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Plenary Session 1. Cultural Relativism and Universalism

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Human, Cultural Rights: Universalism and/or Cultural Relativism

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Preliminary Observations

If we speak about human rights it is necessary to establish that there are different categories of such rights, for instance security rights (life, bodily integrity, liberty), social and economic rights (food, health care, education, labour conditions), and rights that are related to topics like culture, science and the ecological environment. Conflicts and contradictions concerning those different categories of rights may differ between states and social groups. However, reality obliges to recognize that conflicts on human rights concern sometimes the whole package. In this analysis the discussion is about cultural rights, but once in a while it is unavoidable to let reality speak and observe that contradictions exist about major clusters of human rights.

Human rights are embedded in international declarations and covenants on which all or some national states agree. The signature might be a solemn moment, but the big question is of course what happens after this celebration of human good will. It depend from the national states whether they refrain from intervening in the personal life of their citizens and whether they actively take those measures that are necessary for the implementation and recognition of the agreed rights. However, there is no international mechanism that can force national states to respect human rights in all their tonalities. International pressure by a coalition of states might be a tool, but actually it is a weak mechanism that has been exerted mostly rather opportunistically. This ineffectiveness of the international enforcement of human rights is remarkable if one compares this with how effectively the enforcement mechanism of the WTO operates, already a decade after its start. This has huge human rights consequences.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.' This text is nearly the same as can be found in the French revolution declaration.

But, is it true that all human beings are born equal? Costas Douzinas observes that abstract and universal human nature, the essence of the human species, is parcelled out to everyone at birth in equal shares. This is evidently a great fallacy. People are not born equal but totally unequal. . . . once we move from the declarations onto the concrete embodied person, with gender, race, class and age, human nature with its equality and dignity retreats rapidly. . . after sex, colour and ethnicity were added, this abstract disembodied human nature took a very concrete form, that of a white, property-owning man.’ (Douzinas 2000, 96, 7) And, here of course the problems start that I will analyse in the sections below concerning cultural rights.

Let’s believe that the beautiful rhetoric of equality has not been meant as an accurate description of a state of affairs, but as an intention: all people should be entitled on the same rights. In this case we must conclude that there is a serious lack in the human rights declarations. They do not tell how to reach this ideal. What are the strategies? They are silent on how to reach those purposes based on equality, respect for the human being, and cultural participation.

However, we should be aware that human rights ‘were initially linked with specific class interests and were the ideological and political weapons in the fight of the rising bourgeoisie against despotic political power and static social organization.’ (Douzinas 2000: 1) There is nothing wrong with such a start of a bright idea and desire – all social developments commence somewhere, under specific historical conditions -, but it is not to be excluded that his start has left specific traces on how human rights have been conceptualised and formulated: what is in and what is out; what matters more and what has been neglected? Maybe it is no coincidence that the appearance of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights ‘coincides with the globalization of the market economy, which has, particularly in the latter part of the 20th century, penetrated and connected all nations and peoples on Earth into an interdependent network.’ (Bruun 2000, 11)

The fact that human rights have been formulated explicitly for the first time, a couple of centuries ago, in a Western country, France, does not tical mechanisms of democracy should not be confused with basic human rights.’ (Friedman 2000, 25)

An important issue under discussion is that it may sound strange for many people in the non-Western parts of the world that there would exist rights without duties, as has been expressed in the report *Our Creative Diversity*: ‘In many cultures rights are not separable from duties. In South Asia, for example, human rights activists have discovered that indigenous people often find it difficult to respond to a general question as to “what are your rights?” in the absence of a contextual framework (such as a religion, a family, or some other institution). Second, they have found that in responding, people begin by explaining duties before they elaborate on rights.’ (Pérez de Cuellar 1995, 41)

It would be a misunderstanding to think that human rights, and democracy, are implanted in the West already for centuries, Edward Friedman stipulates. 'Few people who embrace the West as the home of democracy and human rights have even an inkling of how recent and politically charged that notion, the "West" is. . . The notion of a democratic West is largely a creation infused by Cold War propaganda, a trope to stigmatize invidiously a "totalitarian" East. . . The myth of a democratic West became popular and is conventionally mistaken for a deep historical truth, something embodying ancient verities and long continuities.' (Friedman 2000, 22,3) This detection should make Western contributions to the human rights debates more modest, less self congratulating.

This observation let unimpeded the question what the character is of the human rights as they have been formulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in other human rights declarations and covenants. Are they as universal as has been pretended? We have seen that they are less Western from origin as many people would think and it would be exaggerated to claim that they are the life and blood of Western societies, but nevertheless in 1948, at the moment of the adaptation of this Declaration many countries were still colonies or economically and politically otherwise dependent from the Western world. In this sense, it cannot be denied that there is a strong Western impetus in the proclamation of the human rights treaties. Does this diminish their claim on universality? Maybe, a bit, and for some a lot. If the work of the formulation of a human rights treaty would be done anew, from scratch, in the beginning of the twenty first century, would we arrive at the same result again? Or to put the question on another way, would we arrive at a result at all?

This serious question refers to the fact that the universalistic claim of human rights has become contested and replaced in several parts of the world by the cultural relativism theory. 'According to the advocates of cultural relativism, to judge a society by values exogenous to the society in question amounts to cultural imperialism.' (Svensson 2000, 199) It is thought-provoking to observe that in several parts of the world, for instance in Arab and Asian countries, nowadays within certain groups the cultural relativism theory concerning human rights has taken roots. The claim is that in any country, c.q. society different norms and values exist that should not be pushed aside by universal human rights. However, in the sixties, seventies and beginning of the eighties of the twentieth century those parts of the world insisted that the universal human rights should be applied on them as well and that it should not stay a Western privilege. In the case of culture and information the request was that the universal human right on access to the means of communication should not be knocked down by the Western domination of those means of communication which resulted in the demand for a New World Information and Communication Order. Let's remember in this context what has been said in the Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas

through any media and regardless of frontiers.’ Article 27.1 of this Universal Declaration states: ‘Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in the scientific advancement and its benefits.’ The central concept in those articles, like in the whole Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is: everyone.

Universalism

In 1961 leaders of newly independent nations and of other countries that did not wish to make a choice in the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the U.S. and that preferred to follow a third way, formed a Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. This movement marked the beginning of a continuing effort by those states, whose economic and cultural independence remained to be achieved, to change the structures and the rules of the international economic and information order. Focusing on the field of information and cultural communication, the Non-Aligned Countries were ‘seeking a more just and equitable balance in the flow and content of information, a right to national self-determination of domestic communication policies, and, finally, at the international level, a two-way information flow reflecting more accurately the aspirations and activities of the less developed countries.’ (McPhail 1981: 14)

In the Report of a decisive symposium of the Movement, held in Tunis in March 1976, it was stated that ‘the peoples of developing countries are the victims of domination in information and this domination is a blow to their most authentic values.’ The Report continued to claim that ‘every developing country has the right to exercise their full sovereignty over information, as much over information about their daily realities as that diffused to their people, equally have a right to be informed objectively about external events and the right to publicize widely their national reality.’ (in Nordenstreng 1989: 89,90) The movement worked in two directions. The first direction was practical and aimed at the strengthening of the information and communication capacities of the developing countries. The second direction was political and aimed at the democratization of international information and communication relations. This purpose got a name. The idea was that there should be installed a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO).

In several Western countries the suspicion grew that the purpose of this endeavour was to legitimise censorship and control by the state of the information and cultural communication. In some cases this was true. However, this did not dispel the fact that there were huge imbalances between the rich and the poor countries in the field of information and cultural communication. Moreover, in those economically weak countries it was only the state that could install the infrastructure for the exchange of knowledge, news and creativity. What was the matter if also in England and France at the time, for instance, the broadcasting companies were state owned? It is also not without reason that newly developing countries were, for the

purpose of nation building, in great need of media that were independent from outside forces. The basic principle, those countries claimed, was of course that media concentration and cultural domination should not exist at all, from a human rights perspective.

To underline that their claim was a universal one, the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement did put the question of the unequal information and communication balance on the agenda of UNESCO which was the right place for such a demand. This culminated on 22 November, 1978, at the Twentieth General Assembly of UNESCO held in Paris in the adoption by acclamation of the “Declaration of Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racialism, Apartheid and Incitement to War” (Mass Media Declaration). During this Assembly Amadou M’Bow, the Director-General, highlighted several areas which required further research and clarification, among them the dialectical conflict between the notions of freedom and responsibility. He mentioned as well the superabundance of goods and services in the information field now becoming increasingly available to industrialized societies, while many Third World nations did have nearly no modern telecommunication infrastructures. (McPhail 1981: 113)

Herbert Schiller summarises that at a number of meetings of UN bodies and Third World nations in the mid-1970s, the characteristics and extent of the Western information monopoly were discussed. The one-way flows of news from a few Western centres drew special criticism: ‘three main demands emerged: greater variety in sources of information, less monopolization of the forms of cultural expression, and preservation of some national cultural space from the pervasive commercialization of Western cultural outpourings. From all these statements and meetings, there was left no doubt in the minds of Third World cultural figures that the products of Western cultural industries had an effect on the peoples to whom they were targeted.’ (Schiller 1989: 142) Who establishes the agenda of social discourse? That became an urgent question. ‘From 1970 to 1976 the Third World aggressively sought to reverse U.S. and Western domination, and introduce new international norms regarding media content, balanced coverage, reciprocal exchanges, and technological equality. Focusing on the right to seek and impart information as well as the right to receive it, these proposals fostered the democratization of access to mass communications and its social accountability to the people it addressed and served. The reform movement also demanded an equitable share of the spectrum as a global resource held in trust for all nations, not simply for those who had got there first.’ (Preston 1989: 124)

Meanwhile UNESCO had commissioned the Irish law scholar Séan MacBride to chair an International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems that came out in 1980 with a report, titled *Many Voices, One World*. Towards a new more just and more efficient world information and communication

order. One of the recommendations (number 58) claims that concerning culture and information effective legal instruments should be designed to: '(a) limit the process of concentration and monopolisation; (b) circumscribe the action of trans-nationals by requiring them to comply with specific criteria and conditions defined by national legislation and development policies; (c) reverse trends to reduce the number of decision-makers at a time when the media's public is growing larger and the impact of communication is increasing; (d) reduce the influence of advertising upon editorial policy and broadcast programming; (e) seek and improve models which would ensure greater independence and autonomy of the media concerning their management and editorial policy, whether these media are under private, public or government ownership.' (MacBride 1980: 266). The Report urges the necessity of strengthening the information and communication capacities of developing countries. Adequate infrastructures should be installed and developed 'to provide self-reliant communications capacity'. (Ibid.: 255) The discussion at the start of the twenty first century within UNESCO on a Convention on Cultural Diversity, and its adaption, applies with Séan MacBride's plea for 'effective legal instruments'.

The movement for a New World Information and Communication Order clashed, already very soon, with the Western sustained philosophy of the free flow of communication and information. This doctrine insists that no national need or purpose can justify interference with the prevailing flow of messages and imagery, wherever its source and whatever its character of production. A nation that departs from a privately owned, advertising-supported media system is on the road to tyranny. (Schiller 1989b: 288) Edward Herman and Robert McChesney comment that the free flow doctrine 'was at once an eloquent democratic principle and an aggressive trade position on behalf of U.S. media interests. The core operational idea behind the principle was that transnational media firms and advertisers should be permitted to operate globally, with minimum governmental intervention. In the view of the U.S. policy-makers, this was the only notion of a free press suitable for a democratic world order.' (Herman 1997: 17) It became more and more clear that the movement for the New World Information and Communication Order was squared to what the supporters of the free flow of communication had in mind.

Already in 1976, in Nairobi, at UNESCO's General Assembly the U.S. threatened to withdraw from the organization if the Mass Media Declaration that was under discussion would endorse unacceptable press standards. As we have seen above this Declaration has been adopted in 1978, still with the U.S. within UNESCO. However, on 1 January 1985 the United States at the end left UNESCO, later followed by Great Britain and Singapore. 'In his memorandum of February 1984 explaining the U.S. position on the withdrawal, William Harley, a State Department consultant on communications, stated that UNESCO 'has taken on an anti-Western tone. . . [and] has become a comfortable home for statist, collectivist solutions to world problems and for ideological polemics.' (in Herman 1989: 245,6)

Edward Herman comments that for this William Harley and his U.S. government “statist” solutions apparently are unnatural, illicit, and “political”, whereas private-enterprise initiatives are natural and apolitical. ‘This is completely arbitrary and an expression of a political preference, a preference that is not even consistently maintained by U.S. officials. They do not insist that “statist” illiteracy programs are illicit, and even in the communications field they do not maintain that government underwriting of satellite technology for the private sector produced an unfair, “statist” basis for the technological edge of the private U.S. communications industry. “Statist” means government intervention in those selected areas where the government does not intrude in the United States, and/or where it is U.S. policy to support private sector initiatives.’ (Herman 1989: 245,6) The U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO weakened the organisation considerably and it was the deathblow for the development of a New World Information and Communication Order.

The United States did a second thing at the same time as it was preparing its withdrawal from UNESCO. It had another new world order in mind, a new world order of ‘free markets’ economics. Jerry Mander writes that this neoliberal agenda would oblige countries, for instance, to open their markets to foreign trade and investment without requiring majority local ownership, eliminating all tariff barriers. It would severely reduce government spending, especially in areas of services to the poor; convert small-scale-self-sufficient family farming to high-tech, pesticide-intensive agribusiness that produces one-crop export commodities such as coffee and cattle. And it would demonstrate an unwavering dedication to clearing the last forests, mining the last minerals, diverting and damming the last rivers, and getting native peoples off their lands and resources by any means necessary. (Mander 1993: 19).

