Global Universal Values and the Dialog among Civilizations

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Abstract

The article explores the extent to which experts from different countries share the same axiological approaches with regard to the dialogue among civilizations and international cooperation at governmental and grass-roots levels. The article shows how subject matter experts provide collaborative input into the features and limits that shape global universal values. Interactions among civilizations promoting their equality and partnership as opposed to clashes should be at the heart of the transformations of values. Such transformations are expected to foster mutual exchange and enrichment achieved through a deeper understanding of the inevitability of increasing global interconnectedness and mutual dependence.

Keywords

globalization – global universal values – civilizational dialogue – transformations of values – global civilization – axiology – culture

1 Introduction

Postindustrial civilization development in the 21st century has made our world more complicated. The emerging realities have become more vulnerable. Post-industrial development of civilization in the 21st century has complicated the world, made the arisen realities vulnerable and presented humanity with the challenge of fundamental value diversity. In the time of increasingly rapid modern society transformation, large-scale changes embracing each government, growing contradictions in systems of values for different civilizations and nations, one should study the global universal values and beliefs that shape the basis for a productive dialogue between peoples and states.

The sustainable development of the world presupposes the existence of an optimal value consensus related to a constructive dialogue that is based on global universal values with the preservation and development of national cultures and historically established identities. Social values are necessary not only for a personal development but also for uniting people from different social groups. In this connection, the issue of finding universal values for countries with different social
and economic situation and culture is of current importance.

The global perspective of the study requires an interdisciplinary approach. One should rely on the achievements of different social sciences, each of which examines its own aspect of values. Philosophy explores the worldview aspect of values. For philosophy, values are common subjective images that have a human dimension. Sociology connects values with social norms of human life organization. Political scientists talk about political values that motivate, guide and justify actions of political actors, reflect the state, needs and prospects for development of society, its main social groups. Without reliance on the development of all these sciences, it would not be possible to develop a conceptual approach to the global universal values of contemporary humanity.

2 Methodology

We proceeded from the methodology where the development of the scientific basis for global values was caused by a number of conceptual differences among the researchers. There is a contradiction between an object interpretation of values (where any object capable of satisfying man's needs is regarded as a value), a subject-object interpretation of values (where a value appears as a subject-object relation of the object's significance for the subject) and a subject interpretation (where values appear as human's motivational preferences linked to the ultimate goal of life). A contradiction in the understanding of truth-value links is not resolved. Some argue that values can be true or false. This point of view is opposed by David Hume and Immanuel Kant, who contended that an epistemological verification of values was impossible. Values can be generally valid and even compulsory for all, but they cannot be true or false, since what is due in this world does not reduce itself to what is existing and is not inferred thereof.

Modern humanity is affected by an unlimited flow of information, which it is unable to absorb. We continue to interact with it to the extent that the matrix of our individual development permits us to. The global omnipresence of “values” that turned from a philosophical concept into an everyday one has resulted in the fact that the very use of the term “value” has lost any definite meaning. While the science of values (axiology) sees a deep crisis due to many unsolved theoretical problems being there, applied research has from the early 1970s up to the present time seen a boom in a wide range of axiological and near axiological studies with monographs, collaborative works and articles being written, national and international symposiums being held, special periodicals published and full-scale institutes set up to study them.

Researchers who are professionally engaged in axiology are ringing the alarm, because these pragmatically oriented studies and events lower the level of theorizing and lead to methodological chaos and depreciation of the very concept of “values” in modern culture. Leaving the concept of “value” to denote the deepest layer of the personality’s intentional structure, or, let's put it simply, for personal preferences and priorities, they propose to use a more “sociologically loaded” word priorities to denote what is now understood as economic, environmental, political, sociocultural, etc. values. At the same time, they rightly believe that most sociologists are unlikely to abandon the broadened word usage which has already become habitual.

It is worth noting that the aforementioned boom in axiological studies coincided with the

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onset of the globalization process. On the one hand, the processes of unification, of “a world without borders” began, but, on the other hand, the processes of localization, regionalization, multiculturalism and religious fundamentalism were getting underway.

Discussions around the concept of globalization have been going on since the 1980s. The problem of globalization is that it is impossible to single out something and say: that’s what globalization is all about, because it implies not one, but many processes, some of which can be polar opposites. In this regard, the debate around globalization goes in many directions. Proponents of globalization believe that it carries prosperity and opportunities for all the inhabitants of the earth; its opponents, however, argue that it is fraught with new forms of exploitation, inequality, and new forms of poverty and injustice. But can we speak today not about the economic or political aspects of globalization, but about another globalism that would suit everyone, or the “globalism of humanitarian values?” In other words, are there such humanitarian values that are global in nature and are shared by people throughout the world? With a certain degree of conventionality, let us pose the question this way: if globalization either directs humanity towards a “single global society,” or necessitates a dialog of different civilizations can we speak about global universal values today?

