, one leg folded under him, his head cocked to one side; his skin glowing like onion skin parchment, his clear gray eyes touching this face then that one; spinning out his thoughts in a weave of words that entranced and captivated—almost exactly as when I first laid eyes on him in a lecture room at Penn State university 12 years ago. My memory of this his last public talk is brilliant and bright. It glows like the red tips of the flame he brought to my life.

Yesterday, you named the Center of Documentation at the Center for Peace for Ivan Illich. I am grateful to be among the assembly that President Tagliacchi, Aldo Zanchetta and the City of Lucca have gathered to commemorate his memory and work. You have seen it proper to call on many friends of Ivan, some of whom have come from far away. Despite the many who are here this weekend, there are many more who could not come. I am particularly happy that it is at Lucca, on this bittersweet occasion, that Silja, Matthias, Samar, Jean, Kostas and a few others who have been studying with Ivan all meet one another again. By also inviting me to this celebration you give me the occasion to praise and honor him. There are some people who re-orient, fundamentally, how one thinks and speaks. One cannot speak about such people. One can only speak with them. I cannot speak about Ivan. Today, I hope he forgives my free use of his writings with the same generosity and patience with which he accepted me as a student so many years ago.

It is perhaps simple but certainly not simplistic to say that all of Ivan's work was in the cause of protecting and fostering friendship. It is rarely on the surface of his writings; occasionally, it is bashfully buried; most often however, Ivan defends friendship by not speaking about it directly. He de-

fends friendship by writing about what destroys the possibility for it. This is how I understand his writings as a so-called 'social critic:' of schools, hospitals, transportation, development, and so on.

About 40 years ago, Ivan was one of the first to challenge and criticize the idea and programs of development, long before that became a fashion. He was also one of the first to point out, in the mid to late 1980's, that the idea of development was made obsolete by the idea of globalization or global management. By now the critique of globalization is almost fashionable. Fashions are ephemeral and fickle, like ripples on the surface of a pond. Ivan's critique of development, and *a fortiori* of globalization, was fundamental, like the deep currents of a sea.

It is fitting that this celebration in Lucca is framed by Ivan's talk to the Asian Peace Research Association from more than 20 years ago, titled "The De-linking of Peace and Development." This talk offers a kind of doorway to much of Ivan's writings that pose a radical challenge to economics. A slow and patient reader of this talk will thereby avoid confusing surface ripples for deep currents. I also think that his argument warns those who correctly counter economic optimism—now under the name of anti-globalization—of how they could become unwitting collaborators in the destruction of what is left of "people's peace." Today I would like to briefly comment on his argument that *Pax oeconomica* destroys 'people's peace'; that a commodity intensive society wages endless war on traditional customs, on nature and on gender.

Notion of Pax Oeconomica

Pax oeconomica is the notion that peace means a truce between economic powers, whether individual or corporate. The idea that commerce or commodity-intensive exchange is an antidote to war and the ground of peace is a uniquely European idea. Jean Monnet, a founder of the EU, believed in it strongly enough that you are all now members of an economic union originally conceived to prevent another war in Europe. Apparently, George Bush and his gang of 8 (G-8) are also firm believers in *Pax oeconomica*. They think that the terrorist is an unsatisfied consumer; that economic growth will eradicate the evil of terrorism.

Pax oeconomica is a modern idea, which nevertheless, by now, has been exported all over the world whether it is written as peace, *paix* or *pace*. I want to emphasize the lowly and modern assumption underpinning *pax oeconomica*. Today, *Pax oeconomica* is taken as valuable as an antidote to war and as a ground of peace. But this value is based on the assumption that the natural condition of man is war. This assumption is modern for two reasons. First, for all ancients, whether Greek or Christian, civil war--war against one's one-- was prohibited and considered evil. After all, that was the only reason why Athenians required no justification for war

against the Spartans, and that both Christians and Muslims required divine justification for war. Second, it is considered an assumption because it is scientific. The preference for scientific hypotheses instead of concepts rooted in common sense is a modern bad habit. Arbitrary and fanciful assumptions permit all kinds of non-sense. The notion that there is one homogenous and universal motivating impulse behind all human action makes no sense; which is why the ancients did not presume to know as much as we moderns do. The assumption that civil war is a natural condition of man legitimizes what was prohibited and naturalizes evil. Instead of recognizing man's highest aspirations, it casts men with beasts. In this it justifies political arrangements ordered by what is base and lowly in man instead of what is highest in him. *Pax oeconomica* is therefore what is valuable for beastly men.

