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On Geopolitics and Geophilosophy

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Abstract

Richard Sakwa's *The Culture of the Second Cold War* is a compelling analysis of the emergence of what he calls the Political West. This new actor on the geopolitical stage, argues Sakwa, can only be fully understood if the culture that sustains it is foregrounded. This culture is structured around a unilateral view of the international order, rather than a dialogical approach to global understanding. Sakwa argues a return to the international charter system of friendly rivalry that emerged after World War II would encourage a more dialogically oriented global order. It is argued that the idea of geophilosophy found in the work of Deleuze and Guattari both sustains Sakwa's approach to the culture of the second Cold War and challenges his appeal to the international charter system. It is concluded that we need a form of geopolitics based on hospitality to the stranger rather than on friendly rivalry, as the latter is too tied to an idea of what I call the Philosophical West.

Key words: geopolitics, geophilosophy, second Cold War, charter system.

In *The Culture of the Second Cold War* (2025), Richard Sakwa continues to develop and refine his analysis of two key features of contemporary geopolitics. On the one hand, there are international political structures that engender the Othering of those geopolitical actors that do not conform to the unilateral understanding of globalisation and cosmopolitanism associated with what he calls the Political West. On the other hand, he argues that the 'culture' of the second Cold War is one in which the hope of understanding the Other is increasingly denounced as dangerous complicity with the non-Political West. The idea of 'culture' is paramount because the discontinuity between Cold War I and II is not simply strategic. Something has happened, he argues, at the level of 'the unseen and deep-seated structures' that shape the Political West such that the institutionally situated major strategists and diplomats who give voice to this unilateral view of the world no longer even seek to understand its Other(s). If we don't think beyond the political strategies into cultural analyses, Sakwa argues, we will never get an answer to this question: If we are witnessing the retrenchment of geopolitics into Cold War II, after the lost peace of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Sakwa, 2023), then why has the Political West replaced the prospect of mutual understanding evident during Cold War I with the explicit 'criminalisation' and 'hatred' of the Other that marks our current geopolitical order? To his credit, Sakwa does not shy away from just how engrained these deep-seated structures may be. While there is a continuing commitment to philosophical anthropology, this book is his most explicit attempt at exploring the epistemological underpinning of the Political West (Sakwa, 2025: 52-54, 128-136). Indeed, it is his most sustained articulation of the relationship between geopolitics and the philosophical in general. Importantly, this shift of analytical register is a deepening, not a transformation of the aim which has marked all his work to date; that is, the pursuit of understanding in the name of a fully-fledged, not ideologically driven, democratisation of global affairs, with the aim of global peace. In this book this aim is characterised as the reinvigoration of the 'international legal framework for relations

between rivals (at the normative level) and a revival of the spirit of 1945 (at the cultural level)' (Sakwa, 2025: 6).

Given the breadth and depth of his cultural analyses and arguments, Sakwa's book invites further speculation on the relationship between the geopolitical and philosophy, which in turn will raise the question of whether he has gone far enough in sloughing off the profound epistemological structures of the West in his pursuit of lasting peace. With a view to developing this intuition, the following discussion aims to bring into Sakwa's geopolitical orbit the idea of geophilosophy, as articulated by Deleuze and Guattari (1994). While it is hoped that there is sufficient *prima facie* reason to bring his cultural and philosophical approach to geopolitics into contact with the idea of geophilosophy, there is also an authorial connection that is not foreign to his work. Indeed, in his article, 'Heterarchy: Russian politics between chaos and control' (2021), Sakwa draws heavily upon Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) work, especially their image of the rhizome and their method of rhizomatics as a tool for investigating what can appear anomalous and paradoxical (in Russian politics, in this case) through other approaches. In the following reflections, I will explore what Deleuze and Guattari's idea of geophilosophy can add to Sakwa's investigation into the Political West, in the end developing a concept of what I will call the Philosophical West. One of the important contributions of Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of geophilosophy is that they challenge the often-unstated presumption that philosophy as an activity, *in toto*, must be understood to be necessarily Western. Unpicking such an assumption sits neatly with Sakwa's deep concern with how the Political West has a unilateral perspective on globalisation and cosmopolitanism. However, it sits less well with his appeal to 'the Charter International System' (2025: 4) if it is the case that this system itself (and/or Sakwa's presentation of it) may be said to be deeply indebted to the visions and values of the Philosophical West. This claim will be presented, in merest outline, in the closing reflections.

