

Hans GÖTTEL*

COSMOPOLITAN TRAITS IN DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD'S POLITICAL VISION

Abstract: This paper explores the benefits of renewed awareness and a new interpretation of cosmopolitan ideas and ideals in international politics. Identifying traits of cosmopolitan wisdom in Dag Hammarskjöld's connectedness with the spiritual world, it relates them to current political trends on the way toward a more authentic global society. It encourages us to reconsider elements of the vision offered by the Second Secretary-General of the United Nations – perhaps too early, perhaps too radically.

Key words: *Dag Hammarskjöld; Cosmopolitanism; Global Society*

INTRODUCTION

In 1953, when Dag Hammarskjöld (1905–1961) took office as Secretary General of the United Nations, he said, “*Man must master his world, but in order to do so, he must know it*”¹. Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) expressed the same idea after the French Revolution which he had approved of but which turned out to be a disappointment with its terrible consequences. In an elegant call for political education Schiller said: “*Eventually citizens will have to be created for the constitution, before a constitution can be given to citizens*”². Thus, before humans begin to act as citizens and take responsibility they should be guided toward a good constitution, they should be made response-able. He was not alone in regarding formation and education as a pre-condition for the involvement of the citizen in politics, but he was the one who designed a philosophy on this theme.

* Europahaus Burgenland, Austria

¹ *Public Papers of the Secretaries General of the United Nations* (PP) 1972: 85 (Hammarskjöld, Address at Luncheon Given by the American Political Science Association, 11. September 1953)

² Friedrich Schiller: Brief an der Herzog Friedrich Christian von Augustenburg, Jena, den 13. Juli 1793. www.wissen-im-Netz.info

In his letters about aesthetic education³ he speaks about “Attuning” [Ger. Hinaufstimmen]: society in its optimum form is a society wherein the “*parts have attuned themselves to the idea of a whole*”, and in his opinion the state should consist of individuals who have “*formed themselves up*”; and this without having lost their individuality.⁴

Hammar skjöld’s bond to Schiller was evidently strong. When the occasion permitted, he sought to extrapolate on Schiller’s ideals.⁵ Such an opportunity was his Commencement Address at Stanford University, entitled: “The World and the Nation”, June 19, 1955.⁶ In this address Hammar skjöld stated that Schiller, “*conscious of the importance of his message of freedom and brotherhood, said that he would find it a miserable idea to write only for one nation*”.⁷ Hammar skjöld noted that a philosopher like Schiller, “*could not limit himself to but a fraction of mankind. This nation or that national event could inspire him only so far as it was of importance to all mankind*.”⁸ What follows in Hammar skjöld’s speech is a development of Schiller’s ideal to what Hammar skjöld perceives to be an even higher level: “*The question is not either the nation or the world. It is rather how to serve the world by service to our nation, and how to serve the nation by service to the world*”.⁹ From this initial allusion to Schiller, Hammar skjöld concludes that today we must find a framework “*inside which it is possible to serve the world by serving our nation, and to serve our nation by serving the world*.”¹⁰ In another speech (“The Walls of Distrust”, 1958¹¹) he also expresses what he feels to be the goal of human strivings: “*The widening of our political horizons to embrace in a new sense the whole of the world*...”¹²

From Schiller we know that the most perfect of all works to be achieved by the art of man is the construction of true political freedom. “*If man is ever to solve the problem of politics in practise he will have to approach it through the problem of aesthetics, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom*.”¹³

³ Friedrich Schiller: *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, translated by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, Clarendon Press, Oxford, England, 1982

⁴ Christian Rittelmeyer: *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen. Eine Einführung in Friedrich Schillers pädagogische Anthropologie*. Juventa 2005, S. 30

⁵ Andrew Thomas Kania: *The Art of Love. A Study of Dag Hammar skjöld’s Mystical Theology*. Uppsala, University, 2000.