Through the mouths of political authorities since the 1600's, allow me to sketch the form of *pax oeconomica* that is now identified with peace. Thomas Hobbes, who is most often considered the first modern thinker on politics, wrote that people everywhere are moved solely by the desire for power and are therefore led to a "warre of all against all." According to Hobbes, if the desire for power make all men equal, then the potential equality of death caused by war also impel them to contract for a sovereign: a Leviathan so strong and powerful that it can put a stop to civil war by overwhelming violence. For Hobbes then, domestic peace is the truce that results from exchanging potential death for certain annihilation.

After Hobbes came John Locke with the idea that the natural desire motivating men was not the desire for power but the desire for money, for purchasing power. Therefore, he argued, people would contract for a State ruled by law and not a sovereign. The rule of law is less arbitrary than the rule of the sovereign because the inclination to possessions is satisfied in more predictable ways than the inclination to power. The desire for possessions is satisfied by economic exchange and domestic peace is ensured, for Locke, when commercial activity flourishes. Yet, for Locke, foreign relations between nation states are plagued by war since the desire for power still afflicts sovereign states.

But Montesquieu writing in 1748 on the benefits of commerce says: "the natural effect of commerce is to lead to peace. Two nations that trade with each other become reciprocally dependent; if one has an interest in buying, the other has an interest in selling, and all unions are founded on natural needs." For Montesquieu, unlike Locke, even foreign relations between states can be peaceful when founded on economic exchange. Yet, like Locke before him, Montesquieu agreed that economic exchange is prompted by the "natural needs," whether of persons or of nation states.

By now you can see that the Lockean desire for possessions is a softer version of the Hobbesian desire for power. By the time of Montesquieu,

war is the absence of peace and commerce is the basis or ground of peace. Commerce is sweet, *doux commerce*, because it softens the passions that lead to war and wickedness; because the rational calculation of commercial self-interest overcomes the war-prone passions of men. Within a hundred years, by the nineteenth century, *pax oeconomica* is given its full form as for example in the writings of Benjamin Constant and the American Founding Fathers. The full form of *pax oeconomica* is that economic exchange is a peaceful alternative to war and is the ground of peace; and that both the desire to trade and to war are natural conditions of man.

As proved by the beliefs and statements of Jean Monnet and George Bush, not to mention the legion of contemporary economists and political scientists, I think that *pax oeconomica* understood in this way is fundamental to modern political self-understanding. We can read this in Benjamin Constant who wrote that, "war and commerce are only two different means to attain the same end, that of possessing what is desired... It is clear that the more the commercial tendency prevails, the weaker must the tendency to war become." Or we can recognize this in the Federalist papers and Constitution of the United States, which underscore the commercial nature of peace by constructing government as a force to protect the pursuit of "happiness" meant as property.

This modern and by now worldwide link between peace and economics hides three truths. First, peace was never before thought as the opposite of war or the fruit of commerce. Second economic growth whether under the name of development or globalization is a form of war itself: unbridled economic exchange destroys nature, cultures. Third, commerce was never before rooted in human nature; neither negatively in the so-called natural inclination to war (Hobbes) nor positively in the so-called natural desire for material improvements (Adam Smith).

History of "Peace"

Today peace has the same meaning of *Pax oeconomica* all over the world but that was not always true. I have already suggested that domestic peace as the opposite of civil war and peace as the opposite of war between nation states was a specifically modern Anglo-European idea. But more deeply as Ivan showed, peace was not an abstract idea but a very specific and particular spirit that was enjoyed by each community uniquely. The Roman *Pax* announced the annexation of a conquered territory to the law and order of the imperial city Rome. The Jewish *Shalom* refers to the grace flowing from heaven like oil dripping through the beard of Aaron the forefather. The Athenian *philia* speaks of the friendship between free men of a city. The Japanese *foodo*, the Chinese *Huo'ping* and the Indian *Shanti* have incomparable meanings though all are today usually translated as "peace." Historically then, what now goes under the name "peace" was neither related to economics or to war. Each people, each ethnos had

its own ethos of peace; each culture claimed its own kind of peace; each community had its own way of being left in peace.

