



George Soros: The Age of Fallibility – Consequences of the War on Terror

Public Affairs, New York, 2006

Soros considers himself a stateless statesman who is able to help making the world a better place, because he combines three qualifications: he has developed a conceptual framework that has given him an understanding of history, particularly what he calls “far-from-equilibrium situations”, he has a set of firm ethical and political beliefs and he has made a lot of money. His last book “The Age of Fallibility” explains his conceptual framework both in general and with respect to contemporary problems, especially in the U.S.A.

First Soros goes into the relation between thinking and reality and explains the main postulates of his conception of understanding reality: a) understanding social phenomena differs from understanding natural ones, because a cognising subject is at the same time an object of cognition (the principle of reflexivity); b) nobody is a bearer of definite truth – there is always possibility of being wrong; c) it does not mean that the pursuit of truth is vain; on the contrary, we must not stop it, but we must be aware of our fallibility. Thus it is necessary to replace the Age of Reason by the Age of Fallibility.

Reflexivity is the key concept of Soros’ conception. He applies it to financial markets, the activities of his foundations and economic and social phenomena in general. The postulate of the absence of definite truth made him inquire into the Popper’ s conception of open society that is able to react to changes and profit by mistakes. On the basis of his own experience (especially with his Foundation of Open Society) he concludes that an open society is threatened not only by dogmatic ideologies and totalitarian regimes but also by anarchy. The collapse of a closed society need not lead to an open one, but it can result in following disintegration.

Recently Soros has been analysing the situation in the U.S.A. and its influence on the development in the world. He is sure that after 11/9/2001 the U.S.A. set out on a wrong journey – and not only in consequence of the policy of Bush administration. Even some aspects of the contemporary American society itself could threaten an open society that can not be reduced to the general criteria of liberal democracy. America has become a “feel-good society” refusing critics and bad news. The adoration of success has weakened ethical values. If success means more than truth, it can result in the manipulation of a society. In Soros’ opinion the justification of the war in Iraq and “war on terror” in general are examples of such manipulation and “false metaphor”. In fact, the war in Iraq did not succeed and terrorism was not stopped. After the collapse of the Soviet empire the U.S.A. remained the only superpower, went on working its own will and interests and consequently lost truth. By reason of it, Soros considers EU – as an open society with all its positives and negatives – a new potential ideological leader. Its mission would be the propagation of open society all over the world.

In his endeavour to fill the ideological vacuum, Soros utilised his foundations for the support of the initiatives of democratic countries (Community of Democracies) and non-governmental organisations (Transparency International). In his point of view the main problems of the contemporary world are global energy crisis, global warming and nuclear proliferation.

The book inquires into a lot of serious problems. The question is which aspects of Soros’ conceptual framework and the analysis of the contemporary world order are innovating. He himself regards his awareness of feedback between thinking and reality and its application in activities in favour of open society as his main contribution. In every case, he gives a lot of impulses and provokes thought.

(A shortened review of the book prepared by Mr. Jaroslav Navrátil – former UNIDO expert – for the European Literary Club)