⁶ *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations* (1972), 508–513

⁷ *Ibid.* 508

⁸ *Ibid.* 508

⁹ *Ibid.* 509

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 513

¹¹ *Public Papers of the Secretaries General of the United Nations* (1974): 90. “The Walls of Distrust”. Address at Cambridge University, Cambridge, England, June 5, 1958.

¹² *Ibid.* 91.

¹³ Friedrich Schiller: *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, translated by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, Clarendon Press, Oxford, England, 1982: 9.

In the 16th century such musings might have led Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670) to the theological approach he developed for pedagogic purposes.¹⁴ He was concerned with what he called the “*universalis*”, one unity consisting of three dimensions of meaning. The first and social dimension referred to “all human beings, every single one, young and old, poor and rich, aristocratic or not, man and woman – everyone born a human being. On the material level he was concerned with all that is true and good; and, on the level of time, with the perfection achieved by reaching the goal of teach all human beings all knowledge: “*omnes, omnia, omnino*”. Comenius emphasised teaching, and he is remembered as a great didactic.¹⁵

Word Society in Comenius' view is an educative act of creation, of which the pedagogic aspect is to develop oneself and others by (self-) education in order to become similar to God—and therefore complete God's Creation. The Judeo-Christian Creation theory is thus prolonged by a theory of human agency: what God has created as a conception shall be completed by human actions. The goal of this agency theory is “*perfection*”, which fulfils the promise of the Sermon on the Mount: “*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (*Mat. 5, 48*).¹⁶

In a theological guise characteristic of his era, Comenius prepared a modern theoretical vision of politics: a world society, not of citizens or of NGOs, but of “*dei secundi*”, of “*vice gods*”. And that is what, 300 years later, Hammarskjöld's *Waymarks* point to. He describes *Waymarks*¹⁷ as a record or, as he put it, “white book” of his dialogues with himself and with God. And he did talk to God, for example in this way: “*Not I, but You in me*”.¹⁸ No wonder he needed the language of the Bible and the imagery of medieval thinkers for the waymarking strength of his vision.

In the year of his inauguration, 1953, Hammarskjöld said: “*We cannot mould the world as masters of a material thing...But we can influence the development of the world from within as a spiritual thing.*” As Roger Lipsey commented in his recent biography of Hammarskjöld, “No one, it seems, took him aside on that occasion to ask: ‘Kind sir, isn't that something of an overstatement? What really do you mean?’”¹⁹ And obviously no one asked him what, from his point of view, should be the mission of the UN: should it be a forum for the management of conflicts between the world's nations or should it function as a global authority above the nations of the world?

¹⁴ Alfred K. Tremml: “Die Erziehung zum Weltbürger. Und was wir dabei von Comenius, Kant und Luhmann lernen können”. In: *ZEP – Zeitschrift für internationale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik*. 19. Jg., 1996, Heft 1, S. 2

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4

¹⁷ Bernhard Erling: *A Reader's Guide to Dag Hammarskjöld's Waymarks*, self-published, 1987 (available online from the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation). *Waymarks* was originally published in Swedish as *Vägmärken* (Albert Bonniers Förlag AB, Stockholm, 1963), and in English as *Markings* (Faber and Faber, London, 1964).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Roger Lipsey: *Hammarskjöld: A Life*. University of Michigan Press, 2013, Vorwort.

The philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) knows the notion of raising Being to a higher level; however, Kant finds his argumentation not on God but on Nature. Humans are natural beings and as such, like every other living being, possess a natural potential that has to be unfolded. The unfolding process needs good pre-conditions and time, but for the individual other dimensions of time are relevant than for the development of society at large. In the first case it is the short period between birth and death, in the second the duration of a specific cultural moment. For the development of a world society, the individual life span is much too short and his talents far too few in order to represent a perfect example of this development. It is much more humankind that is capable of reaching perfection, or in other words: “*According to Kant, those natural talents which are given for the use of reason can only develop completely in the species, but not in the individual.*”²⁰

