

Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change
Series I. Culture and Values, Volume 53

Discerning Boundaries Philosophy across Cultures

Edited by

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The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication

Names: Jonkers, Peter, 1954- editor | Svetelj, Tone editor

Title: Discerning boundaries : philosophy across cultures / edited by Peter Jonkers and Tone Svetelj.

Description: First. | Washington, D.C. : The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, [2026] | Series: Cultural heritage and contemporary change. Series I, Culture and values ; volume 53 | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "This philosophical study comprises articles by scholars from across the world discussing questions such as What do boundaries mean philosophically and experientially? How can we discern which boundaries are necessary for human flourishing and which divide and diminish us? These timely yet timeless questions lie at the heart of this volume, which arises from a shared conviction: that philosophy, when rooted in lived human experience and engaged in dialogue with many disciplines and cultures, is uniquely positioned to navigate, critique, and reimagine boundaries of all kinds"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2026017682 | ISBN 9781565183612 v. 53 paperback

Subjects: LCSH: Philosophy, Comparative

Classification: LCC B799 .D57 2026

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2026017682>

Table of Contents

Introduction <i>Tone Svetelj</i>	1
Part I. Principles of Intercultural Dialogue	
Tolerance: A Paradoxical Virtue <i>Peter Jonkers</i>	11
Negativity: An Ethical Challenge for Intercultural Philosophy in the Contemporary World <i>Raúl Fornet-Betancourt</i>	39
Interculturality and Globalization: Toward a Contextual Understanding of Human Agency in Raúl Fornet-Betancourt's Reflections <i>Tone Svetelj</i>	51
Persons beyond Values: The Spiritual Foundation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights <i>Gabriele D'amico Soggetti</i>	71
In Search of Harmony in Diversity: All-Unity, Intercultural Universality, and a Dialogical Cosmopolitanism <i>Edward Demenchonok</i>	103
Part II. Theoretical Inquiry on Discerning Boundaries	
Border's Vocabulary and Sensitivity to Migration <i>Basia Nikiforova</i>	159
Philosophy beyond Borders: Cosmopolitanism versus Intercultural Philosophizing <i>Marietta Stepanyants</i>	181
Dialogue across Cultures: Ambivalence of Cultural Borders <i>Leszek Korporowicz</i>	197
Philosophy across Boundaries in Defense of Human Dignity: Georgius Benignus's Apologies of Bessarion, Mirandola, Savonarola, and Reuchlin <i>Pavo Barišić</i>	209

Part III. Experiences of Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

Asian Shared Spirituality and the Spirit of Dialogue: Transcending the Boundaries of Religions <i>Jove Jim S. Aguas</i>	237
The Significance of Cross-Cultural Communication in Kazakhstan's Search for a Modern National Identity Model <i>Aidar Amrebayev</i>	261
Shadow Worlds and American Pragmatism: The Varieties of Religious Experience in the Light of the Kyoto School: A Study on Human Dignity <i>Sofia G. Simitzi</i>	279
List of Contributors	293
Index	299

Introduction
**Discerning Boundaries:
Philosophy across Cultures**

Tone Svetelj

What does it mean to speak of *boundaries* – philosophically and experientially? How can we discern which boundaries are necessary for human flourishing and which divide and diminish us? These timely yet timeless questions lie at the heart of this volume, which arises from a shared conviction: that philosophy, when rooted in lived human experience and engaged in dialogue with many disciplines and cultures, is uniquely positioned to navigate, critique, and reimagine boundaries of all kinds.

The papers in this volume stem from the Pre-XXV World Congress of Philosophy conference “Discerning Boundaries: Philosophy across Cultures.” The conference was organized by the *Council for Research in Values and Philosophy* and the *McLean Center for the Study of Culture*, the Catholic University of America, held at Villa Mirafiori, the Department of Philosophy, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy, July 29-31, 2024. Participants from around the world reflected on philosophy’s enduring relevance and transformative potential in a world increasingly fragmented and complex. What is at stake is not only the meaning of philosophy itself but also its capacity to engage with our changing lifeworld – a world shaped by shifting political landscapes, ecological crises, scientific and technological advances, and the ever-deepening entanglement of cultures and traditions. In response, philosophy must neither retreat into abstraction nor confine itself within narrow-minded disciplinary boundaries. Rather, it must deepen and widen its inquiry, rediscovering its vocation in the concrete conditions of human life.

Indeed, if philosophy is universal, it must serve as a bridge – not only across philosophical schools and traditions but also across disciplinary, cultural, and existential divides. This calls for openness to all facets of the human condition: economics, politics, culture, religion, science, technology, ecology, and the search for meaning. It also requires philosophers to inhabit the world with empathy and imagination, engaging diverse cultures and value systems through dialogue and mutual exchange. Every culture, after all, has contributed in its own way to humanity’s philosophical heritage. Each has formed its understanding of reality, shaping values, and proposing ways of being human in the world.

As George F. McLean rightly observed, there is a pressing need for new modes of thinking that are both holistic and personal, responding to the interrelatedness of all life while upholding the freedom and dignity of

the individual. Only through open, universal dialogue can we cultivate a more inclusive and humane global ethics in which the particular and the universal, the aesthetic and the rational, the cultural and the philosophical, are brought into conversation. This endeavor is not merely an academic exercise; it is a practical and urgent task for our time.

Over one hundred papers presented at the Rome conference addressed a wide range of illuminating topics, including the human person and politics, cultural and religious values, multiculturalism, intercultural dialogue, interreligious harmony, human transcendence, universal norms, and cultural uniqueness. From this rich body of work, the present volume presents a selection of twelve papers organized into three parts. Each part focuses on a specific area: principles of intercultural dialogue, theoretical inquiry into discerning boundaries, and lived experiences of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. These areas address themes such as theories of interculturality, the challenges of cultural encounters, the search for human dignity, historical, religious, and spiritual considerations, as well as more specific regional or cultural contests that demand our attention as we reflect on boundaries in our contemporary world. To examine the global world from a particular culture, location, historical moment, or unique theoretical perspective is akin to sitting in a classroom where each student shares a treasure of wisdom and is eager to inspire anyone willing to listen. The papers in this volume should be read in the same spirit.

Part I. Principles of Intercultural Dialogue

In the first paper, *Tolerance: A Paradoxical Virtue*, Peter Jonkers explores the complex and often contradictory nature of tolerance in contemporary multicultural societies. Despite the increasing permeation of cultural boundaries in the West, people remain deeply attached to their own traditions and frequently exhibit intolerance toward nearby sociocultural “others.” Drawing on Freud’s notion of the “narcissism of the smallest difference,” Jonkers sheds light on this enduring tension. He traces the conceptual evolution of tolerance, distinguishing it from mere toleration, and situates it philosophically as a virtue positioned between indifference and full acceptance. Jonkers argues that tolerance requires a careful, context-sensitive reflection on cultural conflict and coexistence. It must navigate not only moral boundaries but also epistemological and societal questions concerning its own limits. Ultimately, he contends that the absence of a single, universal model of tolerance should not be understood as a weakness but as a strength. By embracing multiple ethical traditions and broadening our conception of reason, we can enrich our understanding of tolerance – offering more inclusive and culturally sensitive ways to live together in diversity.

The second paper, *Negativity: An Ethical Challenge for Intercultural Philosophy in the Contemporary World*, by Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, examines the ethical challenge that contemporary negativity poses for intercultural philosophy. He argues that humanity is fundamentally torn between mechanistic capitalist civilization and organic approaches to the lifeworld rooted in lived experience and cultural diversity. Fornet-Betancourt catalogs various manifestations of this negativity – including climate change, militarization, migration crises, and the systematic exclusion of diverse ways of knowing – and traces their roots to capitalist modernity and European colonialism. In response to this structural violence, he proposes that intercultural philosophy must defend the organicity of life through dialogue rather than revolutionary violence. Such dialogue is understood as a demanding process of inverting realities guided by life's inherent harmony, seeking to recover justice, restoring equilibrium, and awakening consciousness of humanity's communion with the living world. Drawing on diverse wisdom traditions, Fornet-Betancourt claims that intercultural philosophy, as a peacemaking mission, trusts in humanity's persistent capacity to resist mechanization and remain open to the ultimate meaning of human existence.

In the paper, *Interculturality and Globalization: Toward a Contextual Understanding of Human Agency in Raúl Fornet-Betancourt's Reflections*, Tone Svetelj examines Raúl Fornet-Betancourt's philosophy of interculturality as a response to the challenges of globalization. He argues that genuine globalization must transcend economic and political frameworks to embrace dialogue among diverse cultures as spaces of freedom, creativity, and human self-realization. Svetelj explores Fornet-Betancourt's key concepts – culture as dynamic, historically situated, and oriented toward liberation; interculturality as a transformative methodology that requires mutual enrichment rather than mere tolerance; and philosophy as contextual engagement with real-world struggles rather than abstract theorizing. Central to this philosophy is the conviction that humanity's full meaning emerges only through intercultural dialogue that recognizes all cultures as equal participants in the co-creation of shared understanding, while preserving the distinctiveness that multiculturalism and transculturality often fail to uphold. This approach constitutes an ethical project that demands attention to the disadvantaged, critiques capitalist hegemony and monocultural domination, and integrates spirituality, justice, and knowledge as pathways toward peaceful conviviality.

Gabriele D'amico Soggetti's paper, *Persons beyond Values: The Spiritual Foundation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, revisits Hans Joas's influential thesis on the sacralization of the individual by examining newly uncovered archival materials related to the drafting of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Building on Joas's synthesis of Talcott Parsons's concept of value generalization

and Emile Durkheim's theory of sacralization, this paper affirms Joas's interpretation of the UDHR as a prime example of how the sacredness of the person became a moral cornerstone of modernity. At the same time, D'amico Soggetti argues that the drafting process of the UDHR reveals an even deeper conceptual richness – a “thick” notion of personhood that served as a stable axis of meaning throughout the negotiations. Drawing on the work of UDHR scholars like Johannes Morsink and Mary Ann Glendon, he introduces the phrase “Persons beyond Values” to both affirm Joas's insights and suggest that the foundational concept of person-hood in the UDHR transcends the framework of value generalization.

In the paper, *In Search of Harmony in Diversity: All-Unity, Intercultural Universality, and a Dialogical Cosmopolitanism*, Edward Demenchonok addresses the urgent challenge of fostering peaceful and just relations in a culturally diverse yet globally interconnected world. It draws on Russian and Latin American philosophical traditions to explore the dialectic of unity and diversity, paying particular attention to Vladimir Solovyov's concept of all-unity and its dynamics of synthesis and differentiation. The paper also engages Alexey Losev's dialectical approach to the One and the Many, as well as Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy of dialogism, which informs the development of transcultural and intercultural thought. Together, these frameworks support a broader philosophical transformation that seeks to reconcile the universal with the particular, moving beyond abstract or imposed notions of universality toward more critical, dialogical, and just alternatives. The paper culminates in a vision of a “new cosmopolitanism” – reflective, rooted, and transformative – that offers a conceptual foundation for global coexistence grounded in freedom, justice, and peace.

Part II. Theoretical Inquiry on Discerning Boundaries

In *Border's Vocabulary and Sensitivity to Migration*, Basia Nikiforova offers a philosophical lens on the evolving realities of borders in an era marked by intensified migration. Far from static or merely geopolitical lines, according to the author, borders are dynamic spaces of both connection and division – spaces that shape and are shaped by concepts of solidarity, responsibility, hospitality, and humanitarianism. The paper introduces a critical vocabulary to clarify the often misunderstood complexities of borders and borderlands, particularly within the contemporary European context. Challenging conventional understandings of migration and spatiality, the author proposes new conceptual tools to rethink how we engage with these pressing issues. Drawing on the insights of thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, and Giorgio Agamben, the author explores themes of biopolitics, sovereignty, exclusion, and security. The paper seeks to reimagine

borders not merely as political constructs but as ethical and philosophical spaces that demand renewed attention in theory and practice.

Marietta Stepanyants, in her paper *Philosophy beyond Borders: Cosmopolitanism versus Intercultural Philosophizing*, examines the apparent tension between the ideal of philosophy as transcending boundaries and the superficially constructed concept of cosmopolitanism. While cosmopolitanism is frequently equated with globalism in modern discourse – raising concerns about cultural homogenization – Stepanyants calls for a deeper, more nuanced understanding. By tracing the evolution of cosmopolitan thought from antiquity through the Soviet and post-Soviet experience, she distinguishes the flattening tendencies of globalism from the richer philosophical tradition of cosmopolitanism as a space for plurality and dialogue. She argues that while globalism has fostered economic growth and technological advancement, it also risks cultural erosion and dehumanization. As an alternative, Stepanyants suggests preserving and adapting traditional human values to modern realities.

In the context of accelerating globalization, the crossing of cultural and geographic borders has become an everyday reality – generating both creative opportunities and destabilizing tensions. Leszek Korporowicz's *Dialogue across Cultures: Ambivalence of Cultural Borders* examines how these movements challenge existing norms, values, and forms of interaction. He emphasizes social dialogue as a vital response to these tensions – one that upholds human and cultural rights while affirming the dignity of individuals and communities. Korporowicz draws on the historical example of Central and Eastern Europe during the Jagiellonian era to illustrate how past political and cultural practices can inform today's intercultural engagement. The evolving ideas about the rights of nations from that period, the author argues, continue to offer valuable insights for navigating the complexities of multicultural interaction in our own time.

In *Philosophy across Boundaries in Defense of Human Dignity: Georgius Benignus's Apologies of Bessarion, Mirandola, Savonarola, and Reuchlin*, Pavo Barišić explores the philosophical and ethical motivations behind Georgius Benignus's defense of four prominent Renaissance thinkers who faced condemnation in their time: Basil Bessarion, Pico della Mirandola, Girolamo Savonarola, and Johannes Reuchlin. A refugee from the Ottoman invasion of Bosnia, Benignus (Juraj Dragišić) emerged as a passionate advocate for intellectual freedom, human dignity, and interreligious dialogue, shaped by his education in Italy and his engagement with the humanist circles of the Republic of Dubrovnik. Barišić highlights Benignus's commitment to bridging philosophical and ideological divides through reasoned argument and dialectical exchange. The apologies reflect not only a defense of individuals under scrutiny but also a broader vision of reconciliation, tolerance, and cross-cultural understanding grounded in Renaissance ideals. Barišić claims that Benignus's

enduring legacy lies in his strong belief in the universality of human dignity and in the power of philosophy to transcend boundaries – an ideal that remains profoundly relevant to contemporary debates on freedom and pluralism.

Part III. Experiences of Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

In *Asian Shared Spirituality and the Spirit of Dialogue: Transcending the Boundaries of Religions*, Jove Jim S. Aguas argues that Asia's profound religious diversity has often led to tensions, but it also holds the potential for deep interreligious harmony through a shared spiritual ethos. Rather than viewing religious differences as rigid divisions, Aguas sees that as "lines in the water" – fluid boundaries that can be crossed through the practice of interreligious dialogue. He emphasizes that this shared spirituality, rooted in a common sense of the sacred and a deep respect for life, can serve as a bridge to go beyond religious boundaries, fostering mutual understanding, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence. Based on the Philippine experience, Aguas illustrates how interreligious dialogue, grounded in shared spiritual values, has helped communities navigate religious pluralism without descending into conflict.

The Significance of Cross-Cultural Communication in Kazakhstan's Search for a Modern National Identity Model by Aidar Amrebayev looks into the pivotal role of cross-cultural communication in shaping Kazakhstan's path toward a cohesive and modern national identity. The author emphasizes that Kazakhstan's unique historical position at the crossroads of various civilizations – particularly Russian, Chinese, and Muslim cultural spheres – has deeply influenced its socio-political development and cultural self-understanding. While the transition from a nomadic heritage to a modern national identity has involved painful social and political experiments, including the imposition of foreign values, it has also enabled productive intercultural exchanges and the synthesis of diverse traditions. While Kazakhstan has successfully integrated into the global community by embracing universal values and modern governance models, it still preserves its language, traditions, and cultural identity. Amrebayev argues that the process of national self-identification remains ongoing and complex, requiring continued philosophical reflection, social innovation, and engagement with global cultural trends, especially amid growing tensions and cultural fault lines in the modern world.

In *Shadow Worlds and American Pragmatism: The Varieties of Religious Experience in the Light of the Kyoto School: A Study on Human Dignity*, Sofia G. Simitzi addresses the existential and philosophical challenges of the postmodern era – a time marked by crisis, fragmentation, and the erosion of shared values. Against the backdrop of global violence, migration, and identity politics, she questions the assumption that

secularism has rendered religion and metaphysical inquiry obsolete. Simitzi argues for a renewed engagement with philosophical reflection as a source of meaning, dignity, and methodological transcendence. Drawing on insights from American pragmatism, the Kyoto School, and William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Simitzi explores the limits of empirical knowledge and the potential of faith that can illuminate dimensions of human reality inaccessible to science. Philosophy, she argues, is not merely a tool for explaining the world but a means of shaping how we value and inhabit it. In this sense, the paper challenges the naturalistic assumptions often dominating contemporary thought and calls for a deeper, metaphysical exploration of the human condition.

These three parts, and the papers within them, seek not only to examine boundaries but also to cross them – with humility, rigor, and a commitment to reimagining the human future. Together, they affirm the enduring promise of philosophy: not as a closed system of thought but as an open, living tradition in constant dialogue with the lifeworld. In the face of uncertainty, crisis, and division, philosophy reminds us of what is possible, what is ethical, what we might imagine, how we might act to shape a humane world, and how to understand ourselves and others. It invites us to think anew, listen deeply, and love wisdom in all its forms. This volume, then, is both a testament and a call to reflect, converse, and cross boundaries in search of a more humane and hopeful world.

Part I

Principles of Intercultural Dialogue

Tolerance: A Paradoxical Virtue

Peter Jonkers

Introduction

Tolerance can be defined as “the fruit of an asceticism in the exercise of power” in situations where one has the power and feels justified in imposing one’s convictions on others.¹ This shows that tolerance is rightly called a paradoxical virtue. The reasons for tolerance are many and varied, ranging from the avoidance of strife or social unrest to respect for the values and moral autonomy of others. Moreover, as a conscious, reflexive attitude of restraint, tolerance is distinguished from indifference: “The indifferent exercise no self-restraint. They don’t have to cultivate humility when faced with a clash of values. They don’t have to balance the demands of their integrity against respect for the convictions of others. [Instead,] true tolerance implies convictions and deeply held values.”²

For all societies in the world and throughout human history, tolerance has been a bulwark against religious, cultural, ethnic, political, etc. intolerance and, thus, a necessary condition for peaceful coexistence within and between societies. To enshrine this in law, fundamental freedom rights

¹ Paul Ricoeur, “The Erosion of Tolerance and the Resistance of the Intolerable,” *Diogenes* 44, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 189. Similar definitions of tolerance can be found in Rainer Forst, “Toleration,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2017², <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/toleration/>, Tolerance “generally refers to the conditional acceptance of or non-interference with beliefs, actions or practices that one considers to be wrong but still ‘tolerable,’ such that they should not be prohibited or constrained;” T.M. Scanlon, “The Difficulty of Tolerance,” in *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue*, ed. David Heyd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 226: “Tolerance requires us to accept people and permit their practices even when we strongly disapprove of them;” Andrew Jason Cohen, *Toleration* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2014), 2: “Toleration...is the intentional and principled refraining from interfering with another whom one opposes”; Anna Elisabetta Galeotti, “The range of toleration: From toleration as recognition back to disrespectful tolerance,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 41, no. 2 (2015): 94: “Toleration means the non-interference with practices, actions and views of some people which the potential tolerator objects to.” Unfortunately, the UNESCO Declaration on Principles of Tolerance lacks any reference to the paradoxical nature of tolerance because it ignores the disapproval or objection dimension of tolerance. See UNESCO, *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance. Proclaimed and signed by the Member States of UNESCO on 16 November 1995* (Paris: UNESCO, 1995), Art. 1.

² George Carey, “Tolerating religion,” in *The Politics of Toleration. Tolerance and Intolerance in Modern Life*, ed. Susan Mendus (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 46f. For the distinction between tolerance and indifference, see also David Heyd, “Introduction,” in *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue*, ed. David Heyd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 4; Ricoeur, “The Erosion of Tolerance,” 196; Rainer Forst, *Toleration in Conflict. Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 18.

have been adopted to guarantee the recognition of minority beliefs and practices that were previously only unofficially permitted by the majority. As a result, liberal democracies have become neutral arbiters of (most) values, whether those of minorities or the majority, and consider these values to be private rather than public matters. The state only requires its citizens to believe in the system of liberal democracy itself.³ However,

the permanent presence of different and often competing systems of value challenges the ideal of civic culture on which liberal principle depends....The separation of public and private intended to secure a univocal sphere of civic culture paid insufficient attention to the fact that the values governing people's daily lives are not ones they are willing to cabin off from decisions that affect the culture in which their lives take place....Hence, there is no easy bridge between the need to secure uniform principles of reasonable public agreement and the social consequences of deep pluralism.⁴

It is not surprising, then, that the content and scope of tolerance as a legal principle and as an individual or collective virtue have become the subject of intense political and public debate. Moreover, these debates have become more controversial because there is no unambiguous epistemological or cultural common ground, let alone an Archimedean standpoint, from which questions about (the limits of) tolerance can be decided.⁵

Increasing ethnic, religious, and socio-cultural diversity, the difficulty of finding common ground in a context of deep pluralism, and the ongoing controversies about the separation of the public and private spheres raise a host of new, critical questions about tolerance and its limits. Does fake news and disinformation undermine social stability, or should it be tolerated as an expression of free speech? Can people reasonably object to having drug addicts as their neighbors, or do they just have

³ Bernard Williams, "Tolerating the intolerable," in *The Politics of Toleration. Tolerance and Intolerance in Modern Life*, ed. Susan Mendus (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 70.

⁴ Barbara Herman, "Pluralism and the Community of Moral Judgment," in *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue*, ed. David Heyd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 60.

⁵ Susan Mendus, "My brother's keeper: the politics of intolerance," in *The Politics of Toleration. Tolerance and Intolerance in Modern Life*, ed. Susan Mendus, 12; see also Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 3f.; Catriona McKinnon and Dario Castiglione, "Introduction," in *The Culture of Tolerance in Diverse Societies*, eds. Catriona McKinnon and Dario Castiglione (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1, 5; Jeremy Waldron, "Toleration and Reasonableness," in *The Culture of Tolerance in Diverse Societies*, eds. McKinnon and Castiglione, 20ff.; John Horton, "Toleration as a Virtue," in *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue*, ed. David Heyd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 40.

to put up with them? Do certain religiously motivated forms of interaction between men and women violate the principle of gender equality, or should they be tolerated as expressions of religious freedom? Do the calls for zero tolerance in various areas of social life jeopardize fundamental freedom rights? These and many other questions illustrate that tolerance has become a hotly debated issue in the public and political arena of today's multicultural societies. A quote from a 1999 paper on tolerance by Bernard Williams shows how much our thinking on the subject has changed since then: "Perhaps toleration will prove to have been an interim value, serving a period between a past when no one had heard of it and a future in which no one will need it."⁶ Williams's expectation that the need for tolerance will fade away is based on his observation that practices that were not so long ago considered morally intolerable, such as euthanasia, abortion, and gay marriage, are now treated with indifference and as private matters that do not in themselves raise questions of right or wrong.⁷ Of course, Williams recognizes that every society must make collective and substantive decisions about important ethical issues, which means that it must set limits on tolerance. But in his view, these limits are a matter of sensible political pragmatism, fueled by a modicum of skepticism about fanatical beliefs on contentious issues, rather than the result of ethical considerations.⁸ However, the persistence of so many debates about whether or not to tolerate certain convictions, values, and practices shows that Williams's prediction that the rise of an international commercial society would create a skeptical attitude toward religious and other claims to exclusivity, thus making tolerance superfluous, is wrong. In fact, as Thomas Nagel has argued, the real problem of tolerance arises not so much from a conflict of (commercial) interests as from conflicts over what is truly valuable.⁹ People are strongly attached to these values because they are part of their existence as individual and socio-cultural persons. This explains why they find it intolerable when their existential values are threatened by the ethnic, religious, or socio-cultural other,¹⁰ thus putting a pragmatic compromise out of reach.

⁶ Williams, "Tolerating the intolerable," 74.

⁷ Williams, "Tolerating the intolerable," 68.

⁸ Williams, "Tolerating the intolerable," 73f.; see also Idem, "Toleration, a Political or Moral Question?," *Diogenes* 44/4, no. 176 (1996): 47.

⁹ Thomas Nagel, "Toleration," in Idem, *Equality and Partiality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 154.

¹⁰ McKinnon and Castiglione, "Introduction," 4; Matt Matravers and Susan Mendus, "The reasonableness of pluralism," in *The Culture of Tolerance in Diverse Societies*, eds. McKinnon and Castiglione, 43; Rainer Forst, "'To Tolerate Means to Insult.' Toleration, Recognition, and Emancipation," in *Recognition and Power. Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory*, eds. Bert van den Brink and David Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 233f.

Paul Ricoeur offers a comprehensive summary of this evolution by distinguishing five stages of tolerance. These stages range from the initial position of “I endure against my will that which I disapprove, but that which I don’t have the power (*puissance*) to prevent” to the attitude of “I approve of all ways of life, as long as they do not manifestly harm third parties; in short I let be all types of life because they are expressions of human plurality and diversity. *Vive la difference!*”¹¹ This comprehensive overview underscores the mounting impact of the principle of individual freedom, signifying the entitlement to live a life as one sees fit. However, the consequences of increasing ethnic, religious, and socio-cultural diversity, as well as the passionate debates they engender, show that a re-evaluation of the harm principle is needed. The harm principle can continue to serve as the criterion to limit tolerance, but it should be redefined in a less individualistic and more context-sensitive way.

These introductory remarks set the stage for this paper. The next section begins with some terminological and historical clarifications of tolerance. In order to connect the philosophical idea of tolerance with the current empirical reality, the third section gives a sociological overview of (in)tolerance in contemporary European societies and a psychological analysis of intolerance as an inherent aspect of human nature. Section four discusses some important problems of tolerance arising from its paradoxical nature, and the final section attempts to answer some current questions about the virtue of tolerance.

Some Terminological and Historical Clarifications

Let us begin by summarizing the most important components of tolerance. According to Rainer Forst, tolerance is a relationship between the tolerator, which can be individuals, groups, society, or the state, and what is tolerated, which can be (systems of) beliefs, worldviews, persons or their characteristics, individual actions, practices, and so on. Second, the tolerated convictions or practices are regarded as wrong or condemned as bad in a substantive normative sense, or at least experienced as objectionable in a strong, non-moral sense. The reference to normativity is essential because it emphasizes that it is indispensable to give (minimal) reasons for condemnation or objection in order to enable a rational debate about the justifications and limits of tolerance and to distinguish it from the expression of gut feelings and a purely pragmatic *modus vivendi*. Third, even if the tolerated convictions and practices are condemned as false, bad, or objectionable, they are not so false, etc., that other positive reasons do not speak in favor of tolerating them. These positive reasons do not cancel out the negative reasons, but are set against them in such a way

¹¹ Ricoeur, “The Erosion of Tolerance,” 190f.

that, although they trump the negative reasons, the objection still retains its force. The fourth component is to specify the limits of tolerance, thus separating it from the intolerable. Tolerance always involves a precarious balance between negative and positive reasons, and requires a willingness to suspend tolerance when the tolerated convictions and practices are judged so negatively that the positive reasons no longer outweigh the negative ones.¹² Finally, tolerance must involve all parties and their divergent value systems in such a way that the outcome of these disputes cannot itself be characterized as an expression of intolerance.

Another clarification concerns the distinction between tolerance as a horizontal attitude or practice between individuals or communities and toleration as a vertical legal and political principle of the state in its relations with different sociocultural groups and individuals. Originally, the term tolerance had the narrow meaning of permitting the presence of other religious denominations.¹³ This type of tolerance is called horizontal because it involves an informal agreement among members of the majority to *permit*, for pragmatic, epistemological, or moral reasons, certain convictions, practices, and values of minorities to which the majority objects.¹⁴ The problem with this permission conception of tolerance is that it depends on the (contingent) willingness of the majority to grant or permit minorities to hold to these convictions and practices but without securing this permission by law. The disastrous consequences of the structural instability and lack of balance of power of this conception of tolerance became apparent during the religious wars that raged in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. The result was the introduction of toleration as a legal concept, distinct from tolerance as an individual or collective attitude. Governments issued toleration edicts that guaranteed religious minorities the free exercise of their religion as long as they did not cause trouble to the majority. It is called vertical toleration because it is a *legally enforced* arrangement between the state and its citizens belonging to different majority or minority groups. However, the toleration edicts did not address the structural power imbalance and lack of reciprocity inherent in the permission conception of tolerance. It is no surprise, therefore, that De Mirabeau and Goethe rejected it as tyrannical and even insulting.¹⁵

¹² For a more complete and detailed analysis of the various components of toleration, see Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 17–26.

¹³ Williams, “Tolerating the intolerable,” 65. For an extensive overview of the history of tolerance and the conflicts it nowadays raises, see Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*.

¹⁴ Galeotti, “The range of toleration,” 94f.

¹⁵ De Mirabeau, “Discours du 22 août, 1789.” Quoted in Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 343: “In my view the utmost freedom of religion is a right so sacred that the word toleration, by which it is sought to describe it, seems itself to smack of tyranny. For the existence of an authority which has the power to tolerate is a menace to freedom of thought from the very fact that, having power to tolerate, it has also the power not to do so;” and Goethe, “Maximen und Reflexionen,” 507. Quoted in Forst, “‘To Tolerate Means to Insult’,” 215:

The next phase in this development resulted from the awareness that the persistent permission overtones in the vertical conception of toleration meant that it fell short of the moral principle of equal and universal human dignity, the requirement to recognize one another as equal members of a political community under the rule of law. This led to the *recognition* conception of toleration, which is based on “respect for the moral autonomy of the individual and her ‘right to justification’ of norms which claim to be reciprocally and generally valid,”¹⁶ even when consensus cannot be reached because of competing ethical views about the good life.¹⁷ The recognition conception of tolerance requires the state to respect the right to freedom of conscience for all citizens and to adopt a neutral attitude toward their convictions, unless vital interests of society, such as public safety and public health, are at stake. This principle of universal and equal recognition of every human being has been enshrined in the constitutions of all liberal democracies.

However, the introduction of the principle of recognition as the constitutional basis of (vertical) toleration did certainly not put an end to the permission conception once and for all, since it persists even in liberal, democratic societies. Anna Elisabetta Galeotti explains the persistent tension between these two conceptions of toleration by placing them in a broader framework through

adopting the principle of neutrality, political authorities do not perceive that some social differences, pertaining to a social majority, are part of social standards and customary ways, and that some others, pertaining to minorities, are not, and that this distinction corresponds to crucial asymmetries in power and social standing of people respectively belonging to majority and minority.¹⁸

An example of this asymmetry is the fact that Sunday, as a day of rest, and most official holidays in European societies are of Christian origin. To respond to this problem, which has become acute with the rise of ethnic, religious, and sociocultural differences, and which makes it much more difficult to reach a reasonable or, at least, societal common

“Tolerance should be a temporary attitude only: it must lead to recognition. To tolerate means to insult.” In this article, Forst gives also a striking historical example of the permission conception of tolerance (see Forst, *Tolerance in Conflict*, 217–220).

¹⁶ Forst, *Tolerance in Conflict*, 30; see also Galeotti, “The range of toleration,” 96f.; Carey, “Tolerating religion,” 52.

¹⁷ Forst, “‘To Tolerate Means to Insult’,” 231, 233.

¹⁸ Galeotti, “The range of toleration,” 98. For concrete examples, see Galeotti, “The range of toleration,” 103–106 and Forst, “‘To Tolerate Means to Insult’,” 221f., 234. See also Wendy Brown, “Tolerance as such does not exist,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 14 (2015): 161f.

ground, Galeotti argues for extending the recognition conception of toleration by making the state less blind to these differences. She argues that the state should not only grant equal freedom rights, but it must also recognize contested sociocultural differences as *legitimate* components of pluralist liberal democracies. “Toleration as recognition is neither *permission* nor *acceptance*,...but is instead *legitimation*: a public declaration that a given practice, if it does not infringe on any right, is a legitimate option of the pluralist society.”¹⁹ Examples of the extended recognition conception of toleration are the wearing of headscarves in public spaces and the building of mosques. As will be argued in more detail below, Galeotti’s argument is particularly relevant when non-moral issues are at stake.

A final introductory clarification concerns the counterpart of tolerance and toleration, namely intolerance. Intolerance seems to be the more original phenomenon, since it is a spontaneous reaction to the morally wrong or objectionable ideas and practices of others. “Intolerance has its first impulse in the power that each of us has of imposing our convictions, our manner of leading our lives on others, from the moment that each believes only these to be valid, only these to be legitimate.”²⁰ Initially, these feelings come to the fore at the horizontal level of social interactions between individuals and between the majority and minorities. But these spontaneous expressions can lead to appeals to the vertical political power to enforce public exclusion or restriction of morally wrong or objectionable convictions and practices. According to Galeotti,

politically relevant issues of toleration are produced when a horizontal dislike of a given difference in the public sphere gives rise to a stand-off between majority and minorities calling for a political settlement. Thus, a horizontal problem is turned into a vertical issue, where political authorities, the only *loci* of a universally binding (i.e., coercive) decision, must declare the controversial difference to be either publicly tolerable or not.²¹

This observation implies that a balanced discussion of tolerance cannot ignore the spontaneous feeling of intolerance.

This paper will commence my investigation of the problem of tolerance from its anthropological root, namely the spontaneous feeling of intolerance. As history has shown, the reflective attitude of tolerance only emerges in response to the (potentially) detrimental consequences of intolerance. The mere existence of sociocultural differences already

¹⁹ Galeotti, “The range of toleration,” 102.

²⁰ Ricoeur, “The Erosion of Tolerance,” 189; see also Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 2.

²¹ Galeotti, “The range of toleration,” 100.

necessitates tolerance.²² However, when these differences are perceived as oppositional and become emotionally charged, intolerance gets a militant character, thus increasing the need for tolerance. Taking an anthropological approach implies that I will discuss tolerance rather as a human and societal issue than as a legal and political question. While contemporary debates tend to focus on the legal framework of toleration, it is important to recognize that toleration remains an ineffective concept if individuals and communities are not committed to practicing tolerance in their interactions with those who hold morally wrong or objectionable convictions and practices. As previously stated, the opposite is also true: to transition from a permission conception of tolerance to a recognition concept, a legal framework for the recognition of freedom rights is essential.

Paradoxical Insights about Intolerance from the Social Sciences

It is challenging to empirically examine the sentiment of intolerance, as many individuals tend to provide politically correct responses to direct questions about tolerance, yet exhibit more pronounced intolerant behaviors in their actual interactions with those who are perceived as “other” in sociocultural contexts. Accordingly, the *European Values Study* inquired about whether people would object to living next door to specific minority groups.²³ The observed degrees of (in)tolerance vary considerably between Western and Eastern Europe and also depend on the kind of minorities. Having alcoholics and drug addicts as neighbors is generally considered most objectionable, and these objections have even increased between 2008 and 2018.²⁴ However, as a result of the rise of individualization following the Second World War, feelings of intolerance, at least in Western Europe, are less frequently directed toward minority groups and more toward objectionable convictions and behaviors of individuals. This evolution also encompasses the growing intolerance of individual migrants who seek to maintain practices and traditions that are deemed objectionable by the majority. These include, e.g., interactions between males and females, attitudes toward the LGTBQ+ community, and religious puns. The data also indicate that, in comparison to 2008, there has been a shift in support for multiculturalism, including the official recognition of differences, as the preferred model for today’s super-diverse societies. This is evidenced by a growing preference for a more assimilationist model. The net effect of these developments is that there is greater

²² Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), xii.

²³ Loek Halman, Tim Reeskens, Inge Sieben, and Marga van Zundert, *Atlas of European Values: Change and Continuity in Turbulent Times* (Tilburg: Open Press TiU, 2022), 139f.

²⁴ Vincent Tournier, “Dis-moi qui tu ne veux pas pour voisin: les Européens et la tolérance,” *The Conversation* 2020, <https://theconversation.com/dis-moi-qui-tu-ne-veux-pas-pour-voisin-les-europeens-et-la-tolerance-131499>.

tolerance in the name of individual freedom in most Western European societies. However, this has, paradoxically, also resulted in less tolerance of individuals who do not conform to a particular sociocultural framework or mode of sociability,²⁵ which is often implicitly defined by the majority and imposed upon minorities through social pressure.²⁶

The above sociological overview allows us to draw some conclusions about the paradoxical nature of intolerance in contemporary societies. It is encouraging to note that individualization has contributed to a reduction in the prevalence of blanket forms of intolerance. The proportion of people who express opposition to having Muslims, people of a different race, and homosexuals as their neighbors has decreased significantly since 2008.²⁷ However, this evolution should not be interpreted as evidence of the diffusion of a general liberal culture, which would suggest a decrease in intolerance. Rather, the individualization of society and the rise in sociocultural diversity have resulted in a competition between different value systems. Furthermore, the culture of expressive individualism engenders a sense of moral obligation to express and live one's values and concomitant practices in the public domain.²⁸ This expressivist attitude is not exclusive to the majority; it is also prevalent among minorities, and increasingly so, thus enhancing the perception of sociocultural strife. When minorities are confronted with intolerance, they frequently ascribe blame to society and the state for failing to maintain neutrality, instead perceiving them as supporting and, at times, even legitimizing in a disguised way the moral and nonmoral values of the sociocultural majority in the public sphere.²⁹ In conclusion, while the focus of intolerance has shifted from groups and ethnicities to individuals, it persists, even in modern, liberal societies. In particular, the individualization and diversification of society, in conjunction with the expressivist turn, have eroded one of the cornerstones of the liberal conception of tolerance: the notion of a universal, univocal, and neutral civic culture that is distinct from the private sphere. Therefore, the distinction between what can and should and what cannot and should not be tolerated has become a topic of intense debate.

²⁵ Tournier, "Dis-moi qui tu ne veux pas pour voisin."

²⁶ Scanlon, "The Difficulty of Tolerance," 230.

²⁷ Halman a.o., *Atlas of European Values*, 140; Tournier, "Dis-moi qui tu ne veux pas pour voisin."

²⁸ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 61.

²⁹ Herman, "Pluralism and the Community of Moral Judgment," 60. A similar observation can be found in McKinnon and Castiglione, "Introduction," 2: "The barriers of the private sphere have been weakened, if not entirely dismantled, which opens up the operations of personal and private life to the uncomfortable scrutiny of the public eye, and subjects them to criteria of justice."

From a psychological standpoint, Sigmund Freud's renowned thesis on the narcissism of minor differences provides a compelling and intriguing rationale for the genesis of intolerance and its effects on individuals and societies. Freud notes that "it is precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them. It would be tempting to pursue this idea and to derive from this 'narcissism of minor differences' the hostility which in every human relation we see fighting successfully against feelings of fellowship and overpowering the commandment that all men should love one another."³⁰ He provides several examples of this hostility, which are relatively innocuous: "Every time two families become connected by a marriage, each of them thinks itself superior to...the other. Of two neighbouring towns each is the other's most jealous rival; every little canton looks down upon the others with contempt."³¹ Nevertheless, Freud observes that narcissism of minor differences also gives rise to more destructive forms of intolerance, particularly in the realms of religion and nationalism: "When once the Apostle Paul had posited universal love between men as the foundation of his Christian community, extreme intolerance on the part of Christendom towards those who remained outside it became the inevitable consequence."³² This phenomenon is exemplified by the Crusades, the religious wars, and the pogroms against Jews. In his paper on "Nationalism and toleration," Michael Ignatieff employs Freud's insights to elucidate numerous contemporary instances of violent nationalist intolerance between proximate peoples: the enduring tensions between Serbs, Muslims, and Croats in former Yugoslavia, the ongoing conflict between Kurds and Turks in Turkey, the enduring violence between Sephardi Jews and Arabs in Israel and Palestine, and the war between Ukraine and Russia in Eastern Europe exemplify the terrible consequences of intolerance.³³

Ignatieff presents some paradoxical conclusions derived from Freud's analysis of the origins of militant intolerance. The roots of intolerance are not primarily found in the objectionable convictions and

³⁰ Sigmund Freud, "The Taboo of Virginity," in Idem, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XI: Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 199.

³¹ Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," in Idem, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII: Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 101.

³² Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents," in Idem, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI: The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 114.

³³ Michael Ignatieff, "Nationalism and Toleration," in *The Politics of Toleration. Tolerance and Intolerance in Modern Life*, ed. Mendus, 92–96.

practices of the other per se, but rather in the tendency of the self to perceive marginal and minor differences as significant. Moreover, the self perceives these differences not as neutral but imbues them with oppositional emotional values. To be more precise, the self projects all its negative characteristics upon the other, thus creating a rift between its positive self-image and the negative image of the other or between “us” and “them.” As a result, the self perceives the other as a threat to its self-image and sees this a legitimate reason for defending itself against the other and, consequently, exhibiting intolerance of him or her.

These phenomena can be explained by the fact that the formation of human identity is a fragile process and thus always accompanied by the anxiety of identity loss. This anxiety functions as a catalyst for the transformation of one’s awareness of strangeness into a form of aggressive intolerance toward the other. Given that this mechanism is a closed system, an unconscious, self-referential circuit between the self and its projections, it is largely unresponsive to rational argument.³⁴ In other words, intolerance represents the negative flipside of the need to preserve and protect one’s identity against the real or imaginary threats posed by the other. In particular, when self-love takes on a narcissistic form, the imaginary character of this threat to one’s identity becomes more pronounced, leading to the transformation of neutral differences between the self and the other degenerate into militant intolerance toward the other. As a result: “What is different is rejected if it fails to confirm the narcissist in his or her own self-opinion.”³⁵

Another paradoxical aspect of Freud’s analysis is the question of why *minor* differences, in particular, give rise to such intense intolerance. A notable example of this phenomenon can be found in the history of Christianity. In the estimation of Thomas Aquinas, heretics are more severe sinners than pagans, Jews, or Muslims because they resist and distort the truth of faith.³⁶ Consequently, he asserts that heretics not only warrant excommunication and separation from the Church but also deserve to be delivered “to the secular tribunal to be exterminated thereby from the world by death.”³⁷ In contrast, non-Christian religious practices should be tolerated in order to avoid causing offense, provided that they don’t impinge upon the true faith.³⁸ This example demonstrates why *minor* differences result in such significant intolerance. Heretics secede from the Catholic church because, in the eyes of orthodox Catholics, they resist and distort specific elements of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, the heretics

³⁴ Ignatieff, “Nationalism and Toleration,” 77, 79.

³⁵ Ignatieff, “Nationalism and Toleration,” 79.

³⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae. Textum electronicum praeparavit et indicavit Ricardo M. Romn* (Goretti Publications, 1998), 2a 2ae, 10, 6.

³⁷ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a 2ae, 11, 3.

³⁸ See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a 2ae, 10, 8; 11.

themselves assert that they are true believers and are convinced that their beliefs command them to (radically) reform the Church from within. They seek to convert their brothers and sisters in faith. Thus, heretics present a much more significant threat to Catholic identity than pagans, Jews, or Muslims, who are regarded as belonging to different communities with which Catholics had minimal interaction in those days. Ignatieff refers to this phenomenon as the Cain and Abel Syndrome, noting “the ironic fact that intolerance between brothers is often stronger than between strangers.”³⁹ The paradoxical conclusion is that minor differences between the self and the other frequently represent a greater threat to one’s identity, thereby increasing the likelihood of outbursts of militant intolerance. While religion may no longer serve as a primary marker of sociocultural identity in contemporary Western societies, the importance of personal and collective identity has remained a salient feature of social organization. When this kind of identity is (perceived to be) threatened, it can result in intolerance, as evidenced by the preceding examples of nationalistic intolerance.

The Contested Nature of Tolerance

Prior to an examination of the virtue of tolerance, it is first necessary to discuss the reasons for its current state of contention. The critical remarks by Goethe and de Mirabeau about the traditional permission conception of tolerance demonstrate that it may not be a beneficial concept, but rather one that is condescending, paternalistic, and potentially repressive. Moreover, Galeotti’s analysis indicates that the permission conception has not been entirely supplanted; it persists in the form of some (vertical) toleration policies of contemporary, liberal democracies. Nevertheless, I think that her proposed solution – to replace the permission conception with the official recognition and legitimation of differences as the most effective means of addressing intolerance in today’s multicultural societies – is flawed. Her proposal that the only acceptable limitation to this policy is an even-handed interpretation of the harm principle and the right to self-defense⁴⁰ creates the mistaken impression that these principles can be defined unambiguously regardless of social context.⁴¹ Furthermore, the extended recognition conception of toleration gives rise to intractable political and sociocultural issues, particularly in instances of non-moral intolerance. To illustrate, each state recognizes at least one official language, which serves as the language of the legislature, the judiciary, and the executive branch, as well as the language of education at all

³⁹ Ignatieff, “Nationalism and Toleration,” 96f.

⁴⁰ Galeotti, “The range of toleration,” 101f.

⁴¹ Herman, “Pluralism and the Community of Moral Judgment,” 62.

levels. This recognition is indisputably a consequence of the (historical) dominance of the majority. Moreover, this language is the dominant form in informal social communication. In light of the argument of the extended recognition conception of toleration, the preferential role of the official and dominant language should be criticized as an unfair expression of the dominance of the majority over the minorities.

Nevertheless, if a polity decides to recognize an unlimited number of minority languages officially or if people utilize them in their informal linguistic interactions with others, this not only comprises the functioning of the state but also jeopardizes the integrity of the linguistic and hence social ecosystem. Furthermore, the implementation of such a formal, political decision may inadvertently discriminate against people who are not proficient in foreign languages or who possess less proficiency. This example demonstrates that the extended recognition conception of toleration is inadequate for addressing intolerance in today's multicultural societies. This example also illustrates that defining the limits of tolerance is not solely contingent upon ethical values; it rather depends on sociocultural conventions, which are morally neutral but are nevertheless essential for social cohesion.

The far-reaching consequences of the ecological crisis introduce a further dimension to the contested nature of tolerance. This crisis exerts pressure on societies and legislators across the globe to redefine and expand the harm principle and the right to self-defense as the generally accepted limits to tolerance. It is beyond doubt that the ecological crisis will result in a revolution in traditional Western-centered and anthropo-centric interpretations of tolerance and its limits, as well as a new understanding of the public/private distinction. While the ultimate resolution of these debates remains uncertain, the ongoing polarization regarding the boundaries of toleration illustrates that (the limits of) ecological tolerance have become a subject of intense contention.

Finally, at the heart of all debates surrounding tolerance lies a significant epistemological dispute. The absence of a neutral common ground and universal conceptions of reason and morality hinders the ability to unambiguously define the substance and limits of tolerance. In its most radical formulation of this problem, Friedrich Nietzsche states:

These preachers of tolerance! They always exclude a couple of dogmas ('fundamental truths')! They differ from the persecutors only in their opinion of what is necessary for salvation. Sticking to reason would be nice if there were *one* reason! But the tolerant person must make himself dependent on *his* reason, its weakness! Moreover, in the end, it *isn't* even reason which listens to the proofs and refutations and takes decisions. It is

instead the inclinations and aversions of *taste*. The persecutors have certainly been no less *logical* than the freethinkers.⁴²

Adhering without reservations to Nietzsche's assertions regarding the parochial nature of reason and the incommensurability of values would render any discourse on the justification of tolerance a futile exercise, a dialogue of the deaf, so to say. If that were the case, tolerance would only be a pragmatic *modus vivendi*, an indifferent attitude of live-and-let-live, or even a return to the permission conception, which gives the majority the power to define and impose the limits of tolerance. However, these options are not only philosophically unsatisfactory but also have significant existential implications. As rational beings, we have a moral obligation to provide justifications for our convictions and practices to one another.⁴³ Nevertheless, we should consider Nietzsche's claim with seriousness, as it should prompt us to reflect on the hidden power mechanisms that enable us to take our Western, liberal conception of reason and our secular moral principles and values for granted, regarding them as universal.

Similarly, Nagel thinks that there is no straightforward, impartial entity capable of resolving conflicts over what is truly valuable by referring to a higher normative level, which all parties ought to accept as reasonable.⁴⁴ This is because the conflicting positions already embody this claim to impartiality, for example, by referring to universal altruism or human dignity, but disagree over the precise meaning of these norms and concepts.⁴⁵ However, Nagel's conclusion is more modest than Nietzsche's:

There are some conceptions of the good and of morality which are incompatible with the ideal of reasonable unanimity that is the heart of the Kantian position. The most one can hope is that it will be able to contain most of the disagreement that divides democratic societies, and that the forms of fanaticism which it cannot accommodate will gradually die out.⁴⁶

In light of Nagel's proposal, the appeal to reason as a means of substantiating the limits of tolerance is not dismissed as parochial. Instead, reason should be regarded as a regulative ideal, rather than a univocal criterion. In conclusion, tolerance can be defined as hoping (in the Kantian

⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe. Band 9: Nachgelassene Fragmente 1880-1882*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (München: DTV, 1999), 480.

⁴³ Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 451ff.

⁴⁴ Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 154.

⁴⁵ Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 164.

⁴⁶ Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 168.

sense of a regulative ideal) that reason can contain (but not solve) disagreements about fundamental values.

The general conclusion of this section is that the notion of tolerance is indeed an essential one, yet one that is also subject to significant contestation. It is essential because it enables us to contain manifestations of religious, ethnic, and cultural fanaticism. Since the recognition conception of tolerance rests on the unconditional and equal respect of the dignity of every human person, recognition of (the ideas and practices of) the other represents a fundamental advancement over merely permitting them. Nevertheless, the (extended) recognition conception of tolerance is contested too, as evidenced by the critique of Galeotti's views. In particular, the principle of the recognition of human dignity as the ultimate foundation of tolerance proves inadequate when non-moral issues, which are deeply embedded in a sociocultural tradition, challenge the unambiguous application of this principle in the case of disputes about (the limits of) tolerance in a particular society. Moreover, the analyses of Nietzsche, Nagel, and others have demonstrated that even in discussions about the moral limits of tolerance, there is no universal, impartial criterion that could serve as an unambiguous standard for the justification of (the limits of) tolerance.

In today's multicultural societies, marked by growing competition between diverse value systems, appeals to the universality of reason to settle discussions about tolerance are often inconclusive. This is because it is "impossible to justify intolerance in the name of the reason of those who are not tolerated."⁴⁷ In light of these considerations, I find Forst's proposed separation between universal, reasonable, and moral norms and particular, traditional ethical values, which is inspired by his Kantian background, to be unconvincing as a solution to the problem of justifying tolerance and its limits.⁴⁸ In contrast to Nagel, Forst employs reason and its associated norms as a criterion for delineating the boundaries of tolerance, rather than as a regulative ideal for defining these limits. Ultimately, this debate inevitably gives rise to the troubling question: "In the name of what [can we legitimately] denounce the intolerable?"⁴⁹

⁴⁷ McKinnon and Castiglione, "Introduction," 5. See also Waldron, "Toleration and reasonableness," 20f.; Horton, "Toleration as a Virtue," 36, 40; Herman, "Pluralism and the Community of Moral Judgment," 60.

⁴⁸ Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 459–468. Interestingly, the section on the incommensurability of ethical values has been left out in the English translation of Forst's book. See Rainer Forst, *Toleranz im Konflikt. Geschichte, Gehalt und Gegenwart eines umstrittenen Begriffs* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 608–610.

⁴⁹ Ricoeur, "The Erosion of Tolerance," 200.