From geopolitics to philosophy

Neither geopolitics nor geophilosophy are easily defined. While the former has a long history and a developed set of disciplinary norms and internal critiques (Dodds, 2019), the latter is a relatively new, indeed niche, idea that is nonetheless deeply embedded within the self-understanding of the Western philosophical tradition (Shapiro, 2015). Whether relatively explicit or implicit, therefore, adding the prefix 'geo-' to politics and philosophy makes a difference to the self-understanding of each discipline. That said, the difference it makes is not obvious, nor should we assume that it is the same across these two domains. We shall start with some of the complexities when it is added to politics.

In the first instance, geopolitics is a geographers view of the political world (Flint, 2021). This can take many forms. At the early stages of the development of geopolitics, there was a relatively balanced focus on the role of geographical factors in shaping domestic politics as much as great power rivalry or international relations (Hagan, 1942). However, as the history of the discipline makes clear, it quickly came to signal a geographers view of competition and cooperation between states. For example, one of the early attempts to provide an academic framework for geopolitical relations between states, Friedrich Ratzel's *Political Geography* (first published in 1897), claimed that the territorial expansion and decline of any given state is intrinsically related to what he called their 'position': the relation a state has to its neighbours by virtue of the topography, climate, sea-borders and such like (Ratzel, 1923). Similarly, the English geographer Halford

Mackinder proposed his famous analysis of ‘the world island’ and ‘heartland’ which then identified ‘pivotal’ areas for world politics in a strikingly simple mapping of major territorial agglomerations (Mackinder, 1904). What both these examples from the history of geopolitics make clear, though, is that alongside the recognition of the role geography plays in the relationships between states there has been a strongly strategic implication. So much so, that Charles Hagan ends his mid-Twentieth Century review of geopolitics with a warning: ‘the geopoliticians of the German school have interwoven with their geographic materials an incalculable amount of national psychology, history, and military strategy...And the ultimate goal is a world organisation based on domination and not on cooperation between equal states’ (Hagan, 1942: 489-90). It is notable that Mackinder’s analyses did not come in for such stark judgement from Hagan, even though they were equally motivated by strategic concerns for the maintenance of the British Empire (Knutsen, 2014). And in this sense we have the first great complexity that comes with bringing the prefix ‘geo-’ to politics: within the international realm, it amplifies a problem that every student of politics already knows, are we studying a specific mode of human organisation we call politics or we intervening in that world to make it suit our ideological views? The ‘geo-’ doesn’t just bring geographical concerns into politics, in doing so it makes a central dilemma in politics itself even more visible: namely, academic geopolitics is itself a form of political intervention in the world (Mamadouh, 1998). As we’ve already noted, this dilemma is at the heart of Sakwa’s work: how can we study global politics with a view to overcoming strategic bias and prejudice without simply imposing alternative biases and prejudices?

Since Ratzel’s articulation of the more subjective idea of ‘position’ (as opposed to the more objective category of ‘space’) it is impossible to ignore the many human-centred ways in which state forms relate to each other and how geography shapes those tensions and alliances. While ‘space’ can serve as the metaphysical bedrock of geopolitics, ‘position’ (or what is now more commonly called ‘place’) conditions what happens between political spaces. It is this aspect of the geopolitical, therefore, that has increasingly come to the fore within the discipline. And in contrast to Hagan’s worries about ‘national psychology’, contemporary geopoliticians and students of geopolitics have looked at the physical dimensions of our environment increasingly through the distinctly human geographical imagination (Suslov, 2020). For example, the mainstay of academic discussion in this field, the journal *Geopolitics*, invites contributions ‘on traditional topics like interstate relations, great powers relations, global institutions, regional integration, territorial control and access to energy, resources and trade routes, and state borders’ but equally on ‘more recent topics pertaining to identity politics and boundary making, post-colonial perspectives, international migration and transnationalism, global cities and city networks, finance, biopolitics, securitization, surveillance and cyberspace, the everyday, climate change, the high seas, and outer space’; to quote from the journal’s editorial aims. In other words, while physical geography has its role to play in geopolitics, human geography has come to the fore, not just as the study of how the physical world shapes human activity but also, and perhaps more importantly, how human imagination and cognitive structures shape what we even mean by the physical world. In this case, it is no surprise that we must consider how our understanding of the physical environment is shaped by our political structures, behaviours, and ideas. And once again, Sakwa is at the forefront of such analyses. His invocation of the idea of culture does exactly this; as well as the way the geographical West shapes our political behaviours, especially between states of the world, it maps the way we *think* about the West which then informs how these relationships are constituted.