The moment that UNESCO became toothless, a new round of negotiations inside GATT, the Uruguay Round, started. It had trade liberalisation as its main aim more than ever before, resulting in the establishment of the WTO in 1995, with some new treaties, like GATS (the General Agreement on Trade and Services which includes culture) and TRIPs (the agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights). In 1993 Martin Khor foresaw that this liberalisation would accelerate the evolution of monocultures. Governments would find it increasingly difficult to regulate or prevent cultural and service imports. ‘Since the largest and most powerful enterprises belong to the North, the already rapid spread of modern Western-originating culture will be accelerated even more. Cultural diversity would thus be rapidly eroded.’ (1993: 104).

Thus far, we have observed that non-Western countries claimed that the universal human right on the access to the means of communication should apply as well to them. On this point those countries have not been served very well.

Cultural Relativism

Human rights declarations and treaties that exist for decades have not been respected, in any case not enough to make it self-evident that states actively favour the development of cultural diversity, analyse what might threaten the flourishing of cultural diversities (plural) and accordingly take appropriate measures. One of the reasons of the failure of the universal human rights principle concerning artistic communication and artistic expressions is that worldwide the unequal communication balance continued to exist. A completely different reason for the failure can be found in the fact that in several parts of the world the idea has grown that there are no and cannot exist universal human rights. On the contrary, it has been claimed, that human rights are related to the culture and the society where people live: this is, what one may call, the cultural relativism approach.

Several Arab and Asian countries started to promote the idea of cultural relativism which claims that, for instance, the freedom of communication is subjected to and limited by, for instance, specific religious rules, and every country has its own set of values, is inside the country monolithic concerning its own human rights, differs from other countries in this perspective, and therefore universal human rights cannot exist.

This cultural relativism approach was defended as well by the former Soviet Union that asserted that the political and ideological structures of Communist states pointed toward a different understanding of rights than was favoured in the West, charging the West with violations of economic and social rights. That debate died more-or-less together with the Soviet Union. It continued to exist, in different form, often in the North-South (or West-East) framework, or in a religious (West-Islam) framework, or more broadly between developing (Third World) and developed (Western-Northern) countries. It also includes non-state actors such as indigenous peoples.

It must be said that some Western countries use, misuse, or neglect the development of a universal world order as if it is a lucky bag. This does not help to give much credit to the international world order and the construction of respect for the idea and practice of universal human rights as an important part of it. Costas Douzinas observes, for instance, that the United States ‘usually promotes the universalism of rights. Its rejection of the world criminal court was a case of cultural relativism which took the form of an imperial escape clause.’ (Douzinas 2000: 122) But, also the continuing process of mergers of cultural industries which dominate worldwide more and more cultural production, distribution and promotion is a permanent violation of the cultural rights articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is a form of cultural relativism that exempts huge slices of cultural life from the universality principle of the human rights.

Several Arab and Asian countries claim explicitly that other values than the universal human rights should govern the live of their citizens. Samir Kassir analyses that until the seventies of the twentieth century in many Arab countries a considerable cultural openness existed. This changed with the siege of Beyrouth in the summer of 1982. Trevor Mostyn is inclined to put this moment already earlier. ‘Since the humiliating defeat of Arab countries in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war (often known as the Six-Day War), a distinction between the Islamic legal tradition based on the Shari’a and the concept of international human rights has become a serious factor.’ (Mostyn 2002: 171) Somewhere at the end of the seventies also the idea of the existence of so called Asian values and the claim on cultural relativism came up.

Ole Bruun summarises those Asian values as follows. First of all there is the straightforward “cultural” argument that human rights emanate from particular historical, social, economic, cultural and political conditions. Second, there is the reflexive, “collective” argument that Asian values differ from Western ones by being communitarian in spirit as opposed to Western individualism. Since the community takes precedence over individuals, individual rights are destructive to the social order and the harmonious function of society. Third, there is the “disciplinary” argument, stressing the importance that Asians allegedly attribute to voluntary discipline in social life. Finally, there is the “organic” argument, building on a notion of state and society as a single body. (Bruun 2000: 3)

An important reproach of the Asian values theory to the universal human rights idea is that it concentrates only on individuals, and the Western person is consequently accused of individualism. If this would be true, how it can be explained, Ole Bruun wonders, that it ‘is after all in Western countries that the most fine-masked social-security nets are found.’ (Bruun 2000: 14) Moreover, when looked upon in isolation, ‘Asian values closely resemble commonplace conservative values: strong leadership, respect for authority, law and order, a communitarian orientation placing the good of the collective over the rights of the individual, emphasis on the family, etc.’ (Bruun 2000: 2)

However, Ziauddin Sardar points out, however, that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights assumes a universal human nature common to all peoples. ‘The Declaration presupposes a social order based on liberal democracy where the society is simply a collection of “free” individuals. Again, the individual is seen as absolute, irreducible, separate and ontologically prior to society.’ (Sardar 1998: 68,9) The basic philosophy of many social and cultural systems in several parts of the world is different from this, however. This is the reality Western countries do not want to know about. ‘Since an autonomous, isolated individual does not exist in non-Western cultures and traditions, it does not make sense to talk of his or her rights; and where there are no rights, it is quite absurd to speak of their denial or annulment.’ (o.c.)

Ziauddin Sardar gives the example of Hinduism, in which the notion of dharma, one of the fundamental concepts of Indian tradition, leads us to symbolic correspondence with the Western idea of human rights. 'Dharma is a multilayered concept and incorporates the terms, elements, data, quality and origination as well as law, norm of conduct, character of things, rights, truth, ritual, morality, justice, righteousness, religion and destiny. In Sikhism, the prime duty of a human being is sewa: there is no salvation without sewa, the disinterested service of the community. The rights of the individual are thus earned by participating in the community's endeavour and thereby seeking sakti.' (Sardar 1998: 70)

This does not mean that individual rights do not have any value, but they should be seen in a broader context, which Ziauddin Sardar again elucidates with an example: 'The notion of an individual person's rights is not unknown to Islam. Thus, individual rights in Islam do not stop at personal freedoms but include economic, social, cultural, civil and personal rights as well.' (Sardar 1998: 72,3) His observations make clear that a lot of work needs to be done, first, to understand the different concepts of human rights, and, second, to understand what can be learned from such varied concepts and what differences cannot be accommodated. (Smiers 2003: 172,3)

From 14 to 25 June 1993 United Nations organised in Vienna a World Conference on Human Rights that had as a purpose to re-affirm the basic principles of human rights and to assert the propriety of culturally diverse interpretations of human rights principles. This was the right moment for Arab and Asian countries to reflect on their position concerning the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Therefore, for instance, 49 Asian countries organised a meeting in Bangkok from 29 March to 2 April 1993. In the Final Declaration of the conference it was stated that the participating countries 'recognize that while human rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds.'

This makes Hugo Stokke conclude that taking together, 'the Declaration, although it nominally upholds the universality of human rights, does seem to introduce so many reservations as far as norm-setting and application are concerned as to compromise the universality of human rights and thereby provides less room for dialogue on the matter.' (Stokke 2000: 135; see as well Steiner 1996: 229) Maybe it should be tried. My guess is that this nearly never happens. At last the Vienna Declaration from June 1993 re-affirmed the principle that all human rights are universal, but qualified this by stating that 'the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind.' Michael Freeman concludes that 'this authoritative UN text left unresolved the relation between the universality of human rights and the legitimacy of culturally particular conceptions of human rights.' (Freeman 2000: 46)

However, there is also a positive side to mention concerning the 1993 Vienna Declaration and its Programme of Action. Not only the universality, as said before, but also the interdependence of all human rights was reaffirmed. This should not be underestimated. By doing this, the artificial distinction between civil and political, and economic, social and cultural rights (as adopted in the different documents as I referred to in the beginning of this article) was rectified. Moreover, the text of the Vienna Declaration was adopted by consensus by all member-states of the United Nations, including those having undergone decolonisation after the creation of the organisation itself.

There we are. The universalism claim concerning human cultural rights is polluted by the continuing unequal communications relations worldwide. The cultural relativism approach is more than once the cover for cruel practices and the suppression of the freedom of expression, also in cultural perspective. This might stem sombre. However, Costas Douzinas suggest that all this ‘does not mean that human rights treaties and declarations are devoid of value. At this point in the development of international law, their value is mainly symbolic. Human rights are violated inside the state, the nation, the community, the group. Similarly, the struggle to uphold them belongs to the dissidents, the victims, those whose identity is denied or denigrated, the opposition groups, all those who are the targets of repression and domination.’ (Douzinas 2000: 144)

It would be an enormous step forward if UNESCO’s Convention on Cultural Diversity would be used as a tool to promote that universal and equal rights in the cultural fields will be taken seriously. This doing, it would keep alive the best part of cultural relativism, that is that human beings are different and express themselves differently.

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Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism

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Introduction

Cultural relativism is at the heart of social and cultural anthropology (hereafter called just “anthropology”). Since it emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, there have been many pros and cons about its academic legitimacy. Few anthropologists, however, would disagree that relativistic thinking about foreign cultures has played a historic role in their discipline. This evaluation contrasts with that in other disciplines, particularly philosophy, ethics, and political science, in which the foundation of cultural relativism has frequently been undermined. I therefore discuss first, from historical perspective, some of the positive legacies of relativistic thinking in anthropology and then examine its problems.

The Historical Significance of Cultural Relativism

For anthropologists, the greatest contribution of cultural relativism lies in its emphasis on the importance of understanding foreign cultures on their own terms. This way of understanding requires us to see foreign peoples from their perspective instead of imposing our own views and values on them, let alone judging them by our own standards of right and wrong. The relativist lesson is easy to preach, but difficult to practice because all of us are in one way or another ethnocentric in the sense that we find our own customs and manners the most sensible or at least natural. From the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, it was obviously more difficult for Westerners to accept relativism than it is today because the power differences that had existed between the West and the rest almost inevitably made non-Western peoples look unsophisticated, often to the point of being labeled “primitive.” Indeed, this sense of superiority lurked in the minds of classic social evolutionists.

In anthropology, aside from Herbert Spencer, one of the best known social evolutionists is Lewis H. Morgan, the author of *Ancient Society* (1877). In this book, which influenced Karl Marx, Morgan

maintained that human society had progressed through three successive stages of development – savagery, barbarism, and civilization. A fundamental problem with this theory is that civilization was effectively equated with modern European and North American civilizations. In other words, the West was placed at the top of the evolutionary ladder, and all the other societies were ranked in accordance with their assumed proximity to the West. Morgan was not a simpleminded, ethnocentric fellow, but he never doubted that social progress would be achieved through technological development. Similar views were presented by Edward Tylor, often called the “father of anthropology.” In *Primitive Culture* (1871), he presented an evolutionary theory of religion, which put animism at the bottom of the ladder, and monotheism at the top, with polytheism in between. Christianity was therefore regarded as among the most developed religions of the world. Although Tylor is best remembered today for his relativistic conception of culture, he in fact was an evolutionist who did not hesitate to declare that, on the whole, civilized people are wiser and happier than savages. For Tylor, like his contemporaries influenced by the Enlightenment, reason was a major driving force of human progress.

It was against this intellectual background, as well as the widespread belief in the racial superiority of Caucasians, that cultural relativism emerged. I emphasize this history because it represents a major turn in modern Western intellectual history. Evolutionism is generally characterized by “vertical” (i.e., hierarchical) thinking in which different societies are ranked by some sort of standard, typically technological and, by extension, moral as well. Relativism, on the other hand, is characterized by “horizontal” (i.e., egalitarian) thinking in which all societies, regardless of the levels of technological development, are placed on an equal footing, and differences are accounted for as diversity, instead of indexes of intellectual or moral development.

I am of the opinion that cultural relativism is not so much a theory as an attitude of the mind in approaching different others – groups of people that are different from our own. It is safe to say that relativists caused an intellectual revolution, for they had completely changed the ways in which foreign peoples and cultures were conceptualized among Westerners. Too often this contribution has been forgotten in the midst of fierce challenges to cultural relativism as a theory.

To demonstrate this point, I quote below the words of Franz Boas, who is widely considered by anthropologists to be the founder of cultural relativism, from the journal he kept while studying the Inuit on Baffin Island. At that time, the Inuit were pejoratively called “Eskimos” (savages who eat raw meat).

“Is it not a beautiful custom that these ‘savages’ suffer all deprivation in common, but in happy times when someone has brought back booty from the hunt, all join in eating and drinking? I often ask myself what advantages our ‘good society’ possesses over that of the ‘savages.’ The more I see of their customs,

the more I realize that we have no right to look down on them... As a thinking person, for me the most important result of this trip lies in the strengthening of my point of view that the idea of a 'cultured' individual is merely relative and that a person's worth should be judged by his *Herzenbildung* (roughly, 'education of the heart')" (quoted in Langness, *The Study of Culture*, 1974, pp. 45-46).

Major Criticisms of Cultural Relativism

I focus here on two key criticisms that have been persistently made of cultural relativism both inside and outside anthropology.