The Paradoxical Virtue of Tolerance

It is proposed that an examination of the virtue of tolerance be initiated from its anthropological root, namely the spontaneous feeling of intolerance. The findings of sociological research, as outlined in section two, have indicated that the sentiment of intolerance can emerge among individuals and groups. In light of the aforementioned evidence, I disagree with Ignatieff's assertion that "intolerance customarily fixes on the group differences as the ones that are salient and tends to ignore the differences between individuals in the loathed group,...so that intolerance...is a willed refusal to focus on individual difference, and a perverse insistence that individual identity is subsumed in the group."⁵⁰ Sociological research indicates that intolerance is directed not only at individuals but also at groups, and that it has persisted and even increased over the last decades. Therefore, although Ignatieff's interpretation of the feeling of intolerance as a reaction to the threat of identity loss is an important insight, his conclusion that "the culture of individualism is the only reliable solvent of the hold of group identities," is incorrect.⁵¹ In contrast with Ignatieff's assertion, numerous scholars have argued that "the affirmation of group identity will result in a more tolerant society,...and that collective identities are an irreducible part of individual identity."⁵² It, however, does not make sense to posit a dichotomy between individual tolerance and collective intolerance.

Intolerance arises when we have the feeling that our individual or collective identity is threatened by the other. This frequently results in a sense of indignation, prompting an exclamation of protest: "This is intolerable!" In this sense, intolerance can be defined as an emotional response to a situation, action, or opinion that is spontaneously perceived as intolerable.⁵³ It is evident that the sentiment of intolerance can serve as a legitimate expression of safeguarding an individual or a collective against the threat by the other. These expressions frequently assume the form of a defense of fundamental substantial values.

Intolerance can also manifest in problematic and even pathological ways. At the individual level, this phenomenon occurs when the self inflates its positive attributes, appropriates them, and identifies itself with them. In a simultaneous process, the self dissociates from its negative characteristics and aggressive feelings by externalizing them onto the other. Subsequently, the other is regarded as the self's negative counterpart, and the dynamic dialectic between the self and the other becomes

⁵⁰ Ignatieff, "Nationalism and Toleration," 83.

⁵¹ Ignatieff, "Nationalism and Toleration," 102.

⁵² Mendus, "My brother's keeper," 5.

⁵³ Ricoeur, "The Erosion of Tolerance," 197f.; see also Idem, "Tolerance, intolerance, intolerable," in Idem, *Lectures 1: Autour du politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 294.

fixed in an oppositional dichotomy: the other is no longer perceived in his/her own right but is instead reduced to his/her reflection by a distorting mirror, casting the other in a bad light while embellishing the self's self-image.⁵⁴ Therefore, the consequence of the distortion of inflated self-love is militant intolerance and even hatred of the other, which Freud identified as a characteristic of narcissism.

The collective expression of this oppositional split occurs when specific identity markers, such as ethnicity, nationality, or religion, become totalizing, thereby displacing other markers and forming the sole basis of sociocultural identity and collective self-love. If collective identity becomes singular and exclusive rather than multiple and inclusive, an oppositional split emerges between two groups. One group, for instance, a nation, racial group, or religious community, inflates its self-image and projects its negative characteristics onto the rival group. A comparable distorting mirror is at work here as in individual intolerance, whereby the in-group embellishes its self-image and simultaneously puts the out-group in a bad light. The inevitable result is the formation of stereotypes about the out-group, the creation of social divisions that are increasingly polarized, and a rise in intolerance.⁵⁵ As evidenced by a substantial body of historical research, the enactment of discriminatory legislation serves to reinforce the polarization and intolerance that already exist.

The aforementioned analysis of individual and collective intolerance demonstrates that tolerance is a pivotal virtue in a multicultural society. It serves as a safeguard against spontaneous feelings of intolerance, which can ultimately result in the marginalization or even annihilation of the sociocultural other, particularly if they belong to a minority group based on factors such as religion or ethnicity. Nevertheless, the idea that embracing all sociocultural differences would conclusively solve the problem of intolerance once is misguided. This perspective reduces the virtue of tolerance to a mere acceptance of all sociocultural differences, which is insufficient to address the complex nuances of tolerance. Consequently, tolerance can only be considered a virtue if it is accompanied by intolerance of the intolerable. This naturally gives rise to the challenging question of how to define the intolerable without falling into the trap of indiscriminate intolerance. In the concluding section, an attempt will be made to analyze some aspects of the paradoxical nature of tolerance in the context of today's multicultural society, without developing a fully-fledged theory of tolerance.

⁵⁴ Ignatieff, "Nationalism and Toleration," 80.

⁵⁵ Helena Kennedy, "The politics of intolerance," in *The Politics of Toleration. Tolerance and Intolerance in Modern Life*, ed. Mendus, 110.

Tolerance as Critical Self-reflection

The spontaneous feeling of intolerance represents the fundamental challenge to which the virtue of tolerance must respond; it is this challenge that makes this virtue so costly. To be effective, it is essential to begin by critically distinguishing between the legitimate and problematic expressions of (in)tolerance. It is, of course, easier said than done. There are clear examples of justified intolerance, such as the intolerance of intolerable convictions (e.g., racism, slander) and practices (e.g., torture, murder) because they infringe on the universal moral principle of respect for human dignity.⁵⁶ An illustrative example of unjustified intolerance is the hostile stance of ethnic nationalists toward other ethnic groups. "Nationalism is a distorting mirror in which believers see their simple ethnic, religious or territorial attributes transformed into glorious attributes and qualities.... The systematic over-valuation of the self results in systematic devaluation of strangers and outsiders."⁵⁷

However, apart from these evident cases of (un)justified intolerance, the cognitive situatedness and the existential and cultural overtones of our indignation over the intolerable, as well as the diversity of its manifestations, make it challenging to identify a common denominator and, consequently, a uniform and universal standard that can be applied univocally to distinguish between justified and unjustified expressions of intolerance. Even the harm principle and the right to self-defense, which are frequently invoked to delineate the limits of tolerance, prove insufficient for this purpose. They rely on a multitude of contingent sociocultural sensitivities and, in the contemporary era, ecological considerations, which necessitate an expansion of the harm principle's definition. Furthermore, the aforementioned analyses have demonstrated that the challenge in defining the intolerable in a clear and unambiguous manner extends beyond its objective dimensions to encompass our subjective feelings.

Therefore, the virtue of tolerance should begin with a critical self-reflection upon the personal and sociocultural motives underlying intolerance and their rationalizations. This enables persons and communities to distinguish between justifiable and problematic expressions of intolerance, recognizing that the majority of them fall somewhere between these two extremes. In other words, tolerance entails achieving "the correct balance between objection, acceptance, and rejection. The correct virtue of tolerance presupposes a complex *ability to say yes and no in a differenti-*

⁵⁶ Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 458f.; Waldron, "Toleration and Reasonableness," 20; D.D. Raphael, "The Intolerable," in *Justifying Toleration. Conceptual and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Susan Mendus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 137; Ricoeur, "The Erosion of Tolerance," 198.

⁵⁷ Ignatieff, "Nationalism and Toleration," 80.

ated manner.”⁵⁸ The insights of Nietzsche and Freud indicate that the self-reflection required for tolerance is a never-ending and occasionally challenging process, aimed at critically evaluating one’s spontaneous feelings of intolerance. Given that human beings are often adept at self-deception, it is imperative to imbue this self-reflection with a dialogic quality. This “involves entering into the ‘strangeness’ of others and feeling their pain.”⁵⁹ In order to assess the ongoing debates surrounding the concepts of tolerance and intolerance in an accurate and comprehensive manner, it is imperative to incorporate a historical lens into the process of critical self-reflection. Some ideas and practices (e.g., homosexuality) that were previously considered intolerable have now been (officially) recognized, while other practices (e.g., smoking in public places), which were once tolerated and even accepted, have become intolerable and have been prohibited by law. To avoid the pitfalls of historical relativism or ahistorical objectivism, it is essential to examine the arguments for and against a given position in their appropriate historical context.

Distinguishing Between Moral and Nonmoral Grounds for (In)tolerance

Another issue pertains to the distinction between moral objection or disapproval and (nonmoral) inappropriateness and (social) unorthodoxy, and their ramifications for (in)tolerance. It is crucial to recognize that attitudes toward inappropriate and unconventional beliefs and behaviors should not be reduced to private sentiments but rather situated within the broader public debate. This implies that such attitudes are contingent upon arguments that can be shared with and comprehended by others. These discussions are centered on the examination of social conventions, established practices, etc., and the need or desirability of adapting them to evolving sociocultural contexts. Examples of discussions about nonmoral (in)tolerance include the recognition of more than one official language, tolerating diverging dress codes, accepting different ways of expressing oneself and behaving in public, and the place of an established religion in society. The grounds for moral objection and disapproval are typically more robust and less context-dependent than those for nonmoral objections, though there is no clear delineation between the two. Consequently, judgments pertaining to moral and nonmoral cases of (in)tolerance “may interrelate in a variety of ways that undermine any attempt to base the concept of toleration on a simple distinction between them.”⁶⁰ One example is passive smoking. Those who are not smokers argue that smoking should not be tolerated, not only because they find it disagreeable, which

⁵⁸ Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 443.

⁵⁹ Carey, “Tolerating religion,” 53.

⁶⁰ Horton, “Toleration as a Virtue,” 33.

is a nonmoral argument, but also because passive smoking is detrimental to their health, which is a moral argument based on the harm principle.

It is unfortunate that the interrelation between moral and nonmoral grounds can distort discussions about tolerance, particularly when people downgrade moral grounds for disapproval to nonmoral grounds or upgrade nonmoral reasons for unorthodoxy to moral grounds. Both strategies of argumentation represent questionable attempts to align public opinion with one's own ideological preferences. One example of the downgrading of moral reasons to nonmoral ones is the argument that the slandering of a religion, ethnicity, or gender, which is commonly considered intolerable on moral grounds, should be tolerated as a manifestation of free speech and, therefore, treated as a nonmoral matter of unorthodox expression. An illustration of this can be observed in how some people think about the practice of wearing a veil in public. This practice is perceived by some as unorthodox and contrary to social conventions. However, when it is being upgraded to a manifestation of female suppression, this practice is deemed intolerable on moral grounds.⁶¹ The first example is based on the argument that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and, therefore, should not be subject to objection. Thus, so the argument goes, the slandering of deeply held beliefs and/or expressions of sociocultural identity is not a genuine matter of toleration but, rather, of accepting the consequences of free speech. Similarly, the second example posits that the act of wearing a veil in public is, by definition, an expression of immoral female suppression and, thus, should not be tolerated on moral grounds. In both instances, tolerance is no virtue anymore as it has become ideologically distorted.⁶²

Nevertheless, these examples and arguments do not imply that there is no scope for tolerance as a virtue, nor that the rationale for accepting or rejecting it would be limited to the conflicting or competing factions. If this were the case, tolerance would be reduced to a mere pragmatic *modus vivendi* among the members of one's own club, ultimately leading to indifference. Such an attitude does not address the fundamental issue of tolerance, as it fails to acknowledge the existence of strongly held opinions about many issues and people's attachment to practices about which they are anything but indifferent. Rather, the correct conclusion from the aforementioned examples is that the distinction between moral and nonmoral reasons for (in)tolerance is not as independent of context as some authors think.⁶³ In other words, discussions about tolerance are a matter of

⁶¹ Yves Charles Zarka, *Difficile tolerance. Intervention philosophique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004), 106

⁶² Horton, "Toleration as a Virtue," 33.

⁶³ This is the fundamental point of disagreement between Horton and Forst. For this discussion see Rainer Forst, "Toleration and its Paradoxes: A Tribute to John Horton," *Philosophia* 45 (2017): 423.

practical wisdom, of finding the right mean in a contingent situation. This will be discussed in more detail in the next subsection.

Tolerance as the Right Mean Between Intolerance and Indifference

Let us return to the paradoxical nature of tolerance. It can be defined as a conscious refusal to impose one's own convictions upon others or to prohibit the convictions and conduct of others, even when one has the power and feels the moral or nonmoral obligation to do so. It can also be defined as the conscious decision to hold on to (the reasonable grounds of) one's convictions and practices and to disapprove of those of others or find them inappropriate, while recognizing that others have an equal, reciprocal right to their convictions and practices. To comprehend this paradox, it is useful to utilize Aristotle's conceptualization of virtue as a mean between an excess and a defect.⁶⁴ In the case of tolerance, the excess is the intolerance of the convictions and practices of others. This implies a dogmatic overconfidence in the truth of one's own convictions and the identification of the good as one sees it with what is right for all. The defect consists in a lack of confidence in the possibility of a reasonable debate about the goodness of people's convictions and practices. This results in a relativistic acceptance of all of them without further argument. This attitude can be described as indifference. In contrast, tolerance represents an effort to identify the right mean between these two opposing extremes. The tolerant person must engage in a nuanced balancing act between considering his/her reason as the only valid one versus giving up a reasonable debate about these matters altogether. It is inevitable that the outcome of this balancing act will be unstable and provisional, open to progressing insight. This makes tolerance an instance of practical wisdom.

A further consequence of conceptualizing tolerance as the right mean between two extremes is that this mean is context-dependent. As Aristotle has observed, extreme feelings of intolerance and indifference are not conducive to a healthy state of mind if they are experienced too excessively or too deficiently. Therefore, tolerance needs "to feel them [these feelings] at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way."⁶⁵ Consequently, tolerance emerges from a reflection that accurately assesses the relevant times, objects, people, and aims, which can only be achieved with the

⁶⁴ Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), II, 1104a 25ff. and 1107a 3ff. For an Aristotelian interpretation of tolerance, although using different categories of excess and defect, see Rainer Forst, "Tolerance as a Virtue of Justice," *Philosophical Explorations* 4, no. 3 (2001): 203f.; see also George P. Fletcher, "The Instability of Tolerance," in *Tolerance: An Elusive Virtue*, ed. Heyd, 158.

⁶⁵ Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," II, 1106b, 21f.

guidance of practical reason. In the event that convictions and practices encroach upon the principle of human dignity, a strong feeling of intolerance, known as indignation, is an appropriate response. Conversely, if convictions and practices contravene nonmoral conventions, it is advisable to accept them with stoic indifference, provided that they do not result in significant economic or societal costs. Therefore, the defining characteristic of the virtue of tolerance is not the content or intensity of the feelings of indignation and indifference themselves, but rather the capacity to assess their appropriateness in specific situations through a process of conscious and critical evaluation. Assessing these contingent elements adds a personal element to tolerance. As with all virtues, tolerance “is a state concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, this being determined by reason and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.”⁶⁶ The right mean, which represents the telos of the virtue of tolerance and the product of practical reason, is relative to us in our contingent sociocultural context.

The aforementioned analysis elucidates the inherent challenges associated with the virtue of tolerance. It links general moral norms and nonmoral conventions to practices that are subject to change, lack clear-cut definitions, and cannot be replicated. These norms and conventions cannot serve as the sole criteria for evaluating tolerance, as they are unable to capture the nuances of specific instances. While theoretical knowledge of norms and conventions is essential for tolerance, determining when prohibition is excessive and when indifferent acceptance is defective necessitates a nuanced assessment of the specific context in which these attitudes are required. It is, therefore, necessary to determine which convictions and practices merit tolerance and which do not. It is crucial then, to identify the objective(s) that one seeks to achieve through tolerance and to assess their impact on the people involved and on society at large. To achieve this, practical wisdom is required, because it has the flexibility to apply general rules and norms to contingent situations. To illustrate this point, Aristotle uses the metaphor of the builders of Lesbos, who utilize a flexible lead rule that “adapts itself to the shape of the stone and is not rigid.”⁶⁷ In other words, while the virtue of tolerance must consider the moral norm of universal and unconditional recognition of a person’s human dignity⁶⁸ and the significance of nonmoral conventions, it must also assess specific sociocultural circumstances. Consequently, tolerance necessitates a context-sensitive judgment, whereby local maxims of persons and groups operating in specific circumstances are aligned with over-

⁶⁶ Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics,” II, 1106b, 36f.

⁶⁷ Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics,” V, 1137b 29–32.

⁶⁸ Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 29f; Idem, “To Tolerate Means to Insult,” 230; Galeotti, “The range of toleration,” 101; Herman, “Pluralism and the Community of Moral Judgment,” 70; Raphael, “The intolerable,” 137; Cohen, *Toleration*, 151.

arching reasonable and regulative principles.⁶⁹ This implies that the most that tolerance can achieve is the formulation of provisional conclusions and rules of thumb, which are always open to progressing insight. The paradoxical conclusion is that we must be tolerant of our own idea of tolerance. It is unrealistic to expect that tolerance can resolve once and for all the tensions and rifts that are characteristic of human relationships.

Conclusion: The Problem of Tolerance in Heterogeneous Societies

The quantitative and qualitative rise of sociocultural diversity in all Western societies and the growing contacts between these and non-Western societies, with their very different moral values and nonmoral conventions, challenge the virtue of tolerance in unprecedented ways. In particular, there is a question of whether tolerance has become the defining characteristic of a Western identity that is posited through opposition to a fantasized non-Western, that is, Islamic, African, or Asian world of pure intolerance. Isn't tolerance always nestled within larger normative orders of power and meaning, which contribute to generating the identities that are the subjects of tolerance? If these questions are answered in the affirmative, "tolerance does not remove but regulates prejudice and subordination."⁷⁰ Other questions challenge the self-evidence of the modern, Western idea of tolerance. For instance, it is unclear whether the enlightened, secular concept of reason is the universal common ground for discussing all issues related to tolerance. In addition, the distinction between universal moral norms and particular ethical traditions, rooted in Kant's moral philosophy, is also being questioned. Is this distinction still valid as a universal criterion for justifying (the limits of) tolerance?⁷¹ These inquiries highlight the potential cultural biases of the idea of tolerance.

A further issue is that universal moral principles, such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, reciprocity, the avoidance of harm to other people, and so forth, are interpreted in a multitude of ways. This has resulted in a loss of authority for these principles as univocal criteria for distinguishing between tolerant objection and intolerant rejection. To illustrate, Yves Charles Zarka justifies (the limitations of) tolerance, particularly the prohibition of wearing a headscarf in public functions, by establishing a direct correlation between the tenets of liberal democracy and the French tradition of *laïcité*.⁷² Nevertheless, Zarka's justification of the headscarf

⁶⁹ Herman, "Pluralism and the Community of Moral Judgment," 67.

⁷⁰ Brown, "Tolerance as such does not exist," 161. Yet, I don't agree with her proposal to replace tolerance with accepting an (unqualified) pluralism since it runs into the same problems as Galeotti's extended recognition conception of tolerance; see Brown, "Tolerance as such does not exist," 163.

⁷¹ See Forst, *Tolerance in Conflict*, 459f.

⁷² Zarka, *Difficile tolerance*.

prohibition is subject to significant criticism from other Western scholars, who invoke alternative liberal principles to challenge this prohibition.⁷³ In this case, the debate is limited to a discussion of the relative priority of certain principles of liberal democracy over others. When this topic is considered in a non-Western context, the issues become significantly more complex. Non-Western scholars have frequently advanced the argument that the concept of universal citizenship, a foundational component of liberal democracy, imposes a homogeneous mold on non-Western cultures. They also contend that this mold is not neutral either; rather it favors the culture of the dominant power – in this instance, Western culture.⁷⁴

In order to identify a solution to this problem, it is first necessary to examine a significant limitation of the Aristotelian concept of practical wisdom. Although Aristotle acknowledged the absence of a unified notion of the good, he nevertheless presumed a general consensus regarding the principles, on which this notion rests and the acceptance of the universality of reason. These convictions invariably limit the reasonable flexibility and adaptability necessary for applying these principles to the sociocultural context with which Aristotle was familiar. In contrast, contemporary societies have become irreducibly plural and even fragmented, thereby challenging the capacity of the Aristotelian consensual framework to accommodate these principles and even the capacities of reason as their common ground. In the words of Ricoeur, contemporary societies have become “after Babel.”⁷⁵ The prevailing justifications for tolerance and its boundaries have been subjected to scrutiny by sociocultural minorities within liberal democracies and by numerous non-Western societies. These groups contend that the principles underlying these justifications employ a biased conception of morality and reasonableness. In this case, the traditional idea of justifying tolerance, which is based on the reasonable distinction between accepting, rejecting, and tolerating against one’s will certain sociocultural convictions and ethical practices, is being challenged. Chatterjee gives an extreme example of this challenge: “We have our own reasons for doing things the way we do, but since you don’t share the fundamentals of our world-view, you will never come to understand or appreciate those reasons. Therefore, leave us alone and let us mind our own business.”⁷⁶

⁷³ E.g., Cécile Laborde, “Toleration and *laïcité*,” in *The Culture of Tolerance in Diverse Societies*, eds. McKinnon and Castiglione, 161–178; Forst, *Tolerance in Conflict*, 556–568; Galeotti, “The range of toleration,” 99f.; Brown, “Tolerance as such does not exist,” 163.

⁷⁴ Partha Chatterjee, “Secularism and Toleration,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 29, no. 28 (July 9, 1994): 1774.

⁷⁵ Ricoeur, *On Translation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 11.

⁷⁶ Chatterjee, “Secularism and Toleration,” 1774.

In my view, these challenges do not inevitably result in a concession to cultural relativism or an abandonment of the idea of reason in its entirety. Rather, they present a potential for a revised conceptualization and justification of the virtue of tolerance. The aforementioned analyses of tolerance indicate that

it is unlikely that we will all have precisely the same reasons to regard toleration as a virtue. Insofar as our reasons differ, so, too, in all probability will our understanding of what exactly toleration requires....I am not persuaded there is any one uniquely rational perspective, any Archimedean point, any view from nowhere, from which the reasonableness or rightness of a specific substantive conception of the virtue of tolerance can be established. Tolerance is not a virtue that stands altogether outside the moral and political conflicts it often seeks to mediate.⁷⁷

Hence, I propose to treat moral and nonmoral principles and rules of tolerance as regulative ideas, rather than as fixed norms or univocal standards. The common ground for these regulative ideas is respect for other persons and the willingness to enter into a reasonable dialogue about the implementation of these ideas in concrete circumstances. In the event that a cultural minority refuses to engage in such a dialogue concerning the validity of its practices, it cannot (reasonably) expect recognition for its ways of life from others. While cultural minorities may have their own reasons for conducting their lives in a certain manner, these reasons are nevertheless reasons and thus, can be exchanged with others, at least with the other members of their community.⁷⁸ The same regulative ideas can give rise to different interpretations of (the practice of) tolerance, its justifications, and its limits.

This proposal avoids reducing tolerance to relativistic indifference while also acknowledging the necessity of re-evaluating the balance between universal moral norms and specific ethical traditions as justifications for tolerance. Tolerance is not a thin moral concept that can be universally applied; rather, it is a thick ethical idea that cannot be detached from sociocultural traditions.⁷⁹ This implies, among other things, that different justifying systems for tolerance highlight aspects of tolerance that are not present in our culture. In other words, the discussions between different ethical traditions and their ideas about (the limits of) tolerance are more fruitful if one refrains from judging these traditions with a standard that is no longer considered impartial. In conclusion, the lack of a

⁷⁷ Horton, "Toleration as a Virtue," 40.

⁷⁸ Chatterjee, "Secularism and Toleration," 1775.

⁷⁹ Horton, "Toleration as a Virtue," 40.

unified normative framework of tolerance, and indeed the absence of an Archimedean standpoint, should not be regarded as a disadvantage. Rather, it can be seen as an opportunity to explore the justifications for tolerance, particularly because different ethical traditions can help us circumvent potential cultural biases in dominant justifications and foster a deeper understanding of tolerance and its limitations.

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Negativity: An Ethical Challenge for Intercultural Philosophy in the Contemporary World

Raúl Fonet-Betancourt

Introduction

Our current historical moment painfully reveals this reality: humanity is experiencing a world shaken and torn apart by multiple conflicts and contradictions, each with its own history and meaning. In the end, all of them disclose what I suppose¹ to be the fundamental confrontation tearing our world apart: the struggle between a capitalist, mechanistic civilization and the peoples who resist it through their processes of organic thinking and feeling. In other words, what I am saying is that today we are witnessing a confrontation embodied at a planetary level, which is, on the one hand, an open struggle for the meaning of the world and the human condition among the powers that forcefully mechanize the world and the human being, and, on the other hand, the alternative movements that try to heal the real (reality) and regenerate an organic sense of life.

We must also observe that one of the main issues of the contemporary historical situation is that the fundamental conflict tearing humanity apart unfolds under conditions of extreme inequality among the parties involved. This inequality is largely the outcome of the hegemony exercised by the powers that impose a mechanistic civilization, which, following G.W.F. Hegel, may be understood to promote “the negative,”² and with Ignacio Ellacuría, to generate “a common evil.”³

In this paper, I would like to focus on this conflict insofar as it reflects the contradiction that ultimately dismantles our current historical situation. I do so in order to highlight the ethical challenge it poses to intercultural philosophy, precisely as a philosophy that defends the organicity of life, to participate, so to speak, by situating itself within the struggle

¹ For an explanation of this supposition, see Raúl Fonet-Betancourt, *La interculturalidad entre los mundos de la vida y la civilización capitalista* (Aachen: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2026).

² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Die Verfassung Deutschlands,” in Idem, *Frühe Schriften, Theorie Werkausgabe, Band 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971), 457.

³ Ignacio Ellacuría, “El mal común y los derechos humanos,” in Idem, *Escritos Filosóficos, Tome III* (San Salvador: UCA Editors, Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas,” 2021), 447–450.

between a mechanistic project and an organic view of the world and the human being.

Starting from the fact that intercultural philosophy takes a stand with the alternative forces that seek to recover the organic meaning of the world and the human condition as guiding principles for development and for the treatment of the real (reality). This paper explores the issue of the pathway that, in tune with the spirit of intercultural philosophy, should be pursued in defense of organicity against the power of negativity in the contemporary world.

This paper is structured in two sections:

In the first section, I will identify, by way of example, some of the fields in which negativity operates with all its forces in the contemporary world.

Against this backdrop, the second section presents the perspective of intercultural philosophy as a response to the issue of how negativity in the contemporary world should be confronted. I anticipate that this will raise the issue regarding the types of actions that can prevent its agents, whether individuals or collectivities, from becoming ensnared by the traps deployed by the powers of negativity in the effort to preserve their predominance. Such traps include, for example, the strategic alliances and their forced “compromises” with the current state of affairs, or answers that follow the same logic of violence that they try to reject. These latter responses reflect the drama of interiorization of negativity, which, in our colloquial language, amounts to “paying with the same token.”

Negativity in the Contemporary World

The expression “negativity in the contemporary world” is a particular summary for many specific and concrete forms of violence that today, overtly or covertly, tear humanity apart. This violence is a consequence of the contradictions that, in line with what I present here, ultimately result from the clash between organicity and mechanicism. As I noted at the beginning of this paper, the struggle over the meaning of the world and the human condition is a response to the issue regarding the quality of the world in which we strive to live and the kind of human being we wish to become.

As an example, I will mention some concrete manifestations that draw the diverse picture of negativity, scourging the reality of our world:

- The reinvention of the old boundaries between “civilization” and “barbarism,” which divides humanity into blocks of the “progressives” (often, without doubt, through a way of colonizing seduction), who promote the mechanistic construction of the world, and those who lag behind

because they follow the rhythm of life and take care of its characteristic slowness.

- The social fracturing of humanity between the insolent opulence of a few and the misery to which millions of human beings are condemned, forced to live poorly.

- Climate change, together with the well-known social and political contradictions it reveals.

- Wars, along with the scandal of ever-expanding military budgets at the expense of social investment.

- The militarization of politics and the brutality of the relationships among peoples.

- Arms and drug trafficking.

- Sexual tourism industry.

- The persistent slavery in various forms.

- The systematic deauthorization and exclusion of vital ways of knowing.

- Massive, forced migration, which compels millions of people to risk their lives in search of a place where they may be allowed to live with dignity.

- Racist practices.

- Child labor.

The phenomena listed above are only a few of the many manifestations that testify to the magnitude of the work of negativity in our time. They do not, therefore, constitute a full map of negativity in the contemporary world. Nevertheless, they suffice to sketch a picture of the current historical reality. These manifestations of negativity allow us to attest, simply said, that humanity is in a bad position regarding its own human concerns. Moreover, our *memory of humanity*, which, as a guardian angel, if the expression is allowed, serves as custodian of the pathway of humanity, urging us to seek alternatives. This is the first aspect of the work of negativity we are facing.

On the other hand, we must be aware that negativity in our contemporary world, in which we are all involved, although it undoubtedly presents new and specific forms, is rooted in a much longer history. This history is particularly linked with the mechanistic turn that propelled capitalist modernity and the unrestrained expansion of European colonialism beginning in the sixteenth century.

Negativity in the contemporary world, therefore, should be understood not only as a continuum but also as a continuation of itself in its long history of colonizing the diversity of humanity. What this means is that, as I suggested earlier when speaking of violence, negativity is seen as a continuation of violence against alterity and, consequently, against the integrity of life. Thus, when this paper speaks of negativity in the

contemporary world, it refers specifically to a structural or systemic violence that aims at the destruction of the other as *other* and of the natural foundations of the lifeworlds.

With this affirmation, I inevitably touch upon a broader topic with its own history and identity: the topic of violence. For obvious reasons, however, I will not focus on violence as such, nor on debates concerning its justification, particularly on “revolutionary violence.”⁴

For the purpose of this paper, it suffices to say that negativity in the contemporary world represents a violent system that produces and reproduces violence. The core of the ethical challenge may be identified in this constellation of the world and the human being. It is precisely this challenge that enables intercultural philosophy, in search of a path to defend and care for the organicity of life, to intervene at the roots of the dynamics of negativity. This requires a path that begins from a principle outside of environments and habits shaped by violence.

Intercultural Philosophy in the Face of Negativity

As said earlier, in the current struggle over the meaning of the world and the human condition, intercultural philosophy aligns itself with the alternative forces that uphold respect for organicity as a vital principle for

⁴ The reality of violence is one of the major problems in the history of humanity and, as such, has been and continues to be the object of countless studies across multiple disciplines. While some hold positions that glorify violence as a driving force of change of human history, others reject it. See Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: A. Harvest/HBJ Book, 1970); Walter Benjamin, “Zur Kritik der Gewalt,” in Idem, *Gesammelte Schriften, Band II, 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980), 179–203; Jacques Ellul, *Contra los violentos* (Madrid: Ediciones SM, 1973); Federico Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1964); Frantz Fanon, *Los condenados de la tierra* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1963); Erich Fromm, *Anatomie der menschlichen Destruktivität* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1974); Johan Galtung, *Tras la violencia, 3R: reconstrucción, reconciliación, resolución. Afrontando los efectos visibles e invisibles de la guerra y la violencia* (Gernika Gogoratuz: Bakeaz, 1999); Friedrich Hacker, *Aggression. Die Brutalisierung der modernen Welt* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1973); Vladimir I. Lenin, *El Estado y la Revolución*, in *Obras Escogidas* (Moscu: Editorial Progreso, 1969); Rosa Luxemburg, *La Revolución rusa y otros escritos* (Madrid: Castellet Editor, 1975); Herbert Marcuse, *La tolerancia represiva y otros ensayos* (Madrid: Libros de la Catarata, 2010); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanismo y terror* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Leviatán, 1956); Vilfredo Pareto, *Traité de sociologie générale* (Genève: Éditions Droz, 1968); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Crítica de la razón dialéctica* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1963); Idem, “Los condenados de la tierra,” in Idem, *Colonialismo y Neocolonialismo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1965), 123–141; Isabelle Sommier, *La violencia revolucionaria* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 2009); Georges Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence* (Paris: Éditions Marcel Rivière, 1972); Simone Weil, *Opresión y libertad* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1957); for a recent general study, see Matthieu de Nanteuil, *Face à la violence, Tome 1: Représentations* (Bordeaux: Le Bord de L’Eau, 2024).

comprehending and engaging reality. To clarify the grounds of this, I will begin with a few brief indications of the position of intercultural philosophy within our present context.

The first indication, broadly stated, concerns the understanding of intercultural philosophy as a *committed philosophy*, which Ignacio Ellacuría called *historical reality*.⁵ In other words, intercultural philosophy, as a philosophy of the world and for the world, develops a conception of philosophy that assumes philosophy, far from avoiding the conflict of history or taking refuge in the famous “ivory tower,” must confront the horror and terror that is spread in the world today.

It follows, secondly, that intercultural philosophy recognizes itself as the heiress of the millenary and plural tradition that conceives philosophy as a guardian and practitioner of truth, goodness, and justice. In this sense, philosophy intervenes in history with the will and intention of contributing to the interruption of the flow of the “common evil” in the various places of the world shaped by human beings, transforming those places into havens for the generation of the *sense and meaning of humanity*.

Lastly, the third complementary indication is that intercultural philosophy, drawn from what has been said, articulates in its reflective task a movement that runs counter to what Hegel proposed, that is, the task and method of philosophy lies in the elevation of reality to the concept.⁶ By contrast, intercultural philosophy understands that the challenge is to be inserted in the movement of the real, or more specifically for our purposes, into the contexts of the negativity of the contemporary world, in order to obtain not only a “concept” of the true state of affairs, but also to listen to the wounds of life and to the demands for reparative interventions.

It is at this point that the need arises to assume a stance in the world with the will to “wager with the poor of the earth,”⁷ to borrow José Martí’s formulation, or to contribute to the redemption of reality and human life from their condition of “damaged life,” following Theodor Adorno.⁸

However, I will conclude the explanation of the position of intercultural philosophy,⁹ in order to return to the issue that is at the core of the

⁵ Ignacio Ellacuría, *Filosofía de la realidad histórica* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas,” 1990).

⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, in Idem, *Theorie Werkausgabe, Band 7* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 26ff.

⁷ José Martí, *Versos sencillos III*, in Idem, *Obras Completas, tomo 16* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), 67.

⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, in Idem, *Gesamtschriften, Band 4* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), 43.

⁹ For a detailed presentation of the spirit of intercultural philosophy, see the following works by Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía. Ejercicios teóricos y prácticos de filosofía intercultural desde Latinoamérica en el contexto de la globalización* (Bilbao: Editorial Desclée de Brouwer, 2001); *Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural* (Aachen: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2004); and *Tareas y*

reflections in this section. As has been repeatedly emphasized, intercultural philosophy is understood here as a mode of philosophy that endeavors to *respond* both to the world and the human being and to the resonances of the organicity of life. It is a fundamental attitude that reflects the *attentive and obedient respect for the sanctity of life*, and understood as the mystery of existence, as it is called among wisdom traditions of different origins.

From this fundamental attitude, intercultural philosophy confronts the ethical challenge presented and fostered by negativity in the contemporary world with the decided intention of contributing to the integral *healing* of life, or to the restoration of its original harmony. This is why intercultural philosophy poses to itself the same question that Jean-Paul Sartre once asked in French colonial society in relation to the neurosis provoked by its own system of violence: “Will we be healed?”¹⁰

Like Sartre, intercultural philosophy responds to this question with a yes. However, whereas Sartre entrusted the potential healing to revolutionary violence,¹¹ intercultural philosophy does not share this capacity for violence. On the contrary, as anticipated earlier, it considers that healing must depart from the logic and dynamics of violence, from the domain of negativity and the ways it operates, and turns toward the *substance* and *language* of the organicity of life as the guiding principle for a path toward healing.¹²

What is evidently at play here is the legacy of wisdom embodied by intercultural philosophy. The *memory of humanity* that this philosophy preserves and cultivates, is what enables intercultural philosophy to critically discern the violent constellation of the world and the life of negativity as forms of a disorder, while at the same time affirming wisdom as a guide toward an order of *harmony* and *Concordia*. This resonates in the *substance* and *language* of reality, functioning as a principle that promises the healing of the wounds caused by the disorder of negativity.

This wisdom of humanity, interculturally intertwined, is what allows intercultural philosophy to confront the negativity of the contemporary world in a manner that rejects violence and finds its direction in the

propuestas de la Filosofía Intercultural (Aachen: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2009). To understand the theoretical development and practical realization of intercultural philosophy as a community task, it is important to follow the “International Congresses for Intercultural Philosophy” ongoing since 1995, as well as the work carried by the International School for Intercultural Philosophy (EIFI). Its webpage (www.eifi.one) provides extensive information and documentation of these congresses.

¹⁰ Sartre, “Los condenados de la tierra,” 140.

¹¹ Sartre’s answer says: “Violence, like Achilles’ spear, can heal the wounds it has inflicted.” See Sartre, “Los condenados de la tierra,” 140.

¹² For an explanation of the ideas of organicity and interculturality of *substance* and the *language* of the world and humanity, see Fornet-Betancourt, *La interculturalidad entre los mundos de la vida y la civilización capitalista*.

profound mystery of harmony and Concordia that manifests itself as a sacrament of peace in the organicity of life.

Intercultural philosophy thus involves itself in the world's negativity, from the awareness that the order of peace, the splendor to which the world is called to contribute, is not built or produced as another work of human "engineering." Rather, it is born from the concordant organicity of the soul of the world, that is, from the intercultural *substance* and *language* of the world and life themselves.

Peace is *nourishment*, and *language* is the music and reason of the Universe.¹³

In the wisdom of the soul of the universe, intercultural philosophy finds both the foundation and the guiding principle for its peacemaking mission within a world that, because of the effects of the works of negativity, is torn and destroyed by violent contradictions. It is, therefore, understandable that Raimon Panikkar has described intercultural philosophy as a "philosophia pacis,"¹⁴ specifying that "it is something more than a peaceful philosophy; it is a philosophy that reflects the harmony of reality and at the same time contributes to that harmony; a philosophy that is simultaneously cause and effect of peace; an effect of peace insofar as it emerges from a peaceful and calm spirit; and a cause of peace insofar as it increases or re-establishes the harmony of the universe."¹⁵

In this sense, the intervention of intercultural philosophy in the face of the world's negativity, with the explicit intention of *healing* reality, is fulfilled in a peacemaking mission. To make this mission feasible, intercultural philosophy proposes the path of dialogue. Let us mention something regarding this peaceful and peacemaking path.

For intercultural philosophy, dialogue represents the true path to peace within the negativity of today's world, because dialogue is not merely an instrument for peace but rather embodies and communicates an experience of peace. Dialogue here does not refer to more-or-less sincere negotiations to reach, for example, political, social, or cultural agreements. Instead, it leads to a process of inversion of realities that begins in a *conversed conscience* (*oriented* toward peace), in which the first word to be heard is the memorial word of the integrity of the world and life. Listening to this first word already conveys peace.

¹³ I follow José Martí, who, with the wisdom of a poet capable of uttering words that open onto what they create, writes in one of his poems: "Everything is lovely and constant. Everything is music and reason." Martí, *Versos sencillos I*, 65. Regarding the meaning of the poetic word as a founding element of permanence, see the commentary of Martin Heidegger on Friedrich Hölderlin's Hymn, *Andenken*, where the German poet affirms that "What is permanent is founded by poets" [Was bleibt aber, stiften die Dichter]. Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlins Hymne 'Andenken'," in Idem, *Gesamtausgabe Band 52* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1982).

¹⁴ Raimon Panikkar, *Paz y desarme cultural* (Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1993), 29f.

¹⁵ Panikkar, *Paz y desarme cultural*, 30.

Thus, when speaking of dialogue, intercultural philosophy speaks of peace within the historical world. Such dialogue implies the questioning of those contexts, structures, and positions that have caused disequilibrium in the world and in humanity, leading to fragmentation into violent and self-destructive antagonisms.

That is why, for intercultural philosophy, dialogue constitutes a demanding process of inversion of realities. Hence, dialogue is a process of contrast and discernment of realities, guided by the intention of unblocking – through reference to that third superior instance – the original and founding word of peace inherent in the integrity which has been obstructed by the violence of the powers of negativity of the contemporary world.

In more positive terms, dialogue fosters peace, making it possible to reestablish the flow of what Martí called “the music and reason of the universe” or the “rhythm of being,” as Raimon Panikkar expressed it.¹⁶

The constitutive moments of this peacemaking dialogue, namely dialogue by and for peace, involve the inversion of realities, or the reversion of the negativity of the world toward the order of peace, the vindication of justice, and the demand for equilibrium. Conditions for these processes make it possible for proportioned and reciprocal relationships with the elements that comprise the rhythmic wholeness of reality as a living organism. Justice and restitution are such constitutive moments in dialogue as a pathway toward peace. To avoid any “irenist” misunderstanding, these moments are essential and necessary as constitutive, not supplementary or additional, for they are from the internal constitution of the order of peace.

Without these elements, dialogue as a process of inversion of realities would evidence the absence of peace in the experience of dialogue, as well as in its practice to reverse the course of realities that are shaped by the forces of the world’s negativity.

When I emphasize the importance of dialogue in these reflections, this should not be interpreted as a relativization of its centrality in the pathway to peace. Rather, dialogue takes place in the context of a historical world, due to the fact that negativity is profoundly linked to the mechanistic image of the world and the human being. Thus, dialogue has an irreplaceable emancipatory potential. As an expression of peace in the soul of the world, dialogue reveals that, despite shadows and walls that try to prevent it, human beings can recover the bonds with the organicity of life, recognize themselves as *members* of one living body, and return –

¹⁶ Panikkar, *Paz y desarme cultural*, 32. On this page, one can read the first of the nine “sutras” on peace presented by Panikkar: “Peace is the participation in the harmony of being.” See also Idem, *El ritmo del Ser. Las Gifford Lectures*, in Idem, *Obras Completas, Tome X, I* (Barcelona: Editorial Herder, 2019).

following Heidegger – “to the broadest scope of openness”¹⁷ in existence, undertaking the regeneration or healing of the world and its inter-human relationships.

Intercultural philosophy, therefore, intends to awaken the consciousness of the original communion with the organicity of life. It seeks to correct the negative course of a historical world that has muted life and humanity by imposing its mechanistic law, in which only the information “platforms,” the applications (“apps”), and programs “speak.” In response, intercultural philosophy tries to recuperate the word of the world, that is, the word of peace of its organicity, as the starting point to heal what has been damaged by the forces of negativity in the contemporary world. In other words, intercultural philosophy commits to the path of dialogue as a path of peace, in which the experience of life becomes an experience of meaning in the harmony of the universe as its ultimate goal.

This perspective, offered by intercultural philosophy, confronts the power of negativity without being trapped by those who spread the “common evil” through the work of negativity in the contemporary world. It lives with the hope that the work of negativity will not prevail. It trusts that the works of negativity, despite its mechanization of life and the human mind, will not triumph over the *humanness* of human beings. The *memory of humanity* will not disappear from the current constellation of realities, because such memory has preoccupied human history with the most profound human questions regarding organic existence, meaning of life, and the fulfillment of life as peace.

It is true that, given the extreme inequality produced by the struggle between mechanicism and organicity, this trust in the persistence of the *humanness* might seem unfounded, or merely as an expression of a nostalgic wish without realistic projection in today’s world.

However, we must bear in mind that our era is not the first in history in which *humanity* has suffered the systematic stalking of the negative power. If we still feel that humanity is threatened in its *humanity*, it is because humanity learned how to persist through other ages and remain operative in our own historical reality, which serves as evidence of the ongoing confrontation between negativity and the organic meaning of life.

It is therefore not unfounded to say that the trust that sustains this perspective of intercultural philosophy is grounded in memory. The work of the negative has never been able to accomplish, at least not fully, its intentions in the world, not even in those moments when its abysmal darkness and brutality seem to indicate the triumph of the “powers of evil.”

This trust is supported by the other chain of tradition in the ambivalent history of humanity: the noble chain of humanizing memory, which,

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, “Why be a poet?” [*¿Para qué ser poeta?*], in Idem, *Sendas perdidas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1960), 258.

in the name of the irreducible value of the wholeness of life, resists and rebels against the destructive powers of evil. This noble chain reaches us, making our time an age that still remains open to the ultimate meaning of the world and the human being.

However, this historical support does not resolve the issue for us today. Human history's ambivalence and contingency prevent this trust from becoming a certainty that can ensure that our age will not be the first in which humanity suffers a definitive defeat in its consciousness of being *human*. But this does not prevent the support of the memory of *humanity* to resist the temptation of resignation and defeatism. More than that, it sustains the struggle for a *human* future. Moreso, inspiring the search for pathways to reverse the negative course of the world today, such as the contrasting realities through dialogue offered by intercultural philosophy.

To embrace this perspective as a call to subversive actions in contemporary societies is crucial to recognize that the work of negativity does not merely penetrate the structures and institutions that regulate our social coexistence and our relationship with nature, underlined in this article. The power of the negative also penetrates the human *heart*, threatening the order of the organ that most intimately connects a person with the organicity of life.¹⁸

Confrontation with the negativity of the world today, at least from the perspective proposed here, requires dialogue as a process of inversion of realities in the historical world. It also entails a more specific movement of inversion of realities within the human being, a response to the expansion of the negative from an integral process of internal and external dimensions. This dual process of inversion of realities opens further study and exploration.

(Translated from Spanish by Barbara Swett-Hansen)

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¹⁸ For the current discussion regarding the meaning of the "heart" as a symbol for the "region" that is at the core of the need for *humanity* in the universe of the human inner self, see *Das Herz. Perspektiven auf die Mitte des Menschen zwischen Glauben und Vernunft*, eds. Therese Feiler and Peter Schütz (Paderborn: Brill/Schöningh Verlag, 2024).

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Interculturality and Globalization: Toward a Contextual Understanding of Human Agency in Raúl Fornet-Betancourt's Reflections¹

Tone Svetelj

Introduction

The globalization process offers many previously unimaginable benefits, which include, among others, a much broader, universal, and holistic self-perception of the human agent. The same process, however, also creates new tensions and previously unknown challenges on different levels in and between individuals and nations. Depicting the global picture, Nobel prize winner Joseph Stiglitz, in his book *Globalization and Its Discontents Revisited*, claims that despite the many benefits of globalization, the big winners of globalization are only the global one percent – the multimillionaires and billionaires, some big multinational corporations, and the new middle classes in India and China. A growing inequality within and between countries has followed the principles of a liberalized, globalized free-market economy, which, in fact, is unable to deliver benefits to large portions of the population. Decades ago, local factories were sources of prosperity, education for younger generations, and racial integration; this is no longer the case anymore. By pushing differences among people to higher levels, the necessary basis for the creation of local community and personal identity is weakening. If this is the case, then the rules of globalization have been poorly designed, and the entire process of globalization has been mismanaged.²

How to become more human in globalized world is the key concern of this article, which is based on the philosophical reflections of the Cuban-German philosopher Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (1946-), one of the leading representatives of the philosophy of interculturality. His work represents a radical rethinking of how philosophy itself should be practiced in our globalized, multicultural world. He suggests that philosophy should

¹ This study is a modified version of Tone Svetelj, "Rediscovery of Universal Human in Raúl Fornet-Betancourt's Philosophy of Interculturality," in *The Role of Intercultural Encounters. Re-Learning to be Human for Global Times* (Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series IVA, vol. 60), eds. Dan Chitioiu and Oana Cogeanu (Washington DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2021), 59–76.

² Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents Revisited: Anti-Globalization in the Era of Trump* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017), xvii–xxv.

become a collaborative human project enriched by the full diversity of human wisdom and traditions.³ Fornet-Betancourt's philosophy primarily emerges from the German-speaking parts of Europe and is grounded in the need to integrate other cultures into one's own philosophical reflection in order to create an intercultural perspective. His philosophical inquiry draws inspiration from Immanuel Kant's *Logik* and its four famous questions: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope? and What is the Human Being? These are questions that cannot be asked with personal tranquility or cultural equilibrium; rather they shape our anthropological inquiry, our position within it, and our history, present, and future.⁴ In anticipation of the paper's conclusion, Fornet-Betancourt seeks to bring conceptions of the human being into intercultural dialogue, which can help us ask anew the meaning of the human being.

The aim of this article is to analyze Fornet-Betancourt's philosophy of interculturality. The first half examines his key terms (culture, interculturality, philosophy), while the second half focuses on the search for how to become more human within the process of globalization.

Intercultural Transformation of Philosophy

Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, born in Cuba in 1946 and currently a professor of missiology in Aachen, Germany, has been in contact with many cultures from the very beginning of his life: European, Hispanic, and African.⁵ His philosophical thought belongs to the tradition of ethical humanism, rooted in the Jewish-Christian tradition and enriched by the philosophical thought of Karl Marx, Emanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, José Martí, Enrique Dussel, and the theology of liberation. The philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, especially his distinction between the subject and the

³ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt's project has sparked substantial debate on whether true intercultural dialogue is possible given global power imbalances, how to avoid romanticizing non-Western cultures, how to implement intercultural philosophy at the institutional level, and how to recognize and prevent intra-cultural oppression. See Amanda S.F. Prazeres, "Breaking Barriers in Intercultural Philosophy: The Power of Empathy and Interrelationship," *Transformação* 47, no. 2 (2024): 1–18; Bron Taylory, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (London: Continuum, 2008); Eric S. Nelson, "Intercultural Philosophy and Intercultural Hermeneutics: A response to Defoort, Wenning, and Marchal," *Philosophy East and West* 70, no. 1 (Jan. 2020): 1–13; Franz M. Wimmer, "Intercultural Philosophy – Problems and Perspectives," *CIRPIT Review* 4 (2013): 115–124.

⁴ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, ed., *Menschenbilder interkulturell. Kulturen der Humanisierung und der Anerkennung. Concepts of Human Being and Interculturality. Cultures of Humanization and Recognition. Concepciones del Ser Humano e Interculturalidad. Culturas de Humanización y Reconocimiento*. Dokumentation des VII. Internationalen Kongress für Interkulturelle Philosophie. Concordia Reihe Monographien, Bd. 48 (Frankfurt am Main: Wissenschaftsverlag, Mainz, 2008), 27–29.

⁵ Michelle Becka, *Interkulturalität im Denken Raúl Fornet-Betancourts*. Interkulturelle Bibliothek (Nordhausen: Verlag Traugott Bautz, 2007), 13–18.

other, has been particularly influential in Fornet-Betancourt's reflection. These and other directions within philosophy are, in Fornet-Betancourt's view, expressions of the Latin concept *humanitas* or the Greek *philantropia*, which literally means "loving what makes us human." *Humanitas* is a dynamic term that designates the process of the formation of human existence with and through other humans. In Fornet-Betancourt's words, the formation of a moral subject is always defined through relationships with other subjects, which are not abstract but concrete and lived.⁶

Even though Fornet-Betancourt focuses strongly on Latin American philosophy, his interest is not limited to this region. For him, philosophy cannot be the domain of a particular culture or continent; rather, it must transcend and unify different cultures in a way that no one feels superior or inferior. The task of philosophy, according to Fornet-Betancourt, is to recognize cultural diversity and, through this recognition, to develop a new framework for the peaceful conviviality of different cultures, i.e., a new humanism. In other words, Fornet-Betancourt advocates an inter-cultural transformation of philosophy, based on dialogue among cultures. To reach this dialogue, philosophy must first critically review its way of thinking in order to become aware of the monocultural limitations of its concepts, and second, to develop new ideas and approaches capable of confronting the challenges of our time.⁷

Following the interpretation of Doris G. Fernández and Álvaro B. Márquez-Fernández, Fornet-Betancourt's intercultural philosophy is, at its heart, a critique of modern capitalism, which has fundamentally altered human self-understanding by converting subjects into beings passionate for private property.⁸ This transformation of consciousness has reshaped the very human condition, making superficial reforms insufficient and inadequate. What is required instead is a thorough reconceptualization of what it means to be human. Metaphorically, Fornet-Betancourt speaks of a collective pilgrimage, a concept reclaimed from Hegel.⁹ The assumption is that different cultures and communities move together toward a shared destiny, which needs to be rediscovered through a new understanding of philosophy. Such a philosophy demands a fundamental methodological

⁶ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Interculturalidad y Globalización, Ejercicios de Crítica Filosófica Intercultural en el Contexto de la Globalización Neoliberal*. Denktraditionen im Dialog: Studien zur Befreiung und Interkulturalität, Bd. 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2000), 109.

⁷ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Philosophical Presuppositions of Intercultural Dialogue*. Polylog, 42–45, <https://them.polylog.org/1/ffr-en.htm>. See also Raul Fornet-Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía*. Palimpsesto: Derechos Humanos y Desarrollo 11 (Bilbao: Desclée De Brouwer, 2001).

⁸ Doris Gutiérrez Fernández and Álvaro B. Márquez-Fernández, "Raúl Fornet-Betancourt: diálogo y filosofía intercultural," *Fronesis* 11, no. 3 (2004): 9–39.