As the boundaries between academic study and strategy, the physical and the human are increasingly interrogated, it is evident that the mutual conditioning of earth and politics – each providing the condition for the other – needs some clarification. Thinking through these processes of mutual conditioning is the inflexion point which brings geopolitics into contact with philosophy. That said, there is an immediate risk of surpassing the complexities of geopolitics with an oversimplified idea of what philosophy has to offer. The risk is most directly articulable by considering the extent to which our modes of thinking, not just our modes of political organisation, are organised in relation to the earth. Indeed, as I shall argue below, it is crucial that we don't rush to a presumed notion of what philosophy can offer geopolitics without simultaneously considering what geography offers to our ways of 'thinking about thinking' that we call philosophy. How can we relate the earth both to modes of organisation and to images of thought in a manner that helps us think about our collective politics of organisation and that also helps us organise politically our ways of thinking? Progress toward answering this question requires us to pause first on what we mean by geophilosophy.

From geophilosophy to politics

In the first instance, and somewhat paradoxically given what we've just explored via geopolitics, geophilosophy is primarily concerned with an historical perspective on the beginnings of philosophy. Of course, that these beginnings are often thought to have a geographical specificity reconstitutes immediately the importance of the prefix 'geo-'. It is a commonplace to say that philosophy began in Greece and it did so for several reasons associated with that locality, both its 'space' and 'position' to borrow from Ratzel. What we find in Deleuze and Guattari's invention of the term geophilosophy, however, is a way of both unpicking the *necessity* of this relationship to Greece and a way of *linking* philosophical thought to non-philosophical ways of thinking, without hierarchy. The idea of non-philosophy simply refers to other modes of thought within the Western tradition and to non-Western forms of thinking that do, of course, vary within different geographical milieus as well as between them. To unpick these claims, it is helpful to recapitulate briefly their argument about the nature of philosophy to then understand how they present its relationship to geography.

In their last work together, *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari give a stipulative definition of philosophy as the creation of concepts (1994: 5). From this initial declaration, they go on to account for how a newly coined concept establishes what they call 'a plane of immanence' (1994: Chapter 2). What this means, in short, is that every newly created concept, if worthy of the name and not merely the name given by the 'ideas-men' to the products sold by all the 'disciplines of communication' (1994: 10), instantiates the mode of thinking appropriate to the concept. Every concept posits an image of thought which is immanent to the concept itself. The relationship between the concept and the plane, however, is not simply determined within that moment of instantiation. Rather, for Deleuze and Guattari, what is needed is 'a conceptual persona' which 'lays out' or organises this relationship (1994: Chapter 3). The persona establishes the relationship between concept and plane without reducing one to the other such that the concept, plane and persona are all (or should be) distinct within a philosophical system. The nuances of these relationships are spelled out in the first part of *What is Philosophy?* and have been, of course, the subject of much discussion (for example, Alliez, 2004; Butler 2015). What is important for our exploration of the relationship between geopolitics and geophilosophy, is that this stipulative

account of what philosophers do and how they go about thinking, raises the question of whether the form of thinking we call philosophy has its roots in a particular milieu, Greece, and if so whether it can claim to be universal.

Inviting these questions places Deleuze and Guattari in direct conversation with Hegel and Heidegger. For both thinkers, according to Deleuze and Guattari, ‘there is an analytical and necessary principle that would link philosophy to Greece’ (1994: 94). In Hegel, notably throughout his *Introduction to The Philosophy of World History* (originally published in 1837, six years after his death) this principle is found in the struggle for recognition oriented around notions of the subject and, therefore, its opposite, the object. Given the role of the state in manifesting the world-historical dynamic of the ‘volk’, it is perhaps not surprising that Hegel locates the emergence of the state in its nascent form in the Greek polis because it is in the polis that he sees the struggle for recognition formalised in such a manner that the dialectical progress to mutual recognition can begin (Hegel, 1988). The situation in Heidegger is similar but with a distinct conceptual flavour. For Heidegger (1956), what marks out the Greek milieu as the beginning of philosophy is the articulation of the distinction between Being and beings. Devoid of the world-historical dialectic that Hegel infuses into the beginning of philosophy, the task for Heidegger is to recover this distinction and to constantly reaffirm it in our open-ended pursuit of the fundamentals of our existence. For both, though, as Deleuze and Guattari say: ‘what remains common to Heidegger and Hegel is having conceived of the relationship of Greece and philosophy as an origin and thus as the point of departure of a history internal to the West, such that *philosophy necessarily becomes indistinguishable from its own history*’ (1994: 95, italics in original). Instead of this necessary relationship to its own beginnings, Deleuze and Guattari claim that we should think of the Greek beginning of philosophy as entirely *contingent*. But what do they mean by this and how does it impact our understanding of geophilosophy?