(1) Universalism vs. Relativism

The first criticism concerns the question of whether there are universals shared across different cultures. Obviously, this question has been posed by people who defend cultural universalism. Strictly speaking, their position contrasts with particularism, rather than relativism, but the two concepts have been almost indistinguishable in past debates, so no strict distinction is made here. It is also important to note that universals are not the same as absolutes, which are fixed across time and space.

A classic debate between universalists and relativists has to do with Samoan adolescence. Margaret Mead, in her book *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), contended that adolescence is relative to culture because in the United States this age is considered to be a turbulent period with a great deal of psychological stress due to the difficulties involved in transition from childhood to adulthood, whereas in Samoa no such conflict is observed because of the continuity between the two stages of life. She even argued that the cultural climate in Samoa is so relaxed that young girls are allowed sexual freedom to a degree unimaginable at that time in the United States. Despite the popularity of Mead's book, her views had often been contested by professional scholars. It was, however, not until the publication of a controversial book *Margaret Mead and Samoa* (1983), subtitled "The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth," that thorough re-examinations of her work began. In that book, the author Derek Freeman accused Mead, although posthumously, of having spread irresponsible stories about the Samoans, particularly about their sexuality. According to him, Mead was deceived by the playful girls she had interviewed through an interpreter. Moreover, Freeman submitted that Mead's almost intentional neglect of biological factors in explaining human behavior and institutions eventually resulted in cultural determinism.

At the base of this controversy is the question of "nature versus nurture." Early American anthropologists influenced by Boas tenaciously emphasized the importance of upbringing, while being fully aware of the politically radical implications of their position. This is because in the race-conscious society of the United States upholding biological explanations would merely strengthen already existing racial prejudices.

In this regard, cultural relativism and its extreme form, cultural determinism, were liberal creeds that challenged the dominant outlook on the world among the Westerners in the first half of the twentieth century. Even today, biological explanations, including those of the cognitive sciences, are viewed with skepticism for political reasons, rather than purely academic ones, as Steven Pinker showed in *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (2003). Among anthropologists, then, the fear of universalism derives from that of biological reductionism.

A more recent debate between universalists and relativists concerns human rights. Before discussing this debate, I should point out that there are two major types of cultural relativism - moral or ethical relativism and the relativity of knowledge. Simply put, the latter holds that people's knowledge varies depending on the conditions, whether ecological, historical, or social, under which they live. Few scholars have seriously disagreed on this point, and this is all the more so today when some indigenous peoples' knowledge of herbs is being used, almost exploited, for producing new kinds of medicine in industrialized countries. By contrast, there has been much controversy about moral relativism in a variety of disciplines. On the whole, negative opinions abound outside of anthropology, although some anthropologists have also objected to moral relativism. In any event, since the end of the Second World War, the issue of human rights has been at center stage in debates regarding cultural relativity.

In the past 60 or so years, anthropologists' views on human rights have changed significantly, especially among those trained in the American tradition. In 1947, one year before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted at the general assembly of the United Nations, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) submitted to the United Nations a document entitled "Statement on Human Rights." This document began with the claim that people should be seen not simply as individuals but also as members of their social group because their personality develops only in terms of the culture of their society. Thus, the AAA's first proposition reads, "respect for individual differences entails a respect for cultural differences." The AAA's statement further declared that conceptions of human rights differ from one society to another, thereby underscoring the necessity to reflect the diversity of values among human groups in the proposed United Nations declaration, instead of highlighting just those values prevalent in Western Europe and the United States. The AAA's statement was best summarized in its third proposition: "Standards and values are relative to the culture from which they derive so that any attempt to formulate postulates that grow out of the beliefs or moral codes of one culture must to that extent detract from the applicability of any Declaration Human of Rights to mankind as a whole." These words faithfully followed the views of the principal drafter, Melville Herskovits, a staunch proponent of cultural relativism.

About a half century later in 1999, the AAA produced a new declaration on human rights. The preamble points out changes that have occurred in the global environment since the end of the war, notably violence

perpetrated by states. When such action results in the denial of humanity, says the preamble, the AAA has “an ethical responsibility to protest and oppose” in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the same time, the AAA contends that they should consider areas not fully addressed by the Declaration or in international law, such as collective cultural rights. As I understand it, collective rights refer here, for example, to an indigenous people’s rights to use their traditional resources without being interfered or exploited by external agents. Thus, the subject (beneficiary) is not so much the individual as it is the group. In this regard, the AAA’s position conflicts, at least potentially, with much of international law in which the individual is the basic unit through which rights and duties are implemented. Strangely, the main body of the AAA’s “Declaration on Anthropology and Human Rights” does not clearly spell out these issues. Furthermore, it continues to reject “the abstract legal uniformity of Western tradition” in favor of “anthropological principles of respect for concrete human differences.” Despite all this, the AAA’s declaration of 1999 does represent a major shift, if not a complete change, from the organization’s previous emphasis on cultural particularities. It goes without saying that the above statement could not have been issued without a general consensus of the AAA membership.

(2) Taboo on evaluation

A second major criticism that has been persistently made of cultural relativism concerns the taboo on evaluation. The relativist principle that each culture is a distinct entity without parallels and that people should be allowed to live according to their own traditions and ideals has greatly contributed to fostering respect for the dignity of non-Western peoples many of whom have been exploited and ridiculed by the Western colonial powers. In times of international conflict, however, especially between great powers as in the case of the Second World War, the same principle has caused problems, even embarrassment on the part of its proponents. Clearly, there are limits to respect for cultural and national differences: the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany, as well as by Japan in the rape of Nanking, were evils, and they could not be justified by any moral standard. Identifying the causes for these incidents, and evaluating them in order to avoid making the same mistakes, should have been the responsibility of not only the countries concerned, but humanity in its entirety as well. In recent decades, similar incidents like genocide and ethnic cleansing have occurred. This unfortunate fact unambiguously attests to the need to reconsider the relativist taboo on evaluation, while respecting the original intentions.

Another example that is often cited in this regard is that of female circumcision as practiced in some parts of Africa. There are a few major types of female circumcision, and it is reported that an extremely violent type has caused numerous young women serious injuries. For this reason, since the 1970s, many Western feminists have openly criticized the practice, demanding that it should be stopped immediately. They have also called for the solidarity of all women in order to fight together against what they consider to be an evil custom derived from patriarchy. It is, however, at that juncture that respect for cultural differences

became an issue. To the surprise of the Western feminists, they have met with strong opposition from their counterparts in the Third World. Moreover, the Westerners have been denounced for their alleged arrogance in dictating the acceptability of other peoples' traditions without fully understanding local situations. Many Third World feminists and activists agree that female circumcision should be prohibited, but they also maintain that it is difficult to eliminate the time-honored tradition overnight and that the Westerners should know the anguish among the people they have criticized. Indeed, the local people's anguish comes from the conflicting desires to respect their culture and to change life for the better.

These controversies show the complexities of cultural evaluation. Even though some customs are harmful, objectively speaking, it is difficult to get rid of them instantaneously, not simply because such customs are socially embedded, but also because they are deeply rooted in the cultural identity of the people concerned. This point becomes clear when we remember how difficult it is for Americans to ban the use of the gun in their country; the experiences on the frontier, including self-defense by the gun, are a part of the collective memories of the American people. Some anthropologists propose that the degree of pain involved in coerced action should be used as an index of evaluation, but again the same kind of pain, whether physical or mental, is interpreted differently in different cultures. What outsiders can do then is to learn to respect other peoples' dignity, as the relativists have long preached, instead of criticizing them outright from one's own viewpoint, and to work together in order to find satisfactory solutions based on the principle of human rights.

Politicization of Culture

I now turn to a more recent problem that relates to the ongoing debate on multiculturalism. This problem is what I call "politicization of culture." It is frequently overlooked that culture is a political construction. Historically speaking, the idea of culture was first developed in Germany in the eighteenth century. Being contiguous with France, which came to the fore of European politics after the peace of Westphalia in 1648, Germany was forced to take a lesser position. Furthermore, because this country had been fragmented into many small territories, it invited foreign invasions. National unity was called for, and some German intellectuals responded to this challenge by inventing a philosophy that extolled the national spirit (Volksgeist) of the German people. This philosophy was none other than the discourse of culture (Kultur), which was conceptualized as a distinctive style of life among members of a nation or an ethnic group. The writings of Jonathan G. Herder are said to have been influential in formulating such an outlook. He rejected the French Enlightenment ideals of rationality and universality, emphasizing instead the spiritual independence of each nation. Herder's ideas were also instrumental in the development of folklore studies in undeveloped parts of Europe.

This history has been concealed in Boasian relativism. Considering his German background, especially since he was influenced by the geographer Alexander von Humboldt and the ethnologist Adolf Bastian, both of whom were Romanticists, it is improbable that Boas was completely unaware of the political implications of culture. After immigrating to the United States in 1887, however, his main concern was recording the cultures of rapidly disappearing Native American groups. He put politics aside, absorbing himself in the study of “vanishing” cultures before it was too late.

It was only in the early 1980s that anthropologists began to research the politics of culture. Behind this development was the rise of nationalism in many parts of the world. The type of nationalism that is being examined today is the so-called “ethnic nationalism,” rather than the type of political nationalism that was triggered by independence movements during and after the Second World War.

Ethnic nationalism may be examined in two realms. First, in international politics, it is basically a reaction against the globalizing forces coming from the United States and Western Europe. These countries are powerful enough to transform the long-standing traditions in the rest of the world, including ways of thinking. At the center of this ethnically motivated nationalism is the strong desire to protect and maintain one’s culture even by resorting to politics.

A quintessential example of politicized culture is the claim made by some leading Asian politicians that because the idea of human rights originated in the West, it should not be applied indiscriminately to non-Western countries. They vehemently argue that Asian values are different from the West and that Asia has a “culture of familism,” instead of human rights. By familism, it is meant that the social system in which the state protects its people is, in some sense, paternalistic. In essence, it is perceived to function similar to the way that parents provide protection for their children. Asian familism contrasts with Western individualism, on which the notion of human rights is allegedly based. It is clear, however, that the discourse of family is presented to get around the criticisms derived from the “human rights diplomacy” deployed by the West - the claim that in some Asian countries human rights are being sacrificed for economic development.

Ethnic nationalism is also observed in the realm of domestic politics, particularly in countries containing competing groups with radically different ethnic backgrounds. For example, in the South African system of apartheid, cultural differences between Europeans and Africans were considered legitimate reasons for segregation. Culture was thus politically manipulated by the ruling class for their advantage, while being used as an excuse for maintaining the status quo. Another well-known example is that of the extreme political right in some European countries with a large population of immigrants, Muslims in particular. Right-wing activists proclaim that the rights of ethnic minority groups are unduly protected by the

government and that their own cultural heritage, including Christian faith, is being undermined. In order to avoid further “contamination” by foreign elements, so goes the argument, the activists should drive them out, if necessary, by force. Unfortunately, this kind of extremism is often reciprocated by the other party, as is shown in the 2004 murder of a Dutch film director by a young Muslim who had been offended by the way the director portrayed Muslim women.

From these observations, we may conclude that culture is indeed easily politicized and that politicized culture is at the base of ethnic, national, and international conflicts in the contemporary world. This assessment is correct ? as long as culture is conceptualized within the framework of Boasian relativism.

Culture in the Age of Multiculturalism

Some political scientists argue that multiculturalism was implemented in ethnically diverse countries in order to overcome the limitations of the assimilation policies that preceded present-day diversity. These policies were based on the long-standing principle that a nation state should consist of one people, one language, and one culture. By contrast, multiculturalists contend that such policies are no longer effective today, for they are the root causes of ethnic conflicts that may eventuate in social disintegration. Because no modern state is without ethnic minority groups within its border, the above principle of nation states may be said to have become an ideal of the past, although the actual situation varies from one country to another. On the whole, it is safe to say that multiculturalism was initially a political ideology that aimed to prevent a nation state from falling apart by incorporating diverse elements - different ethnic groups, languages, cultures, religions, to mention only the most notable - within its border. In this respect, multiculturalism was, and still is in part, a means of political integration.

There are some different types of multiculturalism, and the above statement best applies to the “liberal” type. In this type, which is represented by Charles Taylor, culture is understood as a given entity that constitutes a coherent and homogeneous whole with clear demarcation lines indicating its independence from other such wholes. A multicultural society is therefore one in which different ethnic groups each with a distinct culture exist side by side, while the majority group being situated at the center, within the boundary of a nation state. The ethnic and cultural boundaries are kept rather intact. This situation is in fact parallel to the perspective of cultural relativists because their conception of culture as the totality of a people’s way of life implies (1) that something is commonly shared among the same people, and (2) that this cultural sharing distinguishes them from other groups. Put another way, the relativist conception of culture both accentuates the differences that exist between different groups and obliterates the differences that exist within one’s own group. Mechanisms of heterogeneity and homogeneity function at the same time within and without. Furthermore, the distinctiveness of each culture is emphasized so strongly that

little attention is paid to the question of whether interaction occurs between different cultures, and, if so, how. It is only expected that when culture is understood as such, people's ethnic identity is bound up with their cultural experience and that their demand for recognition, particularly among people from minority groups, result in identity politics - hence "culture wars."