⁹ Fernández and Márquez-Fernández, "Raúl Fornet-Betancourt: diálogo y filosofía intercultural."

shift beyond the traditional subject-object distinction of Western philosophy, toward a plurality of subjects who interpret their own realities and enter into dialogue with each other.¹⁰ Fernet-Betancourt calls for a literacy campaign across the many worlds we inhabit, arguing that contemporary society has become illiterate due to interpretations that decontextualize historical realities. To counter this, he advocates pluralizing the sources of philosophy, recognizing philosophical wisdom in the voices of people, in oral traditions, and in everyday life practices. Such a philosophy privileges praxis over abstract theories and manifests itself in cultural experiences and moments of lived reality. By returning to things themselves, to the actual voices and narratives of marginalized peoples, philosophy can rediscover and describe religions and cultures through their own stories rather than through colonial lenses. In this way, the world can be transformed by changing the very conditions of human existence.

To accelerate our comprehension of Fernet-Betancourt's philosophical thought, the following will focus separately on the meaning of culture, interculturality, and finally, his philosophy of interculturality.

Meaning of Culture

In Fernet-Betancourt's reflection, the meaning of culture is one of the key elements for a new understanding of what it means to be human. Culture is not a fixed essence that determines human identity; rather, it is an open, complex, dynamic, historically situated reality, fundamentally oriented toward liberation. Culture should not be understood as museums or static repositories of human existence, but as both the source and the horizon of history and of the concrete actions of people in their daily lives.¹¹ The dynamism of culture is such that it can never be in position of retirement and live out of its pension. Any one-sided emphasis on one's own culture or its sacralization leads to the erosion of its life-dynamism.

Culture represents substantial power that orients members of a community toward fulfilling their life necessities and realizing their life plans, including daily coping with their concerns and worries. It is the space in which human goals and values take shape; through them, members of a community define themselves and create social organizations that reflect their contextual and material universe.¹² When material necessities

¹⁰ Fernández and Márquez-Fernández, "Raúl Fernet-Betancourt: diálogo y filosofía intercultural."

¹¹ Raúl Fernet-Betancourt, "Einführung," in *Kulturen zwischen Tradition und Innovation. Stehen wir am Ende der traditionellen Kulturen?* Dokumentation des III. Internationalen Kongresses für Interkulturelle Philosophie, Denktraditionen im Dialog: Studien zur Befreiung und Interkulturalität, Bd. 11, ed. Raúl Fernet-Betancourt (Frankfurt am Main: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2001), 22.

¹² Fernet-Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía*, 181.

become scarce and limited, the foundations of a culture and its members are shaken and threatened. No wonder why the globalization process, if based exclusively on internationalization of production and economy, menaces the profoundly material livelihood of nations, cultures, and individuals, as well as their identities.

Fornet-Betancourt sees culture as foundational to how groups of people interpret the world. This interpretation should not be understood as something deterministic, but as a set of choices and actions through which members of a culture engage with their world. Culture is thus not a passive inheritance but a critical engagement.¹³ Fornet-Betancourt assumes that cultures are contextual frameworks that shape how people act, think, feel, and organize social life. As such, culture is a source of meaning and a sense of the real, not merely an object to be studied; it articulates specific visions of life and reality that philosophy must take seriously.

Consequently, the plurality of cultures implies multiple, interacting worldviews rather than a single universal standard. Each cultural universe is constituted through historical interaction, conflict, and exchange with others. This insight leads directly to the project of interculturality, in which cultures are recognized as equal participants in dialogue and the co-creation of shared meaning. An individual's identity is intrinsically intertwined with culture. No human being exists without a specific culture. This relationship, however, is not absolutely determined. Whole culture shapes its members, so members also shape their own culture. This idea is crucial to Fornet-Betancourt's understanding of philosophy since the thinker's cultural background inevitably imprints every form of human thinking, a point to be further discussed in the section on interculturality.

In addition, Fornet-Betancourt does not view culture as a monolithic entity but rather as a dynamic interplay of different traditions within the same culture. These traditions, with their opposing and conflicting forces, create internal dynamism of a culture, which Fornet-Betancourt describes as a dialectic of liberating and oppressing lines of traditions inherent to a culture.¹⁴ Consequently, when we speak of a culture, we inevitably refer to a particular tradition within it, which becomes so strong and dominating that its presence determines that culture. A certain tradition, or sometimes even multiple traditions, together with their correlated interpretations, gain priority over other possible traditions or interpretations. As such, it determines what the essence of tradition or interpretation is, as well as how it differs from other traditions. Every culture, therefore, undergoes a double process of delimitation not only of what belongs to our and their

¹³ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, "Aprender a filosofar desde el contexto del diálogo de las culturas," *Revista de Filosofía* 90 (1997): 365–382.

¹⁴ Fornet-Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía*, 187.

culture, but also of what delineates and shapes our culture within.¹⁵ For this reason, it is very naïve to believe that our understanding of others or a foreign culture can be grounded solely in conceptual descriptions. Our interpretations of cultures are always based on a degree of banalization and simplification, influenced by exotic statements from the tourism industry, portrayals from media tabloids, and political discourse. Conceptual understanding is a useful tool that, at the same time, hinders our understanding of cultural reality.

Every culture also contains certain liberating forces that oppose the dominant mainstream practices. Fernet-Betancourt calls this phenomenon *cultural disobedience*,¹⁶ which can manifest in different ways, such as the critique of present cultural forms and the overemphasis on the rights of all members of a culture, including the right to have one's own worldview. Hopefully, members may realize that their worldview is not the only possible one. Critique, the rediscovery of one's right, the creation of one's own worldview, and the discovery of other possible worldviews, together constitute, in Fernet-Betancourt's reflection, an invitation to encounter other cultures and reexamine one's relationship to one's own culture. Cultural disobedience thus leads to new practices of liberation against the stabilized and sacralized understanding of culture.

Fernet-Betancourt's analysis makes us aware that the concept of culture is a highly complex and historically situated construct. It encompasses ideas of openness, diverse dynamics, inner transformation, and life-orientation, as well as exclusion, delimitation, stasis, choice, and appropriation. Given this complexity, a conceptual comprehension of culture is not possible; what remains possible is an ongoing description.

From Culture to Interculturality

What does "interculturality" mean? If we follow the logic of the Occidental scientific culture, centered on conceptual definitions, then our definition of interculturality will introduce a new boundary in relation to cultures that do not share Western emphasis on conceptual centrality, as Fernet-Betancourt argues in *Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural*.¹⁷ In addition, every conceptual definition contains a degree of delimitation, fragmentation, and subdivision. While these categories are important for advancing human knowledge, they can also pose an obstacle to genuine understanding of interculturality. Human sciences, such as pedagogy, literature, linguistics, politics, sociology, philosophy, theology,

¹⁵ Fernet-Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía*, 258.

¹⁶ Fernet-Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía*, 186ff.

¹⁷ Raúl Fernet-Betancourt, *Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural*. *Concordia, Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie*. Reihe Monographien, Band 37 (Frankfurt am Main: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2004), 19–21.

etc., can definitively analyze the meaning of interculturality. Their fragmentation and subdivision, however, carry the risk of losing the substance and historical dimension of interculturality. Conceptual definition might also reduce interculturality to an object of scientific study, as something simply in front of us, as an external phenomenon. In this case, we follow the logic of dualism, which separates the knowing subject from the object of things. This logic reduces interculturality to something objective, upon which we reflect from a certain distance. As a result, cultural practices and the daily lives of concrete people in a given culture become objects of observation and knowing; the same knowledge, produced through this process, at the same time, becomes an impediment to our comprehension of what is central to that culture.

It is therefore not surprising that Fonet-Betancourt approaches the definition of interculturality with caution. If trapped in a subject-object logic, the observed reality inevitably escapes an adequate understanding. And whatever definition of interculturality we choose cannot be understood as the final definition, but as the starting point for a shared common conversation about what “intercultural” might mean both from one’s own perspective and from the perspective of the interlocutor. The search for the meaning of interculturality should go beyond the mere exchange of concepts and theories. It is not a process that takes place outside of us; it rather first begins within us through our struggle to define it. This struggle first transforms our comprehension of ourselves, and second, our understanding of others. In this sense, our search for the meaning of interculturality is a process of the construction of interculturality.

Specifically, Fonet-Betancourt describes his definition of interculturality as a definition of contrasts,¹⁸ which suggests a dialogical understanding with other cultures as its point of departure. From this perspective, he conceives interculturality as a methodology that enables us to study, describe, and analyze the dynamic interactions among cultures. At the same time, interculturality is a process of real life, or a form of conscientious life based on an ethical position in favor of conviviality with differences. Such a methodology can, in turn, become a political project, seen as an alternative to the current asymmetrical distribution of world powers, as well as a cultural project based on a reciprocal recognition.¹⁹

In other words, Fonet-Betancourt’s notion of interculturality cannot be understood in a narrow conceptual manner, nor merely from a comparative study of cultural positions. He proposes that no culture, and no philosophical reflection, is complete in itself. This insight calls for a dialogue. A culture, when aware of its limitations, is willing to share its wisdom and richness with others while not imposing its own ideas. Fonet-

¹⁸ Fonet-Betancourt, *Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural*, 12.

¹⁹ Fonet-Betancourt, *Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural*, 13.

Betancourt's notion of interculturality is basically a description of an attitude toward encountering and engaging with other people and their way of thinking, living, and practicing. A beneficial encounter can lead to mutual correction and the enrichment of existing practices.²⁰

Philosophy of Interculturality

One might say that this kind of philosophy is as old as philosophy itself, insofar as philosophers in different times and traditions have looked for answers to the question of how to live with foreigners. With Fornet-Betancourt, however, the philosophy of interculturality reaches new dimensions. He claims that interculturality is much more than a method or a theory for understanding the world and the humanity that we are. Interculturality constitutes a fundamental dimension of the historical process by which the world and humanity develop over time their forms of reality and coexistence. In this sense, interculturality is the substance that nourishes both the world and humanity so that they may be historically real, and, moreover, it represents the language through which both express that their real becoming takes place in a plural manner.²¹

Philosophy, understood in this way, should not be an abstract reflection on imaginary problems. Rather, it should reflect on the challenges of its time in an authentic and engaged way, and more specifically, take care of people who coexist and struggle to find better ways of living together. Authenticity and engagement in this case do not mean an external creation of a new theory and its imposition upon people. Instead, they mean to take care of people's real lives, especially their precarious, helpless lives of necessities, and to reflect seriously on the lives of those who have been humiliated and disadvantaged in our society.²² Such engagement is based on the condition that we are willing to assume interculturality as a way of life and a mode of thinking, which will most likely unsettle the thinking habits of our present monocultural socialization and learning processes.²³

Although Fornet-Betancourt belongs to the group of Western philosophers, this does not mean that his philosophy of interculturality is confined to the Western world. In our time of globalization, every culture, tradition, religion, or continent is facing the challenges of how to integrate

²⁰ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, ed., *Unterwegs zu einer interkulturellen Philosophie: Dokumentation des II. Internationalen Kongresses für Interkulturelle Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1998), 8.

²¹ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, "Interculturalidad: Lenguaje del mundo y de la humanidad," *Revista Guillermo de Ockham* 22, no. 1 (2024): 1.

²² Fornet-Betancourt, *Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural*, 21–22.

²³ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, ed., *Interaction and Asymmetry between Cultures in the Context of Globalization*. Documentation of the IV. International Congress on Intercultural Philosophy, *Denktraditionen im Dialog: Studien zur Befreiung und Interkulturalität*, Bd. 15 (Frankfurt am Main: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2002), 30.

the other or the foreign into its own lived world. For this reason, it is meaningful to specify intercultural philosophy in Africa, Asia, the Arab world, Latin America, Europe, or in countries like Canada, the United States, or China.²⁴

All forms of philosophical thinking are inherently contextual, i.e., dealing with people lives in a specific community. Contextual thinking is a fundamental and constitutive moment of philosophical perfection, grounded in thinking with people in a concrete situation, rather than merely thinking for them. Such mode of thinking is complex and dynamic, involving a critique of cultural, social, economic, political, religious, and academic practices through which people justify their life's aspirations. In addition, contextual thinking reexamines the so-called ideals of modern society, such as autonomy, the primacy of individual freedom, the disenchantment of the world and the human being, individualism, etc. If these ideas have been inherited from the previous generations of philosophical thinking, maybe it is time now to correct and complement them with values of responsibility, community, and gratitude.²⁵

Is Western philosophy ready for a paradigm primarily based on co-existence and dialogue in, with, and from different cultural worlds? Fornet-Betancourt offers an affirmative answer with an overview of the various directions of postmodern philosophical thought within the European context.²⁶ In his interpretations, these directions are expressions of the *Zeitgeist*, indicating the surging emergency and gradual unfolding of a new horizon of thinking, acting, and dialogue. The philosophy of interculturality reads these developments as steps toward a dialogue between different paradigms of thought and toward the creation of new ways of co-existence.

The first group of European philosophers (Wilhelm Dilthey, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger) tries to comprehend and transcend the central pillars and coordinates of modernity. The second group is associated with the so-called linguistic turn and the reconstruction of understanding of discursive or communicative reason, represented by Karl-Otto Apel, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jürgen Habermas. This new understanding of communicative reason stresses the necessity of both difference and universality, which, in Fornet-Betancourt's view, leads to the construction of a new paradigm of dialogue between different traditions. The third group is constituted by Paul Ricoeur's philosophy through his narrative, interpretation, and openness to others. It includes an action toward a balance of justice and love, and the reaffirmation of the human

²⁴ See Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, ed., *Zur Geschichte und Entwicklung der Interkulturellen Philosophie*. Denktraditionen im Dialog: Studien zur Befreiung und Interkulturalität. Bd. 39 (Frankfurt am Main: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2015).

²⁵ Fornet-Betancourt, *Filosofar para uestro tiempo en clave intercultural*, 23.

²⁶ Fornet-Betancourt, *Filosofar para uestro tiempo en clave intercultural*, 31–34.

person as the best horizon for philosophical argumentation. As the fourth group, Fornet-Betancourt refers to Xavier Zubiri and his dialogue with other grand traditions of the past, alongside Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and its call for a "return to the things themselves." The fifth group is represented by Emmanuel Levinas with the question "what did you do to your brother?" calling for a new understanding of freedom of responsibility. The sixth group includes thinkers of critical theories in the areas of aesthetics, communication, music, and politics, whose common denominator is a critique of capitalist mentality and society dominated by sensations and consumption. The seventh group consists of those who are reflecting on the construction of new political and cultural unities, such as the European Union, which also involves integrating strangers and immigrants. Finally, the eighth group is represented by Raimon Panikkar's philosophy, with its emphasis on intercultural reorientation.

Fornet-Betancourt does not claim to offer an exhaustive list of philosophers; his list is rather an attempt to identify "seeds" in the Western philosophical tradition that are capable of introducing new dimensions into the philosophy of interculturality. He suggests a similar list for Latin American philosophy, which is again conditioned by its own contextuality and, at the same time, nurtures ideas appropriated for the philosophy of interculturality.²⁷ There is no doubt that similar lists can be made for the philosophies of other continents that respect their specific contextual frameworks while opening to what transcends their contextuality.

Interculturality is far more than multiculturalism. Multicultural rhetoric often amounts to mere tolerance or coexistence, without deep exchange or mutual transformation. By contrast, interculturality requires dialogue, mutual enrichment, and a transformative relationship that preserves difference while fostering shared meaning. Therefore, dialogue does not imply tolerance or coexistence but reciprocal encounter in which participants recognize one another's equality and difference and engage in creative exchange capable of generating new knowledge and shared horizons. Such dialogue gives us a universality that is constructed through intercultural dialogue, where diverse perspectives contribute to a shared horizon of co-dignity and common understanding, thereby avoiding both relativism and unilateral claims to universalism.²⁸

Why do we need a reorientation of philosophy rooted in interculturality? Interculturality is now a fact, not a possibility, challenging us to construct a humanity of peaceful coexistence and universal solidarity that overcomes differences and asymmetries and fosters a culture of political, economic, and cultural equilibrium. A reorientation of philosophy, aimed

²⁷ Fornet-Betancourt, *Filosofar para uestro tiempo en clave intercultural*, 35–39.

²⁸ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, "Theoria y praxis de la filosofía intercultural," *Recerca. Revista de Pensament i Anàlisi* 10 (2010): 13–34.

at peaceful coexistence, must confront the primary and most fundamental option, that is, the realization of justice through the eradication of inhuman poverty. This commitment is not just one among many; it is the decisive one that should guide our hermeneutics, politics, metaphysics, ethics, liberation, feminism, and other fields of reflection and action. Such a reorientation must remain attentive to the intercultural dimensions of dialogue and its contextualization, i.e., the specificity of time and place of the persons in dialogue. In other words, an intercultural reorientation of philosophy calls for an open dialogue among different philosophies, contexts, and human worlds, with the aim of creating new possibilities for making our world a better place.

For this reason, intercultural philosophy is not merely a philosophy of dialogue; rather, it is a dialogue of philosophy in, with, and from different cultural worlds. Intercultural philosophy is a philosophical praxis through which humanity seeks a solidary realization of humanity in every human being. The contextual and cultural diversity of humanity should thus be understood as a source of immense richness and undiscovered human potential rather than a justification for separation, limitation, and domination.

This reorientation of philosophy will not take place by itself or by chance, but only emerge if we learn anew how to teach philosophy, i.e., how to establish a new contextual and innovative relationship with philosophical traditions. This renewed engagement will lead not only to a deeper conceptual understanding of the past but also to its appropriation and, consequently, to the transformation of ourselves in the present.²⁹ The history of philosophy should not be treated as a museum of untouchable ideas, but as an open space of diverse philosophical traditions that call upon us to “touch” them anew. Once we become familiar with ideas of different traditions, we must establish a relationship with them that opens a new path of argumentation, interpretation, and the design of reality. This approach should not be reduced to simple paraphrasing of ideas; philosophy must become a living process of appropriating in our time, which can occur only in the present. Here and now, we find ourselves participating in a historical project that unfolds through us and our time. This is a project of liberation and creation of a humanity that is more human, more capable of coexisting, and more profoundly grounded in solidarity.

The entire process of teaching and studying philosophy is a process of contextualization. Philosophers always belong to a specific space, time, or context, which conditions and permeates our present reflection. Accordingly, the teaching of philosophy always remains contextualized and conditioned by our time, history, and daily life. Philosophy, and philosophers, or human beings in general, should not be considered as abstract

²⁹ Fornet-Betancourt, *Filosofar para uestro tiempo en clave intercultural*, 51.

entities that transcend temporal and spatial frameworks; they are always situated within concrete spatial-temporal coordinates. Awareness of the context in which philosophy is taught and practiced becomes the primordial principle of the entire process of appropriation described above. Therefore, contextualization as such offers a remedy to the chronic infirmity of certain types of studying philosophy in our time, in which one man can read entire libraries of ideas, sometimes even in multiple languages, but is unable to comprehend one's own time and space. Even more, the processes of contextualization and appropriation constitute a human formation that enables one to deeply aware of one's belonging to a community, a tradition, and a contextual framework; this awareness opens the possibilities of novelty and the creation of something new.

If our teaching of philosophy pays attention to human belonging to local and contextual reality, it must take into account the context of globalization, which requires an entirely new process of contextualization. Fornet-Betancourt refers to this process as "re-contextualization" of the existing academic program and traditional approaches to the study of interculturality. To reach this goal, he challenges current academic institutions, especially the faculty of philosophy, (1) to cease being centers of westernization; (2) to develop new ways of teaching competence in interculturality; (3) to help students engage with not only a given text but first and foremost their own contexts; (4) to reformulate the ideal of education as the intercultural formation of the human person; and (5) to view so-called intercultural study programs and research projects not through the paradigm of "modernization" of peoples and cultures, but rather as instruments for the universal or cosmic humanization of humanity.³⁰

Interculturality as Philosophy: Seeking the Meaning of the Human

The philosophy of interculturality is not reserved only for professional philosophers; its goal is to serve the world. As Fornet-Betancourt states, "We want to transform philosophy interculturally because we believe that it could and should help to transform the historical world of human beings of today."³¹ With its intention to transform the world, this philosophy invites us to rediscover the meaning of primordial wisdom, renewing our understanding of who we are as humans and of the practices

³⁰ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, ed., *Interculturality, Gender and Education; Interkulturalität, Gender und Bildung; Interculturalidad, Género y Educación; Interculturalité, Genre et Éducation*. Dokumentation des V. Internationalen Kongresses für Interkulturelle Philosophie, Denktraditionen im Dialog: Studien zur Befreiung und Interkulturalität, Bd. 19 (Frankfurt am Main: Wissenschaftsverlag, Mainz, 2004), 19–20.

³¹ Fornet-Betancourt, ed., *Interaction and Asymmetry between Cultures in the Context of Globalization*, 30.

that make us more human. Besides philosophy, theology in the 21st century should also follow a similar path.³²

Following this logic, Fornet-Betancourt's philosophy of interculturality is essentially an ethical project with an appealing demand to take care of others. This ethical dimension has been neglected in the modern age, especially under capitalism and its passion for private property. The meaning of the human has been distorted, reduced, and colonized. Fornet-Betancourt describes this as "a post-civilizing 'Barbarism' that is evident in the destruction of cultures, social exclusion, ecological destruction, racism, the reductionism of our vision of creation, the cosmic disequilibrium that generates a model of life propagated by our media, hunger and malnutrition, and so forth."³³

Intercultural philosophy thus offers a path to rediscover the meaning of the human – not by inventing it anew, but by recovering what has been lost, suppressed, or distorted through monocultural domination. Indigenous peoples have already known what it means to be human and possessed profound anthropological wisdom. Therefore, the problem is not a lack of knowledge about humanity, but rather the suppression and cover-up of alternative, non-Western anthropological wisdom.³⁴

To be human is to be more than any single culture imagines on its own. The full meaning of humanity emerges only when we listen to all voices, recognize all sources of wisdom, and create space for mutual transformation through encounter.

Interculturality, with its aim of fostering peaceful coexistence and conviviality among nations and individuals, calls for a proactive engagement with people's real-life challenges, especially those who have been severely disadvantaged and impoverished by globalization. This process has been largely ruled by interests and economic domination of stronger companies and nations. Fornet-Betancourt describes this type of globalization as to "Forget what you know, forget your memory, forget your contextual knowledge, break with your 'tradition' and your 'capacities', and learn everything anew in the school of modernity and under the guidance of an omniscient teacher: the market."³⁵

In contrast to humanity grounded in economic globalization and hegemonic power, Fornet-Betancourt speaks of humanity as "universality

³² Raúl Fornet Betancourt, ed., *Theologie im III. Millennium – Quo vadis? Antworten der Theologen. Dokumentation einer Weltumfrage*. Denktradition im Dialog: Studien zur Befreiung und Interkulturalität, Bd. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2000).

³³ Fornet-Betancourt, "Philosophical Presuppositions of Intercultural Dialogue," 7.

³⁴ Ram Adhar Mall, "Intercultural Philosophy: A Conceptual Clarification," *Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies* 4 (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2016), 81–82.

³⁵ Fornet-Betancourt, *Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural*, 73.

without a signature.”³⁶ Such universality grows as a consciousness of solidarity among differences, in which each recognizes, respects, corrects, and is transformed by the other. This consciousness understands that to be universal means sharing and giving up the idea of possessing or controlling the entire process as one’s own property. Symbolically, this is expressed by placing one’s own signature on everything as one’s own property.

To these two steps, the ethical appeal to care for the disadvantaged and the call for universal awareness, Fornet-Betancourt adds a third one, the crucial role of religion.³⁷ There is no religion without a culture, and every form of interreligious dialogue takes place within intercultural dialogue. It is true that, generally speaking, religion transcends the boundaries of a particular culture, nation, tradition, or race. This is because religion serves as a force of unification and harmonization among different cultures and nations. It is also true that religion cannot exist, be practiced, communicated, or enter into dialogue with other religious identities without the mediation of culture. When we speak of religions, cultures, and traditions, we are referring to the source of personal identification that provides foundations, reasons, and meaning for human life. These foundations provide us with orientation and direction for our creation of history. Without them, humanity would fall into universal arbitrariness, as exemplified by extreme relativism and moral neutrality. Only by knowing our own foundational values and principles first can we enter into a dialogical relationship with other religious and cultural traditions.³⁸

Interculturality and interreligious dialogue are, therefore, intrinsically connected. Interculturality, through its peaceful and enriching dynamic among different religious traditions, can help religious identities move beyond the monocultural frameworks in which they often seem to be trapped. At the same time, interreligious dialogue can offer a new orientation to intercultural dialogue, especially when cultures struggle to recover and create liberating memories. This is another point at which Fornet-Betancourt turns to the religious memories of the poor and the humiliated in the world. It is not possible to pursue human coexistence and peace without commitments to work for and with the poor who serve as a guiding light for our cultural and social transformation.

The goal of the philosophy of interculturality, with dialogue as its central principle, is to “interculturize” the question concerning the human being, i.e., to search for new horizons in the task of humanizing humanity,

³⁶ Fornet-Betancourt, *Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural*, 74.

³⁷ Fornet-Betancourt, *Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural*, 94.

³⁸ See Erika Prijatelj, “Religija, posebno krščanstvo, v dialogu s kulturami in drugimi religijami” [“Religion, especially Christianity, in Dialogue with Cultures and Other Religions”], *Bogoslovni vestnik, Theological Quarterly, Glasilo Teološke fakultete v Ljubljani* 77, no. 2 (2017): 303–310.

or universalizing what it means to be human in each person and in every culture. This service is uncertain, uncontrollable, yet very hopeful as the finite and contingent *condition humana* enters into dialogue with the Infinite to realize its full human potential.³⁹

From this perspective, we can better understand why Fornet-Betancourt's philosophy of interculturality is essentially a critique of multiculturalism and transculturality, as well as of interpretations of cultural and religious differences in terms of violence.⁴⁰ Multiculturalism is a concept that describes the reality of different cultures in a given society. It highlights one of the key principles of liberal political strategies, which aim at maintaining an asymmetry of power between cultures by promoting respect for cultural and religious differences. A multicultural rhetoric tends to overemphasize the importance of respect, tolerance, indifference, and fragmentation of cultural, linguistic, religious, and traditional differences, upon which a hegemonic cultural order is maintained. This understanding of multiculturalism, with its imposition of freedom as the grounding principle of a new social order, is limited and one-sided. In Fornet-Betancourt's analysis, multiculturalism is an expression of a semi-colonialist ideology that consecrates the dominant Western culture as a meta-culture, which benevolently allocates some space to other cultures. The same dominant ideology also claims that cultural and religious institutions are the origin of violence and tension among cultures and religions. Such a view obscures its own instrumental use of cultural and religious differences in the creation of a capitalist hegemonic order.

Interculturality also differs from transculturality, from the postmodern notion that individuals can simply construct their identities by following their own tastes or preferences for as long as they wish. Transculturality is based on two assumptions: first, that members of a society are fully autonomous; and second, that they can move freely from one culture to another. Interculturality does not negate these two assumptions but rather integrates them in a different horizon. From an intercultural perspective, cultural differences should not be seen as separate and independent units; instead, they are moments of meeting, solidarity, and support that must be cultivated for peaceful coexistence. If transculturality favors the idea that different cultures all look alike, interculturality is committed to con-

³⁹ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, ed., *Gutes Leben als Humanisiertes Leben. Vorstellungen vom Guten Leben in den Kulturen und ihre Bedeutung für Politik und Gesellschaft Heute; Good Life as Humanized Life. Concepts of Good Life in Different Cultures and their Meaning for Politics and Societies Today; La Vida Buena como Vida Humanizante. Concepciones de la Vida Buena en las Culturas y Sus Consecuencias para la Política y la Sociedad hoy en Día*. Dokumentation des VIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Interkulturelle Philosophie, Denktraditionen im Dialog: Studien zur Befreiung und Interkulturalität, Bd. 30 (Frankfurt am Main: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2010), 26.

⁴⁰ Fornet-Betancourt, *Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural*, 98–99.

structing a pluralistic world of differences sustained through interactive relationships.

Furthermore, interculturality emphasizes communication and qualitative mutual interaction among cultures and traditions. This approach goes beyond a simple factual coexistence of different cultures in the same social space that is propagated by multiculturalism and transculturality. Coexistence, in itself, is not an added dimension to human life; it is the basic condition and foundation for human existence and for any possible agreement among human beings. How do we give meaning to this coexistence? How do we establish the condition that allows coexistence to be transformed into conviviality in this context? Conviviality emerges as a horizon of practice of agape-love embodied in the early Christian communities.⁴¹

Concluding Remarks

The ultimate goal of interculturality is hope and the creation of peace as an alternative to violence, especially the violence produced by neoliberal globalization, which, in Fornet-Betancourt's view, neglects the contextual nature of human life. Intercultural philosophy, with peace as its primary horizon, expresses the hope that all cultures can contribute forms of knowledge about how to live together in an intercultural equilibrium.

Efforts toward new levels of peace can be summarized with Fornet-Betancourt's call for "change toward a world with spirit," based on the triad of "justice, knowledge, and spirituality."⁴² The most important in this triad is spirituality. This emphasis does not imply a Neo-Platonic or esoteric understanding of spirituality, nor does it suggest an egoistic escape from social reality. Rather, spirituality points us toward a critical experience that enables individuals and communities to guard against the instrumentalization and the reduction of human relationships to objects. The study of different traditions of spirituality should offer a new platform for liberty for all human beings and foster a better understanding of what threatens humanity as whole, thereby leading to a more profound under-

⁴¹ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, ed., *Das menschliche Zusammenleben: Probleme und Möglichkeiten in der heutigen Welt. Eine interkulturelle Annäherung; Living Together: Problems and Possibilities in Today's World. An Intercultural Approximation; La convivencia humana: Problemas y posibilidades en el mundo actual. Una aproximación intercultural*. Dokumentation des IX. Internationalen Kongresses für Interkulturelle Philosophie. Denktraditionen im Dialog: Studien zur Befreiung und Interkulturalität, Bd. 32 (Frankfurt am Main: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2011), 29–30.

⁴² Raúl Fornet Betancourt, ed., *Gerechtigkeit, Erkenntnis und Spiritualität; Justice, Knowledge and Spirituality; Justicia, Conocimiento y Espiritualidad*. Dokumentation des XVII. Internationalen Seminars des Dialogprogramms Nord-Süd, Denktraditionen im Dialog: Studien zur Befreiung und Interkulturalität, Bd. 38 (Frankfurt am Mein: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2014), 18–19.

standing of justice. According to Fernet-Betancourt, the present understanding of justice is narrowly conditioned by knowledge supported by the hegemonic epistemologies grounded in a capitalist system, which, within the framework of globalization, devalues life and diverse ways of living. This same hegemony resists integrating spirituality into the process of human knowing, precisely because spirituality cannot be reduced to things governed by the laws of the market. As a response, Fernet-Betancourt proposes that cultivating of spiritual knowledge will enable us to break the prevailing epistemic totalitarianism and redirect the course of history through a spiritual renewal, which cannot be predicted but becomes a sign of hope.⁴³

To achieve this goal, however, requires more than abstract philosophizing. In this sense, Fernet-Betancourt's philosophy of interculturality can be understood as a continuation of *popular philosophy*, the movement among German philosophers in the 18th century, emerged as a reaction against philosophy as it was taught in the academic world. Proponents of this movement sought to use the scientific method to address concrete problems and challenges of their time, aiming at changing the conditions of the world without treating people as minors.⁴⁴

A possible limitation of Fernet-Betancourt's approach is that it remains abstract at the level of general inquiry, missing normative guidelines or direct confrontation with urgent intercultural challenges, such as fundamentalism, especially religious fundamentalism. This raises some questions: How can intercultural ethics help resolve intercultural conflicts and wars? How can it help eradicate poverty and inequality?⁴⁵

Fernet-Betancourt's intention is not to formulate new guidelines but to develop new perspectives for a new methodology and a new hermeneutics.⁴⁶ These perspectives are rooted in options for the poor as articulated within liberation theology. At the same time, they offer not only a new methodology and hermeneutics, but more fundamentally a new anthropology for our endeavor to become more human within the context of globalization.⁴⁷

⁴³ Betancourt, ed., *Gerechtigkeit, Erkenntnis und Spiritualität*, 20.

⁴⁴ Betancourt, ed., *Gerechtigkeit, Erkenntnis und Spiritualität*, 115–128.

⁴⁵ Gregor Paul, *Einführung in die Interkulturelle Philosophie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008), 121.

⁴⁶ Raúl Fernet-Betancourt, ed., *Befreiungstheologie: Kritischer Rückblick und Perspektiven für die Zukunft. Kritische Auswertung und neue Herausforderungen* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1997), 379–380.

⁴⁷ Elisabeth Steffens and Annette Meuthrath, eds., *Utopia hat einen Ort. Beiträge für eine interkulturelle Welt aus vier Kontinenten. Festschrift für Raúl Fernet-Betancourt* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2006).

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Persons beyond Values: The Spiritual Foundation of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Gabriele D'amico Soggetti

Introduction

While this contribution focuses on Hans Joas's perspective and sociological interpretation of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the path of intellectual inquiry that brought me to Joas is a long one.

It started in the domain of international heritage law and knew when I discovered the generative role of the Holy See and the actuality and richness of the debates on human rights which take place transnationally in intellectual and diplomatic circles where Catholics are included.

The first subject I had in mind for this contribution had a structural rather than cultural (sociological) approach, namely, to focus on the pontifical foundations that structure the aforementioned circles and identify operational strategies through which they could maximize their impact and their resonance *ad gentes*. However, I realized that the current epistemic (and socio-political) crisis that the notion of human rights itself is facing requires, first and foremost, avoiding any action that could be interpreted as a form of appropriation of such vocabulary, by any agent of any sort. The point is not to celebrate an alleged catholicity of human rights, nor to reconstruct in the Magisterium of the Church a set of systematic teachings on human rights. Because I ontologically understand the Apostolic See as a structure of service to the Church whose mission is serving humanity, I have chosen to focus on the human rights movement as it has happened mostly outside the Church since the beginning of the second half of the 20th century and to search for what this movement is more in need of.

One could think that human rights activists would need more financial support, stronger legal guarantees protecting their work, and so on. My take is that the original cause of the current state of disgrace of human rights is an epistemic fuzziness, which in turn generated phenomena of (intellectual) problem avoidance, proliferation and fragmentation of claims and institutions, and ultimately a risk of abandonment and irrelevance that contemporary international politics seems to depict far better than words.

For this reason, I have focused on the UDHR, read through the lens of Hans Joas, whose work is in turn placed in the perspective of multiple key thinkers who have devoted themselves to the epistemic question of human rights as it emerges from the notion of universality enshrined in the UDHR.

The first section will thus be devoted to jumping into this fuzziness, discovering the crucial role that the UDHR plays as an epistemic anchor. In the second one, I will try to unpack the notion of human rights as enshrined in the UDHR, borrowing from the Pope Francis's expressions, such as the verticality of human rights or their being rooted in a quest for the absolute, though referencing mostly secular academics who have reached – through different paths – not the same conclusions but the same awareness on the order of priority of the cultural and structural problems which the human rights movement is facing. Joas will be the most relevant of these thinkers, as I understand his perspective on value generalization as the closest intellectual construct to the notion of *Semper Reformatio*, a universalist paradigm questioning ethical stability within cultural evolution crafted by Joseph Ratzinger in the 1990s, which I find of great future usefulness in the socio-political debates questioning how values can be a unifying force for human coexistence. In the third part, I will discuss the significance of recent archival discoveries on the drafting process of the UDHR, which draw attention to the notion of the human person and personal development as the center of logical gravity of the contemporary notion of human rights, thus hopefully opening new scenarios in the field of ethical debates as well as in the practice of cross-disciplinary cooperation among academic, social, secular, and religious institutional stakeholders of the human rights movement.

The Crucial (Epistemic) Gap Around the UDHR

Before addressing Joas's work, and particularly the notion of sacredness of the person and value generalization, I suggest taking a look at the UDHR, which is both the conclusive example Joas offers for his argument and the object of very different interpretations of what human rights should be understood to be.

The UDHR is the undisputed founding document of the post-WWII human rights movement, comprising international and national legislations on human rights as well as social debates and advocacy initiatives that have taken place trans-socially and transculturally ever since. The current state of the art of the human rights movement can be described as a situation of crisis, captured by scholars describing the Endtimes of

Human Rights,¹ or the Twilight of Human Rights.² The immediate causes of this crisis have been analyzed in terms of the phenomena of proliferation and fragmentation³ of human rights. Tracing the ultimate root of this crisis raises the question of whether the UDHR itself was not affected by an original sin, a structural problem that may have inevitably contributed to the current conflict and confusion over what should be recognized as a human right and the underlying reasons.

Human rights' historian Samuel Moyn stated, on this point, that "[t]he drama of human rights, then, is that they emerged in the 1970s, seemingly from nowhere,"⁴ leading him to conclude that "[i]f the human rights movement does not improve states...it will demand replacement, in the name of its own ideals or some better ones."⁵ Moyn's historiographical work provides ample evidence that the human rights movement – while always revering the UDHR – was more the product of the intellectual and political opinion movement started in the 1960s, in conjunction with both post-colonialism and moral liberation ideas.

This interpretation is not refuted by Mary Ann Glendon, one of the legal scholars who has worked extensively on the UDHR. Glendon herself describes how: "over the 1960s and 1970s, the Declaration's framers, one by one" died, and it happened that a "new, hyper-individualistic dialect had the potential to wreak havoc with the Declaration: rights envisioned without individual or social responsibilities; one's favorite rights touted as absolute with others ignored; the rights bearer imagined as radically autonomous and self-sufficient; the trivialization of core freedoms by special interests posing as new rights." "As time went on," she concludes, this process makes it now "painfully apparent that dignity possesses no more immunity to hijacking than any other concept."⁶ According to Glendon, the current vagueness and conflictual nature of human rights stem from the fact that the original meaning intended by the drafters of the UDHR was hijacked.

If this were the case, however, one is entitled to question the hijackability of the UDHR itself, namely the "shaky foundations" of the UDHR, constituting "the business that the framers left unfinished."⁷ What do we

¹ Stephen Hopgood, *The Endtimes of Human Rights* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013).

² Eric A. Posner, *The Twilight of Human Rights Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³ Eva Brems, *Human Rights: Universality and Diversity* (Den Haag/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff, 2001), 23.

⁴ Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 3.

⁵ Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*, 3.

⁶ Mary Ann Glendon, "Foundations of Human Rights: The Unfinished Business," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 44, no. 1 (1999): 8.

⁷ Glendon, "Foundations of Human Rights: The Unfinished Business," 12.

mean by “unfinished business”? One scenario involves constructing a building after making all the necessary plans and calculations, only to encounter a shortage of bricks. Another scenario is creating a façade without a structural plan, resulting from a lack of agreement on the intended function, the disposition, and number of rooms the building should include.

On this point, Cass Sunstein underlined that “people can often agree on constitutional practices, and even on constitutional rights, when they cannot agree on constitutional theories.”⁸ In this way, it has been suggested that *incompletely theorized agreements in constitutional law* do have a value, as they provide future generations with room for re-imagining and re-interpreting the contents of supreme law products, such as constitutions and, by extension, international human rights covenants. As Sunstein phrased it:

The existence of diverse values seems to threaten the very possibility of a constitutional order and social stability. Constitution-makers can agree on abstractions without agreeing on the particular meaning of those abstractions....When people disagree or are uncertain about an abstract issue – is equality more important than liberty? does free will exist? is utilitarianism right? does punishment have retributive aims? – they can often make progress by moving to a level of greater particularity. They attempt a conceptual descent. This phenomenon has an especially notable feature: It enlists silence, on certain basic questions, as a device for producing convergence despite disagreement, uncertainty, limits of time and capacity, and heterogeneity.⁹

From Sunstein’s perspective, when a clear question lacks an agreed-upon answer, abstraction is just an expedient which hides a *conceptual descent*, even though by its “high wording” it appears to elevate the *niveau* of the inquiry. Such praise for incompletely theorized agreements may appear to reflect a dysfunctional attitude in which individuals, acting contrary to their natural inclination for relationality, simply choose to abandon conversation in favour of a peaceful silence that signals a superficial moral agreement to disagree. Sunstein, however, offers evidence that his notion corresponds to the reality of the drafting process of the UDHR itself:

⁸ Cass R. Sunstein, “Incompletely Theorized Agreements in Constitutional Law,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2007): 3.

⁹ Sunstein, “Incompletely Theorized Agreements in Constitutional Law,” 4.

Indeed, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was produced through a process akin...with a refusal to engage high theory and instead an effort to build on widespread understandings. The basic enterprise operated by surveying the behavior of most nations, and by building a ‘universal declaration’ on the basis of shared practices. [A philosophers’ group, involved in the project,] began its work by sending a questionnaire to statesmen and scholars around the world.¹⁰

At a key stage, the people involved in drafting the declaration produced

a list of forty-eight items that represented...the common core of a wide range of documents and proposals. Thus, Jacques Maritain, a philosopher closely involved in the Universal Declaration, famously said, ‘Yes, we agree about the rights, but on condition no one asks us why.’ The general point is that a judgment in favor of a set of rights can emerge across disagreement or uncertainty about the foundations of those rights.¹¹

Was the drafting process of the UDHR really as Sunstein portrays it, and does it align with Joas’s vision? Historically speaking, Sunstein’s narrative is simply inaccurate. Among the drafters of the UDHR, there was no group of philosophers circulating any type of questionnaire. The United Nations itself recounts the drafting history of the UDHR as follows:

In February 1947, in accordance with a decision from the first session of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), a group consisting of Eleanor Roosevelt, Pen-Chun Chang, and Charles Malik, began drafting the International Bill of Human Rights. Following a letter from the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights (Eleanor Roosevelt) to the President of the Economic and Social Council, dated 27 March 1947, this Drafting Committee was enlarged to include representatives of Australia, Chile, France, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, in addition to the representatives of China, Lebanon and the United States.¹²

¹⁰ Sunstein, “Incompletely Theorized Agreements in Constitutional Law,” 9.

¹¹ Sunstein, “Incompletely Theorized Agreements in Constitutional Law,” 10.

¹² United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, *Research Guides, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Drafting History*.

The attempt to distribute a questionnaire was indeed made, but it was conducted by UNESCO rather than the UN Commission on Human Rights, as shown by Mark Goodale's recent archival discoveries, which I will discuss later. It is worth mentioning that

the majority of the CHR members had no idea that UNESCO was undertaking such a survey. In the end, by a vote of 8 to 4 (with one abstention), the CHR decided not to distribute UNESCO's report to its member states or include it as part of the drafting process that would eventually lead to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹³

This historical clarification is significant because, on the one hand, it shows that the members of the Commission on Human Rights did not intend to identify a minimum common denominator (in terms of *conceptual descent*) among the most prevalent moral traditions worldwide. On the other hand, it explains why the exegetes of the UDHR did not examine the UNESCO survey, as it was not distributed, excluded from the drafting process, and remained forgotten for decades up until Mark Goodale rediscovered it in the late 2010s.

Nevertheless, the evidence of this historiographical mistake does not inherently disqualify Sunstein's vision. Sunstein's perspective – that fundamental legal documents do not hold all the answers but instead provide unity through their reference to abstract concepts – appears to be quite similar to Jürgen Habermas's position on human rights. Without any particular philosophical radicalization, Habermas explains that:

The classical human rights declarations when they speak of 'in-born' or 'inalienable' rights, of 'inherent' or 'natural' rights, or of 'droits inaliénables et sacrés' betray their religious and metaphysical origins: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are endowed...with certain unalienable rights.' In the secular state, however, such predicates function primarily as placeholders; they remind us of the mode of a generally acceptable justification whose epistemic dimension is beyond state control.¹⁴

In Habermas's view, human dignity is the exception to all the other expressions that populate the UDHR. He argues that "the role of this

¹³ UNESCO Courier, "Seventy-Year-Old Views That Remain Contemporary," UNESCO (2018): 1.

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, "The Concept of Human Dignity and the Realistic Utopia of Human Rights," *Metaphilosophy* 41, no 4 (2010): 469.

concept is far from that of a vague placeholder for a missing conceptualization of human rights,” which is, however, the case for the rest of the abstract expressions included in the UDHR: his idea of *missing conceptualization* and Sunstein’s idea of *incomplete theorization* appear to be two sides of the same coin.

Understanding human rights treaties as shelves full of placeholders is a perspective not uncommon among human rights scholars. Henry Steiner, for example, states that “the human rights movement has by and large shunned philosophical inquiry as disruptive and unhelpful....The justifications in the preambles to the human rights treaties are more rhetorical than philosophical.”¹⁵

Furthermore, when discussing dignity, Habermas underlines that this concept must be understood without reference to the vertical dimension of human existence. As he frames it: “The issue is the worth of the individual in the horizontal relations between different human beings, not the status of ‘human beings’ in the vertical relation to God or to ‘lower’ creatures on the evolutionary scale;” and this has been the case, Habermas explains, since “when ideas from the Judeo-Christian tradition were appropriated by philosophy.”¹⁶

The same kind of reasoning is, among others, shared by legal philosopher Joseph Raz, stating that:

Typically, rights are established by arguments about the value of having them. Their existence depends on there being interests whose existence warrants holding others subject to duties to protect and promote them....So, the political conception of human rights can and should accept universality of morality. Its essence as a political conception is that it regards human rights as rights which are to be given institutional recognition, rights which transcend private morality.¹⁷

Essentially, Habermas articulates a similar position with the statement: “human rights circumscribe precisely that part (and only that part) of morality which can be translated into the medium of coercive law and become political reality in the robust shape of effective civil rights.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Henry J. Steiner, “Review of *The Youth of Rights* by Louis Henkin,” *Harvard Law Review* 104, no. 4 (1991): 919.

¹⁶ Habermas, “The Concept of Human Dignity and the Realistic Utopia of Human Rights,” 474.

¹⁷ Joseph Raz, “Human Rights Without Foundations,” in *The Philosophy of International Law*, eds. Samantha Besson and John Tasioulas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 335.

¹⁸ Habermas, “The Concept of Human Dignity,” 470.

Understood in this way, human rights as international norms seem to suffer from a defect of conception akin to what has been described in the realm of international heritage law. This issue arises from “the strong role...career diplomats trained in law, international relations, or economics who resort to their everyday understandings when discussing these matters; and [have] the tendency to expedite consensus by simply incorporating any strong demand into a draft, at the cost of consistency.”¹⁹

The most vigorous opponent against this widespread idea that the UDHR (and many other constitutional texts) ultimately lacks epistemic solidity is Johannes Morsink. He has dedicated decades of his life to studying the drafting process and the intricate interconnections among the wording of its 30 articles. In his words:

There is a crucial gap here between what the Universal Declaration – which is the founding document of the human rights movement – says a human right is (that we have them as moral birthrights) and what many contemporary theorists tell us a human right is (that it is a man-made product of international legal conferences). While the UDHR drafters meant their language of inherence and inalienability quite literally, our media and the theorists on whom they report often mean it only symbolically and often merely rhetorically. The human nature to which they link human rights, if they do make that connection, is a man-made and communal creation, ever changing and moldable by the tides of history and the fluctuations of culture.²⁰

Morsink suggests that both the textual meaning and the intentions of the drafters were for the Universal Declaration (UDHR) to serve as the anchor of a static legal system, rather than a dynamic one, as understood in the general theory of law. On this subject, Norberto Bobbio explained that in the first point, “a legal norm belongs to the system when it is deducible from the content of the ethical postulation which grounds it; (while) in a dynamic system the norm belongs to the system when it has been produced in the way previewed by the norm which institutes the sovereign power (the so-called fundamental norm).”²¹

Precisely on this point, Morsink clarifies how:

¹⁹ Christoph Brumann, “Anthropological Utopia, Closet Eurocentrism, and Culture Chaos in the UNESCO World Heritage Arena,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 91, no. 4 (2018): 1222.

²⁰ Johannes Morsink, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, Drafting, and Intent* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 264.

²¹ Norberto Bobbio, *Dalla Struttura alla Funzione* (Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, 1977), 140.

We might compare the UDHR drafters to certain Sixteenth-century theologians who believed that the body of Christ at communion was literally present in the Eucharist. Rejecting this UDHR approach, most contemporary theorists think of human rights as factitious or constructed and invented; they do not think of these rights as inherently present in human beings, waiting to be discovered like the structure of our DNA. However, most of the Declaration's drafters did not think of the Declaration's rights as derived from or legitimated by the just or fair procedures that (we hope) have been used to write up the many international texts that capture human rights norms.²²

Morsink champions the idea that the UDHR should not be seen merely as a rhetorical exercise by international diplomats who are content with accumulating placeholders (as Habermas suggests) or as incompletely theorized agreements (as Sunstein posits).

This position is shared by Glendon, who stated:

The Declaration's framers never envisioned that its 'common standard of achievement' would or should produce completely uniform practices. P. C. Chang stressed that point...that colonial powers had tried to impose on other peoples a standardized way of thinking and a single way of life. That sort of uniformity could only be achieved, he said, by force or at the expense of truth. It could never last. Chang and his colleagues on the Drafting Committee expected the Declaration's rights would be in-culturated in various ways, and that over time the corpus of human rights would be enriched by these varied experiences.... That did not mean, however, that interpretation was up for grabs. They tried to provide the Declaration with safe passage through such transitions by giving it an interpretive matrix: freedom and solidarity, linked to a thick concept of personhood.²³

The concept of personhood appears in the UDHR nine times: five instances use the word "person," while four use the term "personality." The first occurrence is in the Preamble where "the peoples of the United Nations have reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women."²⁴ The concept of personhood in terms of personality is found in

²² Morsink, "The Universal Declaration and the Conscience of Mankind," 3.

²³ Glendon, "Foundations of Human Rights: The Unfinished Business," 7.

²⁴ United Nations General Assembly, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

art. 29, which scholars qualify as “the most underknown article of the Declaration”²⁵ and which states that “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.” Art. 29 is precisely in the middle of the “the last three sections of the Declaration, (which) in Cassin’s view, constituted the pediment of the portico covering the entire Declaration and making essential links between the individual and society. Like the Preamble and Articles 1 and 2, these three sections bear importantly on the meaning of the document as a whole.”²⁶

For Morsink, “article 29 was of crucial importance, because it admits that rights are balanced by and are correlative with duties.” In his view, the reference to the community in which one alone can fully enjoy the free and full development of one’s personality represents a point of equilibrium between “support(ing) a natural rights interpretation of the Declaration” and “a corrective measure against the excessive individualism so often associated with natural rights.”²⁷

Morsink also investigated the drafting history of art. 29, which connects personhood, development, community, rights, and duties. These connections can plausibly provide a crucial interpretive key to understanding the UDHR as a coherently logical text rather than merely a document reflecting an agreement to disagree. Its first draft “as adopted by the Commission on Human Rights said that “[e]veryone has duties to the community which enables him freely to develop his personality” was followed by a discussion led by “Watt of Australia (who) suggested substituting the phrase ‘in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible’.”²⁸ The debate that ultimately led to the insertion of the word “alone” (in relation to the term “community” in art. 29) showed a multiplicity of interpretations of the word community, which did not perfectly align with either the notion of the state or that of society.

“Fernand Dehousse of Belgium,” Morsink writes, “objected to the Australian amendment on the grounds that ‘while there was no doubt that society contributed to the development of the individual’s personality, it was no less true that that development was conditioned by other factors,’ bringing as an example ‘the famous book by Daniel DeFoe, Robinson Crusoe’.”²⁹ The imagery of Robinson Crusoe was used to illustrate “the harmonious individual relations which should exist between and the

²⁵ Laurent Trigeaud, “Article 29.1 – Duties to the Community,” in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A Commentary*, ed. Humberto Cantu Rivera (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 744.

²⁶ Glendon, “Knowing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 1168.

²⁷ Johannes Morsink, “The Philosophy of the Universal Declaration,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 6, no 3 (1984): 317.

²⁸ Morsink, “The Philosophy of the Universal Declaration,” 319.