The easiest way of articulating this claim is to say that philosophy is Greek, to the extent that it did as a matter of fact start in Greece, but that this need not have been the case. Nonetheless, this is a controversial claim in need of specification. To say that philosophy did start in Greece may seem to fly in the face of our increasingly globalised understanding of philosophy (see, for example, Rustom, 2025). Surely, every part of the world at every time in human history has had systems of thought that we can call philosophy? Is there not Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, Indigenous philosophies etc. and are not these often more deeply situated in their respective civilizations than the relatively recent Greek roots of Western thinking? Deleuze and Guattari’s first response to these types of question is to specify that philosophy, as they understand it, is a specific mode of thinking. There undoubtedly have been and continue to be many modes of thinking geographically dispersed and historically evident throughout the world, most notably forms of religion and cosmology, that nonetheless are not philosophy. Of course, even if we accept the claim that philosophy is one form of thinking among many, there is the risk of implicitly or explicitly making the normative claim that philosophy is the best or correct way of thinking. This is indeed the claim animating Hegel’s and Heidegger’s confusion of philosophy with its own history. For Deleuze and Guattari, in contrast, there are many modes of thinking throughout the history of the world of which philosophy is only one. There is no reason to suppose that it is superior to other modes, precisely because it has no necessary relationship to the world-history of humanity or to the nature of human existence *in toto*. As Claire Colebrook argues, it is precisely this openness to understanding philosophy as one mode of thinking among many equally valid modes of thinking that means that Deleuze and Guattari’s project of stipulating what we do when

we do philosophy is not Eurocentric (2022: 173-176). Or, in the language of this discussion, this view of philosophy as a distinct mode of thinking means that there is not the risk of a unilateral globalisation of what it means to think (correctly) that privileges Western thought over thinking in other parts of the world.

We can specify further the importance of this way of thinking about philosophy's contingent relation to its Greek milieu if we think about how philosophy relates to non-philosophy in the West. The non-philosophical modes of thought are those that employ creativity to different ends, notably the arts and sciences in *What is Philosophy?*, but also particular disciplines and practices such as religion, cinema, literature, painting, psychoanalysis and activism (to name a few that are prevalent in the oeuvre of Deleuze and Guattari, without being in any way an exhaustive list). One striking example of their account of the relationship between philosophy and non-philosophy is central to the discussion of geophilosophy. That is, the relationship, in the West, of philosophy to religion. A key feature of the account they give is that they define religion as primarily interested in figures not concepts, where figures are those inventions of human thought that are *projected* onto the world whereas concepts are those that *survey* the world (1994: 89). In essence, figures are constituted when a transcendent entity populates and defines the plane of immanence (*ibid.*). In their characterisation of the relationship between philosophy and religion, therefore, Deleuze and Guattari claim that they are closely related while remaining distinct to the extent that the former instantiates immanence within the concept whereas the latter projects a transcendent onto immanence. Of course, this does not mean that Western philosophy and Western religion are entirely separate, only that when they mix it is from a philosophical point of view for religious figures to become concepts and from a religious point of view for concepts to become religious figures. Indeed, it is well known that Deleuze found key philosophical notions within the history of the Western theological canon (Bryden, 2000). However, it is equally clear that such transdisciplinary activity was always understood by Deleuze and Guattari as the creative work of establishing a philosophical concept from a non-philosophical source. It was the same approach he had to the other non-philosophical disciplines, mentioned above.

Taken together – the contingent relationship of philosophy to Greece and the creative relationship of philosophy to non-philosophy – we get the key features of what Deleuze and Guattari call geophilosophy. That said, we may need to remind ourselves why the prefix 'geo-' matters, with respect to their approach. As they put it: 'thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth' (1994: 85). This relationship is characterised by movement:

movements of deterritorialization are inseparable from territories that open an elsewhere; and the process of reterritorialization is inseparable from the earth which restores territories. Territory and earth are two components with two zones of indiscernibility – deterritorialization (from territory to earth) and reterritorialization (from earth to territory). We cannot say which comes first (1994: 85-86).