Anthropologists are often accused of having helped bring on such wars. The fact is, however, that cultural relativism has been subjected, since its inception, to various criticisms even within the profession. Moreover, since the 1980s, thorough reexaminations of the culture concept have begun, and very few anthropologists subscribe today to the Boasian perspective without qualifications. I, for one, consider culture "consumable" in the sense that its components may be appreciated by many people across ethnic and national boundaries. Judo, for example, originated in Japan, but it is played today in many parts of the world. It no longer belongs exclusively to the originator. The same may be said of any other cultural components, including abstract ideas. In the age of globalization, when boundary crossing occurs in many aspects of life, a salient feature of culture lies in its capacity to be consumed without regard to the consumer's ethnic background.

Respect and Tolerance for Different Others

In this last section, I offer some observations on two important lessons of cultural relativism. The word "lesson" is intentionally used here because, as mentioned previously, cultural relativism is not so much an academic theory as an attitude of the mind in approaching different others. In other words, for anthropologists engaged in the study of foreign cultures, relativistic thinking is based on bodily experience in the field, rather than cognitive training in the library, which has been obtained while struggling to understand unfamiliar people radically different from their own.

(1) Respect for different others

To demonstrate this point, I give the example of Japan's kamikaze pilots in the Pacific War. Needless to say, kamikaze pilots deliberately crashed their airplanes on enemy ships, knowing that they would be killed. For most people, particularly Americans who fought against Japan, kamikaze is the quintessence of insanity, neglect of life, and, above all, contempt for humanity. The same viewpoint is shared among many Japanese today, but as Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney has persuasively shown in *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms* (2002), the pilots deserved no such characterizations. On the contrary, many of them were intelligent college students, comparable to today's masters or even doctoral students, considering the low rate of college attendance at that time. Although they had been recruited from outside the military on a voluntary basis, strong social pressures forced them to present themselves for the sake of their country. The level of their intelligence was such that, while being trained, after returning to barracks in the evening,

some of them wasted no time reading philosophy books, including Kant, Hegel, and Nishida. And they agonized over the meaning of life and death until the day of mission. Nowhere in their actual profiles are found the stereotypical images of kamikaze pilots.

This is, of course, not to glorify the young pilots. Rather, my point is that it would do them gross injustice if we simply judged them from our own perspective and denounced them outright as insane without even trying to understand their plight. Indeed, this is what Boas taught us, in his book entitled *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911), when he said that the meanings of murder in some primitive societies were different from those in industrialized societies. Perhaps we may go one step further and say that a mental understanding is not enough, for it is basically a cognitive activity that is completed in the head. What is called for instead is appreciation, which springs from inside the body as a medium of experience through the senses. In this respect, fieldwork is not merely a means of gathering data; rather, it involves the whole person, both the mind and the body, when attempting to grasp the viewpoints of the people being studied.

Anthropology is basically a study of foreign peoples and cultures. As is shown in the title of Clyde Kluckhohn's classic, *Mirror for Man* (1953), a major feature of anthropological thinking is reflexive understanding or even realization of the self through the others. For Kluckhohn, the mirror was "primitive man" for contemporary Americans. Like other people on the street, almost all anthropologists are ethnocentric in one way or another. Contrary to what is commonly supposed, ethnocentrism is not altogether evil because it is, in some sense, an expression of a successful socialization. In the process of socialization, human beings are trained to see the world in some particular ways, and ethnocentrism refers to none other than such biases. It is therefore at the heart of a person's identity. Problems arise, however, when we are so attached to our own outlook on the world as to refuse to go beyond it. Cultural relativists have encouraged us to move on to a higher plane by temporarily putting aside our own values when faced with different others, not just for understanding them, but, in the end, for gaining deeper insights into ourselves, thereby enriching our life and realizing our potentials.

(2) Tolerance toward different others

By far the most difficult problem involved in cultural relativism concerns the issue of tolerance. According to Elvin Hatch, an anthropologist who squarely examined this issue in the early 1980s, for Boas and his followers, "the call for tolerance was an appeal to the liberal philosophy regarding human rights and self-determinism. It expressed the principle that others ought to be able to conduct their affairs as they see fit, which includes living their lives according to the cultural values and belief of their society" (*Culture and Morality*, 1983, p. 65). Hatch therefore argued that what was at stake was human freedom.

In the United States, no strong objection was made to this kind of statement until around the 1980s, when

multiculturalism did not have a great impact on public life, including school education. The situation has since changed drastically, however. For example, with the rapid growth of Hispanic populations, many people began to worry about the “browning of America.” Also, the influence of Asians began to be felt very strongly along the Pacific coast, particularly in the field of higher education. In Canada and Australia, in which multiculturalism had been adopted in the 1970s as an official governmental policy, voices of dissatisfaction were frequently heard from traditional minority groups, namely, indigenous peoples, because multicultural policies tended to focus on new immigrants from non-Western countries. It was, however, in Western Europe, that the existence of different others was most acutely felt, for central to the so-called “Islamic issue” is the question of religious freedom in modern nation states. The French ban on wearing conspicuous signs of religious affiliation in public schools, which was effectively targeted at the Islamic headscarf, clearly attests to this point.

I dare not go into this politically sensitive issue. I should like to point out, though, that when cultural relativism was formulated in the early twentieth century, the state of affairs as mentioned above, in which minority ethnic groups radically different from the majority group have penetrated a host country in large numbers where they continue to live according to their own principles with apparent disregard for the host’s cultural values, was beyond all expectations. Furthermore, in the days of Boas, almost all groups of people to whom the spirit of tolerance was directed were in weak positions of power: Whether colonized subjects or indigenous peoples, such groups had little capability, unlike the Muslims in contemporary Europe, to resist the imposition of the will of the Western rulers. Thus, sympathetic scholars like Boas could afford to show “compassion” to the non-threatening others who suffered all kinds of deprivation. This dimension of power asymmetry was completely out of sight among cultural relativists.

The question to be posed at this point is this: at what point does out tolerance stop? Behind this question is the assumption that there are cases in which we should interfere because a price is to be paid if we do not do so. Obviously, there are no definitive answers to this question, but perhaps Hatch’s view deserves consideration. Contending that the crux of the matter is “freedom from the deliberate coercion of others,” he wrote: “Tolerance should not extend to actions and institutions in which coercion is used against human beings.” The examples he cited are mainly physical coercion, taken from anthropological accounts of traditional peoples, but it is evident that this principle includes mental or psychological coercion. In my judgment, the above principle is almost universally applicable. How the principle should be applied in actual practice is a matter of local pragmatism.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have discussed from the anthropological viewpoint some vital issues relating to cultural

relativism. The assumed readers are neither professional anthropologists nor specialists in other fields. Rather, I have had in mind people at large interested in the significance of cultural relativism in an increasingly globalized and multicultural world. I have also assumed that the audience comes from all parts of the world. None of my words have therefore been fashioned to appeal to people of just one or a few nationalities, although my largely American training may have influenced my ways of thinking and writing.

In closing, I should like to mention just one thing I always find peculiar. When Asian scholars are invited to an international conference, they are tacitly expected to speak about something that is supposedly peculiar to Asia. In other words, the expectation is that they add an “Asian flavor,” as it were, to ongoing debates that have originated in Western Europe or the United States. This expectation contrasts with that of scholars from the center of what I call the “academic world system” (For the details, see my book *Native Anthropology*, 2004). The Asian flavor is ordinarily appreciated only to the extent that it enriches that which has already been served on the table. This unfortunate situation should be corrected if a truly global community of scholars is to be created. May the First Word Humanities Forum trigger a change for the making of global scholarship!

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Cultural Relativism and Universalism

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Introduction

Mr. /Madam Chairperson and esteemed colleagues, it is a privilege to be in this gathering of intellectuals, thinkers, and change agents from different parts of the world. We are gathered here at the behest of the newly constituted World Humanities Forum. As I understand it, this Forum has been formed to facilitate “a collective reflection” on key challenges and questions facing us in the 21st century. The Forum derives its inspiration from the call of Madame Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of UNESCO, for “a new humanism” in “in times of increasing globalization, of greater connectivity and also of rising uncertainty, with new economic, financial and social challenges.” Under her dynamic leadership, UNESCO with the assistance of the international community of intellectuals, scholars, scientists, and thinkers, to provide answers to the key questions we face today—“questions about how to prevent the fragmentation of humanity and how to build real foundations for development and peace.”

Friends, it is not as if we are naïve or foolish to that forums like these, however well-intentioned, can “solve” the problems of our world. We know that even if they offer viable solutions, which they do not always, such solutions cannot really be enforced. Yet we are here because we have not lost hope, because we wish to be a part of the solution, not of the problem. It is because we wish to be the change that we see in the world.

That is why such gatherings, which foster an exchange of ideas and the meeting of minds, are so important. They can enrich those who participate in them and perhaps also throw up new and interesting ideas. What is special about this Forum, moreover, is the importance it gives to the humanities as the source of news ideas and inspiration. I think this initiative to listen to us must be lauded: now that we are actually being asked for answers, we should not backtrack or evade our responsibility.

Having participated in other, similar conferences in different parts of the world including dialogues between civilizations held in places as diverse as Tehran and Paris, I have come to a rather startling realization. These gatherings neither changed the world nor offered solutions to the pressing problems of our times. Rather, the world changed, powered by economic, political, or military upheavals, while the intellectuals tried to keep pace with its changes. Our real challenge is can we alter this equation? Can we be ahead of the curve? Before the world considers people like ourselves as totally irrelevant, we in the humanities and social sciences must prove our perspicacity, if not utility. Can we generate new ways of thinking and offer new ideas and modes of being? Most importantly, in communicating with one another, can we create small transformations, which may add up to a significant potential for change?

This is our challenge and this is why I would like to express my gratitude to the organizers for giving me an opportunity to be here.

Multiculturalism and Its Discontents

Much of the theme note for this section concentrates on the idea of multiculturalism. The main contention seems to be that multiculturalism is threatened: “In this age of globalization, the multicultural social reality seems to be at risk, in the context in which environmental pressures and rapid scientific and technological progress are further challenging the basis of shared universal values.” What is noteworthy about this sentence is the peculiar elision between “multiculturalism” and “universal values,” as if both are on the same side, at least in being challenged by global forces and processes. But can we forget that though globalization does have homogenizing tendencies, it is in itself a diverse phenomenon, with in-built variations and differences in its manifestations? If the premise that multiculturalism derives its philosophical justification from cultural relativism is true, the more interesting question is the relationship between cultural relativism on the one hand and universal values on the other.

I shall take up this issue later, but at the outset it important to notice that multiculturalism and cultural diversity are two different things. All societies are diverse, some much more obviously and markedly so than others. Some, like Japan, are diverse, but perceived to be homogenous partly because of their self-construction as being one race, one ethnicity, one people, one nation. That is why, both multiculturalism and its opposite, which is an assertion of cultural unity if not homogeneity, do not indicate two different kinds of societies as much as two ways of managing diversity.

But multiculturalism refers not so much to the inherent diversity of societies, but to state policies aimed at preserving the rights of cultural minorities. Rather than forcing them to assimilate they are offered the possibility of maintaining their different identities. In actual practice, however, dominant groups are hegemonic; multiculturalism, therefore, is an indirect, if quasi-apologetic, admission of this fact as much

as it a way of providing cultural space to groups who find it hard, or even refuse to, assimilate.

Historically, this policy was first adopted by Canada, followed by many Western countries, including Australia. While in the United States, it was never enacted into a law, it influenced educational policies. The main impetus for such “official” multiculturalism was the challenge of non-European immigration into these countries, which noticeably altered the demography of these predominantly white, Christian, and Western societies. In its aim to protect cultural and religious minorities, to ensure equal rights to immigrants, and to combat racism and prejudice, multiculturalism was a laudable idea. Even if it did not guarantee or even aim at equality, it did provide a protected and sanctioned space for cultural difference and expression.

However, multiculturalism has come under increasing attack from a variety of points of view. First of all, in countries like Canada, some immigrant minorities themselves have criticized it, essentially on two grounds: first, that it is a camouflage for paternalistic prejudice or condescending racism. The immigrant who belongs to the cultural minority is never fully accepted but kept apart, at arm’s length, under this disguise. The majority feels safer slotting the immigrant into a box; thus contained the latter is less of a threat. Really to accept him would be also to acknowledge that the nation’s identity has indeed changed, as has its essential composition. To admit this would be too threatening to its self-image, to its concept of itself. But to put the threatening outsider into a “multicultural” keep’s the majority’s idea of itself intact. Multiculturalism is thus a strategy of containment. While it has been attacked as the cloak of white dominance, can one really blame the majority community for needing such a device to protect itself, to continue to feel secure?

The second argument against it is that the immigrant may actually wish to assimilate, to be fully Canadian, preferring not to retain his native culture or the values that it represents. He may wish to be an unmarked or unhyphenated Canadian, not always differentiated and separated from the majority or reminded that he is somehow not quite equal or Canadian enough. The policy of multiculturalism denies him this privilege. It enforces and perpetuates the kind of difference which it was designed to overcome. A good example of such a critique is offered by Neil Bissondath, a Canadian of East Indian origin from Trinidad.

The other attack on multiculturalism has come from European leaders such as David Cameron and Angela Merkel. Their views are echoed by politicians across Europe, from the Netherlands to France to Scandinavia. Even Switzerland, which is constitutionally a multi-ethnic state, has shown great aversion to accommodate new cultural elements when they seem threatening or destabilizing. For example, denying permissions to the building of new mosques or restricting their heights so that they are not so visible. Clearly, the discomfort is largely with Islamic immigrants and other Asian minority groups.