Kant conceives a process that needs the individual, but only as a malleable material for the development of the whole human species within the framework of a world citizen constitution. The moulding of the individual serves as a means for social progress and development. Here, education is an accompanying procedure of social engineering that has nothing to do with the image of God, but rather with enthusiasm about optimizing society. Perhaps the construction of the Swedish welfare state in which Hammarskjöld had a hand in the years before and during the Second World War could be considered an endeavour along the lines of the Kantian paradigm to spur development. When Hammarskjöld was asked if he considered himself a political man, he responded: “*I want to be active where it matters*”²¹.

In his professional life he put his efforts into bureaucracy (where it seemingly matters!) – while he explored a Comenian concept of humanity in his private journal: “*The rope above the abyss is held taut by those who give it anchorage in heaven.*”²² Where else could he have written such a thing?

Consequently the heritage of Dag Hammarskjöld consists of two parts: on the one hand there is his unmatched performance as a skilful bureaucrat and diplomat, and on the other hand, so evident in his posthumously published journal, there are his exercises as a mystic. For a long period the one or the other dimension of his oeuvre was investigated by researchers. Only the recently published biography by Roger Lipsey²³ combines both sides and shows how far Hammarskjöld’s life work had arisen out of the connectedness of both. They do not and cannot stand separately.

Hammarskjöld was never a member of a political party and didn’t think that transparent public processes invariably help. Although he was skilful at dealing with journalists, he recognised the social, political, and economic forces that influence the mass media; and yes, he was also sceptical about parliamentary processes

²⁰ Alfred K. Trembl, 4.

²¹ Dag Hammarskjöld: Att välja Europa. Svensk Tidskrift, Jg. 38, Uppsala 1951

²² Erling, *Waymarks*, 1955, 9.

²³ Roger Lipsey: *Hammarskjöld: A Life*. University of Michigan Press, 2013

after having experienced, during the first post-war years, how Sweden was pushed to the edge of financial break-down by party-political gambling:

*"In a position outside political life I can only with great worry note that partisan advantages have been put ahead of the general interest all over. Are we really forced to raise the question as to whether a democracy is viable in a crisis situation like this?"*²⁴

He opted for confidential diplomacy, for rescuing ancient knowledge and sheltering intentions.

I wonder if Hammarskjöld would have paid attention to the cosmopolitan notion of Niklas Luhmann (1927–1998), which deviates completely from the ideas of attuning and developing oneself and society as expressed by Comenius, Kant or Schiller. The point of Luhmann's Systemtheorie²⁵ is that world society is not empire, but rather is a developing reality which we have missed so far. It has appeared somewhat unnoticed. The new task is not to make demands on it or to over-intellectualise it, but simply to grasp it. World society frightens many of us; we do not know how to cope with it. While in years past it was considered as something to come, nowadays, thanks in part to Luhmann, its existence is recognised. Moreover, according to Luhmann's theory, world society is a social system that no longer consists of humans or consciousness, nor of nations or states, but exclusively of communication. Thus individual human beings are no longer parts of, but the *environment* of world society, an environment developed and controlled and exploited like all other resources nowadays.²⁶

World society is in this respect a reality which is not understood and which cannot be constructed or taught. We can only learn to cope with it. "Attuning", as Schiller had put it, doesn't make sense anymore; instead, the time has come for constant conflict management. Actually, this was Hammarskjöld's daily work as Secretary-General of the United Nations. But beyond his daily problem solving, traits of a cosmopolitan vision glimmer through.