It is here where we see that the idea of geophilosophy as understood by Deleuze and Guattari inevitably implicates politics and it is no surprise that it is in this chapter of *What is Philosophy?* that the only (passing) references to what we would commonly recognise as political issues are made in the book (1994: 109-111). That said, the political aspect of philosophy's relationship to its own milieu (and, therefore, all thought's relationship to its own milieu) is in the dynamic relationship between territories, within territories, and how these relationships are shaped by the movements

of the earth itself in terms of the geographical features we noted as central to the geopolitical framing of international relations. As our modes of thought emerge within the ‘zones of indiscernibility’ between territory and earth so it is that thinking, as philosophy in the West and as non-philosophy elsewhere, is profoundly anchored to the modes of organisation we think of as city-states, empires, civilizations, nation-states, stateless nations, and such like. What we must come to conclude, with Deleuze and Guattari’s account of geophilosophy, is that the way we think about ourselves in the world will create political tension with other ways of thinking in and organising the world if, that is, we forget that any localised form of thinking is always conditioned by the particular de- and re-territorializing dynamic that serve as its condition. Sakwa’s account of the ‘culture’ of Cold War II is one way of articulating this relationship within our contemporary geopolitical landscape.

A geophilosophy of contemporary geopolitics

Sakwa’s analysis of the ‘culture’ of Cold War II is his most self-avowedly philosophical treatment of contemporary geopolitics to date. There are several aspects of his analysis that require this novel perspective. For instance, the focus is less on diplomatic intrigue and the processes of international relations and more on the underlying assumptions animating those features that have given rise, as he argues, to the second cold war. The titular term that captures these underlying features is ‘culture’, a term ‘used to describe the deeper processes, attitudes and perceptions of the participants’ (2025: 5). He also uses the term ‘metapolitics’ to indicate these underlying presumptions, but given that many of the key features of the Cold War II are those that refer to how the main actors understand their own identity and use this as the basis for how they relate to others in the world, it is evident that the idea of culture does more to bring the geopolitical analysis into contact with the philosophical themes he surfaces. If Cold War II is defined by virtue of a shift in the ways that cultural identity is used to shape geopolitical strategy (whereas in Cold War I the geopolitical dynamics did much to shape the identity of the major players) then considering the ways in which ‘the whole way of life’ (a definition of culture he adopts from Raymond Williams) conditions geopolitical identities and then subsequent interactions is essential (Sakwa, 2025: 6). Culture serves as the bridge between geopolitics and (geo)philosophy.

Having adopted this perspective, Sakwa embraces the challenge he has set for himself by detailing the major shift in cultural identity that helps us appreciate the emergence of Cold War II. Whereas the West/East conflict shaped Cold War I, it was the result, he shows, of the failure of the post-WWII settlement. What has happened since then is the rise of a new actor on the world stage that he calls the Political West. This new global actor brings with it a cultural identity that now shapes the world order in ways that are reminiscent of Cold War I but that remain nonetheless distinct. So, what accounts for the shift from a Cold War I ‘West’ to a Cold War II ‘Political West’? The answer, perhaps unsurprisingly (though we have Sakwa amongst others to thank for making these claims seem obvious), is rooted in the liberal triumphalism that accompanied the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Taking the most celebrated example of such triumphalism, Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), the idea is that this sense of having won Cold War I and, therefore, having realised the world-historical destiny of liberal democratic values and institutions, profoundly changed the West. It was no longer the case that the West must defend its own values against those it felt were opposed to them. It became apparently self-evident that the West had history and morality on its side such that it must aggressively prevent any other

system of value, and any global institutional order other than its own, from having an equal say in how the world should be run. In the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall the Political West was born. Notably, therefore, this global actor was not just born at a particular historical moment, it was born out of a philosophy of history with specific Hegelian roots. The Greek beginnings of the dialectical struggle for recognition had reached, it was said, a culminating moment in the unrivalled success of liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1992). And, for all that Fukuyama has come to acknowledge democratic backsliding and political decay (Fukuyama, 2015), he remains committed to the idea that liberal democracy is the unsurpassable horizon of world history. It is a commitment that has become hard baked into the cultural identity of those diplomats and political actors shaping the world order from within the Political West.