²⁹ Morsink, “The Philosophy of the Universal Declaration,” 319.

society in which he lived” by remarking how “the example of Robinson Crusoe,...had shown that man could not live and develop his personality without the aid of society. Robinson had, in fact, at his disposal the products of human industry and culture, namely, the tools and books he had found on the wreck of his ship.”³⁰

“The key word,” Morsink remarks, “is, of course, ‘alone’. Its insertion amounts to a rejection of eighteenth-century individualism because it asserts an organic connection between the individual and either the state or society...” He further underlines that René Cassin noted these new rights “were different in character from any rights outlined in the earlier declarations of the rights of man.”³¹ The difference was that while the previous ones “all had in common the fact that national effort and international cooperation were needed for their realization,”³² the new rights – particularly the right to free and full development of one’s personality – rely upon the cooperation of every segment of society.

This is a crucial point, as Sunstein, Habermas, Bobbio, and many others viewed human rights as fundamental rights, essentially constitutional rights on a larger scale, rather than as universal rights intended to attract and amplify grassroots engagement. This perspective suggests that the content of these rights and duties extends far beyond what a state can enforce through coercion.

Morsink’s argument, through Cassin’s perspective, is further reinforced by Glendon when she quotes Eleanor Roosevelt’s 1958 interview: “Where, after all, do human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world....Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”³³

Glendon’s exegesis of the UDHR also shows how art. 29 sheds light on a major “problem that had arisen in the drafting process. Where was primary responsibility for implementing human rights to lie? Even if an international enforcement machinery were to be created someday, that could not be the first line of defense. The Soviet representative had insisted that the sentence ‘This shall be enforced by the state’ be appended to many articles.”

In contrast to the Soviet position, Cassin underlined that the state could not be envisioned as “the permanent and only agency for the protection and regulation of the rights of man” because “man must be envisaged not only in his relations with the State, but with the social groups of

³⁰ Morsink, “The Philosophy of the Universal Declaration,” 319.

³¹ Morsink, “The Philosophy of the Universal Declaration,” 331.

³² Morsink, “The Philosophy of the Universal Declaration,” 331.

³³ Glendon. “Knowing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 1170.

all sorts to which he belongs: family, tribe, city, profession, confession, and more broadly the global human community.”³⁴

Glendon further emphasizes that even with the insertion of the word “alone” art. 29 cannot be used to reverse the centrality of the human person in favor of the notion of community (understood as the state, society and so on) because, as she phrases it: “Everyone has duties to the community (but to a certain kind of community, where ‘the free and full development of his personality is possible’).”³⁵

The Harvard professor also articulates with clarity and elegance that:

It had to be made clear that the responsibility for protecting human rights belonged not only to the nation states, but to persons and groups below and above the national level. The Declaration was thus ahead of its time in recognizing the importance for human freedom of a wide range of social groups, beginning with families, and extending through the institutions of civil society, nation states, and international organizations. The Proclamation clause calls not only ‘all peoples and all nations’ but ‘every organ of society’ to promote recognition and observance of human rights.³⁶

Finally, Glendon concludes that: “The framers of the Universal Declaration were far from naive about the difficulties that lay ahead...they acknowledged the priority of culture over law...If Maritain, Eleanor Roosevelt, Charles Malik, René Cassin and others who held this view were right, then a great challenge faces the world’s religions, for religion is at the heart of culture.”³⁷

Focusing on the exact wording and drafting process of the UDHR has thus the advantage of providing an epistemic barycenter to a galaxy of comments and interpretations on the philosophical basis (and actual moral solidity) of the concept of human rights. Such approach does not detract in any way from the intellectual value and vigor of those scholars who have focused broadly on human rights, but it does help in the scientific process of selecting a canon of interpretation coherent with the internal logic of such a founding document which, in turn, is central in Hans Joas’s explanation of his take on the notion of value generalization and sacralization of the human person.

³⁴ Glendon. “Knowing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 1169.

³⁵ Glendon. “Knowing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 1169.

³⁶ Glendon. “Knowing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 1170.

³⁷ Glendon, “Foundations of Human Rights: The Unfinished Business,” 13.

Joas and the Verticality of Human Rights as Faith-Based Quest for the Absolute

Hans Joas examines human rights through an intellectual lens that corresponds with a longstanding sociological tradition, aiming to position them within a comprehensive theoretical framework of human history. His approach synthesizes the work of two *monstres sacrés* of sociology: Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons. Specifically, Joas builds on Parsons's general (structural-functional) theory to explain social change. He focuses on a critical part of this theory – namely the process of value generalization – to demonstrate how the drafters of the UDHR participated in the process of communication through which “values can be transformed to make them universalists.” Does it correspond to that process of “*inculturation*” that both Glendon and Morsink refer to – by referencing Chang and Roosevelt – indicating that the drafters envisioned it would begin with the proclamation of the UDHR and continue to unfold throughout the world?

Joas's perspective, which distinguishes him from other prominent ones such as Habermas or Rawls's, builds on the idea first articulated by Durkheim, namely the identification of a social (and legal and philosophical) phenomenon grounded in “the belief in human rights and universal human dignity as ‘the religion of modernity,’ ...the idea of viewing the person as such as a sacred object in modern societies.”³⁸ This human tendency corresponds to “the belief that, building on Auguste Comte, he [Durkheim] calls the ‘religion de l'humanité’ and attempts to show that it is absolutely capable of integrating whole societies.”³⁹ In other words, the UDHR can be seen as one of several stages in social development, where societies evolve to become more complex both materially (in terms of technology, bureaucracy etc.) and immaterially.

Material development necessitates the incorporation of new people into the original community, village, tribe, or country. In turn, these newcomers, by bringing their customs and beliefs, place stress on one of the basic functions that each social system must fulfill: the “maintenance of value patterns constitutive of the system's identity.” The greater the diversity of customs and beliefs, the higher the degree of differentiation within a society. From this, as Joas notes, follows Durkheim's “fundamental thesis: “The more differentiated the system, the higher the level of generality at which the value pattern must be ‘couched’ if it is to legitimate the more specified values of all of the differentiated parts of the social system.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Hans Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person: A New Genealogy of Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 51.

³⁹ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 52.

⁴⁰ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 179.

But does Durkheim's *generality* reflect the abstraction intended by Sunstein, specifically a lowering of the epistemic content of the expressions used, intended to identify the commonly accepted values upon which shared societal identity is based? The answer seems to be negative, as Joas remarks that while "it is a sociological truism that a society cannot hold together unless there exists among its members a certain intellectual and moral community, simply calling for such community does little to help to develop it" as "no one can believe in a religious sense solely because it would be socially useful to do so."⁴¹ In other words, society needs intellectual and moral solidarity, which necessitates a rich, cohesive, and intellectually coherent value pattern. In this pattern, different components are not merely placed next to one another, but are intricately intertwined to form a single and unique (embodied) pattern. The *silence-driven, conceptual descent*, which Sunstein defines as *incompletely theorized* (moral) *agreements* does not meet the criteria for the intertwined pattern which Durkheim (and Joas) envision as the result of value generalization.

Furthermore, Joas specifies that Parsons's perspective implies "the inclusion, under a single legitimizing value-pattern, of components which are not only diverse and differentiated from each other, but many of which have, historically, claimed some sort of 'absolutistic' monopoly of moral legitimacy."⁴² This aspect of Parsons's theory on value generalization is essential for understanding Joas's perspective both on the UDHR and vis à vis (and in contrast to) other great thinkers such as Habermas or Rawls. As Joas himself clarified: "What Habermas did in his interpretation of Parsons in *The Theory of Communicative Action* is clearly very different from mine. For him, ...social integration is increasingly achieved through rational discourse, with religiously anchored mutual understanding playing an ever-smaller role."⁴³ This is what he calls "the linguistification of the sacred" – one of the most radical theories of secularization ever conceived. Conversely, what Parsons had in mind when he developed the idea of value generalization was that value traditions may develop a more general, mostly more abstract understanding of their content, without being entirely uprooted from the specific traditions and experiences that are the source of affective binding force for the actors involved.⁴⁴

While the recurrence of the term "abstraction," as used by Sunstein, is undeniable in Joas's words, it is worth noting that Joas and Parsons connect abstraction with the word absolute. Both terms etymologically capture an ascendant movement that transcends the (heavy) materiality of unquestioned practices, man-made well-being-led reasoning, or utilitarian

⁴¹ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 53.

⁴² Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 179.

⁴³ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 180.

⁴⁴ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 180.

concerns. This ultimately calls for a transcendent anchoring, which – in my understanding – is the same reference point phrased by the Preamble of the Universal Declaration as “*faith*.” Such an interpretation appears to be consistent with Joas’s perspective on Rawls, namely that:

His epochal Theory of Justice...is undoubtedly similar to Parsons, but Parsons’ sociological conception seems to me superior to Rawls’ philosophical one, for two reasons. First, Parsons’ conception does not envision a static constellation of coexisting elements but rather a dynamic process of mutual modification. Second, rather than restricting communication to political and constitutional principles, it pays attention to the deeper layers of value systems and religions.⁴⁵

Joas’s perspective is complementarily explained by Glendon, who underlines how the drafters of the UDHR “*acknowledged the priority of culture over law*” and of “*religion at the heart of culture*.” In other words, the word “faith” was not placed in the Preamble by chance. It signaled that the UDHR was not merely about legally enforceable provisions, but rather the distillation of a metaphysical intuition – faith – intended to be inculturated. This aimed to provoke dialogue within and among religious and cultural communities, uniting them around the essence of the religious experience.

Joas clarifies this point referencing Durkheim’s ontological notion of religion, which “in the first instance...must be understood not as a cognitive event in which we believe something to be true, but as a sure sense of the presence of a greater force, a force on which our own vital force in turn relies,...an experience so intense that it constitutes or transforms our entire worldwide and self-understanding.”⁴⁶

This vertical orientation of human rights finds confirmation in the philosophical work of Jeanne Hersch, who, drawing on her experience as the first Director of the Philosophy Division at UNESCO, emphasizes this perspective. After serving in this role and publishing an anthology of over one thousand texts related to human rights,⁴⁷ Hersch wrote an essay that distilled her perspective on the essence of human rights, titled *Human Rights from a Philosophical Point of View*.⁴⁸ In it, the Genevan philosopher underlines how:

⁴⁵ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 181.

⁴⁶ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 55.

⁴⁷ Jeanne Hersch, ed., *Birthright of Man: A Selection of Texts* (Paris: UNESCO, 1969).

⁴⁸ Jeanne Hersch, *Les droits de l’homme d’un point de vue philosophique* (Geneva: The Estate of Jeanne Hersch, 2000); *I diritti umani da un punto di vista filosofico*, Italian edition, trans. F. De Vecchi (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2008), 65.

We should not confuse human rights with the conditions of collective happiness or wellbeing, with the means that allow to better organize the life of individuals and societies. They are not a technique of peace, of comfort, of distribution or repartition. They do not serve to delimitate each one's freedom so that it does not trespass the freedom of others. On the contrary, they serve to recognize that when it comes to 'being human' what is at stake is freedom with its absolute.⁴⁹

Hersch explains the absolute-based nature of human rights through the myth of Antigone, for whom "the absolute necessity was to obey to the unwritten law of the gods that ordered her to bury the body of her brother, without caring of the institutionalized authority."⁵⁰ Antigone thus symbolizes how "the human conscience wants itself free to the point of engaging in an absolute manner vis à vis a law that transcends all natural data, and even at the expense of death it assumes the responsibility of the concrete actions through which it incarnates such an engagement in the facts."⁵¹

Hersch underlines this point when she states that:

One could think that we are here far from the positive statements of law in general, and human rights in particular. But nevertheless: if the revendication of human rights were to be totally detached from this root...they would lose their meaning. An absolute engagement is always dangerous, this is true. Through various forms of integralism, it (absolute engagement) risks to inspire and justify the worst violations of rights. For this reason, some are trying, on the contrary, to understand human rights as the refusal of any form of absolute engagement, a sort of reasonable and pragmatic neutrality. But this means not taking seriously the death threats that always loom over the realization of human rights.⁵²

The example of Antigone not only serves to explain the reference to the absolute in the theoretical framing of the concept of value generalization (as previously explained), but also to strengthen a key element of Joas's understanding, namely his point on value communication.

⁴⁹ Hersch, *Les droits de l'homme d'un point de vue philosophique*, 65.

⁵⁰ Hersch, *Les droits de l'homme d'un point de vue philosophique*, 64.

⁵¹ Hersch, *Les droits de l'homme d'un point de vue philosophique*, 68.

⁵² Hersch, *Les droits de l'homme d'un point de vue philosophique*, 68.

Hersch's vision also resonates with Max Weber's distinction regarding social actions,⁵³ which categorizes individuals' behaviors as being directed toward (rationally) pursuing a goal, or being (a-rationally) motivated by following social customs (tradition) or by acting almost automatically upon a given emotional state or, as the final category, oriented toward values. Within the fourth category, Weber includes cases of ritual suicides, specifically in the context of religious martyrs, for whom martyrdom differs from the actions of a kamikaze, who has a material goal in mind. For these martyrs, their action – similar to that of Socrates – is motivated by adherence to a value-based vision of reality.

For Hersch, Antigone is “one of the purest examples” of the “source of the universality of human rights” which is “that it can arrive to a human to decide: I will not do that, better to die.” Antigone's behavior is not devoid of rationality, as Weber understood value-based behaviors. She contemplates, wonders, and seeks out other points of view, such as her sister Ismene's. She does not act simply upon an a-rational feeling. “The absolute,” writes Hersch, “does not remain ‘at a state of wilderness,’ and not even hanging in ideas or myths.”⁵⁴

Hersch's perspective can be further clarified by referencing Edith Stein, who, in her *An Investigation Concerning the State*, refers to Adolph Reinach's epistemic dichotomy between pure law and positive law. Reinach's notion of pure law corresponds to a universal metaphysical category that “is the same in every era and with every person because it is eternal and does not come to existence here or there or before or after” and that also “subsists independently from every choice and independently from the fact that it is recognized or not by any legislation in force.”⁵⁵

Stein's words, whose richness has already been investigated,⁵⁶ effectively exemplify the true meaning of absoluteness which Hersch refers to, an absolute that, in recalling the notion of truth, echoes Maimonides' famous statement: “Truth does not become more true by virtue of the fact that the entire world agrees with it, nor less so even if the whole world disagrees with it”⁵⁷. The counterproof that the notion of absoluteness ultimately calls into question the concept of truth (as an existential dimension

⁵³ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968).

⁵⁴ Hersch, *Les droits de l'homme d'un point de vue philosophique/I diritti umani da un punto di vista filosofico*, 66.

⁵⁵ Edith Stein, *An Investigation Concerning the State: The Collected Works of Edith Stein*, trans. Marianne Sawicki (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2006), 38.

⁵⁶ See Marcelo Gidi, SJ, “Certain Legal Presuppositions About the Idea of Law in Edith Stein's *An Investigation Concerning the State*,” in *An Investigation Concerning the State: Sociality, Nationhood, Ethics*, eds. Eva Reyes-Gacitúa and Antonio Calcagno (Cham: Springer, 2020).

⁵⁷ Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1956), 52.

that is both experiential and inherent) can be traced in the UDHR, particularly through the central placement of the term “faith” in its Preamble.

Complementarily to these views on the (vertical) dimension of the absolute as the essential core of the notion of human rights, Joas identifies the reason why Parsons’ notion of value generalization differs from those of both Rawls and Habermas. Joas explains that this difference “lies in a field that we might call the logic of communication about values. I believe that this logic contrasts markedly with that of a rational argumentative discourse in the strict sense, but it is not the mere collision differing values or identities or cultures either. Because I view values as the articulation of experiences.”⁵⁸ While their “discourse theory of morality” is based on speaker-listener discourses as a “process of back and forth leading to a progressive mutual modification of validity claims,” culminating in “an ‘organic’ conclusion in which the participants find themselves, uncoerced, in the situation of self-generated consensus,” Joas argues that “to talk about values presupposes that we take account of the affective intensity of our commitment to them.”⁵⁹

He further emphasizes that “our commitment to values differs from the commitment to purely cognitive validity claims.”⁶⁰ Behaviors are the means by which one demonstrates the intensity of such commitments, echoing the words of Saint James: “I by my works will show you my faith” (Jm 2:18). Joas emphasizes that values are primarily embodied and are communicated with non-theoretical discourses but through our lives. He states: “Values cannot simply be discussed in an atomistic way, if they were no more than discrete, self-contained opinions.... Value judgements point to histories. We explain our value commitments but at the same time we defend them by narrating how we or others arrived at them.”⁶¹ In other words, values are fundamentally relational and affective, inherently possessing a communitarian dimension that is both interpersonal and intergenerational. In the communication of values, a transcendental (meta-physical) element is always intertwined with culture, sometimes occupying a central role and at other times being more peripheral.

I thus conclude that Joas’s perspective is that value generalization as a social process cannot occur without the creation of a relational and experiential space within and among different religious and cultural communities. In this space, despite the strength of one’s belief in specific contents of one’s truth, everyone accepts that in the path to value generalization “the starting point was the altar inscription in the Athens market-

⁵⁸ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 174.

⁵⁹ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 176.

⁶⁰ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 178.

⁶¹ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 178.

place: 'To the Unknown God,' as the then Cardinal Roncalli phrased it in his homily at UNESCO."⁶²

While it would exceed the scope of this contribution to explain it in details, I must mention that the meaning of the "altar inscription" as "the starting point" in Roncalli's words is, in my view, perfectly coherent and mutually explanatory with both Durkheim's notion of religion (previously mentioned) and Martin Buber's notion of "the living center of the community."⁶³ "For Buber," writes Dan Avnon, "the fundamental element of human existence is 'the relation,' which is the relation to oneself, or better that part of oneself corresponding to 'the innate You' as 'a priori of relation'."⁶⁴ "What brings members of a Buberian community together," continues Avnon, "is a common yearning, a longing deep inside every human being, that Buber associates with the innate You." But because "the innate You, the unchanging self that relates to being, attains immediate relationship perfection with the 'eternal You', the You that in accordance to its nature cannot disintegrate solely in the into any subdivision, humans are at the same time essentially and existentially drawn to another kind of relation, namely the eternal You as God, or 'the world of the one truth'."⁶⁵

In conclusion, I understand that, for Joas, value generalization is a social continuum process that is not intended to be completed once and for all within a constitutional assembly or through the drafting of an international legal document. Instead, it is an ongoing process with religion (as transcendence, represented by Hersch's concept of the absolute) at its core. In its development, value generalization is expected to gradually produce an emotional and cognitive appeasement of differences (not elimination or amalgamation), as "the sacredness of the person is not just one possible system of belief with socially integrative effects, but the only system of belief that can now ensure the moral unity of the country." What Durkheim referred to as "country" needs to be understood as encompassing the whole world when discussing the human rights movement.

The Person as the Living Center of the UDHR

The UNHR of 1948 has indeed encountered significant challenges characterized by conflicts, conflation, fragmentation and the proliferation of meanings, claims and interpretations. Contrary to those scholars who argue that the UDHR was *more rhetorical than philosophical*, the exegetists of the UDHR, such as Morsink and Glendon, have stressed that a

⁶² Peter and Margaret Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Century* (London/New York: Continuum, 2000), 114.

⁶³ Dan Avnon, "The 'Living Center' of Martin Buber's Political Theory," *Political Theory* (1993): 55–77.

⁶⁴ Avnon, "The 'Living Center' of Martin Buber's Political Theory," 56.

⁶⁵ Avnon, "The 'Living Center' of Martin Buber's Political Theory," 56.

deep understanding of its text reveals an internal logic that addresses the critical points of intellectual and political disagreement surrounding the notion of human rights. Primarily, this includes the relationship between rights and duties, as well as the identification of both individual and communal bearers of these rights and duties, which exist beyond and prior to the state. Furthermore, the UDHR, as a document, was the result of the efforts of the Human Rights Committee, initially comprised of four original members without specific state representation, later supplemented by eight other members who were more vocal about sovereignty-based legal concerns.

However, as a social and intellectual phenomenon, the UDHR was also significantly influenced by the role played by UNESCO through its 1947 survey. Regarding the latter, “by a vote of 8 to 4 (with one abstention), the CHR decided not to distribute...to its member states or include as part of the drafting process that would eventually lead to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”⁶⁶ This document was forgotten for over fifty years, not used even by the exegetists of the UDHR. It was rediscovered only in 2018, thanks to the curated republication by anthropologist Marc Goodale.⁶⁷ Even though it was officially excluded by the Human Rights Committee, it was undoubtedly among the few materials that informed the early stages of the drafting process of the Universal Declaration. For this reason, I have turned to the UNESCO survey in my search to uncover the key to the puzzle regarding the internal logic of art. 29. By extension – considering that the wording of that article contains some of the intellectual pillars of the notion of human rights (rights, duties, community, and the freedom and fullness of one’s personality development), I aim to explore the logical unity of the UDHR as a whole.

My preliminary problem relates to the precise understanding that personhood played in the UDHR as well as in the theoretical framework developed by Joas. Although Joas suggests the idea of the “sacredness of the person,” he does not provide a specific explanation of what was new about the concept of personhood that permeated the UDHR. Instead, Joas simply mentions that while “Durkheim himself switches between references to the sacredness of the individual and of the person...I myself refer to the sacredness of the person” in order for it not to be “mistaken for the unscrupulous, egocentric self-sacralization of the individual and thus the narcissistic inability to break away from self-referentiality.”⁶⁸

Joas does acknowledge that “Durkheim thinks that we are dealing here with a modern articulation of impulses originally generated in

⁶⁶ UNESCO Courier, “Seventy-Year-Old Views That Remain Contemporary,” UNESCO (2018).

⁶⁷ Goodale, *Letters to the Contrary*.

⁶⁸ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 51.

Christianity” in such a way that “the very center of the moral life was thus transferred from outside to within and the individual was set up as the sovereign judge of his own conduct.”⁶⁹ However, in making this observation, Joas does not delve deeper into the implications of Durkheim’s equation of Christianity with Protestantism.

The same equation can be found in other scholars who have investigated the origins of human rights. Among these scholars is Lynn Hunt, who views human rights as the product of the “constant evolution of notions of interiority and depth of psyche from the Christian soul to the Protestant conscience,” of a dynamism of “autonomy and empathy (as) cultural practices” which best flourished in the west, namely north of Europe and north America, while Catholics are left to be understood as those more inclined to be concerned with “equality of souls in heaven (which) is not the same thing as equal rights here on earth.”⁷⁰

The same historical view is shared by sociologists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who, in the 1972 publication they curated as part of the Frankfurt School, wrote: “If fundamentally man exists in terms and because of the others who stand in reciprocal relation with him, then he is not ultimately determined by his primary indivisibility and singularity, but by the necessity of partaking of and communing with these others. This finds its expression in the concept of the person, no matter how vitiated by personalistic ethics and psychology this concept may be.”⁷¹ Such a claim is supported by the argument that:

One need only recall the original meaning of the Latin word, which is directly opposed to these personalistic conceptions. *Persona* was the Roman term for the mask of the ancient theater. In Cicero it is sublimated to the designation of the character-mask in which one appears to others: the role which one – let us say, a philosopher – plays in life; the one who carries out this role; and the special dignity which, as it were, he displays as this actor. In the latter sense the concept is then transferred to the freeborn citizen as a legal person, in distinction to the slave.⁷²

We see here, in historical terms, the first parallelism between that inextricable epistemic diarchy of personhood and community, which is subsequently evident in art. 29 of the UDHR.

⁶⁹ Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 53.

⁷⁰ Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: a History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 30.

⁷¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, eds., *Aspects of sociology* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972), 37.

⁷² Horkheimer and Adorno, eds., *Aspects of sociology*, 53.

Horkheimer and Adorno further explain the evolution of the term, noting that “during the ancient period nothing of substantial individuality, of ‘personality,’ is as yet contained in the word; it only begins to acquire this connotation in Boethius, during the sixth century A.D., while the emphatic, specifically personalistic concept of the person has its roots in Christian dogma, especially that of the immortal individual soul.”⁷³

However, there is another complementary – and not alternative – line of reconstruction of the path that the word *persona* took, which crosses the southern part of Europe instead of the northern one, eventually reaching the north through figures such as Romano Guardini, among others. This second line, instead of Boethius, traces the roots and the essential meaning of the word *persona* back to the so-called Fathers of the Church, especially to Saint Gregory of Nyssa. In this context the alternative use of the term “person” as a synonym for essence was coined to describe the three “Persons of the Holy Trinity,” making it a term that is inherently mysterious, absolute, vertical, and religious.

The historical evidence and the fruitfulness of this second stream of incarnated personalist awareness is comprehensively illustrated by Italian sociologist Franco Ferrarotti. Working alongside Adriano Olivetti (a leading industrialist, intellectual, and philanthropist with his own experience of encounter) Ferrarotti discusses the word *persona*. He notes: “I was proposing an etymological conception of personhood, from the etymological roots of ancient Greek theater and Roman times....He believed that my understanding was too narrow, referencing instead the teachings of patristics and particularly of saint Gregory, but on that path, I frankly could not follow.”⁷⁴

Contrary to Ferrarotti, Hunt’s perspective is almost mirrored by Horkheimer and Adorno when they assert that “this dogma itself constitutes a moment in the historical unfolding of the individual. And in the Reformation, it finds its societal expression.” “We do not thereby postulate that the theological notion as such was the effective cause of the change, or that the sociohistorical unfolding of the individual had its origin in Christianity, as the Hegelian construction of world history would have it. However, in any case, the social-theoretic discussion of the individual was conducted on the basis of this theological doctrine.”⁷⁵

Habermas’s emphasis on the flatness (horizontality) of his notion of dignity finds a clear echo in the notion of the human person championed by Horkheimer and Adorno. They articulate that each human “is determined solely within the interconnections of his life with others; it is these

⁷³ Horkheimer and Adorno, eds., *Aspects of sociology*, 53.

⁷⁴ Franco Ferrarotti, *La società e l'utopia: Torino, Ivrea, Roma e altrove* (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2001), 38.

⁷⁵ Horkheimer and Adorno, eds., *Aspects of sociology*, 42.

which form his social character; only in terms of the latter does his life take on meaning under given social conditions; and only in this character can the person – the persona, the social character-mask – possibly also be an individual.”⁷⁶

At first glance, such an interpretation of the personality development appears to be at odds with art. 29 of the UDHR, particularly when interpreted in line with Cassin, Morsink, and Glendon, rather than through the lens of the Soviet representative. The latter view suggests that one is bound to one’s (national) community, derives his or her personality from it, and therefore has duties of allegiance solely to that community. In this interpretation, freedom and fullness of development are significantly constrained by the givenness of one’s existence. However, this understanding contrasts with the UDHR, its embedded metaphysical universality, its rootedness in the *absolute*, as Hersch would phrase it.

Far from being a problem concealed to the realm of exegetists of the UDHR, the question of what it means to develop one’s personality freely and fully is a fundamental human question. This is confirmed by the decades of medical practice from Carl R. Rogers, one of the most renowned American psychologists of the 20th century. In his book *On Becoming a Person*, Rogers describes a process which he believes “is not one that occurs only in therapy,” namely that “each individual appears to be asking a double question: ‘Who am I?’ and ‘How may I become myself?’”⁷⁷ In other words, the reality of people seems to challenge the notion of persona put forward by Horkheimer and Adorno, as if they revolted against being confined to being “determined solely within the interconnections of (their) life with others,” as actors striving to escape the constraints of the (social) theater. Rogers writes:

As I watch person after person struggle in his therapy hours to find a way of life for himself, there seems to be a general pattern emerging....The best way I can state this aim of life...is to use the words of Soren Kierkegaard ‘to be that self which one truly is’....At first the client shows a tendency to move away, hesitantly and fearfully, from a self that he is not. In other words, even though there may be no recognition of what he might be moving forward, he is moving away from something...instead of simply being a façade, as if it were himself, he is coming closer to being himself.⁷⁸

He further explains that:

⁷⁶ Horkheimer and Adorno, eds., *Aspects of sociology*, 42.

⁷⁷ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 123.

⁷⁸ Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, 166.

I find that many individuals have formed themselves by trying to please others, but again when they are free, they move away from being this person,...define their goal, their purpose, by discovering in the freedom and safety of an understanding relationship, some of the directions they do not wish to move....They do not wish to be what they 'ought' to be, whether that imperative is set by parents, or by the culture, whether it is defined positively or negatively.⁷⁹

Ultimately, decades of interpersonal encounters (in the horizontal sense) led Roger to believe that personhood is a process of be-coming (a dynamic of coming to existence). This unveiling process, beginning with the pre-determined social conditions one has inherited – like masks – during one's upbringing, but ultimately aiming toward “rediscover(ing) Shakespeare's ‘To thine own self be true’.”⁸⁰ Shakespeare's words – being the cornerstone of Roger's line of reasoning – hide their dual meaning. On the one hand, they refer to being true to oneself (as if the self were the center of truth). On the other hand, they imply that in order to achieve this authenticity, one needs to relate to the Truth, or at least to “the world of the one truth” as Buber articulated.

The ultimate revolutionary action, as in Antigone's case, is expressed in Roger's patients' realization that “they do not value such purposes or goals which are artificial, imposed, defined from without...even though they may have lived by them all their lives up to this point.”⁸¹ However, such a realization needs an a priori, even if intuitively, namely what Gramsci referred to as “the revolutionary act” which is “telling the truth, arriving together at the truth.”⁸² Unbeknownst to him, Rogers's experience ultimately confirms the famous statement by Henri de Lubac: “This man is literally dissolved: that being in the name of the myth or of dialectics, the man, losing the truth, loses himself. In reality, there is not a man anymore, because there is nothing that transcends the man.”⁸³

Precisely this second understanding of the word persona (and therefore of personal development) is the intellectual backbone of three brief pages written by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, which are included in the UNESCO survey of 1947. Its wording leaves no doubt that it serves as the inspirational source of the crucial equilibrium among all the opposing forces which characterize the ingredients of article 29: rights with/versus

⁷⁹ Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, 170.

⁸⁰ Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, 170.

⁸¹ Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, 170.

⁸² Antonio Gramsci, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 21 June 1919. Republished in *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 1919–1920 (Turin: Einaudi, 1954), 190.

⁸³ Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (Cleveland, OH: World Pub. Co., 1950), 42.

duties, individual with/versus community, group in which free development of personality is impeded with/versus community in which it is enabled.

I will now analyze Teilhard de Chardin's contribution passage by passage, so that by decoding each part of his thought, art. 29 will manifest itself as a system of conceptual gearwheels that operates seamlessly – like an ancient clock mechanism waiting to be rediscovered – in harmony with all the concepts that I have in so far developed. This analysis also aims to address the puzzles that have intrigued some of the great minds of the generation of Morsink and Glendon, Habermas and Sunstein. In this way, I will both provide documentary evidence that Joas's argument regarding the UDHR being a good example of "sacredness of the human person" is correct, and demonstrate how the unknown drafting experience of the UDHR surpassed Joas's account of the notion of personhood.

Let us return to Article 29 of the UDHR and explore Teilhard de Chardin's contribution, which remained hidden in UNESCO's archives for decades. He begins with the 1797 Declaration on the Rights of Man, conceptualizing it as "mainly an assertion for the desire of individual independence."⁸⁴ That 18th century approach conveyed the idea of "All for the individual within society," he writes, highlighting its implicit assumption: "that the 'human species' was created to expand and culminate in a multiplicity of units, each of which would achieve its maximum development in isolation. This, he suggests, appears to have been the principal concern and ideal of the 18th-century humanitarians."⁸⁵ Far from being confined to 18th humanitarians, this represents the ultimate vision of the so-called capability approach to human rights, a theoretical framework pioneered by economist-philosopher Amartya Sen and philosopher Martha Nussbaum.⁸⁶

Teilhard de Chardin then draws the parallelism between natural and psychic forces, stating that: "[f]or numerous convergent reasons (rapid increase in ethnic, economic, political and psychic ties), the human individual is finally drawn into an irresistible process directed toward the establishment on earth of an inter-dependent organo-psychic system.... Hence the new conflict between the human unit...and his social ties."⁸⁷

Teilhard de Chardin continues by writing:

⁸⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Some Reflections on the Rights of Men," in *Human Rights Comments and Interpretations*, UNESCO edition (Paris: UNESCO, 1948), 95.

⁸⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, "Some Reflections on the Rights of Men," 95.

⁸⁶ See Martha Nussbaum, "Nature, Functioning and Capability: Aristotle on Political Distribution," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 6 (1988); Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999); Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, eds., *The Quality of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁸⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, "Some Reflections on the Rights of Men," 97.

On reflection we realize that this conflict is only apparent. We now see that the human being is not biologically self-sufficient. In other words, it is not by self-isolation (as one might have thought), but by proper association with all other human beings that the individual can hope to achieve full development of his person, full development of energy and movement and full development of consciousness, particularly as each of us cannot become complete reflexions (i.e. men) except by reflecting ourselves in and taking reflexions from other human beings.⁸⁸

This subsequent passage is, at first glance, somewhat obscure. What does it mean that human beings offer “reflexions” to one another and that we “cannot become complete reflexions (i.e. men) except by reflecting ourselves in and taking reflexions from other human beings?” Is this reflecting on and stemming from others a way of expressing that dialogue? Is it about the “two-man-mindedness” that in the drafting process of the UDHR, “Chung Chang, the Chinese representative,” proposed as a complementary (to reason) route of epistemic universality of human rights, “which his colleagues translated into ‘conscience’”⁸⁹ and in turn Morsink understood it as the central feature of the UDHR? Or is it instead related to the I-Thou relation, which constitutes the living centre of Buber’s notion of community?

Accessing the language of Teilhard de Chardin necessitates an understanding of his intellectual path, strongly connected with another great thinker of his time, Henri de Lubac. De Lubac, who wrote an entire book on de Teilhard de Chardin’s religious thinking in 1962, was also a French Jesuit priest. Both men sought clarifications from the Catholic Church vis à vis their perspectives and were ultimately recognized by the Pontiffs as prominent Catholic thinkers: de Lubac was made a cardinal by Paul VI, and Teilhard de Chardin was recognized by Benedict XVI as one of the authors whose ideas most influenced the Second Vatican Council.

Both de Lubac and Teilhard de Chardin employ an etymological language permeated with philosophical images. For example, when de Lubac refers to the metaphysical nature of human being in terms of “the supernatural (being) the impression of the teleology”⁹⁰ (“impression de la finalité”), he understands the word “impression” as a vivid image, referring to the concreteness of a seal that leaves a print – a mark of authorship. This almost indicates how every human being has a bellybutton, symbolizing a chain of genealogical connections that ultimately leads to the question of the original, the first ancestor of the universe. In the same way,

⁸⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, “Some Reflections on the Rights of Men,” 97.

⁸⁹ Morsink, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 5.

⁹⁰ Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (London: G. Chapman, 1967), 95.

when Teilhard de Chardin refers to becoming a person in terms of a development process in which each one becomes “a complete reflection” by reflecting oneself in others and receiving reflections from them, he invokes the image of Plato’s cave, where slaves cannot face the light, as they are accustomed to a mere theatre of shadows (persons as masks, accustomed to the masks, in their path toward authentic personhood). In order to turn toward the light and exit the cave, they require a collective effort to receive it through the reflections in the faces of others. Therefore, freedom – or the free personality development – is a collective endeavor: no one can decide to turn and exit alone; rather, each person’s effort to turn and reflect some light to others is essential for the ultimate possibility of liberation for all the prisoners in the cave. Teilhard de Chardin further explains this vision by specifying that: “within a Humanity that is in process of collective organization, the individual is no longer entitled to remain inactive, i.e., to refrain from developing himself to the full possible extent; because on his perfection depends the perfection of all the others around him.”

What is, however, the polar start of this “possible extent”? Is Teilhard de Chardin referring to the maximization of the number and intensity of development of one’s capabilities? What is the starting point of this “possible extent”? Is Teilhard de Chardin referring to the maximization of the number and intensity of the development of one’s capabilities? If this were the case, one might argue that, similar to how American jurisprudence has coined the metaphor of the bundle of rights to “analytically describe property as a collection of rights vis-à-vis others, rather than rights to a ‘thing’,”⁹¹ the human person could be reduced to a mere bundle of capabilities. If a human person – deprived of the verticality/absoluteness that is rooted in the shift of the term from theater to theological and philosophical discourses – were to be understood as a simple bundle of capabilities, humans would be reduced to something akin to CEOs entrusted with their cognitive and emotional capital, under the constant obligation to maximize their development for the benefit of others.

Fortunately, and in line with the explanation I provided based on Plato’s cave, Teilhard de Chardin’s vision is different. It unfolds not only along the horizontal dimension of capabilities, but also along the vertical dimension of truth seeking (which is the ultimate essence of the light which filters into Plato’s cave). “One capital principle must be stated and constantly observed,” he writes, “that in no case, and for no purpose, must the collective forces be in a position to compel the individual to distort or falsify himself (as he would do if he accepted as true what he saw to be

⁹¹ Denise R. Johnson, “Reflections on the Bundle of Rights,” *Vermont Law Review* 247 (2007): 247.

false, i.e., if he lied to himself).⁹² In this *verbatim* use of the terms “true” and “false,” one can clearly hear the echoes of Rogers’s decades of psychological practice with clients striving to let their true selves emerge. Even more resonant are Gramsci’s words about “telling the truth, arriving together at the truth (being) the revolutionary act.”⁹³

It is therefore in these terms that one has to understand the selection criterion to decipher if and to what extent “not only...the State, but...the social groups of all sorts to which he belongs: family, tribe, city, profession, confession, and more broadly the global human community” are the rights-holders of those “duties to the community (but to a certain kind of community, where ‘the free and full development of his personality is possible’),”⁹⁴ which Glendon refers to when analyzing art. 29 of the UDHR. In other words, no community has the right to impose duties on individuals that hinder their pursuit of truth – a quest that represents humanity’s common path to freedom.

In the final part of his contribution to the 1947 UNESCO survey, Teilhard de Chardin explicitly articulates the harmonious and coherent relationship he establishes between universal rights and universal duties. He writes that “Each human being has an absolute duty to work and personalize himself,” and “Each human being has a relative right to be placed in the best possible conditions for personalization.”⁹⁵ The absoluteness pertains to duty, specifically a duty to develop the fullness of one’s being. This duty encompasses capabilities but extends beyond them, reaching toward the Absolute – the light that penetrates Plato’s cave.

All the rights included in the UDHR (and subsequent international charters), such as the right to migrate, to education, to freedom of religion – including the freedom to change one’s religion – even the right to “reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay,” are just “the conditions under which the inevitable ‘totalization’ of humanity is to take place, in such a way as not to destroy, but to enhance in each of us, I will not say independence, but – what is quite a different thing – the incommunicable uniqueness of the being within us.”⁹⁶

Conclusion

In this contribution, I have analyzed the basic thesis that Hans Joas has developed in his *The Sacredness of the Person*. While Joas’s interpretation of the UDHR as an example of value generalization was not supported by an exegesis of the drafting process of the UDHR, my work has

⁹² Teilhard de Chardin, “Some Reflections on the Rights of Men,” 96.

⁹³ Gramsci, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 21 June 1919, 190.

⁹⁴ Glendon, “Knowing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 1169.

⁹⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, “Some Reflections on the Rights of Men,” 97.

⁹⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, “Some Reflections on the Rights of Men,” 96.

demonstrated that the exegetical efforts conducted by scholars such as Glendon and Morsink affirm the accuracy of Joas's understanding.

Joas's second claim – the successful character of such process of value generalization – remains unjustified. This is particularly relevant in light of scholars like Jürgen Habermas or Cass Sunstein, who argue that the wording of the UDHR was more rhetorical than philosophical, a mere series of (epistemically empty) placeholders, the product of “a conceptual descent...as a device for producing convergence despite disagreement, uncertainty and heterogeneity,” to be understood as nothing more than an incompletely theorized agreement.

By benefiting from innovative insights offered by the archival discoveries of Mark Goodale at UNESCO, my work has shown that the UDHR is the exact opposite of an incompletely theorized agreement: it possesses a sound and coherent internal logic. This logic anticipates and addresses many of the significant theoretical questions that have puzzled human rights for the last seven decades, particularly in the context of phenomena such as proliferation, fragmentation, and conflation. Such a logical coherence is indebted to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whose essay, created to support the drafting process of the UDHR, serves as a bridge connecting the Declaration to centuries of multidisciplinary genealogical development of the notion of *human persona*.

While such historical and documentary evidence confirms Joas's intuition that the UDHR represents both an experience of value generalization and a step in a process of “sacralization of the person,” it also extends beyond Joas's work. Providing evidence of the contents and precise logical unity that the *thick concept of personhood* guarantees to the UDHR Universal Declaration, the work of Teilhard de Chardin offers new insights into the phenomenon of sacralization of the person. Goodale's archival discoveries at UNESCO thus open new avenues of investigation into both the spillover effects of the drafting process of the UDHR in the domain of (inter)religious dialogue and the actual functioning of value generalization as a faith-based process of inculturation and deculturation.

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In Search of Harmony in Diversity: All-Unity, Intercultural Universality, and a Dialogical Cosmopolitanism

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Introduction: Aspiring for Humanity's Wholeness

"War and Peace III," Pablo Picasso's surreal war scene, depicts a warrior, fighting with only a sword against a tank, with a dove nearby and an innocent human face superimposed on the scene. This stark image confronts us on the cover of Fred Dallmayr's aptly titled *Against Apocalypse: Restoring Humanity's Wholeness*. The image symbolically expresses the book's main theme and key message, warning the reader of the threat of war, driving the world to the precipice of a nuclear apocalypse. To prevent this apocalypse, the subtitle indicates a peaceful alternative: the need to restore "humanity's wholeness."¹

The ideal of a harmoniously united and peaceful humanity has been expressed in many philosophical traditions, but its implementation has always met formidable resistance. The establishment of the United Nations was an important attempt to overcome bellicose divisions and to build a more cooperative and peaceful world order. However, this endeavor was hindered by geopolitical ambitions and the Cold War, which divided the world into two military-political camps and brought humanity to the brink of nuclear catastrophe.

The Russell-Einstein Manifesto (1955) warned humanity of the tragic situation brought about by the development of weapons of mass destruction: "We appeal, as human beings, to human beings: Remember your humanity and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open to a new Paradise; if you cannot, there lies before you the risk of universal death."² This humanistic imperative of peace found its political expression in Russia's "new political thinking," which asserts the priority of universal values, peaceful coexistence and collaboration, and indivisible mutual security based on political-diplomatic rather than military means. Similar ideas were expressed by philosophers and like-minded people in other countries. The rise of global consciousness and anti-war movements prompted the two superpowers' political leaders to agree to end the Cold

¹ Fred Dallmayr, *Against Apocalypse: Restoring Humanity's Wholeness* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 6.

² "Statement: The Russell-Einstein Manifesto," *Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs*, July 9, 1955, <https://pugwash.org/1955/07/09/statement-manifesto/>.

War peacefully in 1990. It was a historical turning point that created opportunities for a positive transformation of societies and the international system toward a peaceful coexistence of sovereign nations in a socio-culturally pluralistic world. However, the vested interests of big corporations and the military-industrial-political complex, epitomized in the neoconservative “revolution,” undermined these transformative opportunities, redirecting the foreign policy of the United States toward global hegemony in a unipolar world and provoking a new Cold War.

In the current period of turbulent global changes, discussions about the world’s possible future are at the forefront of international relations. Countries that do not want to be dominated are seeking sovereign equality and independent development within an emerging multipolar world. The idea of a multipolar or polycentric order as an alternative to hegemonic unipolarity is gaining prominence.

At the same time, the idea of multipolarity is being challenged. Although its critics cannot deny that the world is shifting away from unipolarity, they prefer only cosmetic adjustments aimed at preserving the existing hegemon-centered system. These critics raise objections to multipolarity, claiming that plurality is fraught with conflicts and that “a multipolar system is inherently unstable, since within such a system no pole and no international organization have the authority to enforce compliance with the rules and systemic differences.” For this reason, they contend that a unipolar rules-based world order is preferable.³ They also argue that today’s system is not multipolar or bipolar but “partially unipolar,” retaining “many of the characteristics it exhibited in the age of total unipolarity, just in modified form.”⁴

Such debates about the pros and cons of the unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar world order are limited due to focusing mainly on the shifting balance of power and the interests of powerful nation-states, above all, of the United States. This approach does not envision any positive changes in the character of relations among nation-states, which will presumably remain conflictive, driven either ideologically, such as the crusade of “democracies against autocracies,” or by “political realism,” such as the struggle for power among states. This presupposes that the confrontational pattern of international relations will persist: in the unipolar world, as the struggle of hegemon for dominance over the rest of the world; in a bipolar world, as a struggle between two major powers; in a three-polar or a multipolar world, as a struggle among regional “centers of power” and so on. In any of these scenarios, the world remains fragmented and

³ Stefan Mair, “In Defense of Multipolarity,” *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, November 17, 2023, <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/defense-multipolarity>.

⁴ Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “The Myth of Multipolarity: American Power’s Staying Power,” *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 3 (2023): 76+, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/china-multipolarity-myth?check_logged_in=1.

conflictive. The opposition to the multipolar alternative reflects a Manichean “either-or” logic, according to which diversity is incompatible with unity: socially-culturally diverse nation-states are viewed as divided and conflicting entities without any unifying common goals; while unity is viewed as the hegemonic forcible “integration” of nation-states, accompanied by processes of desovereignization and cultural homogenization.

Critics of multipolarity fail to envisage any movement toward a more cooperative and peaceful world. This view is myopic because it lacks long-term vision and is unable to see the bigger picture of the contemporary world to address the fundamental interests of humankind. In a globally interrelated world, humanity is facing global problems that concern all human beings and future generations. Addressing these problems requires the joint efforts of nation-states and, therefore, peaceful and cooperative relationships guided by the harmonious balance between the legitimate interests of nations and those of humanity as a whole.

Are we doomed to the irreconcilable opposition, or is a harmonizing way toward unity in diversity possible? Can the harmony of diversity and unity in international relations be achieved? Such a goal is possible: the character of international relations is not predetermined, and everything ultimately depends on people as responsible political actors. In our globally interrelated world and in a nuclear age, the peaceful coexistence of all nations has become a categorical imperative and a condition for humanity’s survival. Positive examples of international dialogue, the peaceful settlement of differences, and cooperation in solving problems for the common good show that sovereign states can have peaceful relations based on universally accepted international law and shared common goals. In other words, it is both possible and necessary to establish a global system of truly united nations, composed of free and sovereign states voluntarily cooperating on issues of common interests and bound by international law and the ethics of co-responsibility for solving global problems and ensuring the survival of humanity. This vision requires dialogical relationships and the development of a global consciousness, an understanding of the interconnectedness of humanity and the world, a sense of shared humanity and cooperative approaches to world problems, and a willingness to act responsibly.

The theoretical search for alternatives resonates with the political initiatives of countries that do not want to be dominated and are striving for a multipolar world of sovereign states and independent development. This alternative is taking shape in BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and other associations. These entities declare and implement in practice principles of international relationships based on sovereign equality, dialogue among equals, a balance of interests, consensus, and cooperation in addressing acute social and global problems and maintaining peace. This political practice, which outlines the contours of the

emerging multipolar or polycentric world, provides important material for philosophical reflections.

Nevertheless, this movement toward multipolarity needs its own theoretical conceptualization and philosophical justification, the elaboration of which is a task for philosophers and political scientists. This new philosophical vision should elaborate on the dialectic of unity and diversity and the ideas of humanity's wholeness. These ideas have previously been expressed, albeit in different ways, in various philosophical traditions. However, their implementation has now become especially relevant and urgent because humanity faces common global problems and has a shared destiny, which depends on whether nations will unite and coordinate their efforts to solve these problems and advance the transformation of society and the world order toward justice and peace.

In the realm of culture, the cultural diversity movement, which started at the end of the twentieth century, was hijacked by the ideology of liberal "multiculturalism," which pays mere lip service to diversity and ignores dialogical relationships among cultures. However, if the struggle for diversity is in nihilistic opposition to any unity and is unable to find appropriate common ground for dialogue and the unity of diverse cultures, it may provoke chaos and authoritarian forms of unification and forcible hegemonic "integration." Thus, a better understanding of the dialectic of unity and diversity is needed.

Examining the dialectic of unity and diversity from the perspective of intercultural philosophy, Raúl Fornet-Betancourt indicates that true universality can be achieved not by expansion but only through persistent work in favor of dialogue, dialogical relationships, and cooperation. This dialectic unfolds through the sustained effort of the singularization of the universal and the universalization of the singular. "The realization of authentic universality does not need to suppress cultural identities and their 'regions' of development; what is needed is rather the development of a policy of dialogue between them because it is the coexistence with the other and its confines that creates a true universality."⁵

In their search for alternatives, philosophers and political scientists turn to the rich traditions of thought of various cultures and civilizations. Ideas and insights from these traditions can serve as an inspiration in the current struggles for the humanistic transformation of societies and of people's minds and hearts toward justice and peace.

This article traces ideas of unity in diversity and dialogue presented mainly in Russian and Latin American philosophical traditions. The first part examines Vladimir S. Solovyov's conception of all-unity. The second part reviews Alexey F. Losev's original justification of all-unity and the

⁵ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Interculturalidad, crítica y liberación* (Aachen: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2012), 81.

dialectics of the One and the Many. The third part analyses Mikhail M. Bakhtin's philosophy of dialogical relationships. The development of the conception of transculture is highlighted in the fourth part. The fifth part presents the intercultural philosophy and its dialectic of the universal and the particular. The sixth part considers the connection between ideas of humanity's wholeness and the project of a dialogical "new cosmopolitanism" as the path toward a world order of freedom, justice, and peace.

Vladimir Solovyov's Conception of All-Unity (*Vseedinstvo*)

When trying to better understand the nature of problems faced by humanity and the possible solutions, namely seeking humanity's wholeness in a more peaceful and harmonious world, we should not limit ourselves to Western sources; rather, we need to draw wisdom from various cultural and civilizational traditions. The idea of humanity's wholeness has been expressed, in one way or another, in various great traditions of thought, including conceptions of all-unity in Russia, just universality in Latin American intercultural philosophy, and dialogical cosmopolitanism developed by philosophers from many countries.

The idea of "humanity's wholeness," "all-under-heaven," and "all-unity" – meaning all things are aspects of a single unified whole – has been explored by many philosophers in different cultures throughout history and expressed in various ways. We can find the roots of this idea of "all-unity" in ancient Greek philosophy, starting with Parmenides, Heraclitus, and then Plato and Plotinus. They addressed the problem of "the one and the many," referring to the fundamental question of whether reality is ultimately a unified whole ("the one") or a collection of diverse individual parts ("the many") and how these two concepts can be reconciled, that is, how unity and plurality can coexist within the universe. The philosophical history of all-unity was continuously elaborated within Christian thought; further developed in the classical Western tradition by Johannes Scot(t)us Eriugena, Nicholas of Cusa, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and completed in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling.

After Schelling, this notion abided mainly in Russia, and the metaphysics of all-unity became an important stage in the development of Russian philosophical idealism. However, the necessary prerequisites emerged in Slavophile thought, especially in its idea of *sobornost'* (togetherness, conciliarism, spiritual community of many people living jointly), which was akin to the idea of all-unity. Russian philosophy was developed in dialogue with Western European philosophy, not by imitating it but by creatively assimilating its achievements, developing its own originality, authenticity, and voice in the polyphony of world philosophical cultures. The idea of all-unity was a common ground for creative

dialogue between Western and Russian philosophies. It means overcoming discord and aspiring for harmony and peace, which was especially consonant with Russian Orthodox spirituality and convenient for expressing the ideals and values of Russian culture. The Russian mentality aspires to overcome fragmentation and separation in order to achieve wholeness and unity, whether in the world and society or in the human soul.