But there is also a deeper fear, in the wake of terrorist violence after 9/11. Some fanatical groups use the state policy of multiculturalism to foment not just anti-national activities but even abet terrorism. They exploit those very spaces offered by liberal democracies to oppose or overthrow freedoms fundamental to such societies. They thus use their right of dissent to oppose the very idea of a free society. This clash reflects two antagonistic belief systems, religious dictatorships as opposed to Western style liberal democracies. The former are not averse to exploiting the spaces that the latter offer to try to undermine, overtake, or overthrow them. Using an opponent's weakness to defeat him is after all an accepted strategy in any war. Europe's memories of past totalitarianisms, such as Nazism, which rode to power on the back of elections, but, once in power, abolished democracy, no doubt fuels these fears. The concern that multiculturalism shelters those who wish to overthrow liberal democracies has forced some societies to reconsider the formula that guarantees freedom of expression to all citizens. From the tolerance of all shades of opinion including intolerance to a more limited tolerance only of tolerance is the new way; because of the threat posed by a few determined fanatics, free societies have been obliged to restrict their freedoms. At the same time, some governments led by right-wing neo-conservative groups wave the red flag of such external threats to mount increasing surveillance and control of their own citizens, thus tightening their own hold on power. While certain forms of intolerance, such as racism, sexism, or caste prejudice have been outlawed by liberal democracies, religious bigotry and fanaticism are harder to control, let alone curb, because they represent, at times, a genuine class of world views and belief systems. Thus, some states, such as Libya, which have seen regime changes following the Arab spring have imposed Sharia laws considered retrogressive by secular liberals but quite acceptable to many Muslim-majority populations. Clearly, the crisis of multiculturalism is quite different in liberal democracies and in theocratic or other totalitarian states. In the latter the dominance of the majority is taken for granted and multiculturalism as a state policy is not even an option let alone state policy. For liberal societies on the other hand, the tolerance of intolerance presents a real threat to their fundamental ethos because few societies are so strong as to accommodate incommensurable ideologies within their national fabric. What they are better equipped to do is to allow a variety of different views within a framework of acceptable values. For democracy to persist all stake holders need to agree to its constitutive principles. When anti-systemic ideologies threaten these fundamental values, multiculturalism itself gets a bad name, though often it is not at fault but has only been misused by its very opponents. Thus, multiculturalism at times becomes the mask both of majoritarian prejudice and minoritarian subversion.

A third kind of attack on multiculturalism has come from conservative political scientists like Robert D. Putnam. In his famous survey of forty American communities, he concluded that the more diverse a community, the less it tended to trust its leaders or its members. With the lowering of trust, citizens act in a selfish way, taking care of their own interests instead of contributing to public good. Of course, this does not mean that diversity or plurality can be abolished or reversed. Even if the majority finds it threatening,

it is here to stay, as are those immigrants who come from different cultures, ethnicities, or linguistic backgrounds.

But, surely, increasing diversity is not the only or even the chief cause of the decrease in trust. Sweeping across the world, we observe today a wave of anger and indignation against governments, financial institutions, stock markets, and those who control capital. In India, a popular uprising against corruption in high places mobilized public opinion in an unprecedented way in recent months. Simply speaking, the common citizenry worldwide has lost trust in its rulers, finding them selfish, corrupt, or incompetent. Lack of trust, thus, is not an outcome of diverse or multicultural societies but of bad governance, mismanagement, or dishonesty.

Sub-continental Anxieties, Global Concerns

In the Indian sub-continent, multiculturalism, as such, is not an issue. Instead, arguably, a special manifestation of its opposite, namely religious nationalism, has been the cause of much strife, grief, and bloodshed. It was religious nationalism that divided India into two countries in 1947. This partition was accompanied by unprecedented carnage and transfer of populations. The numbers are disputed, but an estimated 300,000 people lost their lives and over six million had to transfer from one country to another. This was nothing short of a bloody civil war, with clearly religious overtones. Within twenty-five years of the creation of Pakistan, in 1971, East Pakistan, which was populated mostly by Bengali-speaking Muslims, separated to form Bangladesh. This second partition was also marked by mass-murders and rapes mounted by the Pakistani army on civilians prior to independence. It was only when the occupying Pakistani army was defeated by freedom fighters, backed by the Indian army that Bangladesh could be declared a free country.

Just ten years later, in the 1980s, a violent movement erupted in the Punjab attempting to create a new Sikh state called Khalistan. In clashes between the militants and the state, several thousands were killed; many civilians also lost their lives. Peace was restored in the early 1990s after the defeat of militancy. But in the process, the police not only killed many, but also used repressive measures including torture and spying. The counter-insurgency left many scars and spurred the emigration of Sikh youths out of India, a phenomenon that still continues. The entire struggle for Khalistan took a very high toll on India. It included the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, at the hands of her Sikh bodyguards in 1984, following the army takeover of the Golden Temple, where the leader of the militants, Jarnail Singh Bhinderanwale, had garrisoned himself along with his armed soldiers. Following this assassination, about 3000 Sikhs citizens, mostly belonging to the poorer sections, were killed in Delhi in riots where the state was ineffective to quell the retaliatory violence.

The insurgency in Sri Lanka, which also lasted for nearly twenty-six years from 1983 to 2009, is said to have claimed over 80,000 lives. Here the fight was mostly between the Sinhala majority dominated Sri Lankan state against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The battle lines were along both religious and ethnic lines. While the state was repressive, the Tamil Tigers were probably worse, rising to power by ruthlessly murdering all rivals, including less militant groups, elected representatives, and members of the civil society. Those who disagreed with their ideology were eliminated. The Tigers also plotted the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 2001; he was killed by a female suicide bomber who blew herself up while pretending to garland the leader.

In Nepal, too, the anti-monarchical Maoist insurgency from 1996-2006, though not a religious conflict, resulted in the estimated death of 15,000 people and the displacement of ten times as many. In Kashmir, the disputed area to the North of India, a portion of which is occupied by Pakistan and another by China, a low-intensity war between two hostile neighbours, often carried out by proxy agents and mercenaries, has claimed nearly 30,000 lives. The valley still simmers with the after-effects of the strife, with a very large presence of armed forces, which have often been accused of large-scale violations of human rights. Cross-border terrorism and insurgent violence countered by retaliatory state oppression seems to be vicious cycle that has cost so many lives and billions of rupees.

Adjacent Afghanistan has been a war zone for over two-decades, with huge losses of life, immense human misery, endemic displacement, never-ending violence, and the continuing oppression of women and religious minorities. The fundamentalist Taliban captured the state between 1996-2001, during which it sheltered the notorious Osama Bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network. These, in turn, launched the September 11, 2001 attacks against the United States, changing our world forever.

What are the causes of religious strife in this region which has also had a history of the peaceful coexistence of multiple cultures, ethnicities, and belief systems since the very inception of civilization? Some say that religious conflicts in this region can be traced to the legacy of British colonialism, perhaps even earlier, to the Muslim conquest of the Indian sub-continent. Colonialism used the strategy of divide and rule (*divide et impera*), confirming and consolidating religious and ethnic identities. Language and caste also became a huge force not only for social division but also for mobilization. In independent India, they have continued to play a major role in the political and cultural life of the nation. Many political parties are organized along caste and linguistic lines. Most Indian states, too, were reorganized on the basis of language. Linguistic state formation, it would seem, is not too different from theocratic politics; both are volatile and often violent forms of identity politics, using emotional appeal and threats to identity as means of seizing power. Yet religious nationalism, if anything, has been more virulent, dangerous, and inimical.

Even if colonialism cannot be blamed for every ill that plagues these countries, its rise was also characterized by a tension between appeals to cultural relativism and universalism. Colonialism legitimated itself by a variety of ideologies, both religious and secular. The earlier Spanish and Portuguese conquests were justified by the claim to spread Christianity to the “savages” of the new world. Later, even after the European Enlightenment saw greater advocacy for equality across races and genders, notions of the civilizing mission of colonialism persisted. Even Marx believed that British colonialism was a progressive force, breaking down the primitive and barbaric peasant society of village India, thus forcing India’s entry into history and modernity. Ideas of natural justice and common law were repeatedly violated by colonial regimes in favour of racist, oppressive, and exploitative modes of governance. Slavery and indentured labour were only two examples. There were many others that disenfranchised, subjugated, even exterminated vast numbers of colonized peoples all over the world. Native populations of the Americas were destroyed by war, pillage, and new diseases imported from Europe. India saw widespread famine and starvation during British rule, culminating in the great Bengal famine from 1943-1945, just a couple of years before independence, that claimed nearly three million lives. Clearly the civilization mission of colonialism was deadly.

In Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Mr. Kurtz, the doomed protagonist, who represents the horrifying travesty of Europe’s civilizing mission, originally writes a paper on how to better the lives of the natives of the Belgian Congo. However, in the end, scrawled over these his earlier pious and naive outpourings are his starkly ghastly conclusion, “Exterminate the brutes.” Kurtz dies in Africa, but his fiancé back in Belgium, still believes in his greatness and nobility. Marlowe, the narrator, does not have the heart to unsettle her. So he lies that Kurtz died with her name on his lips; on the contrary, his famous last words were actually the anguished cry, “The horror, the horror!” As the darkness of European misdeeds in Africa now seeps into the genteel drawing room of the white city of Brussels, the narrator, shows us how European notions of its civilizational mission were dubious; European self-estimation hides a great lie that nestles within its deepest core. The heart of darkness is not to be found out there in inaccessible depths of Africa, but within the very soul of the metropolis.

Ironically, Conrad himself may be considered a product of the European critique of colonialism which was fairly well-formed even as colonialism reached its zenith in the 19th century. By now principles of universal human rights and the equality had become widely accepted. That is why, European thinkers invented newer ideologies to justify the continuance of imperialism. One of these was the developmental theory of history, which held that societies progress along similar lines, from barbarism to civilization, but at different times. In this process, then, European colonialism was only providing a helping hand in the modernization of those societies they had conquered, ruled, and exploited, but which happened to be in a much earlier phase of development.

Similarly, most violent hot spots and flashpoints in the world, including those in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, display the after-effects of European imperialism. These include the highly dangerous and still unresolved conflict between North and South Korea, which is a legacy of the Cold War. The Cold War, like the two World Wars before it, was in itself a tussle between two great imperial systems, one led by the United States and the other by the USSR. The recent US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, too, may be seen as a form of neo-imperial aggression, legitimated by a weak United Nations dominated by Western powers.

From the foregoing account it will be clear that our world faces two great cultural challenges. One is an after-effect of colonialism, which in the modified version of globalization, continues to create vastly unequal and unjust relations between different parts of the world. The other great threat is the rise of religious extremism, which in its nationalistic and oppositional forms, menaces not just world peace, but the solidarity between peoples of different faiths, ethnicities, and cultures. Continued Western domination and reactive religious extremism are both, thus, inimical to the goals of human equality, diversity, and well-being. These crises divide human beings, blunting our capacity to tackle the more serious issues of global warming and other ecological threats to our very planetary existence. In addition, we are faced with great economic risks, brought about by over-consumption and extravagant spending. Our inability to live within our means literally means planetary bankruptcy. Thus ecology and economics are related: we are going broke because we are spending more than we earn or possess. To save our planet, to secure our future, and to bequeath a better world to future generations, we need enormous wisdom and cooperation. But the cultural and religious conflicts that I have identified divide us and reduce our effectiveness to work together for solutions.

Finding Answers?

In this final section of my paper, I wish to present some ways out of these dilemmas. It should, however, be clear to all that without concerted political power and international consensus, no new humanism can prevail. But in a group like this, it might be more useful to concentrate on breakthroughs in ideas. Here, we find that the tyranny of official philosophies and ways of thinking prevent us from finding new ways of addressing issues.

One such issue is the main focus of this panel, namely, “Cultural Relativism vs. Universalism.” At once, we should recognize here a false though persistent dichotomy. But we will not be able to free ourselves from it unless, we make a clever epistemological shift, even rupture. We may take some help in this manoeuvre from the late Richard Rorty, who advocated a break from epistemology and metaphysics, urging us to “move everything” into the realm of “cultural politics” (Truth and Progress 57). As a student of literature and a poet, I find Rorty’s attitude useful and refreshingly pragmatic. Instead of debating in

abstract terms, Rorty's "conversationalist view of knowledge" invites us to think interactively and act thoughtfully.

Little good will come from seeing cultural relativism and universalism as inveterate philosophical antagonists. We must explore how both may be allies, capable of operating in methodological cooperation, even if not concordance. Quite obviously, we need notions of cultural relativism to tolerate, even appreciate, other cultures. We must learn to respect one another and respect so that we might learn from one another. Especially those who come from traditions which proclaim their sole claim to truth or salvation must renounce such claims so as to see others not as non-believers or enemies, but as brothers and sisters. Even believing we are right and others wrong, we must try to persuade them to see our point of view, taking their help in the process to modify what we believe. Free exchange of ideas, rather than coercion, must be the basis of human interaction.

But our history has repeatedly shown that such a free exchange, on a level-playing field without the interference of power, is practically impossible. If so, political power must work to defeat, whether by force of arms, or of ideas, ideologies and beliefs which are violent, intolerant, and dangerous. This includes racism, religious supremacism, and other forms of domination and aggression. Here, we come up the familiar dilemma: one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. But, once again, democratic principles, consensual politics, and the free exchange of ideas can be used to arrive at commonly accepted notions of acceptable as opposed to offensive conduct. In other words, a federation of democratic states, acting in unison, may ensure that the world remains safe for the majority of its inhabitants. Confederations and alliances such as the European Union, as well as bigger bodies such as the United Nations, show us how this may be done, howsoever modesty. Their drawbacks or failures need not dishearten us; we need more international cooperation and understanding, not less. Ultimately, however, we will have to think of a larger federations and world governance. Sri Aurobindo, an Indian poet, philosopher, and yogi spoke about this process in his book, *The Ideal of Human Unity*. According to him, rational, constitutional means must combine with a new spiritual consciousness for us to create the institutions and structures for the governance of tomorrow. The future demands this global shift in consciousness and many are already giving their time and energy to make it happen.