Global universal values represent a new concept. Still, it can be found in the history of ideas under a different name, viz. universal values, or universal human values. As for universal human values, there are two directly opposite views, two positions in philosophy.

These two viewpoints have existed since ancient times, but today, thanks to globalization, they have become more topical and timely than ever in the history of humankind. The first one, based on the idea of the equality of all people by nature, obviously originates from the Athenian Stoics, who equalized all people in the face of the universal law.6 Today, this stance is actively defended and supported by liberals, who are convinced that all people, regardless of race, religion, social status and ethnic background, are morally equal. Christianity is based on this idea. The Dalai Lama XIV calls on modern humanity to disseminate universal values.7

At the other extreme, the idea of natural quality and, accordingly, the universal values themselves are interpreted as a limited and historically obsolete idea, a tribute to the mythical form of thinking.8,9

The first standpoint is identified by its opponents as idealism and utopianism.

Those opposing the latter standpoint share Albert Einstein’s belief that “nationalism is an infantile disease. It is the measles of mankind.”10

Similar contradictions can be found in political science. Quite a number of political scientists doubt the existence of global universal values. In their view, there are only national interests that politicians tend to present as global values. They argue that there are only national interests which politicians are inclined to present as global values or that values can only exist at the level of small communities.11 Some authors believe that “globalization can bring people together only to

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6 Anna Sergeevna Stepanova, Philosophy of the Ancient Sto (St. Petersburg: Alethea, K.N., 1995).
understand how different they really are. At the same time, there are theories that disregard the fundamental differences between national and confessional cultures; their supporters believe that there are values “universally applicable and shared by all people.” Besides, there is no generally acknowledged typology of human values.

If one proceeds from the idea that “global processes are those occurring on planet Earth, spreading over its entire territory and displaying a certain “global planetary integrity”, then one can agree with proponents of the existence of certain values that are global, universal and recognized by all the peoples of the planet.

It should be borne in mind, however, that any value must be considered in terms of two parameters, that is, their formal names and the interpretation of their content. Thus, the concept of “universal values” may contain a certain paradox. In terms of formal names, there can be values that are spoken about and handled by representatives of all countries and peoples, representatives of the political elite, scientific communities and ordinary citizens, e.g. peace, security, pursuit of happiness, justice, etc. Nevertheless, in terms of interpretation, these values may not turn out universal, because representatives of various social strata and groups can put into them their own, distinctive content.

In 2018, an interdisciplinary project “Global Values: a Scientific Basis for the Existence of Global Values as a Foundation of Contemporary Society Development” was carried out at Lomonosov Moscow State University. In this project we proceeded from the notion of “globalization” presupposing a level, on which the influence of different values on the life of world community, including religious, economic, social and political

systems of the global world is analyzed. Special aspects in the interpretation of global universal values represent a fundamentally new task that has not yet been sufficiently elaborated. At this stage, we consider it possible to analyze the interpretations of values in various political cultures in terms of their semantics.

As a result of this approach, the most frequently mentioned values in the analyzed papers that could be treated as global and universal ones were singled out. We united those that were close in their meaning. Then, we made a list of 9 separate values and used this list in the development of research tools.

The list runs as follows:
- Education;
- Equality;
- Freedom;

GLOBAL UNIVERSAL VALUES

– Humanism;
– Justice;
– Patriotism;
– Progress;
– Responsibility;
– Security.

At the preliminary stage the following expert groups were singled out:
– experts from the BRICS countries (the participants of the Association of BRICS research and educational centers);
– representatives of “Global Studies” International Consortium – international network of graduate programs in global studies;
– experts in the field of international cooperation from Western Europe and the USA who do not belong the “Global Studies” Consortium;
– Russian scholars in social studies specializing in the field of global research.

All expert groups were interviewed using online semi-formalized questionnaire, which combines closed- and open-ended questions.

3 Results

We sought to understand whether the values on the list matched to the experts’ views on the values deemed to be global and universal ones. In other words, we were interested to know whether there was a convergence of views in the global expert community on what constitutes global and universal values.

The number of respondents is shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expert groups</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experts from the BRICS countries</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives of international consortium “Global Studies”</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts in the field of international cooperation from Western Europe and the USA who do not enter the “Global Studies” consortium</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian scholars in social studies</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Practically all expert groups regard justice, education, humanism and progress as global universal values. The Russian experts seem less inclined to think of justice as a global universal value than others (see Figure 1).

The experts from the BRICS countries stand out from the other expert groups as many of them do not treat either of the values on the list as global and universal ones. It is only security issue that is considered to be global by almost half of the respondents from this group.