The turn of the 20th century in Russia was an exceptionally creative period called the “Silver Age” of Russian culture. During this era of religious and philosophical renaissance in Russia, in continuity with the traditions of ancient Platonism, Russian religious philosophers and theologians drew on the metaphysics of *всеединство* (*vseedinstvo* – all-unity, total-unity, or omni-unity) in their search for ontological harmony. The intuitions of Orthodox Christian worldview and the ontological basis of the classical Western intellectual heritage met in the philosopheme of all-unity as “one of the dominant intuitions and pervasive themes of Russian religious-philosophical thought. It is at the center of the most important stage of the latter’s development, the stage of the metaphysics of total-unity.”⁶

The founder of this thought was Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov (1853-1900). His philosophy is centered around the concept of all-unity, the spirit that connects the elements of nature and the spiritual realms and unites society with the highest Origin or the Supreme Principle. All-unity became his motto and his formula for the Supreme Principle, closely related to the primary working method of this philosophy: a “critique of abstract principles.” Importantly, it served as a constructive principle for the development of his new, all-embracing philosophical system. Along with the philosophical intuition of all-unity, there is the mystical motif of *Sophia* (Virgin of Wisdom, Eternal Friend, Eternal Femininity). The combination of these two sources created Solovyov’s philosophical system.

Solovyov started his philosophical journey by critically revising existing philosophy, which enabled him to arrive at a new paradigm. From this perspective of the principle of all-unity, he reexamines the entire system of categories developed by philosophical consciousness, labeling them as “negative” or “abstract” principles. He writes that the main “sin” of all abstract philosophy is that “[a]ll its essential errors come down to the conscious or unconscious hypostatization of predicates; moreover, one of the directions of this philosophy (rationalism) takes general, logical predicates, while the other (realism) stops at particular, empirical predicates.”⁷ But the real subject of philosophy, as true knowledge, consists in

⁶ Sergey Khoruzhiy, “The Idea of Total-Unity from Heraclitus to Losev,” *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 35, no. 1 (1996): 32.

⁷ Vladimir S. Solovyov, “Kritika otvlechennykh nachal” [Critique of Abstract Principles], in Vladimir S. Solovyov, *Sochineniia v 2-kh tomakh* [Works in 2 Volumes], eds. A.F. Losev and A.V. Gulyga (Moscow: Mysl’, 1988), 1:700.

what *is*, what *exists*, “the being in its predicates, and not these predicates, taken abstractly.”⁸ Thus, it is necessary to construe a philosophy as a system of positive principles (life principles and religious principles) through a revision of abstract principles and their “organic synthesis,” thereby negating their hypostatization.

According to Solovyov, being, when it is identified with the absolute, is an abstract principle, whereas its proper status is that of a predicate of what *is*, of *existing*: “Existing is not being, but all being belongs to it.”⁹ He distinguishes “between being [*bytie*] and existing [*sushchee*], between the concept and that which is expressed in it, and, following from this distinction, between all-unity [*vseedinstvo*] and all-one [*vseedinoe*]. All-unity is not all-one, but it possesses all-one; this is its definition, its idea.”¹⁰ All-unity is absolute, all-one is not. Solovyov defines “the absolute first principle as that which possesses the positive power of being.” “Thus, the unconditionally existing [*bezuslovno-syshchee*] or absolute first principle [*pervonachalo*] is that *which has in itself the positive power of all being*...As the only positive basis of all being, the unconditionally existing is also cognized equally in all being.”¹¹ Furthermore, “[o]n the one hand, the absolute is above all being; on the other hand, it is the immediate potentiality of being or the original matter.”¹² The Absolute, God, is not being [*bytie*] but existing [*sushchee*] (the Absolutely-Existing, the Supra-Existing). The Absolute is not subject in itself to any definition, and it “remains one and thereby proves that it is unconditionally one, one in its very essence, not capable of being removed or destroyed by any multiplicity.”¹³

All-Unity as the Main Principle of Solovyov’s Philosophical System

For Solovyov, being has three modes: will, representation, and feeling. The positive principle of all-unity governs not only ontology but also other areas of philosophy, such as ethics, epistemology, and aesthetics. All-unity itself has three modes or images, which are goodness, truth, and beauty: “If in the moral sphere (for the will) all-unity is absolute goodness, if in the cognitive sphere (for the mind) it is absolute truth, then the realization of all-unity in external reality, its realization or embodiment in the sphere of sensory, material existence is absolute beauty.” He stresses that

⁸ Solovyov, “Kritika otvlechennykh nachal,” 1:700.

⁹ Solovyov, “Kritika otvlechennykh nachal,” 1:700.

¹⁰ Solovyov, “Kritika otvlechennykh nachal,” 1:710.

¹¹ Solovyov, “Kritika otvlechennykh nachal,” 1:701. Italics in original.

¹² Solovyov, “Kritika otvlechennykh nachal,” 1:705.

¹³ Solovyov, “Kritika otvlechennykh nachal,” 1:706.

this realization of all-unity “is accomplished through ourselves and is a task for humanity.”¹⁴

The concept of all-unity is universal. It defines ontology, sets the principles of the theory of integral knowledge and aesthetic creativity, and serves as a methodological principle for composition. It is the uniting principle of Solovyov’s entire philosophical system. Based on this principle, Solovyov developed an original version of the “philosophy of life” and contributed to the transformation of European philosophy, initiated by Henri Bergson and Edmund Husserl.¹⁵

Solovyov was critical of metaphysical systems that dominated the second half of the nineteenth century and partially anticipated the twentieth-century critique of metaphysical systems of classical thought. Despite speaking out against traditional forms of system with its claim to the “absoluteness” of rationalist philosophy and its one-sided principles at the foundation of those systems, Solovyov did not reject the achievements of systematic thinking as integral to philosophical culture. He criticized the universal rationalism of past philosophy, its scientism, and its insufficient attention to non-rationalist forms of comprehending the world, but did not abandon rationalism as a principle of philosophical inquiry. In Solovyov’s philosophical system, approaches that had previously been focused on disciplines were preserved as dimensions of an integral philosophy, providing it with the multiplicity or multidimensionality of a systematic approach. He argued that a renewed understanding of systematicity links not with any kind of abstracted discrete principle but with the all-unifying principle of *vseedinstvo*.

Summarizing Solovyov’s major works, Nelly V. Motroshilova reconstructs the main systemic dimensions of his philosophy into several groups of related issues: (1) the “metaphysical” group (general theoretical philosophy) with cosmological, ontological, epistemological and logical, and psychological dimensions; (2) the “practical philosophy” group with moral (ethical), socio-philosophical and sociopolitical, aesthetic, and philosophical-historical dimensions; (3) the philosophical anthropology group; and (4) the theological group.¹⁶

Solovyov’s philosophy indicates the foundational existential opposition between the all-unity and the all-differing. Understanding his philosophical system’s construction requires a consideration of its multi-layeredness and the dialectical intensity of the principle of all-unity. In

¹⁴ Solovyov, “Kritika otvlechennykh nachal,” 1:745.

¹⁵ See Nelly V. Motroshilova, *Mysliteli Rossii i filosofiya Zapada (V. Solov'yev. N. Berdyayev. S. Frank. L. Shestov)* [Thinkers of Russia and the Philosophy of the West (V. Solovyov, N. Berdyaev, S. Frank, L. Shestov)] (Moscow: Republic, 2007).

¹⁶ Nelly V. Motroshilova, “Vladimir Solovyov: Philosophy as Systemic Unity,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Russian Thought*, eds. Marina F. Bykova et al. (Cham: Springer, 2021), 164.

this system, two main “vectors” can be distinguished, which, at first glance, are aimed at opposite directions, but in fact “give shape” to all-unity through dialectical conjunction:

The *first vector* is [that of] synthesis, unification: 1) unification of the Good, Truth, and Beauty; 2) synthesis of various philosophical approaches; [and] 3) continuity, unity in philosophy’s movement from God to nature, man, and society. The *second vector* is the vector of freedom, individualization, differentiation, isolation, and even schism: 1) isolation of the individual and his (often dramatic) detachment from the whole, from All-Unity; 2) the confrontation of good and evil; 3) the opposition of creative and destructive forces (in the cosmos, in the nature of man, in culture, in philosophy). In light of this, Solovyov’s All-Unity is a kind of unifying, synthesizing principle that however makes no guarantee of a serene Unity and that forces its way through intense confrontation and struggle between opposing forces.¹⁷

In contrast to the common opinion that all-unity is conflict-free and associated with bucolic serenity, Solovyov shows that all-unity is a free play of forces and a dramatic clash of multidirectional tendencies.

The main principle of all-unity embraces the natural and human world thanks to God, the Creator, the “Universal Artist,” whose complex plan is revealed through the difference between the vectors of unity and fragmentation and in the dramaturgy of all-unity. “In obvious opposition to the primordial chaos and in secret agreement with the world’s soul or nature, which is torn apart by this chaos and increasingly yielding to the mental suggestions of the creative principle, the cosmic mind creates in it and through it the complex and magnificent body of our universe.”¹⁸

All-unity is, first of all, a “universal idea,” an idea-symbol of “the overall connectedness of the universe.” Solovyov points out the opposition between an idea and its materiality (*veshchnost’*), between the positive all-permeability of the idea of all-unity and the impermeability of material being: “Material substance is the inertia and impenetrability of being – the direct opposite of the idea, as a positive all-permeability or all-unity.”¹⁹

In nature, all-unity has its physical expression in light, the active center of which is the Sun. “Light or its weightless carrier – the ether – is the

¹⁷ Motroshilova, “Vladimir Solovyov: Philosophy as Systemic Unity,” 165.

¹⁸ Vladimir S. Solovyov, “Krasota v prirode” [Beauty in Nature], in *Sochineniia v 2-kh tomakh*, 2:388.

¹⁹ Solovyov, “Krasota v prirode,” 2:363.

primary reality of the idea in its opposition to ponderable matter, and in this sense, it is the first principle of beauty in nature.”²⁰ All-unity and its expression, “light, in its initial division into a multitude of independent centers, embraced, however, by a common harmony, is the beauty of the starry sky.”²¹ Beauty is laid at the very foundation of all-unity; it is the main thread stretched through nature to God.

The unity in the natural world, however, is realized in dramatic forms through the struggles and clashes of opposite forces. It is described as dramatic and beautiful, a stormy sea of life: “And this boundless sea itself, in its stormy excitement, acquires new beauty as an image of rebellious life, a gigantic outburst of elemental forces.” This struggle “cannot break the general connection of the universe and disrupt its unity but only fill it with movement, brilliance, and thunder.”²²

There are similar dialectics in the organic world, where we can see “a picture of a difficult and complex process, determined by the struggle of heterogeneous principles, which is only resolved by some stable equilibrium after considerable effort.”²³ Also there is “the same image of all-unity that the Universal Artist sketched in large and simple lines on the starry sky or in the multi-colored rainbow, he paints in detail and finely in plant and animal bodies.”²⁴

The Existential Opposition of the All-United and the All-Differing in the Human World

In Solovyov’s philosophy, the conception of all-unity obtains its most interesting development in the interpretation of the human being. He argues for the possibility and necessity of realizing all-unity in the human world. In his philosophical anthropology, the starting point for discovering the idea of all-unity embodied in the human world is theological and teleological cosmologism in conjunction with aesthetic idealism, connecting human beings to a broader unity with the universe, space, nature, God, and society, as well as freedom, individuality, and the intrinsic value of human beings. “Creation is a *process* that has two closely related goals: a general and a special one.”²⁵ The general goal is “the embodiment of a real idea, i.e., *light and life*, in various forms of natural beauty.” Most importantly, the human being is considered as a form, the creation of which is the special goal of the Creator: “the special goal is the creation of man, i.e., that form which, together with the greatest physical beauty,

²⁰ Solovyov, “Krasota v prirode,” 2:364.

²¹ Solovyov, “Krasota v prirode,” 2:365.

²² Solovyov, “Krasota v prirode,” 2:367.

²³ Solovyov, “Krasota v prirode,” 2:372.

²⁴ Solovyov, “Krasota v prirode,” 2:371.

²⁵ Solovyov, “Krasota v prirode,” 2:388f.

also represents the highest internal potential of light and life, called self-consciousness.”²⁶

In contrast to deterministic interpretations of the human being, its place in the cosmos, and the relations between the universal and the individual, Solovyov stresses that this process of creation is not predetermined since, even in the animal world, “the general cosmic goal is achieved with their own participation and assistance” through their internal aspirations and feelings. The human being is not determined by a blind play of natural forces in the multidirectional tendencies of unification and isolation but has self-consciousness, freedom, and the ability to act. Solovyov asserts the non-deterministic view of the human being: “Man no longer only participates in the action of cosmic principles but is capable of *knowing the goal* of this action and, therefore, of laboring toward achieving it meaningfully and freely.”²⁷

In Solovyov’s interpretation of the human being and the relations between the universal and the individual, the two vectors of all-unity – unification and individualization – are clearly manifested. Without abandoning the universality of the all-unity principle, he asserts the individuality and freedom of the human being and human self-consciousness: “*each* person is capable of cognizing and realizing truth, and each can become a living reflection of the absolutely whole, conscious, and self-contained organ of universal life.”²⁸

Truth, goodness, and beauty are the three *hypostases* (from the Greek ὑπόστασις, the underlying, fundamental state or substance that supports all of reality) of the all-unity principle. As Solovyov writes, “And in the rest of nature there is truth (or the image of God), but only in its objective community, unknown to individual beings,” which are “for themselves,” and thus “separate from the *all*, and consequently outside of truth.” The advantage of human individuality is that “it can contain the truth, it is not abolished by truth but preserved and strengthened in its triumph.”²⁹

Solovyov decisively elevates the metaphysical, ontological status of human individuality, recognizing in it the possibility of accessing All-Unity as truth. Here, he is talking about truth more in the ontological, existential sense than in the purely epistemological sense: after all, for Solovyov, what becomes ‘truth’ is first and foremost not cognition of the truth but the *individual’s meaningful existence in truth*.³⁰

²⁶ Solovyov, “Krasota v prirode,” 2:389.

²⁷ Solovyov, “Krasota v prirode,” 2:389.

²⁸ Vladimir S. Solovyov, “Smysl l’ubvi” [Meaning of Love], in *Sochineniia v 2-kh tomakh*, 2:504.

²⁹ Solovyov, “Smysl l’ubvi,” 2:504.

³⁰ Motroshilova, *Mysliteli Rossii i filosofiya Zapada*, 96.

Ascending toward the Truth – the All-Unity – as a Task for Humanity

Access to truth can be achieved under certain conditions: “In order for an individual being to find its justification and affirmation in the truth – the all-unity – it is not enough for this being only to be conscious of the truth – it must also be in the truth.”³¹ Solovyov views the human ascension toward the truth as both an individual and a collective goal, as a task for humanity. He thinks that Christianity’s efforts can achieve it: “We know that the task of Christian humanity was to realize the truth of Christ in its threefold form: as the truth of faith, as the truth of reason, and as the truth of life; the essence of this truth consists in the harmonious and complete union of the divine with the human.”³²

Being in the truth depends on the individual. Despite having cognitive ability and freedom of choice, the human individual faces internal drama because their egoism hinders them from being in the truth. What is the remedy for these egoistic drives? Solovyov proposes the power of love. In *The Meaning of Love*, he writes: “The meaning of human love in general is the *justification and salvation of individuality through the sacrifice of egoism*.”³³ In Solovyov’s philosophy, love is one of the central philosophical categories. Love is personal, but also one of the manifestations of all-unity. In explaining the meaning of love, he uses the Greek term *syzygy*, meaning conjunction or close union, as the relationship of individual members of society to each other, their connection with the social spheres – local, national, and universal. “This connection of the active human principle (personal) with the all-unified idea embodied in the social spiritual-bodily organism must be a living *syzygic* relationship.”³⁴

Access to truth and all-unity for human individuality is a special way of relating to each other and nature. If people egoistically try to assert themselves, they thereby deprive their own existence of meaning and turn their individuality into an empty form. “A man...can become everything only by removing in his consciousness and life that inner boundary...and only together with others can he realize his own absolute significance – to become an inseparable and irreplaceable part of the whole all-unity, an independent living and unique organ of absolute life. True individuality is a certain definite image of all-unity, a certain definite way of perceiving and assimilating everything else.”³⁵

³¹ Solovyov, “Smysl l’ubvi,” 2:504.

³² Vladimir S. Solovyov, “Velikiy spor i khristianskaya politika” [The Great Dispute and Christian Politics], in Vladimir S. Solovyov, *Sochineniia v 2-kh tomakh* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), 1:98.

³³ Solovyov, “Smysl l’ubvi,” 2:505. Italics in original.

³⁴ Solovyov, “Smysl l’ubvi,” 2:545.

³⁵ Solovyov, “Smysl l’ubvi,” 2:506f.

In accordance with the ideal of all-unity, Solovyov emphasizes the ecumenical Christian culture and views the need for a union of independent nations. He holds that the realization of the idea of the kingdom of God is the vocation of ideal humanity and the supreme meaning of the historical process.

While normatively striving for the harmonious all-unity of humanity, at the empirical level, Solovyov saw the reality of the increasing confrontational tendencies in the world. In 1900, he published his last book, *Three Conversations on War, Progress, and the End of World History*, which was less optimistic about the global situation and humanity's future. In their dialogues, the protagonists mention the growing contradictions between countries, militarism, and military conflicts between the East and the West. Although the long-awaited possibility of all-unity and peace remains, it has been relegated to a distant future. The First World War broke out in 1914.

The eschatology of the philosophy of history as applied to the subsequent 20th century, and also in relation to the new 21st century, the new millennium...turned out to be prophetic, if not in a number of specific predictions, then in relation to the general tragic movement of human civilization in its central characteristics.³⁶

In the contradiction between the all-unity and the all-differing, Solovyov defends the possibility and necessity of humanity's ascent to the ideal of all-unity: "The will of God is open to all: *let all be one*. And this will, realized from the beginning of time in heaven, must be realized on earth through the coordinated action of the human will, for God wants *free* all-unity."³⁷

Alexey Losev's Justification of All-Unity and the Dialectics of the One and the Many

After Solovyov's premature death at the age of 47, various versions of the philosophy of all-unity were creatively developed by Pavel Florensky, Lev Karsavin, Semyon Frank, Nikolay Lossky, Sergei Bulgakov, and Evgenii Trubetzkoy. Solovyev's philosophy strongly influenced Alexey Losev and Mikhail Bakhtin.

Losev and Bakhtin were prominent philosophers who, despite oppressive conditions after the 1917 Revolution, continued to maintain and

³⁶ Motroshilova, *Mysliteli Rossii i filosofiya Zapada*, 10.

³⁷ Solovyov, *Sochineniia v 2-kh tomakh* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), 1:205. Italics in original.

contribute to humanistic thought and passed it on to a new generation striving for a more humane world. They faced the twofold problem of the fragmentation of a world torn apart by war and revolutions and by authoritarian forcible “integration.” These violent tendencies were enforced by certain policies and ideologies. While Losev and Bakhtin remained faithful to the humanistic tradition of Russian philosophy and the ideals of all-unity, they had to rethink these issues in the new reality in order to find feasible paths toward a harmonious society of free individuals. Each of them pursued this goal from one’s own philosophical perspective.

Alexey Fyodorovich Losev (1893–1988), a Russian philosopher, philologist, classicist, and culturologist, was one of the most prominent figures in twentieth-century Russian philosophical and religious thought. In the 1920s, he published his famous eight books on ancient Greek aesthetics, which presented a sophisticated, essentially Neoplatonic hierarchy and dialectic of forms of expression of the First One (*Pervoedinogo*) principle at different levels of other-existence (*inobytiia*). Ancient Greek history evoked allusions to the catastrophic changes of the twentieth century and the search for harmony and wholeness. For readers, it was like a window opening a world different from the reality shattered by the civil war and authoritarian power.

In 1930, he published *The Dialectics of Myth*, interpreting philosophical and scientific ideas in terms of their mythic underpinnings and refuting the official dogma of dialectical materialism as a myth and opposing it with his “dialectical idealism.” Because of this, he was accused of “idealism” and sentenced to ten years in a labor camp at the White Sea-Baltic Canal. When he was released three years later, he was almost blind and had lost his hair. Despite his deteriorating vision, he continued his scholarly work by dictating to his students.

At the heart of his philosophical creativity is the problem of all-unity. “Following the philosophical tradition of all-unity and the personalistic principles of Palamite theology, Losev built a systemic worldview, which is characterized as energetic symbolism and the Orthodox understanding of Neoplatonism. The world in this system is considered as a hierarchical and henologically (from the Greek *ἓν* [*hén*] meaning “one,” “united,” “first-unified”) charged whole, manifested in the continuous self-development of a single living bodily spirit....Losev proved the universality of this system using materials from ancient and Christian cultures, philology, linguistics, musicology, logic, and mathematics.”³⁸ The idea of all-unity was the running thread of his many works, but it was thoroughly elaborated in his eight-volume *History of Ancient Aesthetics*, the first version

³⁸ Viktor P. Troitskiy, “Losev, Aleksey Fedorovich,” in *Novaya filosofskaya entsiklopediya* [New Philosophical Encyclopedia], vol. 2 (Moscow: Nauka, 2001), 453.

of which was published in 1927-1930, before a substantially revised version of that magnum opus was published in 1963-1988.

The categorial-logical framework of Losev's philosophical system aimed to generalize and develop the constructions of Plato and his followers, especially Plotinus and Proclus. It was among the great Neoplatonists that Losev discovered an ideal of logic, which is conceived as being as close as possible in its principles to life itself. The theme of unity was always present in ancient Greek thought, and Losev never ceased to highlight it and emphasize the extraordinary commitment of antiquity to unity. He makes a detailed reconstruction of ancient cosmology and reveals the underlying paradigm of heterogeneous unity.

In the seventh volume of his magnum opus, he analyzes the great Neoplatonists, culminating with Proclus. In Proclus' concept of "the One" and its dialectical relationship with "the Many," the One refers to the central metaphysical concept of a single, transcendent source that is the primary cause of everything else and the origin of all diverse and multiple things, while the Many arises from the One through emanation. It is a completely transcendent reality beyond definition and all categories of being and non-being. The One is the unifying principle behind all existence, allowing for the emergence of multiplicity while still maintaining a fundamental unity. The relationship between the One and the Many is dialectical, a dynamic tension where the One is always present within the multiplicity, providing unity.

In his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, Proclus elaborates the concept of the One and its relationship with the Many, exploring the dialectical process of understanding this complex relationship. He presents the general metaphysical antitheses used in Neoplatonism: unity and plurality, whole and part, cause and consequent, transcendence and immanence, eternity and time, gods and henads, intelligences and souls, being, life, and cognition. In *The Elements of Theology*, in the section "Of the One and the Many," Proclus justifies the set of propositions:

- Prop. 1. Every manifold in some way participates unity.
- Prop. 2. All that participates unity is both one and not-one.
- Prop. 3. All that becomes one does so by participation of unity.
- Prop. 4. All that is unified is other than the One itself.
- Prop. 5. Every manifold is posterior to the One.

Prop. 6. Every manifold is composed either of unified groups or of henads (units).³⁹

³⁹ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text*, trans. E.R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 3-7.

Neoplatonists such as Plotinus and Proclus argue that beneath the surface phenomena that present themselves to our senses are three hypostases: the One (the ultimate source), the Intellect (*nous*, the realm of pure thought and forms), and the Soul (*psyche*, the animating principle that connects the higher realms to the material world), with each level emanating from the one above it.

Losev highlights the paramount importance of the conception of all-unity in Neoplatonism, saying that “Proclus believes that if there is no One, then there is nothing at all.”⁴⁰ Proclus was esteemed for his role in coherently systematizing the ideas of Neoplatonism. Commenting on Proclus’s contribution to the development of this conception, Losev writes: “The One as a category by the time of Proclus had received significant development, and its final systematization was required. Proclus did that in such a way that his entire philosophy, without any exaggeration, must be considered a sheer glorification of the One, or, more precisely, this all-unity with all its subordinate types.”⁴¹

Losev also points out that in Neoplatonism, there are various types of unity based on the Neoplatonic doctrine of three hypostases, i.e., the forms of unity and integrity: the One (the ultimate source), the Intellect, and the Soul. Proclus mainly considers types of unity based on the first hypostasis (the One), establishing six types of unity on the basis of the doctrine of the super-existent first One:

(1) Unity as absolute all-embracingness, exceeding all separateness and therefore pure and unknowable “above” (the bearer of all principles, or the principle of all principles, and for that very reason, the super-principled principle of all principles).

(2) The One as the limit [first origin], when the first positing is outlined in it, while it is still positing something unknown (the principle of unity).

(3) Unity as infinite since limits can exist only when there is infinity (the principle of plurality).

(4) Unity as a fusion of the limit and the infinite, or as a henad, or as a unit in the form of the potency of a number of series (the principle of monoplurality).

(5) Unity as a formed totality of units, or as a number in the form of the *eidos* of a number (integral plurality).

(6) Unity as an energetically charged number, or as the number of something (although this “something” is not here yet, since it is no longer a quantity but presupposes a certain semantic quality, that is, it generally

⁴⁰ Alexey Losev, *Istoriia antichoi estetiki. Poslednie veka* [History of Ancient Aesthetics], vol. VII, book 2 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988), 130.

⁴¹ Losev, *Istoriia antichoi estetiki. Poslednie veka*, 114f.

requires a transition from the pre-noumenal sphere of the original One to the noumenal sphere of certain logical categories); it is a number as energy, the principle of the One-divided becoming wholeness.⁴²

Losev then points to the next sphere of unity – the sphere of the Intellect (*nous*) or the noumenal sphere, the realm of pure thought and forms. The Intellect is “one” already taken as “being.” Both Plotinus and Proclus call this type of noumenal unity not just “one” and “many” but “one-many” (*hén polla*).⁴³ According to Losev, in order to complete Proclus’s system, in addition to the previously mentioned six types of pre-noumenal unity, six more types of unity must be found in the noumenal sphere: 7) intelligible, 8) intelligible-intellectual, 9) intellectual, 10) cosmic and intracosmic, 11) universal-spiritual, and 12) particular-spiritual.⁴⁴ “Therefore, in the end, it must be said that the entire philosophical aesthetics of Proclus is a doctrine of unity, that is, of all-unity and its types.”⁴⁵

Losev also wrote about the great influence of Proclus on medieval and Renaissance philosophies and on Hegel’s dialectics of being, as well as the increased interest in Proclus’s works in the second half of the twentieth century among French philosophers and Werner Beierwaltes.⁴⁶ In an interview in the last year of his life, he stressed the idea of “the wholeness of the world”:

The world does not depend on anything because there is nothing else but the world. Everything else has already been included in the world....The whole world is that wholeness into which the Sun, Moon, Earth, and everything else in general enters only as constituent parts. The whole, naturally, is greater than the parts...If you develop the concept of the world, you need to come to the concept of God. Because you need to come to a whole that is greater than the individual parts and greater than their totality. And this is God, who is above everything, rules everything, moves everything, and includes everything.⁴⁷

Losev’s reasoning about the “wholeness of the world” formed part of the struggle with ideas about a divided world, and thus the search for

⁴² Losev, *Istoriia antichoi estetiki. Poslednie veka*, 118.

⁴³ Losev, *Istoriia antichoi estetiki. Poslednie veka*, 118.

⁴⁴ Losev, *Istoriia antichoi estetiki. Poslednie veka*, 125.

⁴⁵ Losev, *Istoriia antichoi estetiki. Poslednie veka*, 131.

⁴⁶ Werner Beierwaltes, *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1979).

⁴⁷ Cited in Viktor P. Troitskiy, *Razyskaniya o zhizni i tvorchestve A.F. Loseva: Russkiy Prokl* [Research About the Life and Work of A.F. Losev: The Russian Proclus], 2nd ed. (Moscow: URSS, 2022), 18.

the wholeness of the world was the most natural task and responsibility of thought. The task of Losev's application of his method and dialectical "reading" of cognitive antinomies was to overcome epistemological gaps in the worldview rooted in modernity and René Descartes's "ego cogito," such as the dualities of *subject/object*, *idea/matter*, *consciousness/being*, *soul/body*, *infinite/finite*, or *part/whole*.

In Losev's philosophy, the theme of all-unity is always present, and he never ceased to affirm it. His intuition of the whole permeates not only his analysis of ancient Greek philosophy and his general worldview but also many particular topics of his research, including a symbol as a whole or as a synthesis of essence and phenomenon, and his discovery of the fundamental connection between the symbol and all-unity. He viewed myth as the dialectical synthesis of a formative idea and a matter-potentiality, infinity as the integrity of mathematical and physical objects, and linguistic elements as a whole – all particular manifestations of a general principle.

The Dialectics of the One and the Many

Losev explored the problems of the philosophy of culture in several works, including *The History of Ancient Aesthetics*. The central thread of this work is the dialectic of "the One" and "the Many." In its logical-theoretical part, Losev laid out the systems of categories, united by a universal dialectical method, which he applied to various subject areas. These can be roughly characterized as "Dialectics of the world," "Dialectics of the name," "Dialectics of music," and "Dialectics of expression" (or of "artistic form" in its application to questions of the typology of the arts).

His analysis of the different modes of culture is centered on his concept of "*eidos*" (pl. "*eide*"). In the fourth volume, *Dialectics of Artistic Form*, Losev developed his dialectical phenomenology:

Phenomenology is the construction of *eidos* from its individual moments, and the phenomenology of the plurality of things is the construction of a common *eidos*, where these things come in as parts. Dialectics is the construction of the *eidos* in its eidetic connection with other *eide* so that this *eidos* is raised to a more general *eidos* not as part of it but as a logical-categorical moment.⁴⁸

In his doctrine of numbers, Losev made the transition from the standard of the Hegelian triad to the fourth principle, which distinguished his

⁴⁸ Alexey Losev, *Dialektika khudozhestvennoy formy* [Dialectics of Artistic Form] (Moscow: Academic Project Publishing House, 2010), 10.

system from Hegel's "existent Being," Losev argued that the dialectical triad is mostly understood as a pure idea, but dialectics should capture the entire complexity of the living movement of facts. Accordingly, the fourth principle is a "Fact." "The tetrad" is the only way "for dialectics to be saved from subjective and incorporeal idealism, operating with abstract concepts that have no body to them."⁴⁹

Losev distinguishes and examines four main principles in the structure of the process of dialectical thinking, whose universal sequence forms four stages of a fundamental tetrad:

(1) The first stage is "pure One, which as such is indistinguishable and an absolutely indivisible singularity....If we take Being as a whole, then there is nothing for it to differ from, and, therefore, it has no boundaries; that means it is above boundaries, above meaning, above knowledge, above Being. Such is the singularity of the world as a whole and of each thing separately." Thus, the beginning of dialectics is "the unthinkability, the above-thinkability, absolute singularity, which is not this, neither this nor that, no separate thing at all, but the potency of all things and categories."⁵⁰

(2) The second stage is singularity as separated plurality: "Thought, initially demanding unthinkability, immediately demands the positing of this One, demands the existence of this One....From now on, it is not only the indivisible One but also the separate Many as it accepted the boundary. It has received an outline and, therefore, comprehension. It has become something definite and, therefore, Being. This is the singularity that is given as separated plurality."⁵¹

(3) The next stage is the formation that occurs, according to the fundamental law of dialectics, when any dialectical definition is made through opposition to something else and subsequent synthesis. The One (the thesis) and the Many (the antithesis) form a dialectical synthesis as the third principle and "the formation of a logically separated unity."⁵²

(4) Finally, the fourth principle is a Fact. The process of formation requires something that has become a Fact, a presence that carries the process of formation in itself. Since "every dialectical definition is accomplished through opposition to something else and subsequent synthesis with it," the entire sequence is completed here with such an opposition: just as the other, taking upon itself the One, becomes the Many, and just as the other, taking further upon itself the Many, turns into formation, the

⁴⁹ Losev, *Dialektika khudozhestvennoy formy*, 163.

⁵⁰ Losev, *Dialektika khudozhestvennoy formy*, 11.

⁵¹ Losev, *Dialektika khudozhestvennoy formy*, 11.

⁵² Losev, *Dialektika khudozhestvennoy formy*, 12.

other, taking upon itself the formation, is therefore necessarily the formed, “that which precisely is forming.”⁵³

This is a brief and rather schematic outline of the first tetrad and the dialectical definition of the conceivable in general, as well as of the dialectics of One and Another and of the One and the Many. These themes are interpreted in great detail in other parts of the eight-volume opus, with extensive excursions to the primary sources, above all, Plato’s dialogue *Parmenides* and the comments on it by the Neoplatonists.

Losev explains the dialectics of the One and the Many through another example. He notes the difficulties of modern phenomenological thought in providing a precise definition of meaning, or *eidos*, of the whole. For example, one of the most common “definitions” is that “the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts.” But this is not a strictly scientific definition. What does “greater” mean? It is possible to come up with an infinite number of things that are “greater than the sum of its parts,” but this does not yield any definition of *eidos*. On the contrary, as Losev shows, in the dialectical definition, the meaning of this “greater” is given and revealed with the utmost categorial accuracy. “Here is a whole system of dialectical antinomies that reveal the whole essence of the relationship, reigning between the whole, the individual, the many, and the part. Hence, singularity is identical with itself and with another and different with itself and another, rests in itself and in another, and moves in itself and in another, existing and not existing. This illustrates the complete relationship between whole and parts and reveals in which sense the whole is greater than the part and even, in a sense, less than it.”⁵⁴

The Diversity of Cultures and the Principle of All-Unity

Losev applied his dialectical method and his in-depth knowledge of the history of cultures – of ancient Greek, Russian, and Western cultures – to the analysis of the dynamics of the cultural development and the interrelations of cultures within the context of the advancement of humanity’s cultural evolution. His method, implemented for the analysis of ancient Greek culture, can be used by other researchers to analyze other cultures, culture types, and their relationships.

Losev remains faithful in his approach to the fundamental idea of all-unity. Amid the immense complexity of cultures and their different, sometimes conflicting, tendencies in intracultural and intercultural relations, he shows the valuable originality of each culture while discerning the wholeness of each culture. Through his comprehensive philosophical vision of

⁵³ Losev, *Dialektika khudozhestvennoy formy*, 13.

⁵⁴ Losev, *Dialektika khudozhestvennoy formy*, 18.

the history of culture and the political history of humanity, Losev argues for the fundamental unity of diverse cultures within humanity's wholeness. The "unity in diversity" of cultures ought to be viewed not deterministically (as in historicism) but as a potentiality of the human mind and creativity, the realization of which ultimately depends on human effort. Continuing the Russian tradition of humanistic philosophy, Losev consistently promotes the positive tendency toward cultural wholeness and, in doing so, contributes to the realization of the potential of this possibility, which is also a possibility for the intellectual-spiritual advancement of humanity.

Losev made some positive comments on Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, especially appreciating Spengler's critique of European rationalism and his attempts to identify fundamental intuitions underpinning certain "organic eras." Spengler viewed cultures as "organisms," each springing from the native soil of a mother region to which it remains bound throughout its life cycle and world historical development as a kind of collective biography. He identified nine cultures: Egyptian, Babylonian, Indian, Chinese, Greco-Roman, Arabic, Mexican, Western, and Russian. At the same time, Losev criticized Spengler's "physiognomic method" as a non-scientific, intuitive approach, a kind of "instinctive understanding" of a culture rather than a logical analysis. This method only observes the outward expressions of a culture, similar as interpreting a person's character from his/her physiognomy – grasping the "essence" of a culture through its philosophy, art, and architecture.

Losev also pointed out the limitations of Spengler's approach. In particular, in relation to antiquity, Spengler failed to undertake the philosophical-historical and logical analysis that would reveal the transcendental connection of all the structural foundations of ancient culture. These foundations are intuitions of corporeity. Such an analysis would make it possible to see the structural and semantic difference between ancient Greek corporeity and Western conception of space. In this regard, Losev sees the advantage of Hegel's dialectics and philosophy of history, further developing his own dialectical method.

The originality of Losev's examination of historically known cultural types is that it was preceded by a theoretical analysis that explains the structure and logic of functioning of the generalized "art form," of logic as dialectical logic, of structure as symbolic structure, or as mythological symbols or manifestations of mythology. These fundamental structural elements enable us to discern the specificity of cultural types and their universal characteristics.

Losev criticized the view of cultures as isolated, self-sufficient entities: "Spengler is so passionate about this very physiognomy, he feels so vividly the uniqueness and individual irreducibility of the face of each culture that he does not hesitate to directly affirm the absolute

fragmentation of the world-historical culture of humankind, the complete independence and isolation of each culture, its complete untranslatability into the language of any other culture.”⁵⁵

Losev based his classifications of cultural types on a specific understanding of *myth*, conceived through careful analysis of various data and defined in the precise language of logical-philosophical categories. As a result of this approach,

Myth is presented as a dialectical synthesis of idea (formative idea) and matter (matter-potency), as a synthesis consistently developed by antiquity in the form of a *sensual-material cosmos* with the highlighting of one aspect or another in a single (for all of antiquity) “nomenclature” for the constituent parts of the cosmos. Losev described the entire path of development of the ancient worldview and thought as a consistent and steady development of all (truly constructive) possibilities of this dialectical synthesis.⁵⁶

Losev demonstrates a dialectical view of unity in diversity. He appreciates the uniqueness of each culture – not as isolated but as parts of the whole in dialectical relationships with both each other and world history – and insists on the view of “human cultures as a whole, as the life of a single all-human organism.” He stresses that the dialectical method should show that the original cultures of nations or civilizations, for all their uniqueness, have a certain basic commonality as components of the universal culture of humanity. “Dialectics would reveal the unity of those categories that constitute the structure of each culture; and dialectics would show that each culture differs from every other only through a particular combination and accentuation of certain categories that are common to culture in general.”⁵⁷

Losev conducted a detailed reconstruction of ancient cosmology and revealed the underlying paradigm of heterogeneous unity. In his last book, *Vladimir Solovyov and His Time* (1990), he paid homage to his beloved philosopher and the founder of the Russian philosophical tradition, while reflecting on his own philosophical journey. In this work, he stressed the centrality of the theme of all-unity, reaffirming what he had always stood for: “The principle of unity...is the principle of philosophical classics in general.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Alexey Losev, *Ocherki antichnogo simbolizma i mifologii* [Essays on Ancient Symbolism and Mythology], vol. 1 (Moscow: 1930), 62.

⁵⁶ Troitskiy, *Razyskaniya o zhizni i tvorchestve A.F. Loseva*, 23.

⁵⁷ Losev, *Ocherki antichnogo simbolizma i mifologii*, vol. 1, 62.

⁵⁸ Alexey Losev, *Vladimir Solovyov i ego vremia* [Vladimir Solovyov and His Time] (Moscow: Progress, 1991), 119.

Sergei Averintsev, a disciple of Losev, highlights Losev's consistency in elaborating on the idea of all-unity:

Losev's thought, precisely as thought, beyond all external circumstances, was obsessed with the imperative of rigid, inexorable unity; according to this law, the minutest features of the "integrated countenance" [*tselostnyi lik*] and "worldview style" [*mirovozzrencheskii stil'*] must be dialectically deduced from some initial principle, with the same measure of obligation and compulsoriness that is standard for Euclidian geometry.⁵⁹

Mikhail Bakhtin's Philosophy of Dialogical Relationships

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975), like Alexey Losev, was a prominent figure in the Russian philosophical tradition. He was engaged in the Russian and German philosophical debates during the rise of European humanistic thought in the early 20th century. Unfortunately, this process was interrupted by war and revolution. In response to the atmosphere of blatant violence and trampling of moral norms, he championed the humanistic principles of freedom, ethical responsibility, and dialogical relationships.

Bakhtin was committed to the Russian philosophical tradition and the idea of all-unity. However, he pursued this goal in his own original way. Instead of constructing the metaphysics of all-unity, which was supposed to be elaborated from the abstract to the concrete, he began with the individual and their actions, focusing on the nature of one's relationships with the "other" and justifying dialogical relationships and their role in ascending toward harmonious unity. He argued that these I-You relations should be dialogical, and that the assertion of these relations within society would lead to social harmonization. This approach implies that ascending from the particular to the general, from the concrete to the abstract, enables the harmonization of interpersonal and social relations. From this perspective, Bakhtin analyzed the problems of unity and diversity, the universal and the particular. While his personalism affirms the uniqueness of individuals, and thus human diversity, his dialogism stresses the dialogical character of I-Other intersubjective relations.

Bakhtin's philosophy is both personalist and dialogical, two dimensions that were already expressed in his early philosophical works. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, written around 1920, he provided an original response to the philosophical problems faced by neo-Kantianism and

⁵⁹ Sergei S. Averintsev, "'Mirovozzrencheskii stil': podstupyy k iavleniiu Loseva," [*'Worldview Style': Prolegomena to the Losev Phenomenon*], *Voprosy filosofii* 9 (1993): 21f.

Georg Simmel's philosophy of life, both of which tried to find a firm basis for the human sciences. Bakhtin pointed out the main *ethical* deficiency of the "philosophy of life," stating that life can be consciously comprehended only as an ongoing event within the context of concrete responsibility: "A philosophy of life can be only a moral philosophy."⁶⁰ He was primarily interested in philosophical personology based on the metaphysics of freedom and responsibility (or answerability). This work on the philosophy of the act focuses on the metaphysics of morality and personological ontology.

Bakhtin's ideas are similar to those of Martin Heidegger, though they were developed five years before Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*, 1927). Without knowing each other, both thinkers explored the same philosophical issue, focusing on "being-in-the-world" and the defense of human individuality against depersonalizing ideology and power in "mass society." However, Bakhtin not only anticipated Heidegger's ground-breaking ideas but also came closer to the methodological innovations of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, such as the ethical dimension found in Hans-Georg Gadamer's works.

Bakhtin's Personalist Philosophy

Bakhtin began his philosophical reflections with the human being, a person acting in the world. The world is radically changed in the presence of humans, who give it an entirely different meaning in the eyes of a "witness" capable of cognizing: the event of existence as a whole becomes completely different "because a new and major character in this event appears for the first time on the scene of earthly existence – the witness and the judge."⁶¹ With the appearance of a conscious person, being is qualitatively transformed: "It has stopped simply being and has started being in itself and for itself...as well as for the other," because it has been reflected in the consciousness of the other, who acts as the witness and the judge of being. With the latter, "something absolutely new has appeared, a supra-existence has emerged."⁶²

In Bakhtin's words, human existence is "no longer just a kernel of existence in this supra-existence; all existence exists in it and for it." Here is the key to Bakhtin's view of being and human's place in it as the center that organizes the structure of the event of being: "Something absolutely new appears here: the supraperson, the *supra-I*, that is, the witness and the

⁶⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, trans. Vadim Liapunov, eds. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993), 56.

⁶¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), 137.

⁶² Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 137.

judge of the whole human being, of the whole *I*, and consequently someone who is no longer the person, no longer the *I*, but the *other*.”⁶³

When speaking about a conscious person, with whose appearance being is qualitatively transformed, Bakhtin means a concrete living person, unique in the world. The world is given to individuals as an opportunity, which they turn into reality through their lives. A person is in a participative, dialogical relationship with the world; they must do something with it, evaluate it, and build it around themselves. And they cannot evade this duty. The distinctive characteristic of Bakhtin’s work is its ethical dimension. He elaborated on the conception of an individual who actively participates in “being-as-event” and self-realization and who has a moral obligation to assume a responsibility for personal uniqueness in being. The position of a responsibly acting person is defined within the moral realm. The imperativeness of choice and responsibility for deed are rooted in the “fact of *my non-alibi in being*”:

I occupy a place in once-occurrent being that is unique and never-repeatable.... That which can be done by me can never be done by anyone else. The uniqueness or singularity of present-on-hand being is compellingly obligatory. This fact of *my non-alibi in Being*, which underlies the concrete and once-occurrent ought of the answerably performed act... is something I acknowledge and affirm in a unique and once-occurred manner.⁶⁴

Bakhtin’s moral philosophy is considered to be the first philosophy: “It is only from within the actually performed act, which is once-occurrent, integral, and unitary in its answerability, that we can find an approach to unitary and once-occurrent Being in its concrete actuality. A first philosophy can orient itself only with respect to that actually performed act.”⁶⁵ In Bakhtin’s early philosophical works, the justification of the ethics of individually responsible existence in the world leads to the construction of a philosophy of action as the first philosophy on which his philosophy of dialogue is based.

Bakhtin on the Universality of Dialogical Relationships

In Bakhtin’s philosophy, an individual does not remain only with him/herself but is related to the other as co-beings in being. I-Other relations are, ideally, dialogical, and their expansion through society is

⁶³ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 137.

⁶⁴ Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, 40.

⁶⁵ Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, 28.

supposed to lead toward more harmony and unity. These ideas are elaborated in his philosophy of dialogue.

The philosophy of dialogue first became widely known from Martin Buber's classic presentation in his 1923 book *Ich und Du* (*I and Thou*). It was further developed in Germany by scholars such as Franz Rosenzweig, Ferdinand Ebner, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Bakhtin developed his own philosophy of dialogue in which dialogue is conceived not merely as a conversation but as dialogical relationships constituting the basic and omnipresent fabric of the human world: "Dialogic relationships...are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life – in general, everything that has meaning and significance."⁶⁶

Bakhtin saw a paradigmatic shift from the monologic framework to a dialogical openness of philosophy as the major event in 20th-century thought. His methodology challenged philosophical monologism: "In the monologic world, *tertium non datur*: a thought is either affirmed or repudiated; otherwise it simply ceases to be a fully valid thought."⁶⁷ Within this framework, other thoughts and ideas are polemically repudiated: "In an environment of philosophical monologism the genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well."⁶⁸ Bakhtin also criticized the dogmatic one-dimensional unity imposed by monologism, which was expressed in the monistic principle: "the affirmation of the unity of *existence*, is, in idealism, transformed into the unity of the *consciousness*."⁶⁹

In monologism, "The unity of consciousness, replacing the unity of existence, is inevitably transformed into the unity of a *single* consciousness,"⁷⁰ and in the metaphysical form, the unity takes "consciousness in general," which denies a multitude of empirical human consciousnesses. It is a kind of solipsism: "Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another *I* with equal rights (*thou*). With a monologic approach (in its extreme or pure form) *another person* remains wholly and merely an *object* of consciousness, and not another consciousness."⁷¹ Monologue is deaf to the other's response and "pretends to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented persons."⁷² Monolo-

⁶⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 40.

⁶⁷ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 80.

⁶⁸ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 81.

⁶⁹ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 80.

⁷⁰ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 80f.

⁷¹ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 292f.

⁷² Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 293.

gism imposes a dogmatic stereotype and a totally closed kind of unity. In politics, it is characteristic of authoritarian power.

Against this monologism, Bakhtin proposes dialogue, which entails the recognition of the other, cultural diversity, dialogical openness, and “open unity.” He holds that dialogical relationships form the very foundation of all human activities, language, consciousness, cognition, intersubjective relations, and culture. Dialogical relationships between I and the other, between I and the Absolute Other, constitute “the unitary and once-occurrent event of Being” or “the once-occurrent Being-event of life.”⁷³ This ontology determines the forms of existence. The event of being is fundamentally constituted through human activity, involving the morally responsibly or answerably performed act, in “a once-occurrent life-as-deed.”⁷⁴ For the realization of an event of being, at least two personal consciousnesses are needed for “co-being” or “being with.”

Bakhtin further developed his conception of dialogue in his philosophy of language. Language as living dialogue is the realm of metalinguistics, or the study of language in its relationship with other aspects of culture. In contrast to formalism and structuralism, he focused on the speech acts of individuals and their dialogical communication: “Two speech works, utterances, juxtaposed to one another, enter into a special kind of semantic relationships that we call dialogic.”⁷⁵ Bakhtin held that dialogic relationships can permeate utterances, exist at various levels, and be expressed in many ways: “[A] dialogic approach is possible toward any signifying part of an utterance, even toward an individual word, if that word is...a sign of someone else’s semantic position, as the representative of another person’s utterance; that is, if we hear in it someone else’s voice,” and thus within it, two voices interact dialogically.⁷⁶ He also sketched the theory of the double-voiced word, which explains the dialogic relationship between two “voices” within the same utterance, a double-voiced word, while being a single syntactic unit. Within the double-voiced construction, both voices are syntactically interrelated while simultaneously remaining two distinct voices. “The word, the living word, inseparably linked with dialogic communion, by its very nature wants to be heard and answered....My word remains in the continuing dialogue, where it will be heard, answered and reinterpreted.”⁷⁷

Bakhtin concludes that dialogism and all linguistic phenomena related to it is a constitutive characteristic of language as such. The various forms of dialogue related to language (including a dialogue of cultures) bear this “genetic” dialogic property immanent in language.

⁷³ Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, 12, 20.

⁷⁴ Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, 28, 53.

⁷⁵ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 118.

⁷⁶ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 184.

⁷⁷ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 300.

The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life...He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium.⁷⁸

Dialogue of Cultures

Bakhtin expanded the meaning of “dialogue” to intercultural relations. He contributed to the theoretical grounding of the recognition of cultural diversity and dialogical relationships among cultures. In contrast to the Eurocentric and one-dimensional “monolithic” view of culture and its universalistic claims, Bakhtin argued that no culture is self-sufficient and that its incompleteness stimulates each culture to reach out to other cultures. A culture “cannot be enclosed within itself as something ready-made, completely finalized.”⁷⁹ He was critical of Spengler’s ideas about closed and finalized cultural worlds. Rather, he stressed that cultures need to be open to other cultures for their development and that “the unity of a particular culture is an *open* unity.”⁸⁰

From a historical perspective, Bakhtin underlined “the differentiated unity of the culture of the epoch in which it was created,” a unity that can be revealed only in the long term.⁸¹ He argued that “the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries of its individual areas and not in places where these areas have become enclosed in their own specificity.”⁸² Bakhtin applied his category of *vnenakhodimost’* (“outsideness” or “being located beyond” – an ability to distance ourselves from any object of reflection and to see it from the outside) to the realm of culture, stressing its importance for understanding the meaning of culture: “It is only in the eyes of *another* culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly.”⁸³ He advocated for a “creative understanding” that does not renounce its own culture. A dialogue of cultures helps understand their meanings: “A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures.”⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 293.

⁷⁹ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 5f.

⁸⁰ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 6.

⁸¹ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 2, 5.

⁸² Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 2.

⁸³ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 7.

⁸⁴ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 7.

It is worth noting that the expression “dialogue of cultures” is a metaphor, one that is heuristically rich as a concept for describing the mutual influence of cultures. The actual dialogue takes place among individuals, groups, and communities as representatives of different cultures. In contrast to the view that regards cultural relations as an “objective process” (similar to deterministic historicism) of interaction between “objective” cultures, intercultural dialogue concerns the relationship of living human beings with culture. In this sense, Bakhtin preserves the personalist basis of dialogical relations – intra-personal, intersubjective, and intercultural. Through culture, individuals engage in a search for answers to their existential questions and creativity.

Bakhtin’s dialogism provides a philosophical justification for dialogical relationships between individuals, within culturally diverse societies, and among civilizations. Its implementation shows the way toward deeper understanding, constructive negotiation, diplomatic solutions of disagreements, and cooperation in solving social and global problems, that is, toward the harmonious unity of a socio-culturally diverse world. Furthermore, the principles of dialogical philosophy can be extended to a vision of the human being and society grounded in dialogue and communication at all levels as a theoretical basis for a peaceful and just world order. These philosophical ideas obtained their development and specific expressions in the discourse ethics of Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas, as well as the conceptions of transculture and intercultural philosophy.

Transculture and Critical Universality

Bakhtin’s philosophy of dialogue provided a justification for the recognition of cultural diversity and the dialogical relationships of cultures and civilizations. It also laid the ground for the philosophical elaboration of the dialectics of unity and diversity in contemporary contexts and contributed to intercultural philosophy.

In Russia, this philosophy was embraced by the movement for democratization and for the revival of cultural tradition and free philosophical creativity in dialogue with different philosophical currents worldwide. Bakhtin’s philosophy also contributed to culturological research, paying attention to cultures’ national specificity and broader unity. Culturology presupposes a definition of cultural phenomena in terms of their historical and national specificity. Valuable insights into these phenomena were offered both by Bakhtin’s conception of the dialogical nature of culture in its internal and external differentiations and by Losev’s conception of cultural identity as a multifaceted manifestation of one basic, primordial intuition. Sergei Averintsev, Yuri Lotman, and Vladimir Bibler, among other Russian philosophers, further advanced the development of culturology.