From such a perspective, while we need cultural relativism to respect one another and appreciate diversity among the peoples of the world, we also need universalist ideas of ethics, justice, human rights, peace, and non-violence in order to push towards a better world. Human beings, regardless of cultural, ethnic, or religious differences, are actually very similar in their basic needs and drives. As we all wish to avoid pain and to seek happiness, we can ensure that we refrain from harming others and interfering with their happiness. This is both a rational as well as a spiritual principle, which ought to have universal appeal and

applicability.

In order to arrive at a non-dualistic, non-violent, and non-exclusive universalism, we also need to deconstruct the received idea of “universalism,” especially a certain version of it, which is aggressive and dominant, and came to us from Europe. This universalism, as I showed earlier, was able to countenance blatant contradictions in systems such as colonialism and slavery. As such, it was itself culturally specific and historically grounded in the rise of post-Enlightenment Europe, with its colonizing and world-dominating vision. Euro-centric universalism, thus, is nothing but another culture-specific ideology that needs to be relativized, as we might other ways of thinking coming from non-European parts of the world. This move of “provincializing” Europe, of course, is not as straightforward or simple as it may sound. The word itself, in its grammatically dual possibilities, underscores this ambivalence because as we seek to provincialize Europe, we may also be deliberately or unwittingly provincialized by it. In a culturally competitive situation, the choice is between being defined and doing the defining. Resistance to hegemonic ideologies, including Euro-centric universalism is, therefore, necessary if the different peoples of the world are to have a semblance of equal cultural respect and recognition. Though the modern age as we know it has been shaped by Europe and North American, other parts of the world have also contributed to its fashioning as, increasingly, they are to change it. A culturally and intellectually decentred world, thus, reflects our needs and capacities better.

That is why a third way between extreme relativism and Euro-centric universalism is necessary. This third way involves the effort to find alter-universalisms. European universalism was not the only option for the world, though it acquired dominance through colonialism. There were also competing universalisms available or sought to be developed elsewhere. In Asia itself, Rabindranath Tagore, for instance, was trying to foster a non-dominating, non-imperialistic, Asian cosmopolitanism, which his travels facilitated. In India, Mahatma Gandhi fostered a plural, inclusive, egalitarian, and secular nationalism that his successor, Jawaharlal Nehru, tried to universalize in the non-aligned movement. The opposition between cultural relativism and universalism is thus a European binary, the legacy of modernity, from which we need to exit. Indeed, the world that we have inherited is not the world that we in the process of shaping. This latter world demands of us a different kind of rationality, one which is capable of respecting difference while also demanding universally applicable standards of human values.

In this respect, it would not be misplaced if I ended by invoking one the oldest texts of humankind, the Rg Veda, which offers a unique way to bridge the problem of universalism and particularism. “Ekam sat vipra bahuda vadanti” it boldly proclaims: truth (or reality) is one, the learned call it by various names. This ancient holism was perhaps lost somewhere in the emergence of modernity, which, in its excesses of instrumental and tyrannical rationality, set up many false binaries. The new humanism that Madame

Bokova calls for needs to be holistic again, integrating science and spirituality, the past and the present, the West and the rest, the male and the female—and, to refer to our main theme—cultural relativism and universalism.

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Multiculturalism in the New World Context: Towards a New Philosophical Anthropology

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The concept of “multiculturalism”, although widely used in academic and policy discourses, is a highly contested one. Politically charged, with disparate meanings and carrying heavy ideological baggage, the very idea of multiculturalism is often confused and confusing. In this essay I will not attempt to review its many meanings and variants (for an excellent overview see Ivison 2010), but will attempt to set out some foundational ideas for grasping the role and indeed necessity of multiculturalism in the contemporary globalized world. For neither the notions of multiculturalism, nor the world context in which discourses of multiculturalism are situated are static. For the notion itself to have any relevance it must itself move with the social, economic, political and environmental changes that surround and in many respects drive it. While older liberal conceptions of multiculturalism, its salience in mostly Western societies that now have and are continuing to receive large immigrant communities of different ethnic and religious origins from the local core population, and its role in debates about both the seeking for a ‘politics of difference’ and that of ‘post-identity’ politics, all continue to be significant, it is also necessary to rethink the idea in light of contemporary global challenges, and this in brief compass I will attempt to do here.

It is significant that the idea of multiculturalism is not simply a descriptive concept: it is also for many an ideal to be achieved, for as the philosopher John Dewey suggested, the existence of cultural pluralism is not necessarily an obstacle in creating a genuinely democratic society, but also a valuable resource. Empirically the world is culturally diverse and this is a fact that will not go away even under the regime of globalization and even if we should desire it to do so. Two immediate questions then arise: what is the relationship between an actually existing cultural diversity and the desire to seek universalism in values and in a common approach to our pressing global crisis? And what is the role of the humanities in mediating this debate? I will try to sketch out an answer and to show that these two questions are intimately related.

The Humanities, Humanism, and Universalism in a Multicultural World

The humanities have traditionally been understood as the liberal arts: the scholarly study of literature, art and architectural history, theatre, languages, and philosophy. Their moral role – their concern with social justice, in shaping a civilization that genuinely enhances human well-being and in the critique of cultural forms that work against the realization of the highest human values – has on the whole been minimized (with the possible exception of moral philosophy), these tasks being seen as the proper role of politics and the social sciences. Yet at the root of the humanities is the notion of humanism. But in the light of our current and possibly terminal civilizational crisis of environmental degradation, resource depletion, wanton destruction of biodiversity, rampant over consumption in the rich world and the desire to emulate this in the poor, wars and conflicts, political corruption, and culturally and ecologically destructive economic systems, is this term that we can honestly continue to use? I will suggest that we can, if it is redefined and re-contextualized, a redefinition that will allow us to address in fresh ways the issue of the possibility of universalism in a multicultural world.

What then does a new humanism require? I would suggest three basic components. The first of these that it reflects what some scholars are now calling the “ecological self”: the recognition that the human species does not stand alone or at the apex of some evolutionary sequence, but is one species amongst many, and that we are dependent physically and psychologically on the rest of the biosphere that we are privileged to inhabit and share with those other life forms (e.g. Macy 1990). This recognition has at least two major consequences. The first is that we are part of nature, beholden to it for the resources that make our lives possible, and consequently responsible for its care, up-keep and transmission in good condition to future generations. The second, paradoxically for traditional humanism, is that we must find a notion of human identity that transcends anthropocentrism. The ecophilosopher Warwick Fox (Fox 1990) has raised and answered the question ‘what is wrong with anthropocentrism?’ in philosophical terms (its empirical and conceptual inadequacy as a complete explanation of humanity’s place in the total world system), its empirical consequences (its now very visible consequences for all life on the planet), and in terms of ethics (the sheer hubris of assuming the convenient, self-serving, comfortable but entirely unverifiable position that we in our present conflicted form are the end point of evolution). On the basis of this critique, Fox goes on to suggest that the achievement of a sense of self that extends beyond a narrow ego-centered view of personal identity leads to three more expanded senses of identification – what he terms the personal, the ontological and the cosmological which he characterizes as follows: “Personally based identification refers to experiences of commonality with other entities that are brought about through personal involvement with those entities...Ontologically based identification refers to experiences of commonality with all that is brought about through deep seated realization of the fact that things are...Cosmologically based identification refers to experiences of commonality with all that are brought about through deep-seated

realization of the fact that we and all other entities are aspects of a single unfolding reality. This realization can be brought about through the empathic incorporation of any cosmology (i.e. any fairly comprehensive account of how the world is) that sees the world as a single unfolding process – as a ‘unity in progress’ to employ Theodore Roszak’s splendid phrase” (Fox 1990: 249-252).

The second is the requirement of justice. Simply to recognize cultural diversity is insufficient since difference can conceal inequalities, hierarchies of power and domination, traditionally justified gender discrimination or other forms of sexism, ageism or racism, and ecologically negative practices. The task is to recognize different cultural expressions as equally valid attempts to grasp the complexity of the world and to impose some meaning on it, to encourage the flourishing of those cultural expressions congruent with larger existential desiderata (ecologically sustainable, non-violent, respectful of other life-forms and alternative cultural expressions), while showing that those cultural expressions that violate these principles need rethinking and to encourage methodologies for this to become possible for members of those communities without resorting to cultural imperialism. And this while emphasizing that all cultural forms are contingent and temporary and evolve historically: what is need not be what always has to be, as every living and dynamic culture knows from experience and as now collapsed civilizations have learn to their ultimate cost as they have violated these principles and brought about their own self-destruction (Diamond 2006). Globalization, as we now well know, has not brought about a planetary regime of equality and justice: far from it, it has in many cases brought about the destruction of indigenous cultures, exacerbated inequalities within and between nations, promoted the free flow of capital while both triggering and then restricting the free movement of peoples, and is behind many of the resource and environmental problems now plaguing the globe. Cultural diversity without social justice is hollow: worse it can become an ideological and conceptual smoke-screen behind which inequalities flourish, and universalism can simply mean hegemony if the equal validity of its constituent parts is not honored.

The third is the principle of interconnectedness: not only the connectedness, indeed embeddedness, of humans in nature, but of the interconnections between social and cultural processes themselves. Our present academic disciplinary distinctions for example are totally inadequate to capture the dynamic reality of the world in which they exist. Separating economics, political science, sociology, anthropology and psychology from each other, and then further separating all these collectively defined as ‘social sciences’ from the ‘humanities’ as essentially the study of human expressivity has led to a fragmentation of knowledge entirely discordant with the realities of the operating principles of human cultures which are holistic, inter-dependent and with fuzzy boundaries where one culture in practice merges with another and in which one ‘discipline’ (say economics) is in reality wholly dependent on other factors, ecological, sociological, value systems arising from religion, historical and political, which it professionally excludes from its frame of reference. While many are now arguing that education for sustainability is now the

way forward in our current global crisis, it may also be argued that it is our educational systems that have embedded us in the crisis in the first place. As the late Thomas Berry, theologian and leading environmentalist has rightly put it:

Of all the institutions that should be guiding us into a viable future, the university has a special place because it teaches all those professions that guide the human endeavor. In recent centuries the universities have supported an exploitation of the Earth by their teaching in the various professions, in the sciences, in engineering, law, education and economics. Only in literature, poetry, music, art, and occasionally in religion and the biological sciences, has the natural world received the care that it deserves. Our educational institutions need to see their purpose as not training personnel for exploiting the Earth, but as guiding students toward an intimate relationship with the Earth. For it is the planet itself that brings us into being, sustains us in life and delights us with its wonders. In this context we might consider the intellectual, political and economic orientations that will enable us to fulfill the historical assignment before us – to establish a more viable way into the future (Berry 1999:x).

This comment suggests both a new role for the universities (and indeed all educational institutions), and for the humanities, that far from being separated from the critical issues of the day, become major routes for their understanding and addressing what must be done to solve them. The humanities in this vision have both a critical (deconstructive) role, and a positive (constructive) one, provided that they are willing to grasp that opportunity and responsibility. The painful context for this of course is not that we can simply study in neutral and scholarly ways the “civilizations” that world history has so far thrown up, but that it is these civilizations that are the cause of our contemporary problems, or what David Korten calls “Empire”: the seeking for domination rather than partnership in relation to both nature and human beings, the allowing of the economic to become not our tool, but our absolute master, the emergence of consumerism and materialism as our means of attempting to establish our identities and statuses, the imperial ambitions of many religions rather than the attempts of their founders to promote community, sociality and compassion (Korten 2006).

If indeed that task – what Berry calls the “Great Work” of our generation - is grasped, then the humanities themselves are reconstituted as tools for transformation, and their role in promoting emergent universalism becomes critical. Let me take four examples of how this might work. Firstly, in the field of art. In discussing how the conventionally understood zones of the world are formed and constructed (for example “Asia, or “Europe”) and how cultures and civilizations communicate with and influence each other, it is often forgotten that it is as much images as it is concepts that are involved. Elsewhere (Clammer 2011) I have attempted to demonstrate that the formation of regional identities (or “civilizations”) is

constituted in large part by art, and that much of the world (in this particular case Asia) has long been globalized not only through networks of trade and exchange of ideas, often embodied in religions and processes of religious expansion and conversion), but also through the transfer of the visual images that accompanied these ideas. If this can be successfully done, then it is possible to both construct an aesthetic approach to regional identity and to revitalize social and cultural theory by showing how the visual and the sensuous constitute a major part of the ways in which social reality is constructed, expressed and transmitted. When we speak of, say, “Southeast Asia”, “the Muslim world” or “Europe” we are in fact talking about geographical and cultural entities defined not spatially (this comes much later), but by their expressive techniques – art, architecture, calligraphy and shared motifs expressed in the rituals, costumes, implements and manuscripts of their dominant religions.