Of course, it is not just how we understand ourselves that makes our identity but how we understand others. In the case of the Political West, this is arguably its most pernicious and dangerous aspect. From the perspective of world-historical superiority contained within the Political West's self-understanding, all other 'cultural' forms of life are degenerate, criminal and, famously, 'evil'. It is this attitude, Sakwa argues, that defines how the Political West has constituted its Other, the Political East. The Political East, however, is not a straightforwardly geographical East as it 'brings together the Eurasian powers and the Global South' (2025: 47). As the Other, the Political East is both constituted by the Political West but also increasingly finds common identity amongst its disparate sovereign states by virtue of being Othered. Ironically, we may note the echo here of Hegel's master/slave dialectic. The Othered geopolitical actors increasingly define themselves with respect to their shared interests but also with respect to acknowledging that the Political West, the master, cannot sustain its own sense of superiority without them. This sense of reliance, dependency (and one might say in Hegelian mood, eventual overcoming) is captured well in Sakwa's astute analyses of the ways in which the Political East is able to counter the dominance of the Political West by reasserting the international Charter system the West had done so much to establish. While undoubtedly accurate regarding the dynamics of global politics, it is less obvious that this sublation of the Political West is what best suits the 'civilizational pluralism' of the Political East (and the maturation of the Political West into a new global actor), as I will propose in the next section.

Given this unbalanced relationship of Self/Other, however, it is no longer enough, according to Sakwa, to analyse the global dynamics between the Political West and the Political East as extensions of the misunderstandings that fuelled Cold War I. In Cold War II, there is a deeper level of 'miscommunication' based on the 'struggle to control narratives, to shape popular perceptions of reality' (Sakwa, 2025: 99). While the first cold war contained within it the promise of mutual understanding, the contemporary struggle for informational advantage is premised on the idea that our increasingly technologically mediated communicative order is simply an extension of the battlefield, and therefore a territory to be won. It is a struggle, moreover, that the Political West is convinced it cannot lose, even in the face of setbacks, because since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union it believes it has, in effect, already won the world-historical conflict over what counts as reality. The logic of the end of history, embedded firmly in a right-Hegelian analysis of history that instils the pursuit of unilateral globalisation within the Political West, Sakwa argues, imbues Cold War II with an 'anti-hermeneutic' (or 'axiological', Sakwa, 2023) politics of domination. The Political West, according to Sakwa, has no interest in dialogical understanding because it is based on a culture which presumes its own epistemological superiority. The consequence of this sense of knowing better than one's rivals is that any dispute

at that cultural and philosophical level turns epistemological contests into alternative claims about reality. This shift motivates the Political West to demonstrate hegemonic dominance – if our opponents disagree about what constitutes the realities of global politics then we will have to manufacture their consent through cultural and ideological, and sometimes simply brute, force.

Sakwa's solution to this one-sided, axiomatic, anti-hermeneutic, globalism is to make the case for 'the Charter international system' (2025: 20). In large measure, this is the reinvigoration of the international institutional apparatuses of the immediate post-WWII period and the reinvigoration of the cultural politics of the time, shaped as they were by the recognition of differences and the desire to foster understanding between sovereign states. This approach, according to Sakwa, can establish the 'foundations on which a pluralist and progressive social order can be built' (2025: 58). That said, he is astute with respect to the surface level complexities of advancing the cause of the international Charter system. Notably, he recognises that the language of this post-WWII international order has been incorporated into the rhetoric of each of the major global actors. Nonetheless,

While they all claim allegiance to Charter principles, interpretations of when and how its norms should be applied differ and provoke further alienation. This is a topsy-turvy world in which traditionalists accuse the Political West of having become the new Soviet Union, applying neo-communist forms of repressive governance, while liberal states condemn their adversary for parroting anti-hegemonic, anti-colonial and Charter slogans as a cover for illiberal and authoritarian practices. The net result is a diminution of tolerance, pluralism and understanding across the board (2025: 54).

At this level, and as Sakwa ably demonstrates, Cold War II cannot be analysed without consideration of the competing philosophical claims driving the conflicts we see around the world today, even though naked geopolitical strategy and interests remain important. Only a world in which 'states meet as normative equals and unite in various multilateral formats to resolve problems of mutual concern' (2025: 151) is the world, according to Sakwa, that will bring peace. As he claims from the very beginning of the book, 'this work calls for the supremacy of a renewed international legal framework for relations between rivals (at the normative level) and the revival of the spirit of 1945 (at the cultural level)' (2025: 6). It is, in my opinion, an inspiring and philosophically rich vision of hope at a time of great geopolitical despair. But what if there is an idea of the *Philosophical* West – a surreptitious yet hegemonic idea of what it means to think together, to understand each other, to cooperate in the face of different views of the world - underpinning this inspiring vision of an international society of friendly rivalry?