Soon after his inauguration, Hammarskjöld became more of a general than a secretary—the distinction is one he himself drew—and eventually moulded the UN into an active, somewhat independent force in international politics. In his eight and more years as Secretary-General (1953–1961), he astonished those who predicted he would be nothing more than a genial Nordic cypher. He transformed the role of the secretary-general from the Security Council's executive director into an independent international problem solver with immense moral authority. He professionalized the UN civil service, giving it an esprit de corps and an independence

²⁴ Örjan Appelqvist, "A hidden duel. Gunnar Myrdal and Dag Hammarskjöld in Economics and International Politics 1935–1955". *Stockholm Papers in Economic History*, No. 2, Stockholm University 2008, S. 14

²⁵ Alfred K. Tremml, S. 5 (relates to Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie*, Frankfurt am Main 1984)

²⁶ *Ibid.*

from national governments. He pioneered UN peacekeeping and did more than any secretary-general, before or since, to articulate what the UN should stand for.²⁷

Obviously he went too far or too fast: he paid for his efforts with his life. His plane crashed in the night of 17–18 September 1961 in the course of a peacekeeping mission in the Congo, which cost his life and the lives of his companions. The possibility of assassination, considered but officially set aside by investigations soon after his death, has recently come under new consideration, as can be seen in Susan Williams's "Who Killed Hammarskjöld", published in 2011 and in the report of The Hammarskjöld Commission, The Hague, 2013 which suggests to reopen the inquiry into the death of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 1759 (XVII) of 26 October 1962.²⁸ Some important documents, principally NSA recordings of air traffic communications, are currently "classified" and out of reach for questionable reasons. Hammarskjöld was awarded the Nobel Prize posthumously, and Kennedy praised him as the most important statesman of the century.

At the place where Hammarskjöld's body was found after the plane crash, clues of his elusive inner life were also found. His briefcase, intact, contained a German edition of poems by Rainer Maria Rilke, a novel by the French writer Jean Giono, copies of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, a compact edition of the New Testament.²⁹ It is about picking up these bits and pieces. They are *way-marks* literally embodied by Dag Hammarskjöld. Long after his death, they are still looking for a new embodiment in international politics.

World citizen education today is blurred by excessive rhetoric, carried by semantic space ships (Peter Sloterdijk) which seem to have an unlimited loading capacity for magical formulas such as: "One World for All", "Spaceship Earth", "World Society", "Global Co-World", "Global Learning", etc. If such central expressions of the globalisation discourse are non-reflectively taken over into pedagogical programmes in their ideologically appalling and even suggestive functions and political rhetoric, they will function as means of a counter-enlightenment.³⁰ Away from that, we are used to expecting the new to come in forms analogous to the old, so world society might be expected as a sort of enlarged nation or an alliance of all nations, or

²⁷ Michael Ignatieff: The Faith of a Hero. *The New York Review of Books*. 18 Oct 2013, p. 4.

²⁸ Susan Williams: Who Killed Hammarskjöld? The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa. New York, Columbia University Press, 2011

The Hammarskjöld Commission: Report of the Commission of Inquiry on whether the evidence now available would justify the United Nations in reopening its inquiry into the death of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 1759 (XVII) of 26 October 1962; The Hague, 9. Sept. 2013

²⁹ Michael Ignatieff, p. 2

³⁰ Jürgen Hasse: "Globales Lernen". Zum ideologischen Gehalt einer Leer-Problematik. In: Gabriele Schrüfer, Ingrid Schwarz (Hrsg.) Globales Lernen. Ein geographischer Diskursbeitrag, Waxmann 2011.

even as a world republic, a global polis. But what if world society doesn't come in a familiar way? Can Hammarskjöld's political vision and understanding nevertheless lead us on to a viable world citizenship?

I believe that Hammarskjöld would have put another question first: Can we be satisfied with this educational sequence: from the human as a reflection of God to the human as a means for accomplishing some fantasy of development, to the human as a controlled and exploited environment for technology? Surely not, surely never.

What Dag Hammarskjöld embodied leads us back to another thought from Friedrich Schiller: "*Live with your century; but do not be its creature. Work for your contemporaries; but create what they need, not what they praise.*"³¹

³¹ Friedrich Schiller, 1982, 61.