Which brings us of course to the second example: that of religion itself. Religions are also mostly thought of cognitively – as bodies of teachings encapsulated in sacred texts. But they are also bodies of images and the concretization of those images in paintings, sculpture, architecture, garments, ritual implements. The Malaysian writer and critic Karim Raslan argues rightly that “Devotional art of one kind or another suffuses Southeast Asian art whether we are in Luang Prabang, Manila or Jogjakarta” and that the apparent surface diversity of Southeast Asia (itself a constructed concept) is actually underpinned by a great deal of unity in the visual arts deriving from in the most part (and certainly before colonialism) the Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic and later Christian influences that have shaped the region and created a remarkably shared aesthetic language (Raslan 2002). We find here not only an intimate connection between art and religion, but also not only a shared aesthetic language, but also the basis for a shared language of values as well. While formal attempts by countries such as Singapore to formulate an ideology based on shared “Asian Values” for local political purposes have rarely worked well, such strategies do point to a deeper reality: the widely shared ethical systems deriving in particular from Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity in its Asian incarnations that have deeply shaped the cultures in which they have become rooted. It is impossible to understand contemporary Japan or Korea for instance without grasping the roles of both Confucianism and Buddhism in shaping their ethical foundations which today may express themselves not in overtly religious forms, but in forms of civility, political culture, kinship and interpersonal relationships. The roots of cultures are deep, but their flowerings are diverse and the root systems of most cultures are much more entangled than they would probably like to admit.

The third factor relates back to the earlier concept of the “ecological self”. Such an understanding of the relationship of the personal self to the wider universe has sociological and political implications, understood here through the prism of citizenship. The very notion of citizenship has come to be challenged with the advent of contemporary forms of globalization and with it the simultaneous weakening of the nation state, the emergence of new cross-border actors such as transnational corporations, international

NGOs and multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the WTO, and new forms of transnational practice such as the widespread use of the internet, mass tourism and the spread of popular cultures across national boundaries. In societies such as Japan which have been at least until recently relatively immune to the cultural impact of globalization and have not had the regionalist experience of the EU countries or even of ASEAN, the challenges surrounding the redefinition of citizenship are especially strong (Clammer 2007). Julie Davidson argues that there are two major discourses in the shaping of emerging ideas of planetary citizenship – that of globalization and that of sustainability (Davidson 2004:168). While globalization points to the linkages (positive or negative) that currently bind the world into what is effectively a single system, sustainability draws our attention to the fact that that system has no future and indeed is fundamentally self-destructive, unless means are found to create a global or planetary conception of citizenship based on mutual social responsibilities on the one hand and collective responsibilities to nature on the other.

In response to this idea of a planetary citizenship the notion has been slowly emerging of what Bart van Steenberghe (1994) has called “ecological citizenship”. In this debate the traditional notion of citizenship as an abstract formal entitlement based on such criteria as place of birth, have begun to be challenged by the idea of citizenship as an active, ethical status implying obligations and responsibilities, including responsibilities towards the environment and requiring a cosmopolitan identity as being today the only possible realistic and moral social location of a global citizen. While rights undoubtedly continue to occupy a place of central importance, a shift is clearly occurring here from conceptions of the primacy of entitlements to one of responsibility, competence and the sensible use of freedoms. The latter encompasses not only political ones, but also attitudes and practices involving consumption and behavior patterns more generally, at the same time as a parallel shift is occurring from notions of citizenship as nationally bound to one of transnationalism, one in which while local identities bound to specific place, culture, ethnicity and religion remain important, they are contained within the bigger sphere of planetary or cosmopolitan responsibility. As Davidson again puts it “At the core of a cosmopolitan ethic is the idea of people taking more responsibility for the conditions of other people’s lives. Cosmopolitan citizenship is premised on cooperative relationships that enable the sharing of responsibilities and burdens. Like it or not, this era of global risk and vulnerability makes fellow citizens of people across the globe because of their shared responsibilities to participate in the achievement of collective goods such as environmental protection and equity. Citizenship for sustainability entails responsibilities not just for those goods necessary for immediate survival, but also for those collective goods that enable the flourishing of humans and other species now and into the future” (Davidson 2004:176).

But how is this possible? At least three vital elements are required: the development of an institutional framework for global governance and assuring the accountability of the major multilateral actors including especially transnational corporations at the political level; the abandonment or severe curtailing

of consumption in favor of more appropriate practices and values for the achievement of sustainability at the social level; and the identification of a global ethic at the level of culture, values and religion. We will now turn to this last, since it is in fact our fourth key point.

A global ethic clearly exists as an ideal rather than a reality (as yet), but as with all ideals (the foundation of the UN, the Drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or of the Earth Charter and so forth), no progress can be made towards its realization unless the idea is enunciated and thought given to strategies for its realization. But here one must proceed with some subtlety and conceptual clarifications. Values and ethics, while closely related, are not identical. One may hold values that are not expressed in appropriate ethical behavior or expected cultural outcomes. I may believe in the sanctity of life, but still eat meat, even if not of other humans. My government may be a signatory to the UDHR but still violate rights within its borders. The state to which I belong may hold itself up to the world as a paragon of justice, rights and freedoms, but still refuse to endorse the establishment of the International Criminal Court or sign the UN Treaty on the banning of landmines, and may also be one of the world's biggest arms dealers. The first requirement of a global ethic is to define the values upon which more or less universal agreement across cultures, religions and political systems can be reached (something that has been proven to be possible by the long consultative process that led up to the drafting and adoption of the Earth Charter). The second is to inculcate through education, socialization, cultural practice and the law, the idea that there should be no gap between such values and practice, the existence of which is a major source of hypocrisy in the present world situation.

It is also necessary to recognize that many of the conflicts between cultures cannot be attributed to material sources alone, such as competition for resources, but also require that attention be paid to the ontologies which shape practice and appear in any society as the doxa or unspoken or even unrecognized hidden assumptions or the taken-for-granted upon which the culture operates. These ontologies furthermore are not only cognitive in nature, but involve alternative conceptions of nature, cosmocentric as opposed to anthropocentric understandings of peoples' place in the universe, and different conceptions of the body, the latter issue showing up in modern legal codes in terms of classifications of obscenity and the corresponding laws relating to censorship and the socially permissible in art and the media (Young 2005). These are in turn related to indigenous but not always rationally articulated conceptions or intuitions of land, health and healing, food, aesthetics, symbolism, clothing, and other cultural elements that while they at first sight and in conventional philosophical analysis do not have any bearing on ethics, in fact do, in very profound ways. Diet for example relates to religion, body-image, conceptions of what may legitimately be taken from nature and how and in what quantities, and cultural identity, all of which are part of a contextualized ethics, that is to say, understandings of correct behavior towards others, other non-human beings (the debate about the rights of animals) and apparently inanimate nature as a whole, but

then the notion of inanimacy is itself a cultural and religious notion (Clammer, Poirier and Schwimmer 2004).

This is not to deny the possibility of universals or to argue that this complexity reduces us to the position of cultural relativism. Far from it. It is to argue in summary that cultural (including linguistic) diversity is socially important in the same way that biodiversity is ecologically important: monocultures are rarely creative, find it hard to accommodate alternatives, are liable to infection to which they have no natural resistance, and are simply less interesting and give rise to fewer possibilities than multi-cultures. But this desirable and cultivatable diversity need not contradict the existence of universals, not universals of the kind found in lists of cultural commonalities (kinship, religion, the incest taboo), but ones rooted in our common existential condition as humans, our common location in nature as a species dependent on the benevolence of the biosphere, and the fact that as Noam Chomsky demonstrated for language (a foundational aspect of culture), all languages can in principle be translated into all others despite their apparent and in many cases very real differences. This suggested to Chomsky the existence of a “deep grammar”, a logical and communicative set of structures that make translation between languages possible, a position echoed by the structuralist anthropologists such as Claude Levi-Strauss on the one hand who essentially argued that all cultures emanate from a large but finite set of possibilities set in large part by our environment and that that basic set of possibilities can be discovered. On the other hand natural scientists have noted the biological constraints on our cultural and physical possibilities, not, as many critics of so-called “sociobiology” argued, to prove that we are genetically determined creatures and therefore without freedom or moral autonomy, but simply to establish that we occupy our niche in the natural order as do all other bioforms and that the natural order sets limits that cannot be transcended (longevity, need for adequate and appropriate nutrition, and rest amongst the more purely biological, and the need for company and communication with others of our species amongst the more social, traits that we share with the higher apes and many other social species) and create if you will, our “human nature” (Wilson 1982).

While biology has provided one line of approach to the issue of the existence and qualities of a supposedly universal human nature, political science suggests another. In a survey of arguments pertaining to human nature from a political science perspective, Christopher Berry proposes that the discussion actually goes far beyond politics and embraces all of the human sciences, since the topic is central to a range of debates including human rights, the old question of the perfectibility of humans, freedom versus constraint, or of you prefer, Rousseau versus Hobbes, or Lao Tzu versus Confucius, and the possibility of a universalist political theory or of international law, amongst others (Berry 1986). To even begin to address these issues, Berry finds it necessary to call on anthropology to inform political theory. This is partly because the problem of relativism is as acute in political science as it is in cultural studies, maybe

more so as the whole possibility of human rights hangs on being able to establish a reasonable concept of the unity of the human species, as do concepts of development enshrined in such documents as the United Nations programmatic Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed by the General Assembly at the start of the new century. Yet as Berry and others point out, whether this purported unity is posited on the grounds of bio-social limitations, by the fact that all languages, despite their surface differences, presuppose a common underlying structure for communication and translation to be possible, or by the requirements of rationality, presumed to be a quality of all normal humans, actually matters less than the requirement to find or assert such a structure (Berry 1986: 77). There are really three questions here: that of the unity or existence of a universal human nature which must have as its basis certain shared characteristics and values (to be biologically human but to have no moral values would call into serious question one's humanity); that of the basis for the belief in or against such a conception of unity; and the very real question of whether it actually matters if we can establish it or not. If for political, moral, aesthetic, ecological or other good reasons we wish to believe in the sister/brotherhood of all human kind because that belief works a lot better than its alternatives in promoting a peaceful, just and pleasant world and because as a goal we want to bring that unity into existence because we believe it is a realizable potential, does it really matter whether or not "human nature" as yet objectively exists? Perhaps it is our evolutionary goal rather than an a priori characteristic of our species for all time.

This latter position indeed seems to be that of the philosopher Richard Rorty whose defense of liberalism is based on the idea that human solidarity or community is all that is necessary (Rorty 1982:207). In his view, liberalism, while requiring a sense of community, does not need the notion of a common human nature, and that as a result pragmatism is the appropriate corresponding philosophical position: "loyalty to our fellow humans does not require something permanent and ahistorical... which guarantees convergence to agreement" (Rorty 1982: 171). But this view would be contested by many others, including Marx and those who have followed him to various degrees, not by arguing for an ahistorical essence (although such a position has never been actually disproved), but rather by arguing that humanity is less a given than something created by its own labor. We have a "species being" as do all other bioforms, but this being is elastic and amendable and history is the story less of our continuity as a species than of our self-formation through labor (see also Harvey 2002 for a contemporary elaboration of this including detailed discussions of our responsibilities to nature, our utopian impulses, the relationship between self-fashioning and justice and the geographical rather than the biological boundaries of being human). The "anti-humanism" of Michel Foucault and Levi-Strauss which appear at first sight as attempts to demolish the idea of human nature prove on close examination to be something rather different: in rooting their analyses in ethnology, one of the "counter-sciences" that, together with psychoanalysis "ceaselessly 'unmake' that very man who is creating and recreating his positivity...One may say of both of them what Levi-Strauss said of ethnology: that they dissolve man" (Foucault 1966: 379-381), both are attacking the forms of idealist

philosophical anthropology stemming from Kant, not a view of the human rooted in actual human struggles for recognition and survival in a material world constrained by biological limits, but striving endlessly for creativity and meaning. When we speak of creativity from the perspective of the humanities we often are thinking primarily of the arts, yet we should remember that equally important aspects of the human imagination are social creativity (the ability to invent new social forms), moral imagination, and self-transcendence, all of which contain the possibility of both an open future that we can collectively shape, as indeed we must for better or worse, and of what Roberto Mangabeira Unger (2001) has called a “non-necessitarian social theory”, beyond determinism yet within the bounds of the reality of the world that we have been given.

Cultural Diversity and Global Ethics

Cultural diversity then is not only an empirical reality, it is also a desired state of enriching pluralism. But how then can it be reconciled with the idea of a global ethics? This issue was addressed in detail at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions and the result was enshrined in their concluding declaration. In the preface to the declaration the editors (Kung and Kuschel 1993) point out that “By a global ethic we do not mean a global ideology or a single unified religion beyond all existing religions, and certainly not the domination of one religion over all others. By a global ethic we mean a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes” (Kung and Kuschel 1993:21). In practice the declaration argues this means the humane treatment of all beings and the recognition of the inalienable dignity of all humans regardless of age, race, gender, religion, social origin or physical or mental ability. This it is asserted arise from four fundamental guidelines found in most of the world's religions in some form, notably commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life; commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order; commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness; and commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women (Kung and Kuschel 1993:24). Apart from the actual content of the declaration, two other things are noteworthy: the basis of shared values in culture, the traditional field of the humanities, but with the added dimension that this culture is an emerging and dynamic one not to be simply equated with any actually existing culture, and the recognition that a just economy is one of the bases of any shared ethic. This latter is an important point. The humanities frequently ignore the economic and even cultural studies have had to struggle to find a methodology that creates ways to incorporate the economic into the study of culture. It should be evident that the economy is a primary determinant of culture: it shapes or creates consumption through its products, marketing and advertising, it gives the illusion of “choice” in practice simply between the products that it makes available; it creates or heavily influences fashion, the structure and appearance of our cities, our entertainment, travel, art, food, leisure, and, although the authors of the declaration do not point this out, is the primary means of human's interventions in nature through resource extraction,

wastes and pollutants, deforestation, patterns of agriculture and literal physical transformations of the landscape. While religion may shape values at one level of culture, the economy is often busy undoing them at another and substituting its own, and most often the economy wins. Civilizational dialogue is also structured largely through economic relations and few would realistically disagree that the WTO has far more influence than the Parliament of the World's Religions. The implications of this are clear: not only must the humanities engage with economics, but economic factors must be recognized as primary determinants of culture in the civilizational patterns that we have allowed to emerge globally since the Industrial Revolution and must themselves be transformed if progress towards a workable global ethic is to be made (Muzaffar 2005).