An alternative geophilosophy of contemporary geopolitics

To answer this question, and consider an alternative vision of international cooperation, we need to go back to the central claim Deleuze and Guattari explore in their chapter on geophilosophy: there is no necessity to the emergence of philosophy within the Greek milieu. As discussed above, Deleuze and Guattari are explicit in their rejection of Hegel's and Heidegger's attempts to establish a necessary reason why philosophy emerged in Greece. Moreover, they use their own sense of the contingent birth of philosophy in Greece as the basis for considering what this means with respect to philosophy's relationship to non-philosophical thought within and beyond the West. Important

though those claims are, as we shall see, it is worth turning to how they conceive of the contingent beginnings of philosophy in the West to fully grasp what is at stake in their geophilosophy and what it may offer contemporary geopolitics.

In short, the account they give is relatively straightforward, as Deleuze and Guattari defer primarily to a French classicist called Jean-Pierre Faye; in particular, his book *La raison narrative: Langages totalitaires* (1990). What marks Greece as historically important, according to Faye, are its trading links to the Eastern empires. This connectivity brought ‘strangers’ to Greece, ‘not only artisans and merchants but philosophers’, as Deleuze and Guattari put it (1994: 87). These philosophers, however, were only defined as such because they were precisely in-between the Asiatic and the Greek milieus and modes of thought. They were able to deterritorialize imperial thought from the East while reterritorializing it *eventually* in the cities of Greece, Athens of course being the primary example of that. That this took time is important. Deleuze and Guattari go on, ‘As Faye says, it took a century for the name philosopher, no doubt invented by Heraclitus of Ephesus, to find its correlate in the word philosophy, no doubt invented by Plato the Athenian’ (1994: 87). In this sense, the philosopher is the stranger who wanders between territories and philosophy is the practice that emerged as a set of principles which sought to domesticate what the stranger had brought into existence. Deleuze and Guattari continue:

Philosophers are strangers, but philosophy is Greek. What do emigres find in the Greek milieu? At least three things are found that are the de facto conditions of philosophy: pure sociability as milieu of immanence, the “intrinsic nature of association”, which is opposed to imperial sovereignty and implies no prior interest because, on the contrary, competing interests presuppose it; a certain pleasure in forming associations, which constitutes friendship, but also the pleasure in breaking up association, which constitutes rivalry ... and a taste for opinion inconceivable in an empire, a taste for the exchange of views, for conversation (1994: 87-88).

The philosopher, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is the traveller who brought thought from one territory to another (the deterritorialization of thought) whereas establishing the principles of friendship and rivalry, of sharing opinions in the pursuit of knowledge, without presupposing that one is for or against the city/empire is the consolidation of this movement as a stable set of practices within the Greek polis (the reterritorialization of thought). The mistake of Hegel and Heidegger, therefore, is to conceive of the consolidation of the philosopher’s thought as the necessary conditions for the emergence of philosophy itself rather than to acknowledge that the philosopher existed before philosophy itself was born. Generalising, in a manner that resonates with much of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of difference, we can say that to destabilize this sense of identitarian necessity is to argue that the process of emergence is always different from the product that emerges. In this case, the reason a new way of thinking came into existence should not be confused with the reason why philosophy exists. The philosopher, one might say, is the traveller, the stranger, the émigré, who brought a new way of thinking into Greek life that then became sedimented as the activity of philosophy, with its conventions and norms.

This sense of the contingent beginnings of philosophy in Greece, gives Deleuze and Guattari a particularly virulent view of what philosophy became as the thoughts of the philosophers settled into the established practices of the city-state. The Greek city, they say, constituted ‘the friend or rival as a social relation’ (1994: 79) such that the problem at the heart of

domesticated philosophy becomes distinguishing rival opinions and clarifying friendly ones. It is this view of philosophy, however, that Deleuze and Guattari claim ‘reduces philosophy to interminable discussion’ (*ibid.*). The use of ‘interminable’ is the key here, of course. As is well known, Deleuze and Guattari had a deep dislike for the communicative idea of philosophy: ‘philosophy has a horror of discussions. It always has something else to do. Debate is unbearable to it, but not because it is too sure of itself. On the contrary, it is its uncertainties that take it down other, more solitary paths’ (1994: 29). What one finds down these more solitary paths, as was found in the wandering of those who came to Greece from Asia, is the chance ‘to extract an event from things and beings, to set up a new event from things and beings, always to give them a new event’ (1994: 33). Of course, exactly what this creative view of philosophical activity – as the deterritorialization of thought from its milieu – requires is not always obvious. What is clear, is that we have a view of philosophy’s relationship to its territorial beginnings that has no time for the claim that the creative task of philosophical thinking should be confined to discussions amongst friends and rivals seeking knowledge or, indeed, understanding.