Since the 1980s, culturology has evolved toward transcultural theory and practice. As Mikhail Epstein, the leading theoretician of transcultural theory, writes, “[i]f culturology is the self-awareness of culture, then transculture is the self-transformation of culture, the totality of theories and practices that liberate culture from its own repressive mechanisms.”⁸⁵ Epstein applied the concept of transculture to the analysis of cultural processes in Europe and the United States. Why is the transcultural liberation necessary? The problem is that cultures, when involved in the orbit of ideology, tend to claim universality and to present themselves as a “norm” that people are supposed to follow. This imposition is evident in the case of the predominant culture, interwoven with the official ideology, and used to control people’s value preferences, identities, and ways of thinking. This tendency is less obvious – but still influential – in the formation of minority cultural identities. The struggle for cultural diversity, which started at the end of the twentieth century, had a social-liberational aspect; it became a struggle for recognition, against discrimination, and for conditions necessary for the development of minority cultures. However, this movement was hijacked by the ideology of liberal “multiculturalism,” which fragmented the cultural landscape into a “salad” of disconnected cultures, each asserting its own universality and defining itself in opposition to other cultures.

Epstein thus proposes liberation from universalistic pretensions and dependencies. In contrast to dominating canons, he approaches the issue from the perspective of individual freedom from imposed and self-imposed identities through the concept of transculture. The end of the twentieth century in Europe and the United States was a time marked by the rise of movements advocating the recognition of cultural diversity alongside demands for social changes. As a philosopher, Epstein is a strong defender of human rights and freedoms, including those expressed in the realm of culture. He stands in solidarity with the adherents of cultural diversity in their critique of the official ideologies that are exploiting the dominant culture as instruments to control individuals’ mindsets, identities, and behaviors. In this regard, culture can become oppressive.

Culture, by releasing us from physical limitations, imposes new limitations on a symbolic level with its own idiosyncrasies, manias, phobias, ideological assumptions and restrictions, modes of indoctrination, and informational filters....*Transculture* is the next step in the ongoing human quest for freedom, in which we liberate ourselves from the prison-house of language and a

⁸⁵ Mikhail Epstein, “From Culturology to Transculture,” in *Transcultural Experiments: Russian and American Models of Creative Communication*, eds. Ellen E. Berry and Mikhail Epstein (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 24.

variety of artificial, self-imposed, and self-deifying cultural identities.⁸⁶

The movement for cultural diversity, however, was heavily influenced by the ideology of liberal multiculturalism, which involved some postmodern ideas. As an example, Epstein refers to the prominent philosopher Merab Mamardashvili (1930-1990), who lived for many years in Moscow before spending his final years in his native Tbilisi, Georgia. There

he suffered from the excesses of Georgian cultural and political nationalism exacerbated by the downfall of the Soviet empire. Mamardashvili sympathizes with multiculturalism as a mode of liberation from a monolithic cultural canon but objects to the glorification of ethnic diversity for its own sake.⁸⁷

Liberal multiculturalism presents a pluralistic world of self-enclosed cultures, each regarded as valuable in itself. Its deterministic view of culture reduces culture to its racial, gender, or ethnic origins, interpreted in terms of “representation.” In this view, a literary work is not a self-expression of its author as an individual but rather a “representation” of the essence of the author’s gender, race, and ethnicity. Diverse cultures are categorized into a few rubrics such as “male,” “female,” “homosexual,” “white,” “black,” “Latino,” “Asian,” and so on. The resulting cultural landscape appears as fragmented kaleidoscopic images, a “cultural mosaic” or “salad bowl” as opposed to a homogenizing “melting pot.” This implies Manichaean intolerance for the other, hindering dialogue. In the monological view of some of its adherents, this narrow and deterministic vision of culture with pretensions to an “absolute truth” and universality is the only correct one.

Epstein criticizes this view of culture and juxtaposes it with the Bakhtinian approach, which recognizes all cultures as valuable in themselves while considering the historicity and limitations of each. He argues that cultures are inherently insufficient when isolated from one another. The awareness of its own incompleteness and the possibility of other cultures enable each culture to go beyond its borders. Thus, cultures should be open to contact and interaction with other cultures that can complement and enrich them. This requires humility and openness rather than pride in self-identity or self-conceited exceptionalism.

⁸⁶ Mikhail Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities: A Manifesto* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 60.

⁸⁷ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities: A Manifesto*, 60.

Postmodern Anti-Universality.

Jean-François Lyotard's work is marked by a critique of the universality of metanarratives and the principles of generalization. He hypothesized a change in the status of knowledge within the context of postmodern culture and post-industrial society. In the postmodern situation, a universal narrative metalanguage and a traditional legitimation of knowledge disappear. Scientific knowledge is considered a form of speech – an object of study in linguistics, cybernetics, and machine translation. Lyotard associates scientific, philosophical, and artistic postmodernism with the crisis of metaphysics and disbelief in universality. The metanarratives of Enlightenment dialectics, hermeneutics, truth, freedom, and justice are replaced by the themes of paralogy, pluralism, the pragmatism of the language games, and entropy.

He criticizes many of the claims of Enlightenment universality, and several of his works aim specifically to undermine the fundamental principles on which these claims are based. He points out that the “legitimizing” purpose of metanarratives is to justify the dominance of the existing political systems, laws, moral norms, their modes of thinking, and the structure of social institutions. According to Lyotard, the specificity of our “postmodern” time lies in the loss of metanarratives’ legitimizing power after the catastrophic events of the 20th century (for example, the Holocaust). As a result, in postmodernity, metanarratives are replaced by many micro-narratives. Moreover, discourse itself is a meta-narration, producing a “social mythology” that supports the power and the functioning of all governing mechanisms.

Lyotard, along with other postmodern thinkers, is right in his critique of modernity and its ideology, which often justified the violence of colonial and imperialist wars and injustices, as well as moral demagoguery and the misuse of the noble principles of freedom, equality, and justice for purposes of domination and exploitation. However, the fault does not lie with the ideas themselves but with their distortion and ideological abuse by cynical politicians and their pundits. It is therefore necessary to separate the genuine meaning of ideas from their distorted simulacra in order to identify their methodological weaknesses and realize their heuristic potential in a contemporary setting. Instead of making this critical clarification, Lyotard discards these ideas, effectively throwing the baby out with the bathwater. His radicalism, endowing discourse alone with all the powers of authority and giving it the status of a dominant power, essentially continues the traditional line of metaphysics.

Lyotard is critical of universality and society conceived as a whole. He sees society as represented by two basic models: “either society forms a functional whole, or it is divided in two.” The first model, which sees society as an organic whole, he associates with Talcott Parsons’ theory of

society as a self-regulating system and with German technocratic theories, in which the “desire for a unitary and totalizing truth lends itself to the unitary and totalizing practice of the system managers.”⁸⁸ The second model he links to Marxism, characterized by the principle of class struggle and dialectics as a duality operating within society, as well as to critical theory and Habermas’ theory of communicative action. Although the limitations of Parsons’ systems and social action theory, along with the technocratic theories, had already been shown, Lyotard adds little new on this point. Nonetheless, his equation of Parsons’ theory and totalizing technocratic theories with society as an organic whole serves as a pretext for his rejection of the very idea of society as a whole. Lyotard also criticizes Habermas’ discourse theory and “dialogue of argumentation” as a way of achieving consensus, saying that the principle of a universal consensus “may never be attained.”⁸⁹

Epstein refutes Lyotard’s anti-universality and his denial of the possibility of a broad consensus on issues relevant to many people and nations. In response to Lyotard’s statement that “consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value”⁹⁰ and his insistence that consensus can be only limited, local, and temporary, Epstein makes the following argument:

If we accept this view, then the next logical question would be how to achieve consensus among different consensuses. The question of universality does not disappear; it simply moves on to the next level. This must continue until all consensuses, all forms of rationality, and all groups find for themselves some meta-consensus that would include, as a minimum precondition, an *agreement to disagree* peacefully.⁹¹

In our globally interrelated world, consensus cannot be only local; it cannot be isolated from other countries. Even in the case of disagreement, parties must at least have an understanding regarding the ways of their disagreement. “In other words, the right to disagree must once again be recognized by all participants as a universal and not just local value.”⁹²

Lyotard assumes that the incommensurability of values and discourses should become the basis of a new socio-cultural system. His skepticism of dialogue suggests an almost insurmountable obstacle to broad communication and the impossibility of consensus. This perspective disregards the possibility of consensus and cooperation in solving acute

⁸⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 12.

⁸⁹ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 77.

⁹⁰ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 66.

⁹¹ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 185.

⁹² Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 185.

social and global problems, such as domestic and international terrorism. In this context, Lyotard states that “consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value”⁹³ and that it is not needed in the idea and practice of justice. He offers two steps for disavowing consensus: first, “a recognition of the heteromorphous nature of language games. This obviously implies a renunciation of terror, which assumes that they are isomorphic and tries to make them so.” The second step is “the principle that any consensus on the rules defining a game and the ‘moves’ playable within it *must* be local, in other words, agreed on by its present players and subject to eventual cancellation.”⁹⁴

Epstein challenges Lyotard’s argument that terror is based on the assumption of the isomorphic structure of social and cultural values, arguing that “the practice of terrorism...demonstrates quite the opposite: the insistence on the incommensurable and irreconcilable.”⁹⁵ The factual experience, which goes far beyond games of language, ideologies, shows in the terrorist practices that “terror results not from isomorphism, but from heteromorphism, i.e., the idea of absolute heterogeneity and incompatibility of various cultures and religions. The idea that consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value does not help to renounce terrorism, but only encourages it.”⁹⁶

In his critique of the Enlightenment and universality, Lyotard famously stated,

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience....Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name.⁹⁷

To this, Epstein responded that although we cannot allow any metanarratives that would impose on us their totalitarian logic, the contemporary world faces the opposite danger of its possible disintegration into numerous conflicting local narratives along ethnic, religious, and civilizational lines. “Thus, Lyotard’s famous pronouncement should be rephrased as follows: We have paid too high a price for our nostalgia for fragments: so we cannot allow our differences to tear apart the world.”⁹⁸

⁹³ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 66.

⁹⁴ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 66.

⁹⁵ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 186.

⁹⁶ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 186.

⁹⁷ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 81f.

⁹⁸ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 186.

Critical Universality

What we need today, Epstein concludes, is not disagreement but to find paths toward possible consensus and an urgent agreement on the provisions for disagreement and dissent that can be incorporated into possible consensuses. At the same time, the lessons of postmodernism should not be neglected; “instead, they should be incorporated into a broader, more tolerant, demanding, and simultaneously more demanding and responsible culture of agreement, i.e., culture of critical universality.”⁹⁹

Epstein acknowledges the limitations of the traditional conceptions of universality, which originated in the Enlightenment but were not realized in the West, disappointing many who took them at face value and believed in their realization. World War II and the Holocaust profoundly shook people’s moral consciousness and shattered their belief in such universality. Nevertheless, he disagrees with the postmodern dismissal of universality and related concepts such as humankind, truth, and objectivity and points out the dire consequences of such nihilism. He cautions that

the death of universality is fraught, as a result of critical limitation and differentiation of reason, with outbreaks of racism, nationalism, fundamentalisms, and other power seeking ‘-isms’, for which some varieties of postmodern philosophy inadvertently offer justification. The liberal denouncers of ‘humanity as a fiction’ may be shocked by the non-liberal practical consequences of their theories in the religiously and ideologically divided world.¹⁰⁰

He further cautions that “postmodern pluralism,” with its tendency to define culture only in terms of ethnicity and gender, may lead to an epidemic of parochial “-isms”: “This anti-universalist stance is dangerous because it can easily be co-opted for the opposite cause: if universality is fiction, then there is no intellectually justifiable way to limit the power of any particular group which aims to expand its political and cultural dominance at the expense of others.”¹⁰¹ As an alternative, Epstein offers his conception of “critical universality.”

The main characteristics of Epstein’s critical universality include, above all, the idea that it should begin as a critical and even self-critical universality, ethically based not on pride but on humility. “Every

⁹⁹ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 186.

¹⁰⁰ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 187.

¹⁰¹ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 181f.

consensus, every heteromorphous discourse has to be critical about its own rules and abandon any hegemonic claims.”¹⁰²

In the realm of culture and cultural theory, universality means the capacity of each culture and each reason to criticize itself, to abandon the previous illusion of cultural self-sufficiency, and to recognize, as Bakhtin stated, that each culture is somehow “deficient,” incomplete. Therefore, culture needs to transcend its own set of values, remain open to dialogue, and enrich itself with elements from other cultures. No single culture can claim to be universal.

The contemporary recognition of a plurality of ethnically and historically contingent values does not imply the ultimate collapse of universality, rather it underscores the need to rethink it. There is a disappointment with the positive definitions of universality shaped by modernity, the Enlightenment, and rationalism. Epstein states that critical universality should be apophatic: “We should think about universality in *apophatic*, rather than cataphatic terms: we know what it is not, not what it is.”¹⁰³

In contrast to uncritical postmodern pluralism, which is sometimes called relativism, the critical view of universality is open to plurality. The internal plurality of a culture and its openness to the values of other cultures makes it internally diverse and more universal. Plurality is an aspect of universality. “In fact, the more internally pluralistic and self-critical a culture is, the more universal it is.”¹⁰⁴

Critical Universality as Internal Diversity of Individuals in Their Dialogical Openness to Others

Epstein notes that the oft-perceived view of the universal – as synonymous with the “total,” “common,” or “general” characteristics of all people, cultures, and epochs – is distorting the understanding of universality with generality. In fact, these are two very different concepts. If the general is a quality common to many objects, the universal refers to one object that contains or displays many qualities. Epstein supports this thesis through the hermeneutics of the term “universal,” which literally means “around one” (from the Latin *unus* and *versus*, from *vertere*, “to turn”): “It is a category that applies not to all entities of a certain class, but to one single entity, which possesses the qualities of many entities.”¹⁰⁵ The internal plurality of a culture and its openness to the values of other cultures makes it internally diverse and more universal. Applying this to an individual, it is possible to say “a universal genius” or “a universal mind” to

¹⁰² Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 187.

¹⁰³ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 188.

¹⁰⁴ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 190.

¹⁰⁵ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 190.

indicate a given individual capable of being creative and fruitful in many areas.

Critical universality is concrete universality. In his conception of transculture, Epstein preserves Bakhtin's personological focus on the individual. Instead of an "abstract universality," he uses this concept in relation to a concrete culture and a real individual. Culture is a sphere of an individual's cultural creativity. Transculture turns people away from superficial postmodern pluralism toward concrete universality, where individuals internalize cultural diversity. Importantly, critical universality has nothing to do with the neglect of the individual and the particular; it is, rather, a recognition of the individual's inherent potential for diversity. Critical universality itself means diversity as a property of a single individual or culture insofar as it "embraces the value of universality as a capacity of a single individual or a single culture to be different from itself and to incorporate the multiplicity of others. Internal pluralism, creative pluralism is a way to, not from universality."¹⁰⁶

Transculture further develops the Bakhtinian ideas of diversity, openness, and dialogical relationships as conducive to a harmonious unity. "In contrast to the dogmatic universalism that imposes one ideal or canon on all cultures and individuals, critical universality presupposes internal diversity of individuals in their dialogical openness to others. In the secular age, the concept of critical universality may become a major force that challenges both fragmentation and totalitarianism and ensures the survival of humanity as a species."¹⁰⁷

Intercultural Philosophy of Dialogue and a Contextualized Universality

Intercultural philosophy, emerged in the 1980s, was developed from different perspectives by Franz Wimmer, Heinz Kimmerle, Ram Adhar Mall, Raimon Panikkar, and Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, etc. Notably, Fornet-Betancourt launched the project of the intercultural transformation of philosophy, which contributed substantially to the quest for new ways of philosophical thinking and reflecting on contemporary challenges, helping better understand root causes and possible solutions and alternatives.

Philosophy is viewed as culturally embedded. Fornet-Betancourt's project assumes a twofold task. First, philosophy must critically review its way of thinking and expose the "monocultural" limitations of its concepts, that is, "to reconfigure philosophy through the interchange and solidarity of the diverse configurations in the cultural traditions of

¹⁰⁶ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 191.

¹⁰⁷ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 191.

humankind.”¹⁰⁸ The second task is related to the social role of this transformed philosophy that should be able to develop ideas and approaches helpful to confronting the challenges of our time. These challenges come mainly from the fundamental contradiction between the homogenizing tendency of hegemonic globalization and “the dialectics of the cultural resistance of the peoples who want to reaffirm their right to political, economic, and cultural self-determination.”¹⁰⁹

Fornet-Betancourt asserts the necessity of reviewing Eurocentric philosophical historiography and, based on the reconstruction of the history of ideas in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, of creating a new view of the history of philosophy. He criticizes claims of any philosophy to universality. The universalistic pretension of European ethnocentrism is “a type of self-proclaimed universality.” As he writes, “In this sense, the criticism is perfectly applicable to any other type of universality – whether African, Asian or Latin American – which would be the result of a monocultural proclamation.”¹¹⁰

Intercultural philosophy normatively affirms both socio-cultural diversity and dialogical relationships. It creatively develops Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas of dialogue as dialogical relationships at all levels: between individuals within societies, and among cultures. It asserts the fundamental role of dialogical relationships as constitutive of the human personhood: “[D]ialogue is the primordial substance from which human beings...develop their humanity and discern their situation in the world.”¹¹¹ The full realization of this dialogical potential is seen as the path toward the transformation of society and human liberation.

Are there fundamentals of our knowledge and world orientation that can claim universal validity? What role do cultural contexts play in our philosophical self-understanding and world interpretations? In affirming cultural diversity, intercultural philosophy brings to the forefront the problem of the interrelationship between the culturally specific and the universal in philosophy. In the debates around this issue, some philosophers have regarded the notions of “Latin American,” “African,” or “intercultural” as incompatible with philosophy as universal knowledge, while others have exaggerated the culturally specific as opposed to the universal. Both

¹⁰⁸ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, “Introducción” [Introduction], in *Kulturen der Philosophie. Dokumentation des I. Internationalen Kongresses für interkulturelle Philosophie* [Cultures of Philosophy. Documentation of the I. International Congress for Intercultural Philosophy], ed. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (Aachen: Verlag der Augustinus-Buchhandlung, 1996), 13.

¹⁰⁹ Fornet-Betancourt, “Introducción,” 12.

¹¹⁰ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía* (Bilbao: Editorial Desclée de Brouwer, 2001), 166.

¹¹¹ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, “Toward a Philosophy of Intercultural Dialogue in a Conflicted World,” in *Intercultural Dialogue: In Search of Harmony in Diversity*, 2nd ed., ed. Edward Demenchonok (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 44.

positions apparently assume the insurmountable opposition between the particular and the universal. However, intercultural philosophy offers an attractive approach by developing a broader and more pluralistic conception of philosophy, embedded in certain cultural and philosophical traditions while dealing with perennial questions and aiming to give universally valid answers.

Within the project of the intercultural transformation of philosophy is the issue of universality. Intercultural philosophy stands for universality and truth. Thereby, it differs from postmodern philosophers' skepticism of universality. At the same time, it remains critical of traditional views of universality in Western thought and tries to develop an alternative conception that is contextualized, dialogical, intercultural, and just.

Intercultural Universality: Contextualized, Dialogical, and Just

Within his project to transform philosophy, Fornet-Betancourt critically revises Western conceptions of universality in their epistemological, cultural, socio-political, and anthropological aspects. He explores the epistemic deficiency of the Western notion of universality, mainly shaped by scientism and technocratic elites and the dependence of scientific-academic production on the corporate economy, which causes knowledge and power to interlace. This interpretation of universality is also used by ideology to universalize Western conceptions and values, thereby justifying the global pretensions of hegemonic policy.

Fornet-Betancourt calls this condition epistemological violence that, coupled with homogenizing globalization, endangers cultural diversity in the world. It diminishes the experiential knowledge of human beings, knowledge essential to understand the paths defined by cultures in relation to science and philosophy. Importantly, intercultural philosophy is not against scientific knowledge. Rather, it insists that "the cognitive disavowal of humanity and its cultures is intolerable because it is at odds with the recognition of cultural diversity."¹¹²

Accordingly, Fornet-Betancourt proposes an alternative conception of universality. He finds his inspiration and guiding insights in the "philosophy of the relationship" of José Martí, one of the great Latin American intellectuals who promoted freedom and unity, intellectual independence, and the pursuit of a just and equitable society. Referring to Martí, Fornet-Betancourt writes: "Universality is neither the order of a hegemony nor the result of the 'mandate' of a culture or a model of civilization that ensures its expansion ultimately based on the power of money and its military apparatus." Instead, universality should be understood as "a historical

¹¹² Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *La interculturalidad a prueba* (Aachen: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2006), 78.

contextual process of the willingness to communicate and, therefore, also as a process of development of the political will to organize the conditions of life in diversity...[as] many worlds can coexist in balance.” Thus, “Community, accompaniment, and solidarity are historical conditions that make possible the development of a universality *for* the humanity of all peoples. And this means that every reference to universality passes through the relationship with the other.”¹¹³

Intercultural philosophy also addresses the issue of the dialectic of the universal and the particular. It defends cultural diversity and dialogical relationships as the way toward harmonious unity. According to Fornet-Betancourt, within Western philosophy, the formulation of the idea of universality has often been articulated through a distinction between the universal and the particular, “the particular always finds itself at a disadvantage, having to justify itself before the supposedly universal or being forced to seek ways to integrate itself into the universal.”¹¹⁴ The affirmation of national or regional identities is suspected of being “fundamentalist” and questionable and criticized in the name of an alleged universality.

In defense of plurality, Fornet-Betancourt explains that plurality is not an ideology or an apology for diversity “in itself” but rather “a *phenomenological indicator* that reveals that contextuality, historicity, and cultural diversity are fundamental conditions for the formation of human experience.” Plurality is thus primarily the manifestation of the fact that human beings exist within the framework of the historical situation of a given context and a contingent culture. “The singularities that reveal plurality are not isolated fragments but ‘universes’ on the border that can say ‘there is more than one’ or ‘we are many.’ This experience is the source of communication in plurality.”¹¹⁵

From an intercultural perspective, universality should not be understood merely as a theory or a conception; rather, “we should instead start from the phenomenological diagnosis of the plurality of the world and the constitutive plurilingual reality.”¹¹⁶ Fornet-Betancourt thereby inverts the way of posing the question of universality, “what is ‘questionable’ is not contextual diversity but an (abstract) universality in which real worlds do not recognize each other.”¹¹⁷ In light of this, the issue of universality is not posed as a question of an “ideal state of things” but as “a challenging task of reconfiguring the conditions in plurality”; in other words,

¹¹³ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia* (Aachen: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2014), 63.

¹¹⁴ Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 66.

¹¹⁵ Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, Convivencia*, 65.

¹¹⁶ Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 65f.

¹¹⁷ Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 67.

universality is posed in the sense of “the patient task of ‘ingression’ (ingressio) into the many worlds.”¹¹⁸

Fornet-Betancourt states that “abstract universality” is detached from real life due to its “dematerialized” view of being. Instead of a relationship “*in* the absolute and *with* the absolute,” as in German idealism, universality should be “a relationship within and between the many contextual worlds.” This is a vision of “universality as a plural world in economic, political, and cultural equilibrium.”¹¹⁹ The tension or conflict between the universal and the particular “*translates*, so to speak, the intercultural perspective into a conversation of many in which there is not a talk in front of the supposed ‘center’ of the world but is a talk with and among all.”¹²⁰

As an alternative to “abstract universality,” Fornet-Betancourt develops a conception of a concrete and contextualized universality aimed at improving people’s lives. He stresses the contextuality of our understanding of both plurality and universality: “If we talk about plurality and diversity as one of the densest signs of our time, this implies that we have to take responsibility for the fact that the contextuality and historicity of the world and humanity are not general notes but rather properties of singularization, since there is no plurality or diversity without contexts or times of our own.”¹²¹

Universality as Realization of All Cultural Universes of Humanity

Intercultural philosophy approaches universality by articulating the cultural plurality of the concrete worlds in which humanity exists, and it “explicitly takes plurality as its starting point, viewed as a commitment to efforts to improve people’s lives and coexistence in all its contexts.”¹²² Accordingly, people should not be treated just as a means for the implementation of a universal idea. Rather, everyone can participate in universality as “a process of humanization of living conditions,” while it serves as a place and protective refuge for the particular: “For humanity also needs the particular and the singular so that universality does not become the trap of an abstraction that ultimately turns out to be destructive.”¹²³ In this sense, intercultural dialogue creates the conditions that allow a philosophy to reach a genuine universality because it arises from shared communication among the diverse cultural universes of humanity.

¹¹⁸ Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 66.

¹¹⁹ Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 63.

¹²⁰ Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 67.

¹²¹ Fornet-Betancourt, *Interculturalidad, crítica y liberación* (Aachen: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2012), 14.

¹²² Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 9.

¹²³ Fornet-Betancourt, *Interculturalidad, crítica y liberación*, 73.

In contrast to hegemonic globalization, which promises “one world” imposed through the homogenization and suppression of difference, intercultural philosophy suggests a new understanding of universality as a dialogue of cultures. Culture is not only a realm for cultivating a plurality of worldviews and mutual respect; the plurality of cultures presupposes their interrelation and dialogue. Intercultural philosophy also serves as a guide for the concrete realization of the plurality of the real world. This requires the reorganization of the world order to guarantee fair conditions for communication among cultures as distinctive worldviews, materialized in concrete realities. Fornet-Betancourt sees intercultural philosophy as the basis for a movement that would economically, politically, and socially organize an ecumenical union of nations and cultures, thereby universalizing tolerance and coexistence. This universality emerges from the grassroots, recognizing the particular and the other and uniting people “in a common goal to make life possible for everybody.”¹²⁴ This universality presupposes the liberation and realization of all cultural universes. A similar approach is expressed by Enrique Dussel, who reconfigures universality in conjunction with the recognition of cultural diversity, terming it “diversality.”

Fornet-Betancourt has also developed the conception of “universality without signature.” This entails, first of all, a recognition of the plurality of cultures and the participation of different peoples in the creation of diverse cultures as an open process of actualization of their possibilities in reality. In this sense, “universality escapes any intent to be ‘authorized’ as such by a concrete ‘signature’” and “no culture... would ‘certify’ with its signature what is the universal.”¹²⁵ This pluralistic and participative approach does not renounce the idea of universality; rather, it affirms interculturality as “a movement of increasing participation in the processes of universalization.” It implies the emergence of new possibilities and, with this, the continuing theoretical tasks of discerning what makes us better in our humanity.

Philosophically, this conception presents at first glance a paradoxical vision that “it is the reality in its plurality which makes us universal” and that it implies participation in its dynamics. More specifically, it entails an ontological inversion, postulating that “reality does not belong to us, but rather we are who belong to the reality, in the form of realization of this belonging in which the degrees of universality are decided.”¹²⁶ It also has an anthropological inversion, suggesting that a human being comprehends his/her realization not in terms of appropriation but through participation or sharing. Thus, to be human is not “to appropriate” the other but

¹²⁴ Fornet-Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía*, 382.

¹²⁵ Fornet-Betancourt, *Interculturalidad, crítica y liberación*, 130.

¹²⁶ Fornet-Betancourt, *Interculturalidad, crítica y liberación*, 130.

to participate in and share with the other. At the level of a philosophy of culture, this implies that cultures should not be used as instruments of appropriation of reality, but should be lived as “the concrete possibilities of participation in the realization of the universality of reality.” This requires rethinking our cognitive and cultural belonging to reality as “co-belonging,” which disavows any pretension “to reclaim with a signature any exclusive property right.”¹²⁷

Universality as Dialogical Relationships with the Other

At the heart of this intercultural view of universality is a dialogue or, more exactly, dialogical relationships with the other. This includes intercultural dialogue. Universality is understood from the point of view of the plurality of humanity and as “plurality in dialogue.”¹²⁸

Intercultural philosophy promotes a “dialogical universality,” which is viewed not as a goal in itself but as a possible path toward the full integrity of human beings. “In other words, universality should be conceived and practiced as a process of increasing reciprocity, which aims to help the full realization of humanity of human beings in the conditions of living together in solidarity.”¹²⁹ Universality should be defined in terms of solidarity and coexistence, serving as a “*method* for the transformation of current society oriented toward living together,” and “as a political and social program for the change in the currently predominant material conditions.”¹³⁰

Fornet-Betancourt emphasizes the transformative meaning of pursuing “a *just* universality,” aimed at improving the human condition and coexistence. This transformation is comprehensive and includes the international dimension and the struggle for a new world order: “The question of whether universality will remain a ‘privilege’ of the global elites of the hegemonic world order and its so-called global culture, or whether, on the contrary, it will become a political practice for a participatory and symmetrical transformation of the world, is a question that is decided in the struggle for a new order of international relations.”¹³¹

An Anthropological Turn

In the face of social, political, cultural, and anthropological crises, intercultural philosophy provides a foundation for a comprehensive response to them by both critiquing the root cause of these crises and

¹²⁷ Fornet-Betancourt, *Interculturalidad, crítica y liberación*, 131.

¹²⁸ Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 67.

¹²⁹ Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 70.

¹³⁰ Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 70.

¹³¹ Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 71.

guiding the search for alternatives. The desirable comprehensive transformation seeks not only the improvement of the human condition but, most importantly, the perfection of human beings themselves: “Universality, which emerges dialogically from plurality and for plurality, is not a goal but a *method* for the open totalization of human experiences and, with it, also for the perfection of human beings.” This requires dialogical relationships and ethics of co-responsibility and solidarity: “[U]niversality must be thought of and practiced as a process to increase reciprocity and in order to help the full realization of the humanity of the human being in conditions of solidary coexistence.”¹³²

The realization of this goal requires the even more radical anthropological transformation of human minds and hearts (*metanoia*). The search for this alternative universality “makes necessary an anthropological turn in the current human type.” This means that the goal of alternative universality can only be realized if human beings abandon the individualistically isolated and fragmented “image of man,” transform themselves through “the unfolding of the relationships of reciprocity and the community,” and learn that “the human being becomes a place where reciprocal relationships develop.”¹³³

Philosophical reflection on the theme of intercultural dialogue in a world permeated by conflicts raises questions about the conditions of the (im)possibility of dialogue itself. Fornet-Betancourt analyzes the existential and historico-cultural conditions under which dialogue is practiced, as well as the obstacles that hinder it. Constructively, philosophy should incorporate the “culture of reason” into public opinion and “show the path of dialogue as the only reasonable alternative leading toward the true humanization of history.”¹³⁴ The enhancement of dialogical relationships is both a condition and an indispensable means for the transformation of society and international relations toward a more humane, peaceful, and just world order.

Humanity’s Wholeness within the Project of the New Cosmopolitanism

The enduring ideas of humanity’s wholeness – as elaborated in conceptions of *all-unity*, transculture, and intercultural philosophy – remain relevant and helpful to contemporary intellectual and spiritual journey and to the effort to transform philosophy and the human condition. They are also relevant to our concerns about today’s world problems, to the quest for raising global consciousness, to a better understanding of how to

¹³² Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 70.

¹³³ Fornet-Betancourt, *Justicia, restitución, convivencia*, 71.

¹³⁴ Fornet-Betancourt, “Toward a Philosophy of Intercultural Dialogue,” 49f.

overcome growing fragmentation and to find possible solutions to social and global problems and to move toward a more harmonious and humane world. These ideas resonate with the moral-political notion of *cosmopolis*, an “emerging global city” or community.

The end of the Cold War in 1990 opened opportunities for positive changes and the establishment of peaceful international coexistence and collaboration. However, these hopes for changes were soon overshadowed by the neoconservative “revolution” and the US policy of global hegemony in a unipolar world, accompanied by homogenization and forcible “integration.” The hegemonic policy of *divide et impera* is conflict-ridden. NATO’s expansion eastward, in violation of the agreement not to do so, and its proxy hybrid war in Ukraine against Russia led to the escalation of conflict.¹³⁵ Wars increase the risk of a nuclear catastrophe.

The real alternative to hegemonic unipolarity isn’t for power to change hands but for a world free from *any* hegemonic domination. This alternative is promoted by the growing movement toward a multipolar or polycentric world. Countries that are striving for sovereignty and independent development create organizations such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, based on the principles of mutual respect and understanding, sovereign equality, democracy, inclusiveness, collaboration and consensus, with the goal of promoting a more just and equitable multipolar world order.

These principles are in tune with intercultural philosophy, promoting cultural diversity and dialogical relationships. The movement toward multipolarity needs its theoretical conceptualization and philosophical justification. The synergy of the emancipatory ideas of an intercultural dialogue with a political movement toward a polycentric international order, and the realization of these ideas and projects in practice, can lead toward a profound transformation of society and international relations. Furthermore, this transformation and the development of dialogical relationships can foster a better understanding and closer collaboration of peoples, thus increasing intercultural and international “unity in diversity” and facilitating the processes of “cosmopolitization” in a contemporary context.

Philosophers have tried to address the problems of today’s world, giving new impetus to cosmopolitanism and discussions about the rebirth of cosmopolitan ideals in a contemporary context and their practical implementation. This concept has ancient roots but gained prominence in the contemporary search for viable alternatives to both a contentious state-centric system and a hegemon-centric dystopia.

¹³⁵ See Edward Demenchonok, “War and Peace: The Russian Philosophy of Dialogue and Peace for a Polycentric World,” in *Peace in the Face of Aggression*, ed. Court Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 2025), 191–262.

The idea of cosmopolitanism, with its emphasis on equality, citizenship of the world, and human rights, can be traced back to ancient Greece and the emergence of the idea of all-unity. This idea was further developed by Diogenes Laertius, the Stoics, and the Christian moral universalists. In the philosophy of Kant, it found both a moral and a political grounding, together with the concept of a cosmopolitical law based on the rights of world citizens as the condition for perpetual peace in a cosmopolitan order. The horrors of World War II and the breakdown of civilization renewed interest in the cosmopolitan idea, culminating in the establishment of the United Nations and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Like-minded philosophers are aware of the difficulties in discussing cosmopolitanism within a Western civilization that does not know what the κόσμος (cosmos) is and confuses the universalistic term with the expansion of its own interests. Thus, it is important to distinguish the genuine, liberating meaning of the cosmopolitan ideal from subjugating hegemonic simulacra as an “imperial” version of cosmopolitanism. At the same time, a human being, due to his/her finite condition, needs a “hometown,” a family life-world, rooted in proximity and vital community ties. True cosmopolitan aspiration involves openness to the universal without forgetting one’s own roots, a balance insightfully expressed by many thinkers.

This poses a formidable challenge to cosmopolitanism, requiring its own self-reflection in a new situation. It must respond to the critique of classical “moral” cosmopolitanism, often seen as lacking the power of political theory and practice that is so necessary for the implementation of its ideals. The cosmopolitan agenda has frequently been associated with the universalized Western-centrism, which tends to exclude decolonial or subaltern perspectives. Critics have pointed out that such claim to universality was rather a pseudo-universality¹³⁶ insensitive to the plurality of the world and cultural diversity. Such forms of “abstract universality” are associated with homogenizing hegemonic globalization with its ethnocentric pseudo-universality and “imperial cosmopolitanism.”

While cosmopolitan ideals remain morally attractive and powerful, they still need to become a political project for their practical implementation. In recent decades, the ideas of humanity’s wholeness, cultural diversity, and dialogue have been developed in the framework of a “new

¹³⁶ See Jovino Plizzi, “The Hijacked ‘International Society for Universal Dialogue’ Must Be Dissolved: Monologic Sophistry versus Dialogic Intercultural Philosophy,” *TOPOLOGIK* 28 (2020): 4–27, https://www.topologik.net/Jovino_Pizzi_Issue_28.pdf; Christopher Black, “Separating Genuine Dialogue from Simulacra: The ‘International Society for Universal Dialogue’ as a Parody of Itself,” *TOPOLOGIK* 23 (2018): 9–25, https://www.topologik.net/Christopher_Black_Issue_23.pdf.

cosmopolitanism,” conceived as a conception and a project of transformation for society and international relations.

*New Cosmopolitanism:
Rooted, Dialogical, Democratic, and Transformative*

Debates around cosmopolitanism present a broad range of interpretations and approaches, encompassing individuals, various societal domains, and academic disciplines. This diversity is reflected in the number of adjectives linked to the concept: “moral,” “political,” “legal,” “cultural,” and “economic,” as well as “cosmopolitanism about institutions” and “cosmopolitanism about the good life.” These perspectives cover a variety of topics, including individual freedom, human rights, global distributive justice, feminism, intercultural communication, nation-states, international relations, and the world order. Some theorists use the term in a purely normative sense, while others’ approaches are more analytical and empirical.

Theorists of cosmopolitanism have therefore sought to revise its traditional ideas, developing a new conception of a cosmopolitanism that is not merely ideal but also a political project, open to diversity and characterized as being reflective, critical, rooted, democratic, dialogical, and transformative.¹³⁷

The *reflective* dimension of cosmopolitanism refers to the self-reflection of its philosophical and methodological assumptions, concerning self-problematization and deep self-understanding. It requires awareness of its own conditions of possibility, while also considering the perspectives of the other. Cosmopolitanism is seen thus as a political philosophy, a culturally oriented approach to anthropology and cultural studies, a methodological framework for social sciences, and a new orientation for the world today.

The *critical* dimension of cosmopolitanism suggests a critical attitude to the social world. It plays an important role in critiques of the status

¹³⁷ See Fred Dallmayr, ed., *Dialogue and the New Cosmopolitanism: Conversations with Edward Demenchonok* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2023); Edward Demenchonok, “World in Transition: From a Hegemonic Disorder toward a Cosmopolitan Order,” in *A World beyond Global Disorder: The Courage to Hope*, eds. Fred Dallmayr and Edward Demenchonok (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 183–270; Ruth Abbey, ed., *Cosmopolitan Civility: Global-Local Reflections with Fred Dallmayr* (New York: SUNY Press, 2020); Seyla Benhabib, Jeremy Waldron, Bonnie Honig, Will Kymlicka, and Robert Post, eds., *Another Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Gerard Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination: The Renewal of Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Eduardo Mendieta, “From Imperial to Dialogical Cosmopolitanism?,” *Ethics and Global Politics* 2, no. 3 (2009): 241–258; Ulrich Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

quo and hegemonic globalization, it is relevant to the renewal of critical theory in its traditional concern with the critique of social reality, and it requires a “cosmopolitan imagination.” Critical cosmopolitanism is also decolonial, recognizing non-Western schools of thought as crucial components of the conceptual development of cosmopolitanism. It must be attentive to the voices of women, the poor, ethnic minorities, and excluded groups in different geographical locations, thereby ensuring globally inclusive and truly cosmopolitan. Moreover, it seeks to foster possibilities for cosmopolitics from below and transnational solidarity.

The *rooted* or grounded dimension of cosmopolitanism emphasizes that an individual has roots or is embedded in a specific history, nation, or people, a condition fully compatible with being a cosmopolitan citizen of the world. This dimension arises from an awareness of one’s location, nationality, and cultural heritage, harmonizing a sense of being a citizen of the world with an appreciation of the richness of shared culture. One can feel deeply committed to the local while at the same time adhering to global identities and universal values, that is, “universality plus difference.”¹³⁸ Such cosmopolitanism is an attempt to integrate the similar and different aspects of cultures worldwide. *Democratic* cosmopolitanism, in turn, asserts democratic principles and values both within society and in international relations, as expressed in the theory of cosmopolitan democracy.¹³⁹

The core of the new cosmopolitanism is its *dialogical* character, which embraces its rootedness, openness to cultural diversity, recognition of the other, and the normativity of dialogical relationships, engaging in dialogue with individuals, groups, nations, and cultures.¹⁴⁰ This approach demonstrates the possibility of reconciling differences through dialogical relationships without diminishing the voice and uniqueness of the other: “unity in diversity.” In dialogical relationships among equals, people from different cultural backgrounds who understand their common humanity and status as “citizens of the world,” can better understand one another, find common ground, collaborate on mutually beneficial solutions to existing problems, and join their efforts to build a better future – a cosmopolitan world. Dialogical cosmopolitanism emphasizes respect for difference, commitment to genuine dialogue, and the expansion of moral concern to achieve universal inclusion and global justice. It seeks to bridge the alleged national-global divide while honoring the values and cultures of other societies and fostering dialogue across cultural boundaries.

¹³⁸ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), xv.

¹³⁹ Daniele Archibugi, *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens: Toward Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹⁴⁰ Fred Dallmayr, *Being in the World: Dialogue and Cosmopolis* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2013).

Cosmopolitan claims involve universality assertions, yet philosophers criticize what they call universalistic pretensions and pseudo-universalistic ethnocentrism. In contrast to abstract universality, they offer a concept of concrete universality, which is grounded in a pluralistic view of the world and the different paths of human history, such as “multiple modernities.” By rejecting the monologic image of the world in favor of the pluralistic view, they lay the groundwork for the recognition of the social-cultural diversity of humanity and different historical perspectives giving voice to the other and the subaltern as a participant in global “dialogue” or multi-voiced “polylogue” concerning the past, present, and future of humanity. Dialogic cosmopolitanism emerges from the various spatial and historical locations of the colonial (and imperial) difference. This refers to global processes of “dewesternization” and “decoloniality” that seek to disengage from the matrix of Western power and project a movement for a global future, in which human beings are not exploited, and the natural world is not undermined. This view is oriented toward “pluriversality,” or a combination of diversity and universality that is called “diversality.” Instead of a homogenous world centered on an ideology or a state power, critical and dialogic cosmopolitanism is “a cosmopolitanism of multiple trajectories aiming at a trans-modern world based on pluriversality rather than on a new and good universal for all.”¹⁴¹

The new cosmopolitanism is essentially *transformative*, guiding political practices toward social change on both macro and micro scales. Its realization requires profound transformations of society and international relations, aiming to secure freedom and equality for every human being as a “citizen of the world.” Cosmopolitanism is “never an absolute or fixed category, but a dimension of social life that must be actively constructed through practices of meaning-making in social situations.”¹⁴² The new cosmopolitanism also envisions the elevation of human minds and hearts, cultivation of a global and cosmopolitan consciousness, and a theoretical foundation for a critical revision of existing socio-economic structures, institutions, policies, and ideologies, while exploring positive alternatives. In this way, it can become the regulative principle for understanding the interaction between national, cultural, and cosmopolitan imperatives in contemporary society.

An important characteristic of the new cosmopolitanism is its attempted connection with today’s social reality. Its practical implementation highlights the obstacles hindering efforts to facilitate dialogue across differences and realize self-transformative dialogical cosmopolitanism,

¹⁴¹ Walter D. Mignolo, “Cosmopolitanism and the De-Colonial Option,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 29, no. 2 (2010): 111.

¹⁴² Gerard Delanty, “Introduction: The Emerging Field of Cosmopolitanism Studies,” in *Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies*, ed. Gerard Delanty (London: Routledge, 2012), 2.

therefore showing the need for changes in order to overcome these obstacles. In relation to social movements, this new cosmopolitanism has the potential to shape translocal solidarities in spaces of convergence and provide a vision for combining local and global dimensions of protests and struggles for global justice and the necessary material conditions for a dignified life.

In contrast to some premature declarations, theorists of the new cosmopolitanism state that we are not yet living in an age of cosmopolitanism but rather “in an age of cosmopolitization.” They refer to a “cosmopolitanism to come”¹⁴³ as a viable perspective, a still unrealized but realizable future potential for democratic political arrangements both within sovereign states and in international relations. In conformity with international law, this vision gradually evolves from an international to a cosmopolitan order. These ideas can serve as a guiding and mobilizing force in striving for social and global transformation,

The central problem is how to imbue cosmopolitan moral thought with a legal and enforceable status that applies for individuals, states, and governments alike. International human rights norms need contextualization in specific polities through democratic iterations. Citizens can reiterate these norms and incorporate them into democratic will-formation processes through arguments and contestation, thus becoming increasingly convinced of the validity of cosmopolitan norms. Through this process, the principles of human rights are progressively incorporated into the positive law of democratic states, facilitating the emergence of cosmopolitan law.

Fred Dallmayr, reflecting on an emerging global city or community, views it as a historical journey of humanity toward “cosmopolis.” He advocates a vision of harmony in diversity:

Hence, any move or journey in the direction of cosmopolis today can only occur in the mode of sustained dialogue, the mode of cross-cultural and inter-religious interaction.... Going beyond the narrow confines of anthropocentrism, the journey has to make ample room for dialogue and listening, for the humanizing demands of education, ethics, and spiritual insight. Differently put: *homo faber* has to yield pride of place to *homo loquens*, *homo quaerens*, and *homo symbolicus*.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Benhabib et al., *Another Cosmopolitanism*, 177.

¹⁴⁴ Fred Dallmayr, “After Babel: Journeying toward Cosmopolis,” in *Intercultural Dialogue: In Search for Harmony in Diversity*, ed. Edward Demenchonok (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 366.

The new cosmopolitanism provides a comprehensive conceptual framework for promoting dialogical relationships. At its core lies a dialogical philosophy and the conception of dialogical relationships at every level – intersubjective, social, intercultural, and intercivilizational. The principles of dialogical philosophy can be considered as a theoretical basis for a new society. Both the theory and practice of dialogue, including the dialogue among civilizations, provide a heuristically fruitful framework for conceiving a new, dialogical civilization, in tune with the ideals of humanity's wholeness.

The peaceful alternative is attractive to many people and serves as a common ground for dialogues among people with different cultural backgrounds and worldviews who are vitally interested in the survival and prosperity of their families, communities, nations, and civilizations. People can use the internet and social media to establish solidary networks of associations, growing into a peaceful world community that is able to discuss and develop the theoretical dimensions of cosmopolitanism, create strategies and tactics for the spread and implementation of cosmopolitan ideals, and move toward the ennoblement of human hearts and minds. The process of “cosmopolitization” within societies can influence political processes and promote democratic transformation of societies and international relations. The articulation of a pluriversal and dialogical “cosmopolitanism to come” as a viable alternative inspires and provides us with a vision for strengthening a broad international collaboration toward a cosmopolitan world order grounded in freedom, justice, and peace.

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Part II

Theoretical Inquiry on Discerning Boundaries

Border's Vocabulary and Sensitivity to Migration

Basia Nikiforova

Introduction

Borders as a phenomenon have always been the object of philosophical inquiry in terms of their genesis, functions, and qualities such as connectedness and separateness, situatedness and spatialisedness. Another concern lies in the close connection between the meaning of space and the meaning of territory. It is not unusual that the key dichotomies of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, originate within their philosophy and were later taken up in the fields of geography and geopolitics.

Thomas Nail challenges two common assumptions about how borders work: that borders are static, and that borders keep people out. For him, borders take the form of three interlocking propositions: first, borders are in motion; second, the primary function of borders is not to stop movement but to regulate and circulate it; and third, borders operate as tools of primitive accumulation. He concludes that

borders are not static. They are always made and remade according to a multitude of shifting variables. In this sense, the border should not be analyzed in terms of movement simply because people and objects move across it, or because it is 'permeable.' The border is not simply a static membrane or space through which flows of people move.¹

Researchers on borders often focus on "border crises," challenges to state sovereignty, and the impact of global economic restructuring in conjunction with increased migration from developing countries. Rather than being seen as rigid political boundaries, borders are now understood as complex spaces characterized by ethnic, religious, and cultural interactions. Traditional notions of separation and connection between identities have shifted toward understanding the generative processes and hybridity that occur in and around border regions.²

¹ Thomas Nail, "Moving Borders," in *Debating and Defining Borders: Theoretical and Philosophical Perspectives*, eds. Soren Tinning and Anthony Cooper (New York: Routledge, 2019), 196.

² Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992): 6–23.

This shift in perspective marks a departure from a strictly state-centered analysis, recognizing that borders are distinct subjects worthy of study beyond conventional frameworks. How do borders intersect with the phenomenon of migration? Nicholas De Genova elucidated a crucial dimension of this relationship by examining the concept of the border spectacle.³ The term border spectacle refers to the dramatic enforcement of borders, which embodies the act of exclusion. Border spectacle highlights both the real and symbolic aspects of migration. It marks the emergence of what William Walters describes as the “birth of the humanitarian border.” This phenomenon sparks a discussion about important themes, including justice, security, humanitarian responsibility, hospitality, solidarity, and the intense emotions of fear and anxiety. It promotes hospitality, critical engagement, and activism, while urging us to navigate the complex landscape of both crisis and non-crisis with the aim of fostering compassion.

The goal of this small paper is to rethink the realities of borders and migration through the use of specific terminology, concepts, actors, and spaces. It clarifies the complexity of borders as a fundamental aspect that cannot be fully resolved in either theory or practice.

Borders in the Age of Mass Migration: A Small Vocabulary

This vocabulary requires a brief introduction that defines some features of the current approach to border and migration. First, we are not talking about terminology in its final version but about meanings in the process of formation, the perspectives of which are not yet fully visible. It is therefore important not so much to describe the historical aspects of the data but rather the properties and meanings that can be attributed to them in the future.

The method of deconstruction employed in this analysis allows us to intricately weave together geographical, historical, and notably philosophical tools to scrutinize the complex dynamics of migration and the evolving borders of the European Union, along with Europe as a whole. Our selection of Jacques Derrida as the principal figure of philosophical deconstructivism is grounded in several compelling reasons. First and foremost, Derrida engaged with the concept of hospitality long before the contemporary waves of mass migration emerged and before the current humanitarian crises at Europe’s external borders escalated. His early insights provide a profound context for understanding the nuances of these situations today. Secondly, Derrida’s journey reflects a significant evolution in the concept of hospitality, transforming it from an unconditional

³ Nicholas De Genova, “Spectacles of migrant ‘illegality’: the scene of exclusion, the obscene of inclusion,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 7 (2013): 1180–1198.

ideal to one that is bounded by legal frameworks and shaped by the interests of both the host state and the migrants. This nuanced development highlights the delicate balance between duty and regulation, illuminating how hospitality can be understood in a modern political context.

Over the span of more than three decades, Derrida's philosophical and political legacy has emerged as particularly relevant and instrumental in grappling with these ongoing challenges. Moreover, his personal experiences with neo-colonialism and xenophobia add depth to his philosophical inquiries, enriching our understanding of the complexities surrounding migration.

In addition, while Derrida stands prominent in this discourse, the works of other thinkers such as Deleuze and Guattari, Agamben, and Foucault despite their differing conceptual frameworks, share a critical engagement with the themes of power, identity, and the socio-political constructs that intersect with the experiences of migration and hospitality in contemporary European society. Before delving into Derrida's concept of hospitality, it is essential to recognize that he consistently critiqued his own theory. Derrida practically agrees that "hospitality is a self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct or protect itself from itself, auto-immunize itself in some way, which is to say, deconstruct itself – precisely – in being put into practice."⁴

In the later years of his life, he clearly faced psychological stress arising from the gap between his ideals and the realities he encountered. This conflict challenged not only his understanding of conditional hospitality but also the very essence of unconditional hospitality, highlighting the complexities and tensions inherent in these concepts. "For Derrida, the responsible action and decision consists of the need to continuously negotiate between these two heterogeneous requirements."⁵

Responsibility

In the context of migration and borders, the issue of responsibility is one of the most important meanings. In defining responsibility, we want to start with the legacy of Derrida. Derrida's philosophy and politics have always been inseparable. Scholars tend to focus on the aporetic concept of responsibility developed in Derrida's works. As Agnes Czajka points out, Derrida's texts interpreted "the more spectacular suicidal tendencies

⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," *Angelaki* 5, no. 3 (2000): 5.

⁵ Gerasimos Kakoliris, "Jacques Derrida on the Ethics of Hospitality," in *The Ethics of Subjectivity: Perspectives since the Dawn of Modernity*, ed. Elvis Imafidon (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 144–156.

of democracy with an exploration of the banality of autoimmunity and the quiet, everyday agony of democracy.”⁶

In one of the interviews, Derrida was asked whether he considered himself *a philosopher of the present*, or at least one who *thinks his time*. Derrida responded that:

Like anyone else who tries to be a philosopher, I do not want to give up on the present....I try not to forget that it is often the untimely intrusions of so-called actuality that are most ‘preoccupied’ with the present. To be preoccupied with the present...perhaps means to avoid the constant confusion of presence with actuality.⁷

Derrida denies that true responsibility involves confronting aporia, which refers to the possibility of the impossible. The concept of undecidability is crucial because it underpins every philosophical activity and interpretation. We bear responsibility for our decisions precisely because our goals are often unattainable. The act of deciding is always incompatible with the theoretical justification that supports it.