To explain the reasons for such a distribution of opinions it is necessary to have a larger interdisciplinary research and more complex research tools. However, the survey results have definitely shown that there is an agreement in expert community not only about the existence of such a phenomenon as global universal values, but also about the accordance in the global expert community on what values should be treated global universal.

Another task was to compare specific global values from the point of view of their importance for different expert groups. We then compared the values against their primary importance for humanity, leaving aside their belonging to global universal ones. The experts had to name the three most significant values from those they had singled out as global universal (see Figure 2).
As is seen from the survey, the most significant global values are justice, education, security and freedom.

Certain tendencies in the assessment by different expert groups can be singled out:

- for the representatives of International Global Studies Consortium i.e. “professional globalists” – justice, freedom and security are the most valuable;
- the experts in the field of international cooperation from Western Europe and the USA, who are not part of the Global Studies Consortium, and the Russian experts both appreciated justice and security. They also coincide in assessing equality. There are certain differences in education and freedom assessment – the Russian experts tend to estimate these values as the most important ones.

- As in the case with choosing global universal values, the experts from the BRICS countries differ from the others. They give preference to justice, progress and responsibility.

The issue of the content of global universal values seen from the perspective of different expert groups was one of the most essential ones. To this end, open questions were included in research tools that let the respondents formulate their answers on their own, and thus gave the researchers more detailed information about their opinions and ideas.

When answering open questions, the experts had to define what meaning they put in those values they called global.

Before giving an outline of this research, it is necessary to note that the definitions of values given by the respondents do not depend on their culture, civilization, country, social group etc.

### 3.1 Security

Security is defined as protection and preservation of people’s life in accordance with norms adopted in society; security of vital interests of person, society, country, humanity at large from inner and outer threats; confidence in the future, being safe and calm for oneself and for one’s relatives; conditions when a person is secured from encroachments of all kinds on his / her life, personality and health all over the world; preservation of human life, health and rights; possibility to live and be sure about one’s future and the future of one’s children. Security is the basis of life in our unstable world.

### 3.2 Justice

Despite the fact that many Russian experts placed justice among the three most important values, they did not define it for some reason. By contrast, foreign experts defined it quite thoroughly. In general, their ideas correspond to Aristotle’s concept about common and private justice that is still relevant. Justice is a common moral component of all relations among people, nations and states; it presupposes living rightly and helping each other.
Some definitions of justice fit in liberal-democratic social theories: *justice is when everyone has equal rights regarding general freedoms; justice presupposes respect to each other and to the interests of other people, nations and states.*

There are also definitions of justice coming from the sphere of morals: *justice means confidence in the fact that a man lives for some purpose, that good deeds are to be estimated rightly but vices and evil deeds are to be punished; justice is the interconnection of deeds and punishment.*

### 3.3 Humanism

No wonder that humanism is among the main global universal values. It embraces respect to life and love for each person, as well as for all humankind. Experts gave the following definitions: humanism is *the acknowledgment of the most important issues on the Earth and in any country – man’s life and dignity; care for life, health and inner world; respect and love for oneself and for other people; admission of the fact that human life is priceless, and that the weak should be treated with special care; we should treat others not as the citizens of different countries but as ourselves.*

### 3.4 Freedom

There is a common opinion that freedom is understood differently in diverse cultures, in particular, it differs in Russian and Western cultures. However, there are not such differences at the expert community level. Definitions of freedom given by the experts can be gathered in three groups:

1) *Freedom is a right by nature for everyone despite his / her origins as it belongs to him / her because he / she is a human;*

2) *Freedom is the most important human right to participate in social and political life of his or her country;*

3) *Freedom is the possibility of self-developing without restricting one’s talents by someone’s will.*

### 3.5 Equality

Equality is a crucial democratic principle. Experts have specified it as a political equality, first of all in terms of equality before the law, *when every citizen is equal before the law irrespective of nationality, race, religious and political beliefs etc.; when there is an equal responsibility of everyone to abide by the law; when there are no privileges; and when people have the right to participate in politics equally.*

### 3.6 Education

Education as a value has been broadly discussed by experts. It might be connected to the fact that the majority of experts being university teachers or scientists associate themselves with the sphere of science and higher education. Education is generally understood as *an introduction to a universally accepted moral, social and religious reference points; it is the acquisition of skills necessary for a conscious and productive participation in social life of one’s country and the whole world community.*