At which point, there is now a glimpse of an alternative geophilosophy of our contemporary geopolitical order. Focused as we are on Sakwa’s work – because of its inspiring courage and political vision – there is now reason to develop his analysis of the Political West into a related claim about the Philosophical West. The Philosophical West is a ‘culture’ which presumes that the task of philosophy is defined by its Greek domestication rather than by the emigres that brought it to Greece, the philosophers themselves. Continuing the comparison with the Political West, it can be said to be a unilateral view of the task of thinking, searching for knowledge beyond opinion, that confuses the full richness of creative thinking with the established order of the Greek milieu. It does so in two senses: locally, with respect to other forms of non-philosophical thinking that emerge within the West, and globally with respect to the non-philosophical cosmologies found across the great civilizations of the world. The Philosophical West presumes the necessity of its own beginning in Greece and then normalises this as the only kind of thinking that counts as legitimate: a normative hegemony of thought based on the sharing of views amongst friends and rivals. As this image of the Philosophical West emerges, so too does its impact on Sakwa’s vision of sovereign internationalism.

There is, in the first instance, *prima facie* reason to pause over the idea of a world order of sovereign states normatively equal and culturally attuned to the same dialogical desire for understanding. For all Sakwa’s insight about the role of the Political West in establishing a Cold War II, has he surreptitiously accepted the principles of the Philosophical West in his alternative vision of peaceful coexistence? This potential problem would seem most acute given his critique of liberal triumphalism and the Hegelian philosophy of history that supports it, while nonetheless remaining committed to a broadly Hegelian view of the conditions of philosophy itself. Less clear, but also important, there is recognition from Sakwa that some views of the geopolitical order from Russia, especially Dugin’s Heideggerian-informed right-wing communitarianism (2025: 132), share his concern with the epistemological dominance that is enshrined within the Political West’s self-understanding. Such a Heideggerian view does not instantiate the struggle for recognition as the beginning of philosophy in Greece but it does presuppose that the language of Being/beings is necessarily at the heart of the Philosophical West. As such, while it is surely imperative that we address all perspectives from the Political East and there is more to Dugin than his Heideggerianism (for good and for ill, perhaps), it is equally important that we can discern the Philosophical West even when it appears within the Political East. Dialogue between the Political

East and West will always be hamstrung if the presumption of dialogue itself is simply part and parcel of the Philosophical West. More to the point, the idea of dialogue is so thoroughly embedded within the Philosophical West that any appeal to its virtues, from either East or West, risks reinstating the problem that Sakwa has done so much to shine a critical light upon. But, if not dialogue, then what are the alternatives?

In truth, this is not the place to sketch out an alternative vision of global order and I am certainly not equipped to even conceive of how this could be done. One guiding gesture can be made in that direction, though. If the task is to create geopolitical systems that do not presume that one 'culture' is intrinsically superior, and I agree with Sakwa that this must be our guiding assumption, then it would be helpful to unpick the assumed priority of philosophical discussion itself and embrace the role of the philosopher. In this sense, the philosopher is the traveller, the émigré, the stranger, who moves from one place to another. In this movement, the philosopher leaves one territory of thought behind while being open to the creative potential of thinking anew, amidst a new relationship to the earth and its milieus. Of course, the philosopher in this sense travels not just from East to West, even though that is the contingent basis of philosophy as a Western mode of thinking, but from West to East (and North and South). Such planetary modes of intellectual cross-pollination offer ways to guide what we then consider to be a new system of international cooperation, one that invites mutual creativity rather than discussion. A simple formula might be this: instead of a diplomacy of friends and rivals, we could consider the diplomacy of strangers.

A Personal Note

In a special issue of this nature, dedicated as it is to the wonderfully inspiring and insightful work of Sakwa, it is appropriate to end on a personal note. Richard once said to me that he is a 'peacenik', one of those 1960s hopefuls who believed that peace was possible if mutual understanding could be established between the warring parties of Cold War I. In my years of working with him, this has always been obvious, in my view. That said, I wonder if he might also consider the debt the peaceniks had to the beatniks of the 1950s. A beatnik was someone who could combine emerging jazz rhythms (beats) in words and music, drawn from the cross pollination of Western and African styles, with new Soviet visionary thinking about space; after all, it was Sputnik that contributed the 'nik' to the beatniks. Perhaps thought travelling through various forms and cultures takes us beyond discussion and understanding toward greater, mutual creativity, for the enrichment of philosophy and all forms of thinking within the West and worldwide? Perhaps a beatnik world is one in which the global institutions encourage hospitality to strangers?

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