Derrida argues that no single conclusion can inevitably lead to a specific action. If a conclusion lacks the necessary options, uncertainties, and moral accountability, then the outcome cannot truly be regarded as a decision. In this sense, deconstruction presents both significant opportunities and challenges. It allows us to remain neutral, often resulting in a hesitation to make definitive choices. He asserts that deconstruction is a valid approach for taking responsibility and making informed decisions.

In this sense, deconstruction presents both significant opportunities and challenges. Derrida’s concept of deconstruction serves as a powerful tool for critically examining meaning and it decisively challenges established hierarchies, absolute truths, and binary oppositions, revealing their inherently fluid and contingent nature. However, Derrida fears that one of the challenges of deconstruction contains the potential danger of neutrality, which can suspend both decision-making and responsibility for them. He asserts that deconstruction is a valid approach for taking responsibility and making informed decisions. In *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, Derrida underlines clearly that deconstruction is not a neutral analysis.

For ‘democracy to come’ can hesitate...between two possibilities: it can, on the one hand, correspond to the neutral, constative

⁶ Agnes Czajka, “Europe after Derrida” in *Crisis and Potentiality*, eds. Agnes Czajka and Bora Isyar (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 6.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, “The Deconstruction of Actuality. An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” *Radical Philosophy* (Autumn 1994), <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/interview/jacques-derrida>.

analysis of a concept. On the other hand, no longer satisfied to remain at the level of a neutral, constative conceptual analysis, 'democracy to come' can also inscribe a performative and attempt to win conviction by suggesting support or adherence, and yet it is necessary to believe it.⁸

For Derrida, the concept of responsibility has always implied involvement in action, doing, a praxis, a decision that exceeds conscience or theoretical understanding. "The same concept requires a decision or responsible action to answer for itself consciously, of what action signifies, it causes its ends, etc."⁹

According to Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida understands responsibility as a way in which

the sameness of myself is derived from the other, as if it were second to the other, coming to itself as responsible and mortal from the position of my responsibility before the other, for the other's death and in the face of it. In the first place it is because the other is mortal that my responsibility is singular and 'inalienable'.¹⁰

For Derrida, the call to responsibility invites commitment and reflection on existing commitments. It should not serve as an uncritical justification of those commitments and here the question arises "how can that project play a part of an ethical life, a life which, among other things, attempts to take up its responsibility towards the other?"¹¹

By endowing the host with the quality of invisibility, Derrida opts not for the host but for the other. Others "can come into play only within these limits ascribed to the invisible: the invisible as concealed visible, the encrypted invisible or the non-visible as that which is other than visible."¹² He calls this problem classical and mysterious, emphasizing its historicity and the uniqueness of its manifestations at many historical stages and events. In the context of mass migration at the beginning of the 21st century, such definitions as invisibility and opacity are becoming characteristic features of European (and not only European) borders.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 91–92.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Willis (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 25.

¹⁰ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 46.

¹¹ Gregory B. Sadler, "Responsibility and Moral Philosophy as a Project in Derrida's Later Works," *Minerva: An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 8 (2004), <http://www.minerva.mic.ul.ie/vol8/derrida.pdf>.

¹² Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 90.

When the event of the decision is over, it is part of our past, no longer present. This returns us to what is constant, which doesn't allow us to reduce our past decision to a simple historical fact or to put it in a different context. Derridean unconditional hospitality is the possibility of welcoming others according to some conditions: a place, a language, or locality to receive the person. Derrida doesn't ignore the fact that they weren't there a moment ago, that their coming is contingent. He describes new arrivals as "disarmed as a newly born child" and requires a reciprocal vulnerability on the part of the host.

Derrida tries to call attention to the problem of being, and first of all, a historical and eschatological being. He believes that the possibility of having an eschatological history is already linked to responsibility. In the same time, the project of deconstruction always remains a political project in which the relationship with the other plays an important role.

Hospitality

A *critical practice*, as a popular concept and approach, examines transformation processes across various dimensions. This perspective significantly differs from merely theorizing about transformation; it shifts our focus from viewing transformation as a static or objective phenomenon to be studied and described with an external viewpoint. Instead, it emphasizes transformation as something that is imagined, co-created, and enacted collaboratively in practice with others.¹³ Critical practice perspectives evolve from *critical theories*, and the resulting paradigm shift encourages humanitarians to reframe their understanding of colonial, national, migration, and border issues. Of course, it is one of the approaches for explanation and deep investigation of everyday social experimental and socio-spatial practices among others. The *critical practice* perspectives developing through *critical theories*. Paradigm shift pushes humanitarians to re-framing colonial, national, migration and border thinking.

Derrida was a prominent critical thinker who constantly questioned established ideas and avoided simplistic solutions to complex contradictions. His notion of "unconditional hospitality" serves as a pertinent example of critical engagement with issues surrounding borders, migration, and the dynamics between host countries and refugees. It highlights the intricate contradictions between the legal and moral aspects of their relationship. The case of Derrida's concept of "unconditional hospitality" is the example of such critical practice about these issues.

His critical practice is directed toward himself, language, ethics of hospitality, policy of state. The critical start laid down in his method of

¹³ Elisabeth Conradi, "Redoing Care: Societal Transformation through Critical Practice," *Ethics and Social Welfare* 9, no. 2 (2015): 113–129.

deconstruction relates to “problematization of the foundation of law, morality and politics.”¹⁴

Today, in the context of mass migration we often hear opinions and voices that sovereignty is an antinomy of hospitality. The two contradictory modalities highlight an internal conflict filled with a wide range of emotional expectations, such as fear, risk, hope, compassion, and solidarity. Derrida discusses the various risks and expectations, as well as the hopes and fears associated with this concept. Drawing inspiration from Levinas's ethical perspective, Derrida emphasizes that hospitality carries a deeper significance. At its core, hospitality represents the unconditional welcome of those in need of compassion and assistance.¹⁵

The last events in Europe such as mass migration (2015-2017), the pandemic and closure of national borders (2020-2021), hybrid forms of migration expansion on the border with Belarus (2021-2022), and Russia's war against Ukraine show that a paradigm shift needs primarily the idea of paradigm pluralism and a “matrix of alternatives.” This process should include all the players of the bordering process. The image of modern migrants started to mirror Levinas's words that the Other “does not constitute a number with me, does not obey the general concept, that is, does not constitute a totality...,when man truly approaches the Other, he is uprooted from history.”¹⁶

From his own personal biography, Derrida knows what it means the hospitality and its opposite. The expressions of “hiding the inner,” trauma, and secret were also important for him. In his political philosophy, Derrida focuses on what happens when people who are excluded from any political system or law ask for asylum. Derrida builds his own concept of unconditional hospitality on a radical basis. At the same time, this concept establishes a connection between unconditional hospitality and the necessary conditions for the realization of hospitality, which means rules, rights, obligations, conventions, borders, and laws on migration.

“Hospitality is a very general name for all our relations to the Other, it has to be re-invented every second, it is something without a pre-given rule.”¹⁷ In other words, hospitality must be repeatedly reinvented and rethought, requiring responsibility toward others. Derrida understands all the consequences of hospitality: being hospitable is not a simple duty. The

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida,” in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, eds. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 48.

¹⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 52.

¹⁷ “A Discussion with Jacques Derrida. An Exchange between Jacques Derrida and Sydney seminar participants,” *Theory and Event* 5, no. 1 (2001): 15–16.

problem lies in the disharmony between the two laws: the ephemeral law of unconditional hospitality and the legislation based on which hospitality can be realized. Derrida analyzes the conflict between the law of hospitality as such and the legislation of hospitality (norms, duties, and laws in society that form the basis of habits, etiquette, boundaries of hospitality) and shows us all the difficulties for implementing this project.

When we speak of greeting the Other within the framework of codified tolerance, we are often referring to conditional hospitality, one that is limited by law and legislation. Derrida, realizing the potential difficulties inherent in this situation, noted that such moments cannot be governed by rules. Derrida frequently uses the verb “may” to emphasize not reality but possibility; he focuses on potential rather than necessity. He believes that only by believing in the possibility of the impossible can we effectively guide our decisions and actions. Many scholars and politicians have viewed Derrida’s effort to redefine hospitality – both within the nation-state and in a cosmopolitan context – as utopian and potentially harmful to political discourse.

Derrida identifies a dilemma that he considers an unavoidable aspect of the concept of hospitality, which becomes particularly evident during mass migration crises and discussions about immigration. The tension between the two facets of hospitality, openness and closedness, depends on specific circumstances. Rather than providing definitive answers to these dilemmas, Derrida urges us to recognize that we are always in a situation where we have not done enough.

Derrida’s and Levinas’s writings on hospitality make them the foremost theorists on concepts that represent a rich field of paradoxes and uncertainties. Derrida links hospitality with an understanding of power that potentially limits how we use and understand hospitality in a global context. His hospitality as ethics establishes a constitutive connection between self and other, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. Retaining to Derrida’s aim of improving the practice of international hospitality, it does not mean that we must pay attention only to the scriptural examples about the full dissolution of our own identity. Derrida outlines it famously by saying that “the residence, the familiar place of dwelling, since it is a manner of being there, how we relate to ourselves and others, to others as our own or as foreigners, ‘*ethics is hospitality*’.”¹⁸ How we welcome or choose not to welcome it is the very definition of the ethical relation, and it is always a matter of “answering for a dwelling place, for one’s identity, one’s space, one’s limits.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. M. Dooley and M. Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001), 16–17.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford, CA: University Press, 2000), 149.

In recent years, one of the main questions in philosophy has been the question of the Other: how and to what extent are we able to accept and welcome the radical Other? The debates about our hospitality, willingness, and ability to offer it to the Other are of great importance today, although their discourse has changed markedly.

Other and Othering

The concept of the "Other" plays a crucial role in contemporary discussions of migration and hospitality. The border is the place where most of the migrants feel more or less Other through belonging to religion, race or ethnicity. Migration and migrants as Other take place in temporal, spatial, and political contexts. The concept of othering is perceived as colonization, conquest, or war, but also forms that are present in everyday life, such as interactions and behaviors of different groups or individuals in society. Othering is the process of casting a group, an individual, or an object into the role of the other and establishing one's own identity through opposition to this Other. Othering in the socially dynamic process of migration in Europe is a ground and result of the contact of different ethnicities, cultures, and religions.

When analyzing the consequences of migration, who counts as a *migrant* is crucial. Today, there is no consensus on a single definition of a migrant. Migrants might be defined by foreign birth, by foreign citizenship, or by their movement into a new country to stay temporarily or to settle for a long term. The desire of international organizations and researchers to establish differentiation and gradation of Other's types must be preceded by the recognition that the primary connection between migration and security lies in the human security of the migrants themselves. Media coverage has shifted between calling the situation a European refugee crisis to a migrant crisis. This inconsistency highlights the contradictions in how human mobility is categorized, often reflecting governmental agendas.

The ongoing crisis of European borders corresponds above all to a permanent epistemic instability, which itself relies on the exercise of a power over classifying, naming, and partitioning migrants/refugees, and the more general multiplication of subtle nuances and contradictions among the categories that regiment mobility.²⁰

²⁰ Nicholas De Genova, "Introduction. The borders of 'Europe' and European Question," in *The Borders of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*, ed. Nicholas De Genova (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 9 (1–35).

Migrants are vulnerable at every stage of the migration process before departure, during transit, upon entry, throughout their stay, and during their return. This vulnerability is evident in numerous forms. The regulatory and policy actors play a crucial role in promoting human security. However, to achieve meaningful progress in improving the human security of migrants, they require support, collaboration, and engagement from non-state actors. This includes civil society, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, border activists, and researchers.

Mostly mass media uses the term migrant to refer to all people on the move who have yet to complete the legal process of claiming asylum.

The term *asylum-seeker* is mostly predicated upon a general suspicion of all people who petition for asylum within a European asylum system. This group includes people fleeing war-torn countries as well as people who are seeking jobs and better lives and who governments are likely to rule are economic migrants.²¹

The word *refugee* has a specific definition, with legal and social implications. Refugees are entitled to international protection, which guarantees basic human rights. Those who migrate for purely economic reasons are not refugees.

The UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) describes a refugee as “a person who has fled his/her country owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality.”²² The international protection of refugees is based on “the grant of asylum, the recognition of refugee status and the principle of non-refoulement.”²³ It outlines a refugee’s rights, including freedom of religion and movement, freedom from being penalized for illegal entry and being deported unless certain conditions are met, the right to work, education, but what is important, it also underscores a refugee’s obligations to a host government.

Economic migrants should not be confused with refugees who fleeing life-threatening persecution. An economic migrant leaves a country voluntarily to seek a better life. In the last few decades, millions of economic migrants have sought new lives in other countries. Modern migratory patterns often represent a complex and mixed knot of economic migrants, genuine refugees and others. Governments face a challenging task

²¹ De Genova, “Introduction. The borders of ‘Europe’ and European Question,” 8.

²² *UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* (July 28, 1951), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-relating-status-refugees>.

²³ *UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, Article 33.

in separating the various groupings and treating genuine refugees according to established asylum procedures.

The next participant in the migration process is the *stateless person*. The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons defines a stateless person as “a person who is not considered as a national (or citizen) by any State under the operation of its law.”²⁴

A stateless person also can be refugee if he/she has been forced to leave his/her country of habitual residence because of persecution. Not all stateless persons are refugees and many of them never leave their country of residence. People become stateless for a number of reasons. The more important reason is the transfer of territory or sovereignty (state dissolution) which alters the nationality status of citizens of the former state and may render some persons stateless.

An *internally displaced person* is one who fled his/her home but has not crossed an international border to find sanctuary. They have similar reasons as those that drive refugees (such as armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations), but they legally remain under the protection of their own government even when the source of danger is that government.

International human rights law provides that detention in the migration context must only be used as a last resort when alternatives cannot be applied. Examples of alternatives to detention include measures ranging from policy or legislative developments until effective identification procedures, and casework-oriented models.

Solidarity

The idea of solidarity has a deep-rooted history in the social sciences and humanities, encompassing a wide range of theories and discussions. In recent years, this concept has received considerable attention in the context of migration and refugee studies, where it plays a crucial role in understanding the relationships and support systems that emerge in response to the challenges faced by displaced individuals. Researchers are increasingly exploring how solidarity can foster community resilience, promote social justice, and inspire collective action among diverse groups. In the existing literature, the concept of solidarity lacks a single definition or a standardized approach. Instead, a diverse array of solidarity types emerges, each rooted in different philosophical foundations. This plurality highlights the complexity of the issue, as various interpretations

²⁴ UN Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (September 28, 1954), <https://www.unhcr.org/media/states-parties-1954-convention-relating-status-stateless-persons>.

and frameworks coexist, reflecting different cultural, social, and ideological perspectives on what solidarity means and how it should be practiced.

Over the past decade, the notion of solidarity has become a focal point of public discourse, particularly in light of the numerous crises that have emerged within the European Union. These challenges ranging from economic struggles to political upheavals have put the idea of European solidarity under considerable strain, prompting intense debates about its relevance and meaning in today's context. The emergence of populist parties in several European nations, the outcome of the Brexit referendum, and the rise of Eurosceptic and xenophobic demonstrations in various regions of Europe have sparked important discussions about the potential fragility of European solidarity.

Researchers have posed new questions about European solidarity that directly point to new doubts and a new vision of solidarity in Europe: "Is European solidarity really on the decline within the European citizenry? How strongly is solidarity rooted at the individual level, both in terms of attitudes and practices? What are the driving factors and mechanisms that tend to contribute to the reproduction and/or corrosion of solidarity in times of crisis?"²⁵

For Maurizio Ambrosini, migration and asylum raise relevant questions about borders, reception, solidarity and humanitarian action. Specifically, he looks at mobilizations by citizens through the lens of "active citizenship" and "de-bordering solidarity." The term solidarity refers to "various forms of support provided by activists and volunteers, through which these actors contest policies of asylum and borders in practice."²⁶

Cecile Cantat's concept of marginalizing solidarity with refugees reflects a shift in priorities during the pandemic. What does marginalizing solidarity mean for border researchers? First, it involves the symbolic reconstruction of political claims and the exclusion from social life. Second, it leads to the intensification of both internal and external frontiers. Third, it brings increased attention to racial and religious markers in determining who belongs. Fourth, it highlights the growing prioritization of security over humanitarian concerns in public opinion and political statements.²⁷

Anna Kurowska and Maria Theiss in the book *Solidarity in Europe. Citizens' Responses in Times of Crisis* show the history and the meaning

²⁵ Christian Lahusen and Maria T. Grasso, eds., *Solidarity in Europe. Citizens' Responses in Times of Crisis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73335-7>.

²⁶ Maurizio Ambrosini, "Humanitarian Help and Refugees: De-Bordering Solidarity as a Contentious Issue," *Journal of Migrant and Refugee Studies* 22, no. 3 (2017): 517, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/15562948.2022.2059823?needAccess=true>.

²⁷ Cecile Cantat, "Rethinking Mobilities: Solidarity and Migrant Struggles beyond Narratives of Crisis," *Intersections. EEJSP* 2, no. 4 (2019): 11-32. DOI: 10.17356/ieejspv2i4.286.

of political solidarity. Historically, Poland, a country where the idea of solidarity is primarily associated with the “Solidarity” social movement, has shown and is showing unprecedented solidarity with Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. The situation in Poland prompts us to explore new and complex questions for which there are currently no clear answers. One important question is how the historical tradition of national solidarity, rooted in the rich legacy of the Solidarity movement and affects contemporary attitudes toward migrants and refugees from different regions and continents in the world. Furthermore, we are compelled to ask whether it is truly feasible to speak about solidarity at a European level without taking into account the unique local characteristics and experiences that shape individuals’ perceptions and responses to this issue. Therefore, the question of the relationship between the interaction of the local and the global at the level of solidarity is extremely important in matters of mass migration.

The cultivation of bridging social capital through solidarity practices significantly boosts the willingness of individuals to engage in diverse forms of collective action aimed at promoting solidarity. This strengthening of social connections encourages active participation in civil society organizations, inspires a greater commitment to social action. As individuals unite around shared values and common goals, they create a more vibrant and interconnected community, ultimately working toward the common good.

Humanitarianism

Over the past two decades, the interplay between humanitarian principles and asylum issues has generated considerable debate and controversy. As countries grapple with their responsibilities toward those seeking refuge, discussions have intensified about the ethical obligations to provide sanctuary versus the challenges of managing border security and immigration policies. This conflict raises important questions about the balance between protecting human rights and addressing national and international security concerns, making it a critical issue in contemporary discourse on refugee assistance and asylum reforms.

Interest in humanitarian issues has increased significantly and has focused on a few key theorists, namely, Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, and Giorgio Agamben, who have critically assessed the past and present state of humanitarianism. Arendt in her book *Origins of Totalitarianism* and her article “We refugees” wrote that

the concept of human rights, based on the axiom of the value of human existence as such, collapsed in ruins, as soon as those who professed it found themselves confronted with people who

had really lost everything. They are left with only one specific quality: the fact of being a human being.²⁸

Foucault's exploration of the complex and nuanced dimensions of discipline and biopolitics has made a profound impact on current studies of colonialism, migration, and race. As he says: "I have never tried to analyze anything whatsoever from the point of view of politics, but always to ask politics what it had to say about the problems with which it was confronted."²⁹ Foucault is wondering: how has the concept of human nature functioned in our society? Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery with which it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body.

Foucault's primary method is to historicize categories such as human nature whenever he encounters them. His aim is to understand how human nature has been understood as a social practice in our civilization, rather than as a yardstick against which these practices are measured. Foucault's rejection of such functions of political philosophy as a high theory with its abstractions, first principles, and utopian theory opens a way for concentration on critics of the functioning of institutions that claim to be neutral and independent. His approach allows for a critique in such a manner that the political violence that has always exercised obscurely through these structures can be unmasked, enabling us to confront and fight them.³⁰ In such institutions, the object of criticism is such correctional institutions as prisons, psychiatric hospitals, centers of migrant detention. Foucault's exploration of the complex and nuanced dimensions of discipline and biopolitics has made a profound impact on current studies of colonialism, migration, and race. For Foucault, dividing practices are a substantial part of the subject matter.

Continuing this idea in the essay *We Are Refugees*, Agamben offers a new view of Europe as an extraterritorial space in which all inhabitants of European states are in a state of Exodus, and the status of "European" means "citizen of being in Exodus."³¹ Agamben's theories, particularly

²⁸ Hannah Arendt, "We refugees," in *The Jewish Writing*, eds. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schochen Books, 1996), 264–274.

²⁹ Michael Foucault, "Polemics, politics, and problematizations: an interview with Michel Foucault," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), <https://foucault.info/documents/foucault.interview/>.

³⁰ Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, *Human Nature: Justice vs Power. The Chomsky-Foucault Debate*, ed. Fons Elders (London: Souvenir Press, 1974), 171.

³¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

his concepts of “bare life,” “Homo Sacer,” and the camp as the “nomos of modernity,” delve deeply into the complexities of contemporary society and its humanitarian frameworks, describing the fundamental relationship between the biological fact of human life and sovereign power, which is the main form of political existence.

These concepts resonate deeply with the realities associated with an increasingly expansive global humanitarian framework, resulting in a substantial body of influential literature. Across diverse regions, social activists have used Agamben's theories to highlight the significant tragedies experienced by immigrants and refugees, along with the often-grim conditions in detention centers. Through this perspective, they highlight the dehumanization experienced by vulnerable populations and emphasize the urgent need for reform and empathy in addressing these global crises. They introduced several concepts into the political discourse, including biopolitics, biopower, responsibility, governmentality, humanity, citizenship, and statelessness.

For rejected asylum seekers, support from NGOs and other civil society actors is becoming increasingly important. Derrida questions what has happened to the country, culture, and language where the expression “a crime of hospitality” exists, considering how hospitality can be perceived, in the eyes of the law and its representatives, as a criminal offense.³² However, like solidarity, “a crime of hospitality” varies in form and intensity from one country to another.

Miriam Ticktin, using the term “blurring” the boundaries of humanitarianism, considers it to be one of the most important theoretical hypotheses of the 21st century. Humanitarianism as such and humanitarian actions do not always elicit approval and support from government organizations and mass media. Among the main critical comments, sometimes suggesting that it should entirely dismantled, in other cases highlighting its complexities and limits.³³ Researchers seeking to understand humanitarianism have aimed to clarify the distinctions between humanitarian efforts and other initiatives that promote well-being, such as human rights initiatives and development projects. Their studies have revealed that the boundaries between these activities are not fixed; instead, they are fluid and continually evolving. This ongoing redefinition underscores the dynamic nature of humanitarian efforts and their interaction with broader social and political contexts.

³² Jaques Derrida, “The Principle of Hospitality,” in Idem, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 66.

³³ Miriam Ticktin, “Borders and the Politics of Mourning,” *Social Research* 83, no. 2 (2016): 255–271, <https://doi.org/44282188>.

Crisis and Non-Crisis Perspectives on Migration

The crisis – non-crisis dichotomy is one of the most popular topics of discussion among border researchers. This dichotomy is not merely a point of interest; it fundamentally shapes our understanding of border dynamics and necessitates critical examination and debate within the field. The practices and discussions around these issues serve specific purposes. Strict controls on human mobility worldwide empower conservative groups to promote the narrative of “crisis migration” when certain immigration processes fail. These include discretionary immigration procedures, strict border closures, and mass deportations. Bert Spector argues that claims of *crisis* are little being more than rhetorical devices and often frame ideological assumptions. The crisis discourse is generally mobilized to describe the figure of the migrant in their movements and allows for emergency measures to be taken. Agamben explains it as follows:

The exception does not subtract itself from the rule; rather, the rule, suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and, maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule. The particular ‘force’ of the law consists in this capacity of the law to maintain itself in relation to an exteriority.³⁴

The formation of the public image of the refugee and its associated characteristics (depoliticized, silenced, or framed as a threat) is therefore an attempt to suspend migration. In fact, the crisis approach pragmatically presents to public opinion that moral norms and human values remain secondary to security and sovereignty.

Some researchers argue strongly that crises may not be real phenomena. According to Bert Spector, there are three crucial points. First, we often misinterpret the nature of crises and the role of leaders who claim their existence. Second, crises should not be seen as “neutral, scientifically objective readings of the external environment.” Rather, they are tools for exercising power and expressing interests on behalf of those making the claims. Third, while emergencies or crisis-like situations can and do occur, they are not an inevitable reality. This proponent proposes the development of a meta-theory that focuses on the concept of crisis, with the dynamics of urgency serving as the foundational element.³⁵

Cantat focuses on the relationship between crisis as a set of discourses and practices, and the governance of migration. She notes that

³⁴ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 18.

³⁵ Bert Spector, *Constructing Crisis: Leaders, Crises and Claims of Urgency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

the naming of a crisis authorizes a series of strategic actions. The discourse of crisis frames recent mobilities towards Europe as exceptional and out of the ordinary, and calls for and justifies emergency interventions – indeed, the redeployment of brutal strategies of bordering – in order to restore a putative normality.³⁶

Cantat focuses on the crisis as “a discourse that frames 21st century European mobilities, as exceptional and out of the ordinary;” it justifies extreme border strategies “to restore the past normality.” In addition to these geopolitical gestures, it legitimizes a set of practices such as detention, deportation, pushback, and forms of psychological pressure.

The discourse of crisis precisely at moments when the state's incapacity to control and discipline the movement gains visibility is in this sense an operation aimed at the reassertion of the binaries on which sovereignty relies in the face of autonomous mobilities which escape its logic.³⁷

For Birgit Meyer, the concept crisis is far from being neutral. “The use of the term crisis involves a diagnostic act that may legitimize massive political consequences.”³⁸

The concept of crisis as a framework provides a powerful narrative to insist on the necessity even in a state of emergency. On the other hand, the narrative of exceptionality and exceptionalism of current events also makes it seem as if the refugee issue is only a recent phenomenon, mostly linked to globalization.

We agree with the proponents of the non-crisis approach that, in the condition of a dominant crisis approaches, the importance of non-place (spaces of exception) increases and becomes an instrument for creating a crisis landscape as such, and with the notion of marginalizing solidarity with refugees that reflects the shift in priorities in times of mass migration and pandemics.

What we find most worrying in the non-crisis approach is that it fails to recognize the complex and interconnected nature of different crisis phenomena occurring simultaneously. The unprecedented scale of mass

³⁶ Cecile Cantat, “Rethinking Mobilities: Solidarity and Migrant Struggles beyond Narratives of Crisis,” *Intersections. EEJSP* 2, no. 4 (2019): 11–32. DOI: 10.17356/ieejspv2i4.286.

³⁷ Cantat, “Rethinking Mobilities: Solidarity and Migrant Struggles beyond Narratives of Crisis.”

³⁸ Birgit Meyer, “Mobilizing Theory. Concluding Thoughts,” in *Refugees and Religion. Ethnographic Studies of Global Trajectories*, eds. Birgit Meyer and Peter van der Veer (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 256–273.

migration we are currently experiencing is not an isolated issue; it is deeply intertwined with a variety of crises, such as devastating environmental disasters, violent conflicts and wars, and the alarming rise of fundamentalism used as a tool of terror. Simultaneously, we are witnessing a growing awareness of the significance of borders in the collective consciousness. Not just as lines on a map but as a vital barrier that provides a sense of security and stability in the face of these escalating crises. This evolving perception has led to increased attention on the political and social implications of borders, highlighting their enhanced importance in contemporary discourse.

Conclusion

This small paper aims to analyze and rethink the terminology, concepts, and spatial dynamics related to borders while clarifying the complexities and variability of the migration process. We have selected four significant definitions – responsibility, solidarity, hospitality, and humanitarianism – recognizing their deep value and moral significance. Each of these concepts resonates with our shared human experience, emphasizing the importance of being accountable to one another and extending compassion to those who are vulnerable.

The recent events in Europe indicate that a paradigm shift requires the concept of paradigm pluralism and a “matrix of alternatives.” This process should involve all stakeholders in the bordering process.

Derrida highlights a dilemma that he views as an inherent part of the concept of hospitality, especially during mass migration crises and debates about immigration. This dilemma stems from the tension between two aspects of hospitality: openness and closedness, which depend on particular situations. Instead of offering clear answers to these challenges, Derrida encourages us to acknowledge that we are always in a position where we could do more.

The migration and asylum raise relevant questions about solidarity and humanitarian action. In the past decade, the concept of solidarity has become a central topic in public discussions, especially due to the various crises faced by the European Union. In the last two decades, the relationship between humanitarian principles and migration has sparked significant debate. Discussions focus on the ethical obligation to save human lives and the challenges of border security and immigration policies, raising questions about balancing human rights and security concerns.

Cultivating solidarity practices boosts individuals’ willingness to engage in collective action. Strengthened social connections foster participation in civil society and inspire commitment to social action. By uniting around shared values, individuals contribute to a vibrant, interconnected community working toward the common good.

The interaction between humanitarian principles and asylum issues has sparked significant debate and controversy. Discussions have intensified regarding how to fulfil ethical obligations to provide sanctuary while also managing border security effectively. Humanitarian migration is crucial for balancing human rights with national and international security. It highlights the dehumanization of vulnerable populations and the urgent need for reform and empathy, as well as the evolving nature of humanitarian efforts within broader social and political contexts.

The distinction between crisis and non-crisis situations is a pivotal topic for border researchers. This dichotomy is not merely a point of interest but rather shapes our understanding of border dynamics and call for critical examination and debate within the field.

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Philosophy beyond Borders: Cosmopolitanism versus Intercultural Philosophizing

Marietta Stepanyants

Philosophical Discourse on Globalization

Until 1993, the term ‘globalization’ had not appeared in the agendas of world congresses of philosophy. True, however, critical rhetoric against Eurocentrism emerged earlier. Worthy of mention in this regard is the XVII World Congress of Philosophy in 1983 (Montreal), where a number of sessions were devoted to Latin American, Indian, Chinese, and African philosophy and culture. However, these sessions attracted only a small audience, while the majority of meetings focused on Eurocentric perspectives. A significant turn of philosophers to the criticism of globalization was observed at the XXI Congress of Philosophy on “Philosophy Facing World Problems” in 2003 (Istanbul). This is evidenced by the themes of plenary sessions, symposia, and special sessions, such as “Globalization and cultural identity,” “Human Rights, the State and the International Order,” “Global Federation: A Proposal for the Twenty-first Century,” etc.

The call for “a new philosophy, a new grammar of thinking” was proclaimed at the XXII World Congress of Philosophy in 2008 (Seoul), under the theme “Rethinking Philosophy Today.” In his address to the participants, UNESCO Director-General, Koichiro Matsuura, said that the global problems of our time have come close to humanity and require an immediate solution. Philosophers, like no one else, are able to see these problems and should try to develop a methodology for addressing them.

The theme “Rethinking Morality, Social and Political philosophy: Democracy, Justice and Global Responsibility” was the subject of one of the plenary sessions; two of the four symposia were devoted to “Globalization and Cosmopolitanism” and “Bioethics, Environmental Ethics and Future Generations”; several round tables discussed similar topics: “The Contours of the World: Globalization, Cosmopolitanism and World Citizenship,” “Values and Faith in Asia in the Context of Globalization,” “Cultural Dialogue between East and West: Past and Future,” “Rawls’ Theory and Global Justice,” etc.

At the plenary session “Rethinking the History of Philosophy and Philosophical Comparative Studies,” a report on the topic “A New Century in the History of Philosophy: World Dialogue between Philosophical

Traditions”¹ was presented by Enrique Domingo Dussel Ambrosini (1934 – 2023), a Mexican-Argentine philosopher, historian, and theologian. For me, as a participant, this paper was the most impressive in terms of content and passionate conviction.

Dussel was born and educated in Argentina. He studied at the Sorbonne University in Paris, where he received his doctorate in history in 1967. He was greatly influenced by Emanuel Levinas, who taught at the Sorbonne. Dussel continued his studies at the University of Madrid, where he defended his doctorate in philosophy. In 1969 he returned to Argentina, where he was persecuted for his political views. A year before the military dictatorship established in 1976-1983, Dussel was forced to flee to Mexico as a political émigré. There, he continued to work as a professor of philosophy at the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAFM), periodically teaching courses at universities in Latin America and Europe (Belgium, Spain, Italy). Dussel received an honorary doctorate from several universities across continents, the University of Fribourg in 1981, the University of San Andrés in 1995, the University of Buenos Aires in 2012, the University of Santo Tomás in 2015, the National University of San Martín in 2015, and the University of Chile in 2017. He had been involved in dialogue with philosophers such as Karl-Otto Apel, Gianni Vattimo, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, and Emmanuel Levinas. He was the author of more than fifty books on a wide range of disciplines, including theology, politics, philosophy, political economy, and history.

Dussel’s report sounded like a declaration of the fundamental principles of the international philosophical community: “for the first time in the history of philosophy, diverse traditions (European, North American, Chinese, Indian, Arab, African, Latin American, etc.) will be open to an authentic and symmetrical dialogue...that will make it possible to transcend the Eurocentrism of Modernity.”²

First of all, it should be affirmed that humanity has always sought to confront certain core universal problems. Among fundamental principles, it is necessary to reject the false position that philosophy was born exclusively or originally in Greece, and that it should be regarded as a prototype of philosophical discourse. This error arises from the fact that Greek philosophy is seen as the definition of philosophy itself, without a clear criterion for distinguishing between mythical and philosophical categories. Thus, the relation between the universal and the particular is confused: the particular case does not reflect the universal scope of the necessary definition, while the origins of European philosophy are mainly rooted in

¹ Enrique Dussel, “A New Age in the History of Philosophy: The World Dialogue Between Philosophical Traditions,” *Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 9, no. 1 (2008): 1–21.

² Dussel, “A New Age in the History of Philosophy: The World Dialogue Between Philosophical Traditions,” 3.

Greece, the origins of world philosophy are multiple and diverse. Hence, “the philosophy of the East would be philosophy understood *in a broad sense*, and that of Greece according to much *narrower* criteria.”³

In addition, it is a mistake to consider the history of philosophy as a linear process: from Greek philosophy to medieval Latin philosophy and subsequently to the modern European schools. The true historical trajectory is much more complicated.

Philosophy was created and developed by all the great cultures of the world, each of which produced its own conceptual and structural categories. Philosophical discourse does not destroy myth, rather mythical elements are present even in the reasoning of great philosophers. In fact, mythical elements may even contaminate the discourses of great philosophers. For example, Immanuel Kant argues in favor of the “immortality of the soul” in the “dialectics of pure practical reason” of his *Critique of Practical Reason*, as a way of resolving the question of the “supreme Good.” In Kant’s view, the soul receives after death the happiness it had earned in its earthly life. But these concepts of the “soul” and of “immortality» demonstrate the persistence of mythical elements of Indian origin in the Greek thought-elements that came to permeate all of the Roman, Medieval Christian, and Modern European world. The supposedly philosophical proofs provided are, in these cases, tautological and not rationally demonstrative upon the basis of empirical facts. This illustrates the unrecognized (and in this case, inappropriate) presence of mythical elements in the best philosophies.⁴ Dussel uses Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel as an example. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant employs the concepts of soul and immortality, thereby demonstrating the preservation of mythical elements of Indian origin in Greek thought that permeated throughout the Roman, medieval Christian, and modern European world. The supposedly philosophical justifications given in these cases is tautological, not rationally demonstrative on the basis of empirical facts.

Hegel is also the one who wrote that “the Germanic Spirit is the Spirit of the New World [Modernity], whose end is the realization of the Absolute Truth.”⁵ He fails to note, however, that said “Spirit” is regional (European Christian and not Taoist, Vedanta, Buddhist or Arab), nor is it global, nor does its content reflect the problems characteristic of

³ Dussel, “A New Age in the History of Philosophy: The World Dialogue Between Philosophical Traditions,” 12.

⁴ Dussel, “A New Age in the History of Philosophy: The World Dialogue Between Philosophical Traditions,” 11.

⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 358: “The German Spirit is the Spirit of the new World. Its aim is the realization of absolute Truth as the unlimited self-determination of Freedom – that Freedom which has its purport. The destiny of the German peoples is to be the bearers of the Christian principle.”

other cultures. For these reasons, it does not constitute a universal philosophical discourse but instead reflects the characteristics of a mythic and provincial narrative. Such a Spirit is fully valid as a component of the mythical narrative, of significance to those who live within the horizons of regional culture (e.g., Europe). It cannot ascribe to it a rational philosophical content with empirically grounded universal certainty, as modern European philosophy still claims.

Dussel emphasized the need to study the concrete circumstances that enabled European philosophy to be positioned as a universal philosophy. For him, it is a military, economic, political, and cultural power of Europe as a colonial world center. Through this power, geographically, economically and culturally, “it succeeded to manipulate the *knowledge* and *information* wrested from all peripheral cultures within its grasp and position itself in such a way as to appear to be a universal philosophy, both in its own eyes and in the eyes of the intellectual communities of the colonial world, who lay prostrate at its feet and philosophically paralyzed by formulas similar to Hegel’s ‘Universal history goes from East to West. Europe is the absolute end of world history’ or ‘The Mediterranean Sea is the axis of world history’.”⁶

Since 2008, a number of significant changes have characterized the activities of the World Congress of Philosophy. As a member of the Elected FISP Executive Committee (2003-2018) and the first Vice-President of FISP (2008-2013) I am able to identify several developments. For more than a century of existence, this main world philosophical forum has held twenty congresses – all of them in the West (either in Europe or North America). However, over the first two decades of the twenty-first century, four congresses have taken place outside the Western world: in Turkey, Moscow, Korea, and China. Meetings of the Executive Committee have been convened in India, Thailand, Mexico, Benin, and Iran. The number of participants from non-Western countries has increased manifold.

The Future of Globalization: Forecasts

Until recently, the prevailing conviction (at least in the West) was that globalization would lead to the widespread triumph of liberal democratic values and institutions. As Francis Fukuyama asserted in his book *The End of History and the Last Man*,⁷ we are at the end of history, because only one system will continue to dominate world politics, namely, the liberal-democratic West.

⁶ Dussel, “A New Age in the History of Philosophy,” 15–16.

⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 418.

However, as globalization unfolds, the excessive confidence in such categorical judgments becomes more obvious. According to one of the leading political scientists of the United States, Peter Berger, “Globalization is neither a single promise nor a single great threat.”⁸ Even the most general outlines of the future global world order are still unclear, and multiple scenarios of the course of events are still possible.

The U.S. National Intelligence Council regularly updates and revises its projections to reflect changes in the global situation. In consultation with independent experts from around the world, the Council produced “World Trends 2010” in 1997, “World Trends 2015” three years later, and “Outlines of the World’s Future: Project 2020 Report” in 2004.⁹ The latter report formulates the concept of four hypothetical scenarios, each describing the “possible worlds” on the threshold of which we may find ourselves, depending on which trends prevail and how they interact.

The first scenario: the steady and rapid economic growth in a number of previously lagging countries, primarily China and India, could change the direction of globalization, making it less Westernized. The balance of power in the political arena would shift, and traditional dichotomies, such as “West vs. East,” “North vs. South,” “developed countries vs. developing countries” would be abolished.

The second scenario: the United States would be able to maintain a dominant role in shaping an all-encompassing world order.

The third scenario: a global movement to create a “New Caliphate,” based on radical Islam, could pose a profound challenge to Western norms and values, and become the foundation of a new world system.

The fourth scenario – “Ring of Fear”: a widespread sense of insecurity arising from by the growth of terrorism, organized crime, arms trafficking, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

In 2021 the Council published “Global Trends Report 2040,” which identified five plausible, distinctive, and illustrative stories of the future. Three of the scenarios portray futures in which international challenges become incrementally more severe, and interactions are largely defined by the US-China rivalry...Two other scenarios depict more radical change. They portray a world in which *globalization has broken down*, and economic and security blocs emerge to protect states from mounting

⁸ Peter Berger and Samuel Huntington, eds., *Many Globalizations. Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16.

⁹ Tim Jones, *Future Agenda – The World in 2020* (London: Infinite Ideas, 2019), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330216363_Future_Agenda_-_The_World_in_2020.

threats. *Tragedy and Mobilization* is a story of bottom-up, revolutionary change....¹⁰

Cosmopolitanism and Globalism

The final judgement on the future of globalization cannot yet be made, a reversal of trends remains possible. In response to new challenges, the cosmopolitan moment is reviving. The term cosmopolitan derives from the Greek *kosmopolitēs* (citizen of the world). There is a belief that Diogenes was the first who, when asked where he came from, replied: “I am a citizen of the world [cosmopolitan].”

In the Greco-Roman world, Stoic cosmopolitanism became widespread, likely as a result of the conquests of Alexander the Great and the division of the empire into kingdoms, which deprived the cities of their traditional power. The early Christians embraced the later Stoic recognition of the two cities: the citizens of the polis and the citizens of the cosmopolis, both doing the same work of seeking to improve the lives of citizens. For centuries, an ongoing debate took place about the relationship between ‘temporary’ political power and the eternal Church.

In the Age of Enlightenment, the concept of world citizenship acquired the character of a humanistic, anti-feudal ideal in the works of Dante, Petrarch, Mirandola, Rabelais, Montaigne, and Erasmus of Rotterdam). Later, thinkers such as Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Kant, and Fichte developed the ideas of world citizenship, considering world citizenship inherent in human nature.

Kant played a huge role in the development of a cosmopolitan theory of morality, arguing that all rational beings are members of a single moral community. Moral cosmopolitans pointed to the fundamental equality of people, rejecting slavery, colonial exploitation, and feudal hierarchy. In addition to constitutional and international law, Kant also proposed cosmopolitan law: not only states, but all human beings as citizens of the earth have rights.

It is striking how the meaning and use of the concept of cosmopolitanism could change within one country over a short, historical period of time. The October Revolution and the formation of the USSR widely used the slogan from the Communist Manifesto “Proletarians of all countries, unite!” The commitment of Russian Marxists to the idea of a classless society and of the withering away of the state allows them to be adherents of a post-revolutionary type of cosmopolitanism. In the pre-war period, the struggle against cosmopolitanism took the form of a campaign against

¹⁰ The National Intelligence Council, *Scenarios for 2040, Charting the Future amid Uncertainty* (March 2021), <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/gt2040-home/scenarios-for-2040>.

subservience to German history and culture. Then, in connection with the establishment of relations with Germany (from August 1939 until the German attack in June 1941), England became the target of criticism. In the beginning of the war and the formation of allies in the anti-Hitler coalition, this policy was reversed: Germanophiles were criticized and persecuted, while the achievements of Great Britain and especially those of the United States were exalted.

Between 1948 and 1953, the struggle against cosmopolitanism turned into a mass criticism of a number of scientific trends, administrative measures against individuals, a political campaign against anti-patriotic and pro-Western tendencies among the Soviet intelligentsia. The campaign was accompanied efforts to assert Russian and Soviet primacy in science and technological inventions. During the Cold War, after the Stalin period, the fight against cosmopolitanism had an episodic character and gradually lost its intensity. In the era of perestroika, the situation changed radically: in contrast to the class-based morality that had prevailed in the USSR, the concept of universal values was introduced by the country's leader, M.S. Gorbachev. Speaking in his Nobel lecture on June 5, 1991 in Oslo, he emphasized the desire of the Soviet peoples to be an organic part of modern civilization and to live in harmony with universal values and the norms of international law.

The idea of a global ethos was widely discussed in both academia and the media. Particular attention was paid to the comprehension of the theory of world ethos (Weltethos), developed by H. Küng (1928 – 2021) in his work *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethics*.¹¹ Küng defines the world ethos as a minimum of moral obligations that need certain moral foundations in order to let people live together in peace. At the initiative of the Gorbachev Foundation, a round table devoted to this theme was held with the participation of Russian philosophers and religious scholars.

Support for the idea of universal values is also demonstrated in the early period of V.V. Putin's presidency. Speaking at a meeting of the State Council on December 26, 2006, he stated:

The ideological vacuum created after the collapse of socialist ideology is being filled and it will definitely be filled. But it will be filled either with extremism, chauvinism, nationalism and national intolerance that destroys us, or, with our active support, with universal values.¹²

¹¹ See Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility. In Search of a New World Ethic*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1991).

¹² *On State Support of Traditional Folk Culture in Russia*, Verbatims report of the meeting of the State Council (Moscow: Kremlin, December 26, 2006) [*О государственной поддержке традиционной народной культуры в России*. (Стенографический отчет о

Official rhetoric has changed radically in the last decade. The ultra-nationalists, especially among the representatives of political Orthodoxy, identify universalist ideas, even academic interest and research of general humanistic significance (non-violence ethics, inter-cultural philosophy, etc.) with what is described as harmful cosmopolitanism. The leading role in this campaign is played by Tzargrad (a Slavic name for Constantinople – the capital of the Byzantine Empire), founded in 2015, which calls itself “The first Russian conservative informational Internet TV Website.” One of the recent examples is the article in which the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences is labeled as “Fifth Column.”¹³

Dialogue and the New Cosmopolitanism

The traditional notion of cosmopolitanism has been revised and replaced by an updated conception of dialogical new cosmopolitanism. This is examined by the authors of *Dialogue and the New Cosmopolitanism. Conversations with Edward Demenchonok*.¹⁴ The editor-in-chief of this book, Fred Dallmayr (1928-2024), Professor Emeritus of Political Science and Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame (USA), was known for his works on modern Western thought and non-Western philosophy (Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism). He was the former president of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy (SACP), a member of the RESET Advisory Board (Rome), and co-chairman of the World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations” (Vienna). He authored thirty-eight books and edited eighteen others. His most recent books include: *The Coming Democracy: Politics as a Relational Practice* (2017); *Post-Liberalism: Restoring Common Peace* (2019); *For a New and “Different” Humanism* (2020); *Horizons of Difference: Interaction with Others* (2020); *Political Life in Dark Times: A Call for Renewal* (2021).

In the Preface to the book on *Dialogue and the New Cosmopolitanism*, Dallmayr explains that the concept of new cosmopolitanism does not support one-sided supremacy but instead promotes democratic or lateral interaction among equal partners in the world. Such a vision is crucial in our present global arena. Dallmayr believes that breakthroughs to a new

заседании Государственного совета 26 декабря 2006 г. Москва. Кремль], <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23986>.

¹³ Михаил Тюренков, “Пятая колонна философов. Контрнаступ против России под флагом Академии наук,” *Первый Русский Царьград*, 7 января 2024 [Michail Turenkov, “Fifth Column of Philosophers against Russia under the Flag of the Academy of Sciences” (Moscow: Tzargrad, 2024), https://tsargrad.tv/articles/pjataja-kolonna-filosofov-kontr-nastup-protiv-rossii-pod-flagom-akademii-nauk_936490/nsk].

¹⁴ Fred Dallmayr, ed., *Dialogue and the New Cosmopolitanism. Conversations with Edward Demenchonok* (Boston, MA: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2023), 525p.

paradigm were achieved by existentialism and phenomenology, in particular by Martin Heidegger with his transition from individual subjectivity to a common life world. This move dismantled the traditional dualism of self and other, interior and exterior, immanence and transcendence, and replaced them with differential connectedness.

The leitmotif of this work is the recognition of multiplicity, the need for new correlations and interactions, a gradual transition from self-identification to diversity, multiplicity, and transversality, from mono-logue to conversation, dialogue, and ultimately polylogue.

This book is largely inspired by the early published volume *The World beyond Global Disorder: The Courage to Hope*,¹⁵ which includes articles by a number of prominent Asian thinkers, such as Du Weiming and Ni Peiming from China, Abdulkarim Soroush from Iran, and Ashish Nandi from India.

The new cosmopolitanism is a project that opens to diversity and distinctively characterized by its reflective, critical, democratic, dialogical, and transformative nature. It is akin to intercultural philosophy, as both argue for cultural diversity and dialogical relationships among diverse cultures, and peaceful coexistence and cooperation of people in facing world problems. Although intercultural philosophizing has been present in history since ancient times, it began to acquire the status of a distinct field during the 80s and 90s of the last century. The emergence of intercultural philosophy is usually attributed to the late 1980s and early 1990s, which is not entirely accurate, for much depends on how the essence and basic principles of intercultural philosophy are defined.

R.A. Mall is one of the first to define intercultural philosophy as a distinct concept. A German philosopher of Indian origin, he studied at the universities of Göttingen and Cologne. In 1963 he received his doctorate with a dissertation on *Hume's Concept of Man*. Upon his return to India, Mall held the chair of philosophy at the Jadavpur University of Calcutta (1964-1967). In 1967 he returned to Cologne to work on phenomenology and empiricism at the Husserl Archive. Mall defended his habilitation in 1981 at the University of Trier with a study on *The Operational Concept of the Mind: Locke, Berkeley, Hume*. He taught philosophy at the Universities of Trier, Wuppertal, Bremen, Heidelberg, Munich, and Jena.

Mall demonstrates through his own experience that belonging to different cultures does not hinder intercultural philosophizing rather it can support it. He was the first who formulated what intercultural philosophy is, describing some of the key features of what is actually a hermeneutic situation. He develops his own theory of interculturally-oriented analog

¹⁵ Fred Dallmayr and Edward Demenchonok, eds., *The World beyond Global Disorder: The Courage to Hope* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 316p.

hermeneutics, demonstrating how this approach provides what is needed for intercultural philosophizing.

According to Mall, intercultural philosophy is not a special theory, discipline, or school; rather, it offers an orientation within the practice of philosophizing aimed at promoting tolerant pluralism. It is a certain type of philosophical belief, approach, and deep understanding. Philosophies, just like cultures, are unique and have no right to absolutize themselves. Mall embraces a broad understanding of intercultural philosophy, not linking it exclusively with the modern era. Paraphrasing Heidegger, Mall highlights the tautology of the concept of intercultural philosophy, since “philosophy is by its nature intercultural.”¹⁶

The statement that philosophy cannot be anything other than intercultural is too categorical. Nevertheless, the intercultural nature of philosophy is not exclusive to modern philosophizing. Let us recall the Axial Age, which Karl Jaspers described as the spiritual process, occurring between 800 and 200 BC, when philosophers independently emerged in various regions. In China, – Confucius, Lao Tzu, Mo Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Le Tzu; in India, the Upanishads, Buddha and Mahavira; in Iran, Zarathustra; in Palestine, the prophets Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Deutero-Isaiah; in Greece, Parmenides, Heraclitus, and Plato. A common thread for them was the awareness of being as a whole, of the Self and its boundaries. In the unfolding spiritual struggle, each tried to engage the other by communicating one’s own ideas, justifications, and experiences. A person was no longer closed in him/herself but became open to new, limitless possibilities, capable of hearing and understanding what one had never asked about before.¹⁷

Philosophy has acquired an intercultural character whenever cultures have encountered, which can be due to various reasons. An example of this is Muslim philosophy shaped by Judaism and Christianity; the creative perception and adaptation of Greek ancient philosophy in falsafa; and the presence of concepts of Zoroastrianism in the philosophy of Sufism.¹⁸

One of the founders of this trend, Raúl Fornet-Bettencourtis, a native of Cuba who left his homeland at the age of fifteen, received his bachelor’s degree in Puerto Rico and defended his dissertation in philosophy and literature in Spain. In Germany, he wrote a dissertation in linguistic philosophy. Fornet-Bettencourtis served as director of the Latin America Department at the Missio Catholic Institute in Aachen and taught as a professor at the Universities of Aachen and Bremen, the Pontifical University of Mexico and the University of Unisinos in Brazil.

¹⁶ Ram Adhar Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy* (Boston, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 8.

¹⁷ Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021).

¹⁸ Marietta Stepanyants, “The Encounter of Zoroastrianism with Islam,” *Philosophy East and West* 52, no. 2 (April 2002): 159–172.