Pax Populi or people's peace

This was true, even for Europe until the early modern period. *Pax populi*, or people's peace did not mean the absence of war between feuding lords. Rather, the *pax* that the Church and emperor protected in the 12th century was the peace of the land. The customary rights of way to water and pasture; the safety of grain and livestock; the integrity of fields and dwellings; all these were the subject of the *pax*. *Pax populi* ensured that people were at peace even if the lords were at war. *Pax populi* protected vernacular autonomy. Vernacular means everything that is homemade, homegrown, and homebred. What is vernacular is not economic; vernacular activities are neither paid for nor exchanged; modes of vernacular subsistence do not separate production from consumption; vernacular autonomy refers to the countless different ways that people all through history and in places as different as Peru and Iran have subsisted without being dependent on markets or the State. What is customary here is different from what is customary there: even in Italy you know well that until quite recently, Sicilians and Florentines spoke, dressed, walked, ate, and built very differently from the Luccase. Even during the 14th and 15th century, when merchants, craftsmen, or even town dwellers wanted to incorporate their common bonds of customary practice, they did so by a legal oath—a *conjuratio*—blessed by God and not a contract. Neither the 12th century serf nor the 14th century merchant thought that peace was the opposite of war, as did Montesquieu. Neither the serf nor lord thought that peace was rooted in commerce, as did Locke. Neither lord nor guild merchant imagined that there was a natural inclination to commerce as did Constant, or that there was a natural inclination to war as did Hobbes. For commerce to be thought of as the ground of peace, the *conjuratio* or oath blessed by God would have to become a contract between free individuals guaranteed by the State; *pax populi*—the customary protection of vernacular culture would have to be replaced by *pax oeconomica*—legally enforced economic contracts.

Economy destroys the vernacular.

Pax oeconomica has thus replaced *pax populi*. But this is no simple replacement as when you replace one light bulb for another. *Pax oeconomica* is founded on the destruction of *pax populi*; market-intensive society destroys vernacular cultures; and economic contracts transform independent people into wage-dependent needy humans. Economic peace is like war: just as war makes all combatants similar, so also economic peace replaces the great variety of vernacular cultures with commodity intensive markets. Market society propagates a continuous kind of low-intensity war. It is a kind of low-intensity war because economic existence is based on

endless competition and insatiable envy: neighbor and friend must turn into stranger and potential competitor for scarce resources. Envy fuels needs and therefore needs knows no bounds: is this not why the richest time in history is also plagued by the perpetually fear of scarcity?

It is also deadly. *Pax oeconomica* is deadly because it destroys nature and culture. We are all familiar by now with the immense destruction of nature – after all, from the Club of Rome to the Kyoto agreements, that has been the great political theme of the last half-century. The war on nature can be understood as a war on the commons: what in Italian is called *gli usi civici*. The commons is that part of the earth that is outside the household but still open for its subsistence. The well-known enclosure of the pastures in England is an example of how the commons is destroyed. Economic exchange encloses all commons by transforming the earth into either private or public domains. Both private and public domains are owned as economic resources to be used—euphemistically called “the environment.”

Market society devastates vernacular culture and introduces industrialized man to a kind of frustration unknown to human history. People are not only utterly dependent on institutions but must suffer the inevitable frustrations that these institutions cause when they grow beyond a certain intensity. Traffic jams that kill about 50,000 a year in the US, doctor induced deaths that kill twice that number; schools that produce more failures than graduates; these are the trivial consequences of the counter-productivity of modern institutions. Modernized poverty—where the industrial poor are prevented from subsisting outside the market or the government handout; and shadow work—which require people to participate in destroying their own abilities at subsistence are two less trivial consequences of market society.

Market society also destroys gender. It is founded on the scientific hypothesis that all people, everywhere, are human. To be human is to be individual; to be human is to be without gender; to be human is to belong nowhere. One can find no better definition of the human than the Declaration on Human Rights, which states that —“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” Only he who is shorn of all marks of social and personal distinction and reduced to biological functions is entitled by the name human. Devoid of all status and opinion, the subject of modern rights and freedoms is exactly as John Locke imagined it: as an “X”—a nothing that is free because radically undetermined. To be human is, as the Americans say, “to be whatever you want to be.” Since whatever you want to be is increasingly obtained through economic exchange, the human is also the abstract subject of economic peace and is better named *homo economicus*. *Homo economicus* replaces gender just as *pax oeconomica* replaces *pax populi*. The pro-

pagation of *homo economicus* under the banner of market society is the hidden conceit of human rights and individual freedom no less than that of development and globalization.

Market society has now penetrated to all corners of the earth; it is now global. There are many who fight against economic development and globalization—the hooks through which market society is inserted into vernacular culture. But these are unwitting collaborators in the spread of market society when they defend the environment and the ecology whether through “natural contracts” (Serres) or environmental risk assessments. They are collaborators when they defend cultural identities and human rights whether through “peace-keeping” by force or by promoting the ethnic by making it chic. They are collaborators when they defend economic peace whether through government regulations or corporate ethics. They are collaborators when they are seduced by the many guises of market society to forget that the only true enemy of market society is vernacular culture and that only *pax populi* is a permanent threat to *pax oeconomica*.

I am mindful of those who think that Kyoto-style agreements are different in kind from those of the WTO. I am mindful of those who argue that because vernacular cultures are almost entirely destroyed and because market society is a worldwide fact, we who see it as a great threat to life and liberty should be practical in our criticisms. It is occasionally useful to remind such practical wolves in sheep’s clothes that it is a mark of courage to continue the battle even after the war is lost.