

# Hyperglobalist, Sceptic, or Transformationalist?

GY300 ESSAY ONE  
BLOCK ONE: EUROPE IN A GLOBALISING WORLD

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When it comes to debates of nearly any sort, I tend to exercise my opinions somewhere in the middle. I'm not a strict conservative, nor a wholehearted liberal, and I quite like the label "moderate." Extremities often frighten me, though I almost always identify convincing points on both sides of the debate. The issue of globalisation is no exception; I find myself agreeing on points from all angles of the globalisation debate. I will say, though, that I most likely side with the transformationalists.

The transformationalist thesis as presented in David Held's *Global Transformations* is, essentially, the more middle-of-the-road approach to the globalisation debate. For example, in terms of the role of the state, the transformationalists "reject both the hyperglobalist rhetoric of the end of the sovereign nation-state and the sceptics' claim that 'nothing has changed'" (Held 9). I agree with the transformationalists, considering that nation-states today still wield enormous political and economic power, and also recognising that the world *is* changing through the advancement of technology and communication.

In addition to debates concerning the role of the state, the hyperglobalists believe that culture is losing its distinction in nation-states as economic forces accelerate the development of a global civilization. I disagree with this claim because world cultures are still strongly unique and definitive; on the contrary, I would propose that cultures that do interact with other cultures in an increasingly interconnected world would—instead of converging into one global culture—find more reason to celebrate their individual customs, traditions, and values to avoid such homogeneity.

I do, however, admit that globalisation is blurring some lines among cultures and nation-states. We are witnessing economic and social trends that begin in the United States and Western Europe and permeate to the rest of the world, and it cannot be denied that globalisation thus has at least a slightly detrimental effect. What is one

culture's craze becomes another culture's craze after a bit of time, and so on, until we find blends of different cultures that don't quite fit into the cultures they were first from.

I find strong agreement with the sceptics' claim that "[w]hile international economic conditions may constrain what governments can do, governments are by no means immobilised" (Held 7). If governments *were* immobilised in a globalising world, as the hyperglobalists claim, what explains the wealth of government activity happening today: the consideration of a United States of Europe; the growing, government-assisted economies of East and Southeast Asia; the "wars on terror" in the United States and the United Kingdom? Governments are in constant flux and conflict with each other, and evidence of an international government and economy that could supersede the powers of nation-states is still yet to be fleshed.

Instead of a hyperglobalist globalisation, then, is a significant regionalization that the sceptics identify as an evolution towards three major financial and trading blocs: Europe, Asia-Pacific, and North America. This regionalization, when considering numerical flows of business and information, makes more convincing sense to me, for it realizes that power is still concentrated in specific areas and that globalisation does not, by any means, imply an inclusion of the entire global order. For instance, Peter Dicken in Chapter 10 of *Global Shift* diagrams that the largest players in the automobile industry are North America, Western Europe, and Asia (Dicken 320). Other transnational industries and companies often have their major business partake in these three blocs as well. This facet of the sceptics claim is persuading also because it capitalizes on the idea of competition among these three blocs, such that each bloc is trying to become the dominant world power.

There is, indeed, a hyperglobalist sympathy in me. Held identifies the driving forces behind globalisation, among them capitalism and technology under the hyperglobalist lens. Technology has truly led to the interconnectedness that even I feel

as a citizen of the United States. Without advances in aviation, telecommunications, and the Internet, I would hardly feel as “global” as I do now. Thanks to technology, we are able to see the various political, economic, and social threads intertwined among seemingly divergent cultures and countries. In this matter, I agree with the hyperglobalists. Still, Held also identifies that transformationalists consider “combined forces of modernity” as driving forces of globalisation, which would also include technology (Held 10).

I think it is extremely difficult to say right now whether or not we are becoming a fully globalised society, for on a very practical level, it certainly doesn't *feel* like it. I admit to the growth of transnational corporations, of international NGOs, of interdependent markets and economies, of “global” names like Starbucks and McDonald's. I admit to having my coffee imported, my clothes and electronics assembled abroad, my gasoline extracted from nations I will perhaps never visit. But are we really capable of becoming a homogenised, truly “global” world? With such uncertainties in mind, I find my strongest leaning towards the transformationalists, for they seem to identify the patterns of intensified global interconnectedness without coming to such final conclusions of where the world will ultimately be. Whereas hyperglobalists imagine a global civilization and sceptics envision regional blocs and the clashing of civilizations, transformationalists just do not know, at least as of yet. Instead, they are waiting to see what *will* happen—whether fragmentation or integration—and using whatever evidence about what *is* happening to help them. And I am doing the same.

I want to close recognizing the importance of a historical understanding of globalisation, as suggested by Held. Studying historical forms of globalisation “avoids the current tendency to presume either that globalisation is fundamentally new, or that there is nothing novel about contemporary levels of global economic and social interconnectedness since they appear to resemble those of prior periods” (Held 17).

Seeing globalisation in a larger context, as a movement supported and directed by events in the past, may help us to map with better precision the direction of these trends, thus clarifying the debate among hyperglobalists, sceptics, and transformationalists. This, along with empirical research and data from present times, will hopefully simplify the globalisation debate, and give us a stronger sense of what really is going on out there, and how it will ultimately affect our lives and futures.