### 3.7 Progress

It is not frequent when progress is placed among global universal values. Perhaps, it is connected to the fact that many people are disappointed at scientific and technical possibilities to enable happy future, as well as they are aware of negative consequences on nature that modern science and technology can do. Probably it is predetermined by modern prejudices against the mere notion of progress. The idea of progress treated as a global universal value is mostly characteristic of the BRICS countries. For those experts who placed progress among the main global universal values progress meant the following: it is *the process of people’s striving for a better future, freedom and justice; it is the development of science and technology that could guarantee a comfortable existence and the possibility of developing person’s individuality; it is the exploration of the world; it is the overcoming of irregularities in economic development of different countries and regions.*
3.8 Patriotism

By placing patriotism among main global universal values, the experts define it as love for one’s country, nation, respect for the country’s traditions; manifestations of patriotism are aimed at strengthening and developing of the country. Patriotism is a significant value, common for all humankind, lying in the basis of an aspiration for developing and strengthening one’s state not to the detriment of other countries.

These results can become a foundation for the matrix of global values in order to increase mutual understanding among representatives of different social groups in various countries. They can also be used to forecast and minimize possible risks of social practices connected to the difference in interpretation of value meaning. For that it is necessary to identify why experts prioritize these or those global universal values. Their argumentation could be used in forming various analytical and informational materials developed for a purposeful shaping of value unity and social solidarity based on realizing the specificity of meaningful national and global values. This could guarantee social agreements and solidarity both within the country and on the international level.

3.9 Security

The experts who deem this particular value to be the most important one have given an insight into rationale of it: “Security unites us all. Everyone needs it. It is possible to build future only in a secure world.” “We need security to give people the possibility to live and be sure of their future.” “Security saves life.” “People need to feel secure, to be sure of it as it gives them freedom.” “Only in a secure society a man can plan and build his or her life.”

3.10 Justice

There are three general ideas behind placing justice among global universal values:

1) injustice – the source of tensions and conflicts, and as a result – justice is the act of overcoming irregularities in the distribution of resources and riches that provoke conflicts;

2) lack of justice is a source of tensions and conflicts; justice helps to protect life by redistributing resources in favor of the weak;

3) belief in justice is the resource of human and humankind development – if there is no belief in justice in the world, or at least in one’s milieu, the meaning of life is lost; belief in justice helps to confidently face the future; it is the basis of a person’s harmonious development;

3.11 Progress

The experts who chose progress as the main value used the same argumentation as is the case with “justice followers” who spoke about the redistribution of resources and riches: because of progress the irregularities in the economic development of different countries and regions must be overcome: a man would get the possibility to satisfy his / her needs and develop his / her talents irrespective of the place of living; progress would help humanity to become a single community, thus eliminating intergovernmental conflicts and wars.

3.12 Education

Arguments for education as the main value were few in number and rather laconic: education is the means of human development and formation as a person and a citizen; it is the most important factor of social progress; a source of human and society development.

3.13 Humanism

All that surrounds us is meaningful as long as we, people, exist. Without love for people, for a specific person, without humanitarian politics humans would not be able to survive not to
speak of further development; humans would not be able to preserve fundamental human qualities – these are the main arguments of experts who named humanism the most significant global universal value: “We are born humans. Unless we show our human characteristics and see them in others, there would be no human society, we could not find a common language and cooperate neither on a personal and group level nor on a governmental and intergovernmental level.” “It is impossible to build a modern society without considering the subject – human. Humanism must be the basis of each politics both domestic and foreign.” “Humanism lets people be born, survive, develop and please the Creator.” “Human life is the most precious value. Without love for humans and for a human being any group or government are meaningless.”

### 3.14 Freedom

Contemporary social sciences treat freedom as the highest spiritual value, as a fundamental human quality that defines a human being as a person. Perhaps, that is why some experts think of freedom as of the main global universal value: only free people can take a conscious participation in building a safe and just world order; freedom gives people the possibility to express their best qualities.

### 3.15 Patriotism

The reasons for placing patriotism among the main global values are the following: love for one’s country and nation is the most important factor of understanding and respect of other countries and nations; patriotism is a natural feeling of every sensible man; it is typical of humans to be proud of their country and be aspiring for spreading its achievements around the world.

4 Conclusions

To sum up, three conclusions could be drawn:

- The modern person really has the idea of a number of universal global values being there. Those values make it possible for people of various countries, cultures and civilizations to avoid conflicts and wars and to save life on Earth on the basis of mutual aid and respect for the human being and protecting him or her from the dangers and challenges of the modern world;

- Even though the respondents named different values as global universal, their interpretation had a certain imposition of context: progress is determined through freedom; security is connected to solidarity etc. Therefore, one could speak of a whole set of value ideas, which define the integrity of the modern global worldview;

- There is no contradiction in interpretations of different experts. Although the respondents represent different states and cultures, they give certain values a common content. Therefore, the problem of global universal values and the perception of it by different groups are of vital importance for civilizational dialogue and world sustainable development.

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