Multiple cultural identities, while they exist but often under threat of extinction, require a supportive socio-economic environment for their flourishing. As economic migrants, refugees and many other mobile or displaced groups have long discovered, together with those who have made inter-ethnic or inter-religious marriages or have simply lived long in another culture, one does not just "possess" a culture in the same way that one just has a particular eye color. Culture is performative: it must be remembered, repeated, expressed, transmitted, and none of these things can happen in a situation where it is suppressed, indigenous languages forbidden to be spoken (as has happened in many colonial situations and in religious schools and institutions), considered quaint or shameful to wear one's ethnic dress, or one's literature or art denigrated. Many minorities have experienced this suppression and the protection as well as the celebration of cultural diversity then becomes an important role for the humanities, if they can but see themselves as a comparative discipline, and one that has moved beyond the categories of "high" and "low" culture, of "popular" culture as opposed to "serious" culture", of "art" as opposed to "craft", "folk" as opposed to "mainstream", with which they impose their own subtle hegemony on the study and appreciation of culture. It is a pleasure to see that a literature is emerging that does indeed contest and deconstruct these hierarchical categories, for example in relation to art (Buszek 2011).

We are clearly then dealing with a dialectical process, one in which global citizenship possess local rooting, and in which globalization itself has the tendency to trigger movements towards localization and the pursuit of the authenticity of indigenous cultures. Behind this lie a number of fundamental assumptions of a political and philosophical nature. There has been a tendency in much recent and contemporary social philosophy, cultural theory and anthropology to talk of the "Other" as the counterpart to the self, drawing in large part from the philosophies of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, from which some commentators have derived a politics of "difference" often promoting a multiculturalism of separation rather than communication, a multiculturalism of difference also extending to gender (e.g. Irigaray 1989). But the pursuit of universalism in the sense of a global ethic affirming diversity while recognizing commonalities requires a new philosophical anthropology, one in which there are no "Others"

in any ethical sense, and in which the politics and sociology of difference is transcended by one of unity. This position however can very easily become an idealist one. In discussing ethics, it is always necessary to consider its shadow side and the reason for which ethics needs to exist: notably the existence of evil. This of course is an enormous topic to which a huge amount of religious and philosophical thinking has been devoted. As Tzvetan Todorov has pointed out, collective identities are fragile and the “clash of civilizations” debate signals perhaps deeper fears about the barbarism that exists within and between civilizations and the severe limitations of idealist accounts of “dialogue between civilizations” that do not take into account the actual dynamics of inter-cultural relations and the political and economic forces that drive them (Todorov 2010). For identity politics may actually stand in the way of democratic and genuinely liberatory processes if they are based on conflict rather than compromise and dialogue and can and do become the means through which tensions rather than consensus emerge (Gilbert 2010). The fine line between identity and community becomes the fault line that constantly has to be negotiated and can rarely be taken as a given or as a permanent position.

So whereas idealism in its philosophical sense is naïve and dangerous in the complex globalized and politicized world that we inhabit, idealism in an ethical and political sense is very necessary. Without goals and ideals, even utopias, standards cannot be set towards which actual social, political and economic systems and institutions should strive and in which they should be encouraged to move. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights embodies such ideals, as does the more recent Earth Charter and the on-going attempts to create a Universal Charter of Human Responsibilities (e.g. Kumar and Sudha 2010). Equality and justice between cultures as well as within them needs to be one of these goals. This is vividly illustrated in current debates about climate justice. Whereas the consensus now is that it has been the rich industrial nations that have through their economic and consumption practices been the main culprits in creating global warming and all its attendant and potentially highly destructive climatic changes, sea-level rises and shifts in weather patterns that will immensely impact agriculture in developing nations, it is these latter countries that are likely to feel the worst effects and have fewer resources to combat them. Should then the North increase aid and compensation to the South to help offset these effects? Should the North accept drastic cuts in consumption and lifestyle expectations to help the globe as a whole and to increase the transfer of resources to the global South? These are hard questions, but I would certainly predict that issues of environmental justice will move to the forefront of intercultural and inter-civilizational debates in the coming decades.

Indeed, it is precisely these environmental issues that are forming the new commonality upon which inter-civilizational dialogue is taking place, even as it has encouraged religions globally to address the resources within their own traditions that now speak to this deep ecological crisis and help to revise values in ways that promote sustainability and responsibility towards the Earth (e.g. Gottlieb 2004, 2006). The

Earth Charter, a secular document that in its formulation drew on multiple sources, voices, traditions and areas of concern (including the religious) (available in many printed sources and online at <http://www.earthcharter.org>), is an excellent model and resource for approaching the issue of cultural universalism and particularism at many levels: in its formulations and conclusions, its methodology and its realism. The first issue relates to its seeking for a universal set of values in our conflicted world: “The Earth Charter focuses attention on the need for global ethics. It is concerned with the identification and promotion of ethical values that are widely shared in all nations, cultures, and religions – what some philosophers call universal values. Global ethics are of critical importance in the Great Transition because we live in an increasingly interdependent, fragile, and complex world...global interdependence means that no community or nation can manage its problems by itself. Partnership and collaboration are essential” (Steven C. Rockefeller quoted in Corcoran and Wohlpart 2008:xv). The second proved that a universal consensus on values could indeed be reached through a long process of consultation and drafting involving people from many cultures, religions, and ethnicities, of both genders, and of many kinds of social, professional and educational backgrounds, proving to the skeptics that with good will and attentive listening such agreement can be achieved. The third was to recognize the critical and perilous time in which we live in which real and urgent choices must be made – to enhance life, promote partnership and to create an integrated set of ethics and practices to address the contemporary crisis and to challenge the forces of “Empire” (greed, violence, lack of care for nature), or to admit defeat and see our species go down to inevitable destruction, taking with us many of the precious and unrecoverable life forms and beauties of the planet that we are privileged to live on, but treat as if it were endlessly exploitable real-estate. If one looks for models that combine idealism with realism, a methodology for achieving consensus and a synthesis of ecological care and social justice, the Earth Charter is undoubtedly one of the best resources that we have currently available to us.

The question of values is then clear enough (the need for a global ethic based on agreed and shared principles for enhancing a just and ecologically responsible life on the planet). Where we are weakest is in theorizing the link between these two and in creating a methodology for achieving them. The development ethicist Denis Goulet puts this first issue very succinctly:

The ecological imperative is clear and cruel: nature must be saved or we humans will die. The single greatest threat to nature – menacing, irreversible destruction of its regenerative powers – comes from “development”. This same “development” is also the major culprit in perpetuating the “underdevelopment” of hundreds of millions. The task of eliminating degrading underdevelopment imposes itself with the same urgency as that of safeguarding nature. These twin concerns have spawned two ethical streams of protest. Yet almost always the two streams flow in opposite directions: one is concerned with protecting nature, the other with protecting economic justice. This dissonance is

tragic because it is the identical pseudo-development which lies at the root of both problems. The only antidote to pseudo-development is a working ethic of what is generally called “sustainable development”, but which is better termed “integral authentic development”. Such an ethic joins the two normative streams, linking concern for environmental responsibility with the drive for universal economic justice. There can be no sound development ethic without environmental wisdom and, conversely, no environmental wisdom without a solid development ethic” (Goulet 1995: 119).

One of the major reasons for this dichotomy in Goulet’s thinking however lies not in the absence of a common ethic, but in the inadequacy of our institutions, including universities, governments and multilateral organizations to think through or respond creatively to these critical issues: “In rich and poor countries alike, still another major obstacle blocks the quest for new development models: the worldwide paralysis of creative imagination. Although new institutions and problem-solving approaches are urgently needed, the wellsprings of social invention have run dry... today’s global institutions are relics of an earlier age and no longer function. They are already dead, but not yet buried. Alternative institutions, although often portrayed in desirable scenarios, do not yet exist; worse still, they seem powerless to be born. Practical problem-solvers concede that radically new long-term structures are needed, but nonetheless expend their energies scurrying from one futile exercise in short-term crisis management to another. This state of ‘colloidal suspension’ between a dying but lingering world and a stillborn new universe induces institutional paralysis in several realms” (Goulet 1995:185-6). I think that he is correct, and in our search for a global ethics we often neglect the institutional structures that underpin, generate, reproduce, and transform ethical principles, and are usually the main way apart from the individual in which they are materialized and practiced in the world.

This issue is closely linked to that of methodology. Proclaiming a global ethics or a universal charter of human responsibilities is one thing; seeing it widely or universally practiced is altogether another. The painful challenge for the humanities that that engagement with the social, political and above all economic sphere is necessary to accomplish this: declarations in themselves will never achieve this. As the distinguished liberation theologian Leonardo Boff rightly puts it “Having a new cosmology is not enough. How are we to spread it and bring people to internalize it so as to inspire new behaviors, nourish new dreams, and bolster a new kindness towards the Earth? That is certainly a pedagogical challenge. As the old paradigm that atomized human beings, isolated them, and set them against the universe and the community of living beings permeated through all our pores in our lives and created a collective subjectivity suited to its intuitions, so now the new paradigm must form new kinds of subjectivity and enter into all realms of life, society, the family, media, and educational institutions in order to shape a new planetary man and woman, in cosmic solidarity and in tune with the overall direction of the evolutionary process” (Boff 1997:119). What links the positions of Goulet and Boff it will be noted, is education: for

new patterns of socialization that enshrine and transmit global values congruent with a just and sustainable future for all beings – for a new institutional structure for the globe in other words.

A New Philosophical Anthropology

All that has gone before suggests four major conclusions. The first is the challenge to the humanities to broaden their scope to a holistic picture of the human condition, the very holistic picture indeed embodied in the best literature, art and music, which at its best is always profoundly humanist in the best sense. It is often through the novel for example that human emotions, motivations, character and actions are best understood, far more so than through a sociological tract on that same society depicted in the work of fiction. This is indeed is the high calling of the arts: to render the highest and deepest aspects of humanity visible through fictive, visual or auditory means and to communicate these in ways that not only reveal and make existence intelligible, but actually expand our knowledge of existence, not primarily through cognitive means, but through imaginative ones. The case can certainly be made that it is not reason but imagination that is the most significant of our human faculties. But for the humanities, as commentaries on this primary artistic production, to achieve their own goals requires in today's world an engagement with environment, justice, and globalization, and in particular the ways in which the forms of economic life promoted by globalization impact and structure in subtle and less subtle ways our imaginative lives, and through them our emotions, and hence our actions.

The second is to engage with globalization itself: as the major structuring force of our everyday lives, as a source of themes for literature and art, and as the dialogue partner in the debate between localism and the authenticity and autonomy of the indigenous and those wider forces and institutions. Globalization, especially in its economic forms or under the rubric of “development” is the major way in which our industrial civilization is attacking and destroying nature and the resources upon which that civilization and its economy are built. As a consequence the ecological crisis is not one theme amongst many, but the main theme for any contemporary engagement with the world. For to study ecology is necessarily to study our civilization and the consequences of certain patterns of cultural practice that far from solving all our problems, have brought us to the brink of our deepest crisis. Culture or civilization is not thus simply subjects of study: they require critique and reformulation of the values, practices, and institutions on which they are built.

The third is the important issue of not simply attempting to formulate a global ethics, but to create institutions that enshrine those ethics, reinforce them and transmit and disseminate them, throughout society and to the next generation. As Denis Goulet rightly suggests, this is where we are at our weakest: we neither have such institutions yet in any systematic way (perhaps some NGOs and social movement

organizations are the closest to which we have yet come) nor have we encouraged sufficiently our existing institutions, and especially the universities, to move in the direction of seeing their central purpose as not the exploitation of the Earth, but its future sustainability. Much the same can be said of our courts and legal systems, our multilateral institutions, businesses, schools, science, technology and religions.

Finally, what the whole argument presupposes is the move towards the creation of a new philosophical anthropology, one based on the nurturing of a new kind of human being: ecologically aware and non-anthropocentric, committed to universal justice, social, political, economic and ecological, willing to put community (including the biosphere) before self-interest, and willing to act on shared and universally agreed values on which our survival will depend. The challenge is then not simply an academic one, but one of our future as a species. Scholars have a unique role here: because of their social position as those paid to think and reflect on the widest issues, and as those not necessarily tied to the ideology of any specific religious community, the scholarly life is both a privilege and a huge responsibility. For to have time and space to think, but to fail to apply those powers to the issues that now press upon humanity, is not only to deny the meaning of humanism, but is also the height of irresponsibility.

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