Fornet-Bettencourtis considers intercultural philosophy an “alternative to globalization” – “a work project that seeks to provoke a paradigm change in the doing of philosophy,” in which the boundaries imposed by the West of monocultural structures of philosophy should be removed. It cultivates “a philosophical attitude that starts from the recognition of the plurality of philosophies with their respective cultural matrices and their consequent ways of argumentation and grounding.” Moreover, “intercultural philosophy seeks to be, in short, a philosophy that is practiced from the standpoint of *mutual cultural assistance*.” This implies that the intercultural transformation of philosophy articulates itself within the communication among different traditions: “It recognizes, then, that it is not monological, but polyphonic.”¹⁹

Fornet-Betancourt’s early works show his commitment to a program of enculturation of philosophy in Latin America along the lines of liberation theology and later liberation philosophy. His starting point was the critique of traditional Eurocentric epistemology. He argues that modern philosophy erroneously asserts the exclusive superiority of the Western mind, thereby obstructing dialogue with other cultural realities. Proposing to expand the field of rationality, Fornet-Betancourt defends a demonopolized philosophy and the recognition of the existence of philosophies among the Maya, Inca, and Mapuche Indians (literally “people of the earth”) of Chile and Argentina).

Franz Martin Wimmer, an Austrian philosopher, is another influential founder of intercultural philosophy. He defended his dissertation at the University of Salzburg in 1975 on *To understand, describe, explain. On the Problems of Historical Events*. Wimmer has taught at the universities of Salzburg, Klagenfurt, Innsbruck, and Vienna. He is honorary president of the Vienna Society for Intercultural Philosophy.

The author of numerous books and articles on intercultural philosophy, many of which have been translated into many languages, Wimmer considers it necessary to rethink the history of philosophy by including non-Western traditions. Although philosophy claims to be universal, it is always embedded in a specific culture, in certain modes of expression, and in certain problems. The problem of modern philosophy is that European culture alone prevailed and established itself as the scientific standard. Philosophizing about culture should take into account two aspects: first, cultures compete with each other, and second, in the modern period, they are oriented outwardly, that is, globally. Wimmer pays special attention to African philosophy, supporting the efforts of philosophers of

¹⁹ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, “An Alternative to Globalization: Theses for the Development of an Intercultural Philosophy,” in *Latin American Perspectives on Globalization: Ethics, Politics, and Alternative Visions*, ed. Mario Sáenz (Lanham, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 230, 234.

African descent to defend the right to recognize African contributions to the global philosophical heritage.

Over the last decade, Russian philosophers have significantly contributed to the development of intercultural philosophy.²⁰ Based on several of my previous publications, I authored the book *Intercultural Philosophy: Origins, Methodology, Problems, Prospects*.²¹ This work is an attempt to explain the concept of intercultural philosophy, trace its origins in connection with the evolution of comparative philosophical studies, and identify the cultural preconditions for its development. The book focuses on intercultural philosophy as both a methodology of knowledge and a perspective for creating a new cartography of rationality. Intercultural dialogue is viewed in the context of global challenges, including the ecological vector of civilizational development, the disastrous gap between economics and ethics, the expansion of the boundaries of philosophy and science, and the need for the moral improvement for both society and the individual. The book also discusses the future prospects for intercultural philosophy.

My reflections on the present state of world philosophy have led me to the conclusion that intercultural philosophy is not something fixed and clearly defined. I think there are two paths toward the establishment of intercultural philosophy. The first, shorter path leads to a relatively easily attainable goal, for it enables us to overcome myopia, color blindness, and deafness when perceiving a different culture. This path broadens the horizons of those who are engaged in philosophical reflection, freeing them from the limitations of seeing only one part of the world or hearing only the voices of their immediate environment. In sum, the short path is focused on the formation of an intercultural *approach* to philosophy.

There is also a longer path, which is more difficult to achieve. This path goes beyond merely an intercultural approach but works with different cultures to create what can be called a genuinely intercultural philosophy. It requires going beyond epistemological modesty and embraces learning that is inspired and enriched by the ideas and concepts of another culture.

I admit that a third path is also possible, though it becomes available only after successfully passing down the first two. This is the most

²⁰ The review of the development of comparative and intercultural philosophy in Russia was published as Marietta Stepanyants, "Philosophers Striving for the Recognition of Cultural Diversity and Dialogue," in *Dialogue and the New Cosmopolitanism Conversations with Edward Demenchonok*, ed. Fred Dallmayr (Boston, MA: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2023), 69–94.

²¹ *Межкультурная философия: истоки, методология, проблематика, перспективы* / М.Т. Степанянц; Ин-т философии РАН. М.: Наука Вост. лит., 2020. 183 с. ISBN978-5-02-040560-8 [Marietta Stepanyants, *Intercultural Philosophy: Origins, Methodology, Problems, Prospects* (Moscow: Eastern Literature, 2020)].

creative and therefore especially difficult path goes beyond simply recognizing a plurality of culturally rooted philosophies and establishing mutually respectful relationships between them; it goes beyond conducting a dialogue that enriches everyone who participates in it. “The third path is fraught with hopes and opportunities for discovering new, previously unknown solutions to universally significant problems.”²² In order for philosophy not to lose its purpose to grasp the spirit of the times, it must cease to be one-dimensional, abandon its arbitrarily chosen cultural isolation, and become truly intercultural.

In the Russian public discourse today, there is a criticism of cosmopolitanism, being simplistically identified with globalism. Along with this critique, the activity of nationalism and chauvinism is on the rise. Among these voices, often excited to the point of loss of sobriety, fortunately, one can still hear reasonable and balanced views, expressed by intellectuals who are wise in life experience, aware of the battles of the ideological campaigns of the historical past, and capable of dialectical thinking. Among them is one of the most respected figures of Russian philosophy, Academician V. A. Lektorsky. In his opinion, “the homogeneity to which today’s form of globalization is leading is a road to a dead end,” arguing that development and evolution are possible only under the condition of diversity. “Different forms can find different resources at one or another stage of further development, and what seems most promising today may not turn to be so tomorrow.”²³

Lektorsky does not consider globalization an exclusively negative phenomenon. He sees its positive aspects in the worldwide spread of market economies, the emergence and development of transnational corporations, the creation of a number of global organizations, and new information and communication technologies (Internet, television, mobile telephony, etc.). Globalization gives rise to new economic and political ties between different regions of the world.

Lektorsky ponders whether we are able to impact on the negative forms of globalization such as the dehumanization of human and culture. This could be avoided only if we “will be able to preserve traditional human values and, at the same time, adapt them to contemporary realities.... The diversity of traditional cultures is not a disadvantage but a condition for the survival and further development of mankind.”²⁴

²² Межкультурная философия: истоки, методология, проблематика, перспективы, 25.

²³ Vladislav Lektorsky, “Philosophical Reflections on Humans, Identity, and Intercultural Dialogue,” in *Dialogue and the New Cosmopolitanism Conversations with Edward Demenchonok*, edited by Fred Dallmayr (Boston, MA: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2023), 180.

²⁴ Lektorsky, “Philosophical Reflections on Humans, Identity, and Intercultural Dialogue,” 180–181.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I do not regard “dialogical cosmopolitanism” as the only way for the human community to achieve unity in organic connection with diversity. I know that what I am talking about is a utopia that may be objected, and that such a path cannot radically liberate us from modern problems: conflicts, wars, and mutual destruction. In response, I would like to recall Gandhi who dreamed not only of a non-violent path to India’s liberation from British colonialism, but also of the creation of a non-violent civilization in the future. Some, like Churchill, laughed at him, calling a “fakir,” wishing him dead; others – millions of Indians of all castes and even those untouchables, of all ethnicities, religions, women and men – named Gandhi Mahatma – “the Great Soul” – and followed him, ultimately achieving independence in 1947. Gandhi’s enemies and critics labelled him a dangerous utopian, yet the Mahatma soberly assessed his projects. He never doubted the power of non-violent resistance as the “most powerful force” in the political struggle, and the possibilities of creating a “non-violent civilization” in the future. Two years before his assassination by Hindu nationalists, Gandhi wrote: “I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid’s point, though incapable of being drawn by a human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for the mankind to live.”²⁵

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²⁵ Mohandas Gandhi, “To American Friends,” *Harijan* (November 16, 1947): 112.

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Dialogue across Cultures: Ambivalence of Cultural Borders

Leszek Korporowicz

Introduction

The contemporary world, especially the processes of globalization, is far from what was predicted back in the 1970s. At the time, progressive unification was forecast, a kind of melding of cultures into a single organism governed by analogous methods and similar types of values. We were supposed to dress alike, listen to the same music, live in same style houses, all of which were an advanced product of modernization, meanwhile the processes of secularization were supposed to eliminate any kind of religion. The reality, however, turns out to be much more complex. In addition to standardization in the world of technology, many areas, such as management and consumer behavior, culture, mentality, and social emotions, including religion, are diversifying at a rate that is difficult to estimate and in directions that surprise almost everyone. This is happening due to various objective and transcultural reasons, such as the enormous scale of social mobility, cultural products and contents, the deterritorialization of cultural groups, and, finally, the abundant virtualization with diverse results.¹ The resulting mix of ethnic groups, peoples, and entire cultural configurations triggers progressive processes of deconstruction, decomposition, and often disintegration of the axio-normative systems inherent in cultural communities. As a result of the continuous progress of cultural diversification processes, many traditional forms of identity and boundaries, the principles of their cohesion, cultural security norms, and the type of indigenous values, have been broken down. These processes are, in many cases, highly creative, allowing stereotypes and prejudices to be abandoned, opening up authentic communication opportunities and the exchange of socially valuable skills. Unfortunately, the breaking down of borders also has many negative aspects. It destroys the norms of social order, harms the dignity of specific individuals and cultural communities, eliminates transcendent religious values, and breaks down identities that are important for specific groups. These processes also lead to the loss of the subjectivity of communities that have become easy targets of economic, political, and mental manipulation by dominant powers and their

¹ Leszek Korporowicz, ed., *Mobility of Cultures* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka Politeja, 2012).

main actors.² For various reasons, these dominant powers mostly remain hidden, take the form of transnational structures and offer addictive systems of services, commercial, technical, or military. The actions they generate, however, create environmental conditions that allow for the appropriation and control of cultural actors through the phenomena of axiological chaos. It leads to deconstructing the capacity of the dominated to build independent social and mental entities and finally inhibiting their internal development potential. The existence of cultural boundaries shows its ambivalent character, on the one hand, dividing the wider communities into detached and even conflicting segments and, on the other hand, protecting them from too far-reaching mechanisms of atomization, disintegration, and loss of coherence. The last element is necessary for the development of the personal and cultural identity expressed by a sense of irreducible dignity, freedom, and agency.³

Ambivalences of Cultural Transgressions

Transgression, defined as a process of going beyond existing boundaries, i.e., cultural transgressions, generally has positive evaluations among representatives of the social sciences and humanities. This is due to the hope that authentic development, in whatever sense, is not possible without broadening, deepening, and thus gaining access to new contents and experiences. It is impossible without going beyond who one is, beyond the state of one's former competence. This includes transcendental, mystical, and spiritual experiences. It is worth noting, however, that transgressing boundaries should not and is not a value in itself. Transgression is, for example, in fact, carried out by any criminal who "transgresses," which means to break the boundaries of the law, the social order, and ultimately moral norms. Transgressiveness is the perpetration of genocide, any atrocity, or even the violation of the balance of an ecological, cultural, or mental system. Moreover, it is also necessary to note the peculiar ideologization of many types of transgression, which are made as the object of propaganda pressure, connected with the human body policy, confusing human rights with the conscious promotion and even coercion of various deviations, and running against medical and mental standards. These types of transgressions are not implemented in an one-sided manner. Unfortunately, this practice is de facto becoming even more of an ideological construction, the rejection of which is made the object of a consistently constructed and institutionalized atmosphere of pressure. But the "new

² Ulrich Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Perspective: Sociology of the Second Age of Modernity," *British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 1 (2000): 79–105.

³ Leszek Korporowicz, "Culture in Interaction. Towards a Community of Heritage," *Politeja* 10, no. 1 (2008): 373–388.

order” of such transgressions often becomes a chaos of values, decomposes identities, and brings many overt pathologies. It happens even in very totalitarian societies.

Forms of Integration and Disintegration

The positive and negative forms of integration and disintegration are examined extensively in Kazimierz Dąbrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration, which has been fruitfully developed since the mid-20th century, first in Poland and later in Canada. These forms have gained adherents in many countries among both researchers and practitioners,⁴ who emphasized the need for a much deeper understanding of the notions and processes of integration and disintegration in personal, social, and cultural life. Some criminals have highly integrated personalities, while some brilliant artists live with disintegrated internal worlds. Creative human activity requires dramatic, transformative achievements that are ultimately positive. By contrast, many integrated organizational or social actions within authoritarian communities lead to pathological consequences.

Cultural Transgression

Similar studies on positive and negative forms of transgression were carried out by the Polish psychologist Józef Koźielecki, who created his theory of cultural transgressions, which means cultural behaviors and attitudes that transform existing norms and values.⁵ Disintegrating processes and actions are necessary for development, thus allowing for the abandonment of standards imposed by the environment or accepted in non-reflected ways. But, if the process of disintegration could be positive and generate developmental dynamisms, it must necessarily – according to Dąbrowski – be undertaken in the company of parallel and complementary stimulators of content from the high level of the cultural and spiritual world. This type of content possesses the ability to create and support a sense of life, a meaning of human activity stimulated by fundamental, self-referential, autotelic values to which we recall, like dignity, love, or responsibility. These values could be defined as “values for themselves,” as values that could not be replaced, substituted, or exchanged by other types of values, because they fulfill the functions of secondary integration, i.e., highly reflective, mature, prospective processes of cultural development. The secondary integration is far from axiological emptiness; it does

⁴ Kazimierz Dąbrowski, *Zdrowie psychiczne a wartości ludzkie* (Warszawa: PTHP, 1974).

⁵ Józef Koźielecki, *Koncepcja transgresyjna człowieka* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1987).

not replace spiritual values or the profound content of symbolic culture with particularistic physiological needs, nor does it reduce itself to one-sided adaptation to promoted fashions, ideological trends, and cultural boundaries. Rather, it resists the tendency to escape from human responsibility and from a conscious and meaningful life into a modern type of posthumanism and abstract cosmopolitanism.

In Dąbrowski's and Koziński's concepts, both integration, adaptation, and respect for existing borders, as well as disintegration, maladaptation, and border violation, can take either positive or negative forms. Everything depends on the specific values and the mental and cultural content that guide us in our attitudes toward borders, whether they trigger or ruin goal-oriented developmental dynamisms and visions of life they propose. Hence, we are not helpless in the face of axiological chaos and the boundaries that affect us and sometimes create our existence. The problem is that we cannot accept them unreflectively, nor can we embrace the strategies, tactics, fashions, or policies offered to ignore them. We are rather obliged to ask questions about where these strategies, etc. are leading us and whether their goals are well-intended or whether we are obscured by these strategies. Anything that stands in the way to these trajectories, including faith, mature personality, and intellectual culture, becomes a dysfunction that hinders the construction of controllable collectivities, stripped of identity and dignity, severed from serious heritage and with human rights reduced to individualized consumer needs.

Modern times, unfortunately, promote transgressive attitudes as sacrosanct values, while leaving us uncritical of their purpose or concealing the social engineering of the market, technology, or politics behind them.⁶ Reflection on cultural transgressions is thus becoming an indispensable element of axiological security today and, consequently, of cultural security for both individuals and communities. Without losing the ambition of its development, cultural transgression does not want to glorify the principle of disintegration, confusion, and diversity as chaos.

In order to diminish these risks, it is necessary to work toward positive transgressions, which, in a situation of intensification of the above-mentioned processes of diversification, mixing, and mobility, can show the art of interaction, exchange, and intercultural competencies with a clear vision of purpose and strength not to weaken the humanistic and hopeful human condition. This action is possible only by animating and teaching the practice of dialogue at each level, for instance, the internal, interpersonal, intergroup, and inter-organizational levels. If this dialogue unfolds all its dimensions, it will be possible to transcend the boundaries

⁶ Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

of particular interests, and the limitations objectivity of human and interpersonal conditionality, opening the paths toward possible transcendence.

Jagiellonian Inspirations

Overcoming the negative consequences of cultural diversity, i.e., that which results from the natural boundaries between cultures, is not just the subject of intellectual quibbles or well-intentioned and noble visions of missionaries. One historical example was the epoch of the Jagiellonian dynasty, which, from the second half of the 14th century to the end of the 16th century, determined the dominant elements of political, economic, and cultural reality in Central and Eastern Europe, especially the Kingdom of Poland and later the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: Poland and Lithuania. Surprisingly, this period showed many parallels to the challenges close to our modern times. A careful analysis of the cultural transformations that took place from the end of the fourteenth century onward in the period and territory of the formation of the Jagiellonian dynasty reveals many interesting parallels in both the dynamics of the processes and the intellectual overview that contemporary analysts of European culture construct.⁷ It is easy to see these dynamics if we translate the archaic language of late medieval scholars, with which they communicated in the European community of the Latin language, sharing with each other the fundamental questions of nascent humanism.⁸ What brings these questions into the contemporary focuses are values that are significant in the Jagiellonian imagination. For instance,

- an interest in what is indivisible, intrinsic in human beings, grounded in natural law as the basis of humanity, yet always in the *diverse forms* of life, where it is recognized as a kind of human fulfilment, expression, and richness;
- a conviction of the possibility and value of interacting in *intercultural spaces* in an era of increasing interaction and interdependence between ethnic communities;
- a belief in the beneficial effects of the *mobility of people*, ideas, and creations of both individuals and communities;
- *a willingness to transcend habits*, particularisms, and even one's own patterns of valuing for purposes that transcend the boundaries of one's own cultures;

⁷ Hans Joas, ed., *Kulturowe wartości Europy*, trans. Marta Bucholc and Michał Kaczmarczyk (Warszawa: IFiS PAN, 2012).

⁸ Kazimierz Ożóg, *Uczeni w monarchii Jadwigi Andegaweńskiej i Władysława Jagiełły (1384-1434)* (Kraków: PAU, 2004).

- *multiculturalism in public life, moving toward interculturalism* through the form of new skills of cultural interaction, i.e., the development of intercultural competence;
- *openness to the values of equality, freedom, and fraternity* in various practical spheres of community life, such as academic culture;
- *religious tolerance* and openness toward cultural minorities;
- *complementing* the unique local and universal perspective on the issue of cultural heritage and its importance in the development of human communities and institutions;
- *discovering* the creative potential of cultural synergies and *opening up the symbolic space of national cultures*.

An example of the intellectual realization of all the above-mentioned values is the multifaceted thought of the rector of the Krakow Academy, the leader of the Krakow School of International Law, Paweł Włodkowic (Paulus Vladimiri).⁹ This outstanding thinker not only evoked and developed the concept of the rights of nations (*ius gentium*), an axiology of the relations of nations, but also formed much smaller cultural groups and communities that went beyond his epoch.¹⁰ A precursor conception of the foundations of contemporary cultural rights, of individual and communal subjects of relations, communication, and intercultural dialogue, was thus created.¹¹ All of these issues have become burning challenges for modern Europe. Growing cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity has become the cause of many conflicts, the failure of integration policies and what we now call intercultural governance. Another concern for the contemporary world is the inability to communicate cultural heritage to each other, especially the indigenous values, without which it is difficult to understand cultural identities, especially of large groups of migrants.

In the Jagiellonian era, the solution was to find the means to build social cohesion and reduce levels of alienation and exclusion. The common good understood as a shared inspiration was central to the Jagiellonian values and not imposed by force. The concept of the rights of nations defined the principles and practice for resolving ethnic conflicts and for regulating peaceful coexistence and cooperation despite barriers, religious differences, etc. Despite different interests and moral traditions, the principle of dialogue was employed to establish mutual relations. Decisive factors included the pursuit of mutual benefit rather than particular groups and the capacity to think in terms of the needs of the broader community.

⁹ Wanda Bajor, "The Cracovian Precursors of *Ius Gentium* in the Jagiellonian and Contemporary Periods," in *Jagiellonian Ideas Towards Challenges of Modern Times*, ed. Leszek Korporowicz et al. (Kraków: The Jagiellonian Library, 2017), 99–128.

¹⁰ Ludwig Ehrlich, *Pisma wybrane Pawła Włodkowica* (Warszawa: PAX, 1968).

¹¹ Stanisław Wielgus, *The Medieval Polish Doctrine of the Law of Nations: Ius Gentium* (Lublin: University Press of the Catholic University of Lublin, 1989).

The Jagiellonian axiology is characterized by several features that are contemporarily relevant:

- *the dignity of communities*, based on the dignity of the person, as an irreducible value that describes the human world and relations between people, cultures, and states;
- *cultural rights* as an aspect of human rights in intercultural relations;
- *cultural security*, based on the advancement of the theory of just war, as an axiology of the right to the defense, existence, and development of cultural communities as analogous to the right of nations.¹²

The classical concepts regulating relations between nations do not exhaust their contemporary continuities. Many contemporary problems, however, remain closely tied to the fundamental dilemmas, especially the ethical ones, that shaped relations between states and historical communities. This may explain why many issues addressed in earlier theories are being revisited today, albeit in different civilizational realities, in the contemporary world of hybrid wars, cultural coercion, and the disintegration of dominant cultural patterns.

The Jagiellonian ideas of building relations is not so much between states, but between communities, which were called nations at that time, but today are treated as cultural communities. These ideas are based on the following principles:

- recognition of the indigenous values of individual cultures;
- recognition of and respect for cultural heritage as symbolic capital of specific communities;
- attitude of interaction, both individually and communally;
- systematic development of skills for intercultural and interreligious dialogue;
- connection between the local and the universal;
- discovery and use of intercultural space and the fruit of lasting relationships between communities;
- ability to cross cultural norms;
- preference to prospectives.

A careful analysis of the relations projected in these principles reveals that a dialogue transcending intercultural barriers can be realized in both historical and contemporary contexts. These values exist as potential encoded in cultural heritage, which requires creative revitalization,

¹² Leszek Korporowicz et al., ed., *Jagiellonian Ideas towards Challenges of Modern Times* (Kraków: The Jagiellonian Library, 2017).

sometimes recomposition, and above all, clear recognition and incorporation into necessary contemporary actions. The notion of dialogue directs us to the original problem of communication, which today is often understood in a misleading way. This is the result of the growing dominance of information and technical sciences, which oversimplify this category, fundamental to multicultural societies, into mere transmission, transfer, and instrumental interaction. This deviates fundamentally from the Latin understanding of the term “communicare,” meaning a collective action and thus involving all participating parties.¹³ The notion of communication as interaction is particularly fruitful because of its heuristic qualities, showing both the types and variety of values present in cultural relations. The prefix “inter” points to values such as *reciprocity*, *exchange*, and *interdependence*, the suffix “action” indicates *subjectivity*, *causality*, and *intentionality*. In the practice of intercultural relations and the practice of everyday life within a developed media civilization, these values are not always respected, often disappearing from analyses that are reduced both axiologically and epistemologically. What deserves emphasis here is the attribute of subjectivity, which directs the interaction toward the dignity highlighted by Włodkowiec and the resulting freedom, thereby endorsing interaction with the features of properly understood communication and, beyond that, specifying it toward a more demanding form of dialogue.

Dialogue as an Autotelic Value

An anthropological view of culture in the age of advanced globalization makes it necessary to identify at least several processes that are ambivalent from a developmental point of view, as already described in the previous sections. First, there is the increasing diversification resulting from the intense mobility of people, products, and cultural contents. While this phenomenon can be a positive enrichment of the cultural environment, it can also cross the limits of social cohesion, leading to conflicts and the breakdown of social order. Second, diversification fosters increasing processes of interaction, which may transcend the prior horizons of cultural experience for individuals and communities. These transgressions and interactions do not always respect the identity and subjectivity of participants. In this case, interaction turns out to be a deeply ambivalent process that is far from the classical sense of *communicare*. Third, the deconstruction of cultural patterns or their hybridization breaks down the traditional rules of community integration. It can equally violate the cultural rights of communities and turn act as an oppressive strategy, imposing solutions that are detrimental to the cultural environment of specific

¹³ Fred Casmir, “Third-Culture Building: A Paradigm Shift for International and Intercultural Communication,” *Communication Yearbook* 16 (1993): 407–428.

communities by violating heritage, identity and, ultimately, subjectivity.¹⁴ Fourth, the progressive virtualization of culture expands its reach crossing successive objective borders, and producing a deterritorialization effect unknown in the history of humankind.¹⁵ This transformation fundamentally changes the meaning and functions of the territory. A negative consequence of such transgression is the disembodiment of cultural contents, a deconstruction of cultural forms, where relations become ad hoc and superficial, thereby reducing the contextual values of cultural heritage.

Overcoming all the above-mentioned negative consequences of transgressing boundaries requires not only the search for potentials but also for real actions that counteract the reduction of the human being to mere hedonistic or narcissistic experiences of the divided and disintegrated personalities. These potentials make it possible to find an integrating energy that makes individual experiences more than a hybrid reality of stimuli, that turns the individual into a fully realized person and the collective into a genuine community, while finding the supportive forces that enable authentic communication. The value of such relationship, however, is not purely utilitarian, calculated to achieve an instrumentally treated goal, but fosters a form of autonomy that is beyond functional understanding. Even the most alienated or individualized individual can possess such autonomy. The relationship in question reaches, finds, and releases the irreducible attributes of human subjectivity, enabling the construction of bridges, channels of exchange with the network of different entities that constitute the spiritual, social, and cultural environment, especially in the processes of growth and development. A relationship understood in this way constitutes a value that can be described as autotelic.¹⁶ It can be constituted not so much by communication but by a more narrowly conceived dialogue precisely because it fulfils many of the characteristics that this type of value brings to human reality.

There are at least three important characteristics of autotelic values that have been mentioned before. First, they are not a means to the realization of another type of value; they are non-instrumental and do not serve as links in a chain subordinated to a higher strategy of action. Second, as a result, autotelic values constitute ends in themselves, they are the ultimate fulfilment of the subordinate sub-values and the actions that realize them. Third, deriving from the previous two characteristics, they are

¹⁴ Edmund Ryden, SJ, *Finding Truth in Life: A Philosophy of Human Rights* (Taipei: Fu Jen Catholic University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Sylwia Jaskuła, "Information Culture in Intercultural Space," *Politeja* 5, no. 44 (2016): 183–198.

¹⁶ Leszek Korporowicz, "Bridges of Hope. World Youth Day: The Way to Building Intercultural Communities," in *World Youth Days. A Testimony to the Hope of Young People*, ed. Józef Stala and Andrzej Porębski (Kraków: Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, 2016), 319–331.

irreplaceable, as they have no substitutes or analogous values and cannot be bought, exchanged for others, or realized partially. Examples of such values include human dignity, honor, freedom, truth, the higher feelings already mentioned, faith, justice, fidelity, or honesty.

The possibility of treating dialogue as an autotelic value is suggested by representatives of the Krakow School of International Law, as described earlier, who consider it as a central value of the Jagiellonian ideas, allowing for the creation of relations transcending particular interests, attitudes, and preferences of specific ethnic groups. At the time, intercultural dialogue fulfilled many different, often more utilitarian, functions. This instrumental use of autotelicity may be due to the fact of solving complex human or social problems, to which dialogue can be used effectively to reduce or even eliminate these problems. However, there are situations in which dialogue cannot be replaced by another type of relationship or communication, which does not always emphasize recognition, respect, willingness to understand, and readiness to co-exist. This situation is fully possible in the case of dialogue, which, despite the right to maintain different positions and preserve one's own way of valuing reality, offers a readiness to search for common ground and shared goals, providing a solid basis for duration and continuation of relationships.

Conclusion

The preparation for the practice of dialogical skills and attitudes, from an intercultural perspective, does not arise spontaneously. It requires extensive socialization and education that highlight the axiological dimensions. For this purpose, standard strategies of intercultural education that reduce it to simple techniques of mutual adaptation or treat intercultural communication as purely informational and instrumental are not enough.¹⁷ Nor is the educational approach rooted in social engineering or cultural relativism sufficient, as this diminishes sensitivity, empathy, and can often foster an ostentatious indifference. Education conceived in such a manner reproduces all the errors of axiological reductionism, characteristic of contemporary culture, neglecting the previously described needs to intensify cultural diversity. Contemporary education, therefore, must focus on exposing rather than eliminating the problem of the real role of indigenous values, emphasizing their autotelic character in the experience of cultural identities and the knowledge of their specificity in building relations and, more importantly, intercultural dialogue. To achieve this end, it is necessary to study the positive examples we know from the cultural history of all continents. The Jagiellonian era and the values it

¹⁷ Neil Selwyn, *Education and Technology: Key Issues and Debates* (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

engendered are a good illustration of attempts, practices, and efforts to conceptualize such values. It is worthwhile to create a repository of these historical experiences, which can be a common treasure of the cultural heritage of humanity. This repository can support contemporary efforts, which need to be better recognized and consolidated through the good information and organizational practices of Christian and non-Christian organizations. This fact will not reverse the global trends of destructive border-crossing aimed at establishing a new world order that diminishes autotelic values, promotes instrumental education, and enforces cohesion through the manipulation of artificially produced, commercial needs. By building islands of irreducible values and connecting them through networks of dialogue, we can preserve, strengthen, and develop many cultures and human lives. This does not mean that it is not worthwhile to cross the boundaries that Dąbrowski referred to as functional automatisms, resulting from forced socialization and instrumental education. However, this type of transgression must respect the cultural dignity and subjectivity of individuals and communities. This is possible by promoting dialogue without violating the rights of cultures, understood as the rights of human beings. Specialists in artificial intelligence¹⁸ as well as political scientists analyzing contemporary examples of authoritarian power relations, have already warned against violations that undermine these values and principles, such as the lack of religious freedom in despotic countries of the world.

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¹⁸ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

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Philosophy across Boundaries in Defense of Human Dignity: Georgius Benignus's Apologies of Bessarion, Mirandola, Savonarola, and Reuchlin

Pavo Barišić

Introduction

During the Renaissance humanist era, respect for human dignity – understood as the inherent right of every human being to be valued and respected for each one's own sake – was elevated to new heights. This development was driven, in part, by encounters with diverse cultures and, more profoundly, by the rediscovery of ancient classical traditions that had refined humanistic ideals and education to their peak.

The need to understand others becomes especially pronounced at the borders of states and empires, where cultural intersections challenge established beliefs. At these junctures, the effort to discern foreign ways of life and traverse cultural boundaries assumes paramount importance. Amid tensions between opposing worldviews, such encounters create opportunities for fruitful exchanges that transcend divisions, nurture universal spiritual values, and unite people through their shared human dignity.

The philosophical pursuit of bridging divides and mediating differences in defense of human dignity formed the core of my deliberation on “philosophy across cultures.” At the height of the Renaissance, among many universities in Rome, particularly the Sapienza University, founded in 1303, was home to the distinguished professor of logic, metaphysics, and theology, Georgius Benignus de Salviatis / Juraj Dragišić (c. 1443/1445-1520), whose remarkable apologies exemplify these aspirations. His works reflect a profound commitment to fostering rapprochement, building bridges between opposites, promoting tolerance, and defending human dignity.

Born in Srebrenica (Lat. *Argentina*) in the Kingdom of Bosnia, Georgius Benignus was exiled due to the Ottoman invasion. As a refugee within the intellectual circle of Cardinal Basil Bessarion, he received an exceptional education and spent much of his life in Italy and the Republic of Dubrovnik. He also traveled throughout Europe and the Middle East on various expeditions and missions.

Immersed in a milieu of émigré scholars, primarily centered in the *Academia Bessarionea* in Rome, and cultivating close ties with prominent humanist circles across Europe – from Urbino, Florence, Pisa, and

Dubrovnik to Paris, Oxford, and Vienna – Benignus emerged as a distinguished advocate of reconciliation and the synthesis of cultural values. Above all, he championed the inner dignity of the human person and the right to free thought. His writings, marked by logical virtuosity, boldly defended human dignity and advanced reconciling principles of Neoplatonic philosophy, demonstrating extraordinary tolerance and freedom of thought in an era fraught with doctrinal conflicts.

This article explores Benignus's arguments in defense of the human dignity and intellectual freedom of four renowned thinkers of his time who faced accusations and scrutiny: Basil Bessarion, Pico della Mirandola, Girolamo Savonarola, and Johann Reuchlin. Central to this deliberation are the motivations that spurred Benignus to advocate for these intellectuals and their freedom of expression, and his enduring commitment to bridging diverse philosophical traditions.

Spanning over half a century, Benignus's apologies reveal a lifelong dedication to mediation and dialogue. What inspired him to champion tolerance and understanding across differing ideologies and religions so fervently? Rooted in profound philosophical reasoning and enriched by his mastery of logic and dialectics, his apologies offer timeless insights into the supreme value of human dignity. The dialectical brilliance of Benignus, shaped five centuries ago, continues to serve as a guiding light for those striving to uphold the universality of human dignity in contemporary times.

Apology of Cardinal Bessarion

Cardinal Basil Bessarion (1403-1472), head of the Platonic circle in Rome, was renowned for his advocacy of understanding and reconciliation. He was particularly supportive of his young humanist protégé from Srebrenica. In his works, Bessarion, the Cardinal Patron of the Franciscan Order, sought ways of rapprochement between Platonism and Aristotelianism, demonstrating the possibility of a concordia between Thomism and Scotism. He was also a staunch proponent of reuniting the Western and Eastern Churches.

However, his conciliatory efforts did not go unchallenged. The quarrelsome fervent Aristotelian of Cretan origin, George of Trebizond, opposed the revival of Platonic philosophy reintroduced to Western Europe by Bessarion's teacher, Georgios Gemistos Plethon. In his *Comparatio philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis*, published in 1458, and other writings, Trebizond accused Plethon and his followers of promoting heretical theses by relying on Plato's ideas. He polemically sought to prove the alleged conspiracy of the Platonists, especially targeting Bessarion and his humanist circle.

Bessarion responded forcefully with the treatise *In calumniatorem Platonis* (Against the Slanderer of Plato), first written in Greek in 1459 and published in Rome in August 1469. In this work, Bessarion provided a comprehensive account of Plato's philosophy and an insightful overview of the reception of Platonic writings. Unlike his teacher Plethon, Bessarion's Platonism was conciliatory, offering room for an understanding of Aristotle not as an adversary but as a complement to Plato, expanding on the philosophical ideas Plato addressed.

Among the authors who joined in responding to Trebizond's attacks and defending Bessarion, the humanist philosopher from Srebrenica is also noted. Peter Schulz mentions three key defenders: "Fernando Cordovano, Domizio Calderini and Giorgio Benigno."¹ Thus, the learned refugee from Bosnia embarked on his literary career in the genre of *apologia* or "defensive books" (*libri defensorii*).

The ancient philosophical genre, which dates back to Plato's supreme *Apology of Socrates* and Christian philosophers such as Justin Martyr, the author of two *Apologies* defending Christian philosophy, became a favored medium for expressing humanist ideas during the Renaissance. Georgius Benignus gave a particular impetus to this apologetic genre with his insightful treatises. His first known work, a defense of his patron and friend Cardinal Bessarion, was written during his stay in Rome in 1469. Throughout his life, he continued to contribute to the genre, dedicating apologies to various individuals and viewpoints.

Titled *Defensorium Cardinalis Bessarionis*, the manuscript was likely lost during Benignus's stay in England. In the proem of his comprehensive treatise *De natura angelica*, written during a splendid philosophical retreat in Dubrovnik, Benignus noted that his apologetic writing in support of the Cardinal's standpoint had likely been lost in England: "I have lost that little work translated in England."² From this formulation, one could infer that the Latin original may have been translated into another language.

In this context, Dominicus (Domitius) Calderini of Verona is mentioned as the translator who allegedly transcribed and translated the work. Cardinal Bessarion's secretary, a member of his Academia, who traveled with them to Paris in 1472, was a Greek teacher.³ From this note, it is

¹ Peter Schulz, "Plethon, Trapezuntios, Bessarion," in *Philosophen der Renaissance*, ed. Paul Richard Blum (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 26.

² Georgius Benignus, *De natura angelica* (1499), Liber sextus, Caput XI, f. 12. Rb: "Quod opusculum in Anglia translatus amisi Benignum itaque cuperem esse in omnes." Ivica Martinović, "Filozofske teme u Dragišićevu djelu *De natura angelica*," in *Juraj Dragišić (Georgius Benignus): Život i djela*, eds. Erna Banić-Pajnić et al. (Zagreb: Institut za filozofiju, 2016), 157.

³ Cf. Johann Ramming, "Domizio Calderini," *Repertorium Pomponianum* (2019), www.repertoriumpomponianum.it/pomponiani/calderini_domizio.htm (accessed January 8, 2025).

possible to conclude that Benignus's work was translated into Greek. Nevertheless, the writer is certainly proud that with this apology, the entire controversy had been brought to an end: "And indeed, as if little had come from above, all controversy was extinguished."⁴

Since the manuscript of the apology has been lost, its contents can be reconstructed through testimonies recorded in other works. The author himself has explained the reasons for creating the script in his summa *De natura angelica*. In response to young Dubrovnik nobles, their teacher (praeceptor), as they called him, explained his close patronal relationship with the Cardinal, who honored him with the name "Benignus" in the permanent memory of his benevolence:

Benignvs: So, let me speak. There was a long philosophical dispute between Bessarion, the Cardinal of Nicaea, commonly called the Greek, and George of Trebizond, a Cretan man who was likewise a learned man. And when the Nicene – my lord and father – had published a book of defense, the latter, by contrast, began to attack him on many points. Among other things, he charged him with thirteen heretical statements. To these I too, a young man of about twenty-three years of age, responded..., while those to whom the reply to the said George properly belonged neglected to do so.⁵

It is significant that the exile from Srebrenica began his remarkable literary journey with a treatise entitled *Defensio*. He later became renowned across Europe for this genre, to which he returned on several occasions throughout his life. His writings consistently championed individuals and their right to freely express their opinions. He did this bravely

⁴ Georgius Benignus, *De natura angelica* (1499), Liber sextus, Caput XI, f. 12. Rb: "Et prorsus ac si parum de supernis venisset, omnis altercatione extincta est." Martinović, "Filozofske teme u Dragišićevu djelu *De natura angelica*," 157. On the development of genres in Croatian philosophy from the 15th to the 18th century, especially the significance of Dragišić's writings, see Ivica Martinović, "Žanrovi hrvatske filozofske baštine od 15. do 18. stoljeća," in *Otvorena pitanja povijesti hrvatske filozofije*, ed. Pavo Barišić (Zagreb: Institut za filozofiju, 2000), 76–78.

⁵ Georgius Benignus, *De natura angelica* (1499), Liber sextus, Caput XI, f. 12. Rb: "Benignvs: Dicam ego. Erat inter ipsum Bessarionem Nicenum cardinalem sive vulgo Graecum nuncupatum atque Georgium Trapezuntium Cretensem virum etiam doctum longa in philosophia concertatio. Dumque Nicenus dominus et pater meus defensorium librum edidisset, ille econtra in plurimis eum carpere coepit. Atque inter alia tredecim heretica dicta eidem opponebat. Ad que ego trium et viginti annorum circiter adulescens quoque respondissem (Magistro meo atque Guilielmo Gallo penitentiario cum apostolico Fernandoque Cordubense pontificis subdiacono, viro acutissimo, et Ionne Siculo Abbate nuncupato ex ordine prius praedicatorum plerisque item aliis qui tum Romae aderant) respondere dicto Georgio negligentibus." Martinović, "Filozofske teme u Dragišićevu djelu *De natura angelica*," 157.

before several notables whom he had named and who were expected to come to the aid of the slandered Cardinal. The accusation of thirteen heretical claims was a dangerous threat, one that he believed it was necessary to confront.

Several researchers state that Benignus dedicated his second work *De libertate et immutabilitate Dei*, which remained in manuscript, to Cardinal Bessarion.⁶ However, the American Franciscan historiographer Girard J. Etzkorn, who carefully investigated the Vatican archives, claims that the script is likely dedicated to Pope Sixtus IV.⁷ He appears in the dialogue as Cardinal Francesco della Rovere and was a prominent member who deepened his knowledge in discussions within the *Academia Bessarionea*.

Nevertheless, Cardinal Bessarion is the main interlocutor in the conversation. He presides over the dispute of opposing views. In Platonic style, the dialogue conveys the course of public discussion between distinguished scholars on God's freedom and immutability. As a member of the Roman humanist circle, which gathered in Bessarion's house, learned people exchanged their opinions, and the young Benignus recorded the conversation that took place on June 1, 1471.⁸

The disputation scrutinized the differences and similarities of Platonic and Aristotelian views, as well as Thomistic and Scotist standpoints. The recorded arguments led to the conclusion that God's omniscience and eternal immutability do not contradict or nullify human's free will, even concerning future events. Benignus elaborated on this reasoning later in several of his works.

Benignus's striving for a rapprochement and mediation of the opposing views is emphasized in the title of his first printed work, which states that his writing on the "new dialectic" is "in the spirit of the Subtle Doctor and the blessed Thomas Aquinas and other realists." Although it was expected that Master Georgius, as a member of the Franciscan order – "highly gifted in logical thinking and doctor of theology" – would follow the teachings of the Subtle Doctor, he did not fail to acknowledge the influence and importance of the Dominican philosophical master. The logical incunabulum was published in Florence in 1488 and dedicated to the sons of Lorenzo the Magnificent Medici, Giovanni, and Pietro. The original Latin title reads *Dialectica nova secundum mentem Doctor Subtilis et beati Thomae Aquinatis aliorumque realistarum*.

⁶ Ivica Martinović, "Humanist, filozof i teolog Juraj Dragišić," *Dubrovnik* 6, no. 4 (1995): 215; Erna Banić-Pajnić, "Juraj Dragišić (Georgius Benignus de Salviatis): His Life and His Works," in *Juraj Dragišić (Georgius Benignus)*, eds. Banić-Pajnić et al., 13.

⁷ Cf. Girard J. Etzkorn, "John Foxal, O.F.M.: His Life and Writings," *Franciscan Studies*, 49 (1989): 20.

⁸ Cf. Martinović, "Humanist, filozof i teolog Juraj Dragišić," 215.

In contrast to the masters of logic, who primarily follow the authorities of their own school of thought in their search for the truth, the philosopher from Srebrenica advocated dialogue, understanding, and the inclusion of other, even opposing, approaches. The humanist professor of logic and metaphysics, who became rector of the prestigious Franciscan institution of Santa Croce in the same year that this work was published, shows a tendency toward the ancient tradition of concordism or reconciliation in his early works. This is evident in his teaching of logic and his actions in society. It reflects the humanist ideal of universal unification, which aims to create peace and stability within the spiritual and political community.

In logic, this striving for agreement is evident in his last work, *Artis Dialectices praecepta vetera et nova*, which was printed in Rome in 1520. The endeavor to reconcile Scotist and Thomistic philosophy becomes clear in his treatise *Fridericus, De animae regni principae* (*Fridericus, On the Ruler of the Kingdom of Souls*). The dialogue on human free will between Federico da Montefeltro, whose views mirror those of Benignus, and his brother Octavian is presented as a debate between the teachings of Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas. Federico defends the Scotist theses on the will as the governing principle of the soul, while Octavian advocates the primacy of the intellect in the Thomistic tradition: “I shall adopt the opinion that they call that of Saint Thomas.”⁹

However, the different views are not refuted or excluded but reconciled and complemented in a fraternal spirit. Both positions are recognized as valid. The author emphasizes that they discuss these questions in a friendly and fraternal manner. Federico refers to the long-established Scotist view of the primacy of the will, but also recalls Aquinas’s opinion that the faculties of the soul can only be formally divided because the soul and its faculties are a single unity and substance: “For it has long been demonstrated in the school of the Subtle Doctor that the soul, together with its powers, is one thing and one substance; yet these powers differ both from the soul and from one another in the manner which they themselves call ‘formal’.”¹⁰ This provides a reconciliation formula between the two opposing scholastic approaches: the powers of the soul are individual and distinct, but not in a real sense, rather in a formal sense.

In his main work *De natura angelica*, which was printed in Florence in 1499, Benignus explicitly emphasized his inclination toward mediation and reconciliation between opposing philosophical orientations, such as

⁹ Georgius Benignus, *Fridericus, De animae regni principae*, Capitulum 1, in Juraj Dragišić (Georgius Benignus), eds. Banić-Pajnić et al., 230: “Assumam mihi illam quam Sancti Thomae dicunt opinionem.”

¹⁰ Benignus, *Fridericus, De animae regni principae*, Capitulum 2, 232: “Demonstratum namque diu est apud Subtilium scholam animam suis cum potentiis unam rem unamque substantiam esse, differo vero et ab ea et a sese invicem ea ratione quam ipsi ‘formalem’ vocitant.”

those of Aquinas and Scotus. Reconciliation (*conciliare*) is the magical formula with which the humanist philosopher sought to order the world. For him, truth comes first and gives validity to the perspectives of different schools of thought. Truth is, therefore, the force behind the demand for reconciliation.

Benignus: Certainly, Thomas is no less dear to me than Scotus. Both are outstanding, both are learned, both are strong defenders of the holy faith. Where I am able to *reconcile* [emphasis added] them, I shall endeavor to do so, without setting aside Alexander [of Hales], who preceded them and was the first among those who joined philosophy with theology, nor the Seraphic Doctor of the Order of Friars Minor, Bonaventure. And if, for a clear reason, something appears otherwise to me, I shall spare neither of them; for truth is dearer to philosophers – especially sacred philosophers – than men. Nevertheless, it is exceedingly difficult to disagree with either of them, for among many paths they have chosen the more honorable ones.¹¹

The humanist reconciliation proponent appropriately paraphrases the famous passage from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* when it comes to truth and friendship. This is because he learned from his intellectual paragon Bessarion how the truth reconciles the writer of *Metaphysics* with his teaching master, Plato.

Benignus himself often refers to Aristotle in his works, addressing him by his name or, as was customary, by the general term *Philosophus*. His views frequently reflect the Aristotelian worldview, evident in his discussions of logic, metaphysics, epistemology, and cosmology. However, he also draws upon the ideas of Plato, Aristotle's preceptor, and endeavors to reconcile their views wherever possible. For it is truth that reconciles, and truth is more precious to the humanist from Srebrenica than even his closest friend.

¹¹ Georgius Benignus, *De natura angelica* (1499), Liber secundus, Caput XV, f.d8vb, quoted according to Martinović, "Filozofske teme u Dragišićevu djelu *De natura angelica*," 155: "Benignvs: Mihi certo Thomas non minus carus Scoto. Uterque enim praestans, uterque doctus, uterque sacrae fidei validus propugnator. Ubi valero illos conciliare, id facere enitar, non postponendo Alexandrum priorem illis et de his qui philosophica miscuerunt theologicis primum neque Seraphicum doctorem Minorum Bonaventuram. Et si quid mihi ratione evidenti aliter videbitur, neutri parcam: magis enim amica philosophis maxime sacris veritas quam homines. Difficile tamen admodum est a neutro illorum dissentire. Elegerunt namque ex multis honorabiliores partes."

Apology of Pico Della Mirandola

Benignus arrived in the capital of Renaissance humanism, Florence, in 1483 and spent the most turbulent decade in the European center of Neoplatonism just at the time of its greatest flowering. With the support of the famous patron of science and art, Lorenzo Il Magnifico, he participated in the city's creative and vibrant intellectual life as a professor of philosophy and theology, rector of the Franciscan college, and minister of the Tuscan province. The learned apologist of human dignity from Srebrenica gained considerable renown for his public defense of the theses of Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). His second defense script (*liber defensorium*) stands as a tribute to the dignity of the greatest star of Renaissance humanism and author of *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.

At the behest of Florence's Archduke Lorenzo de Medici, Benignus wrote an apology in 1489 for the author of the "Manifesto of the Renaissance." Benignus's manuscript, entitled *Opus septem quaestionum*, is preserved in the Laurentian Library of Florence. Dedicated to the Florentine sponsor of artists and philosophers, the treatise was written in defense of Pico della Mirandola's 900 *Conclusiones nongentae in omni genere scientiarum*, which had been suspected of heresy. In the same year, 1489, when Benignus composed his apologetic treatise, Pico himself published his *Apologia* of disputed theses.

The *Conclusions* were published together with the *Oratio de dignitate hominis* in 1486. According to Pico's vision, they were intended to serve as a basis for interfaith dialogue among scholars, philosophers, and theologians of various traditions at a public debate in Rome. This magnificent project sought to reconcile differing philosophical and theological schools, laying the groundwork for all knowledge and a Christian vision of global peace. However, controversial statements – such as the assertion that Kabbalah and magic could prove Christ's divine nature more effectively than traditional science – led to their condemnation. The public disputation among the learned in Rome, announced for early 1487, was halted, the "Princes of Concordia," as Pico was named by his friends, was forced to retract both his suspected theses and his *Apologia*.

Despite the accusations, after several years of investigation and suspicion, Pico was rehabilitated. Lorenzo, the protector, certainly played a major role in Pico's acquittal and in persuading the Pope to allow him to return to Florence. However, it is also worth noting the significant contribution made by the writing of Georgius Benignus. His defense script confirmed Il Magnifico's belief that the defender of human dignity from Santa Croce would be able to acquit the charges against the philosopher from Mirandola, who advocated for the harmony of all the spiritual knowledge of humanity. The humanist from Srebrenica was fueled by a shared belief in the need for reconciliation and concord among people.

Like the author of the *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Benignus derived the idea of the dignity of human existence from the insight that human beings can transcend the chain of existence through their own free will. The Florentine patron was confident in the intellectual prowess of the rector of Santa Croce and the teacher of his two sons. In the later dedication to his apology of Pico, which was penned in 1513, Benignus reminded his former pupils, Giovanni and Pier, of the trust their father had placed in him. He was entrusted with such a responsible task because Il Magnifico believed that Benignus surpasses all philosophers and theologians of the time: "That great man [= Lorenzo Medici] so highly esteemed my modest intellect that he believed me to surpass all the philosophers and theologians of our time."¹²

Benignus maintained close relations with Lorenzo's sons even after their father's death. As already mentioned, he dedicated to them his first printed book, *Dialectica nova*. With Giovanni, who became Pope Leo X, Benignus collaborated on numerous theological matters. His relationship with Piero, called "the Unfortunate," who succeeded his father as head of Florence, was particularly close. The support Piero gave him when he tried to be re-elected as provincial of Tuscany and general of the Franciscan Order, as well as Benignus's advocacy for the alleviation of the tax burden on Jewish citizens, is evidenced by the preserved correspondence kept in the *Archivio di Stato di Firenze*.¹³

The philosophical and theological brilliance of Benignus was also esteemed by other leading intellectuals of the humanist circle. Marsilio Ficino, the founder of the Platonic Academy, paid glowing tribute to the learned Franciscan in a letter from December 1489. Addressed to three of Ficino's disciples on the publication of his *De triplici vita*, the letter vividly praises Gregorius as the Academy's protector and defender. The leader of the Platonic Academy in Florence wrote the following words of praise and hope to the humanist enlightener from Srebrenica, who boldly stood up to the howling wolves:

The Academy, moreover, has its own dogs, and it is to you, as the swiftest runners, that I now call. For there are three of you.

¹² Georgius Benignus, *Opus septem questionum*, manuscript, 18, f. 1v, quoted according to Martinović, "Humanist, filozof i teolog Juraj Dragišić," 216: "Maximus vir ille [= Lorenzo Medici] tenue ingenium meum adeo magnificiebat, ut crederet me superiorem universis nostrae tempestatis philosophis, seu theologis."

¹³ Ten letters of Benignus addressed to Piero de Medici were published by Zvonko Pandžić, "Georgius Benignus (Juraj Dragišić) i Piero de' Medici. Deset neobjavljenih pisma," *Prilozi za istraživanje hrvatske filozofske baštine*, no. 53-54 (2001): 209–229. Cf. Elisabeth von Erdmann Pandžić and Basilius Pandžić, *Juraj Dragišić und Johannes Reuchlin. Eine Untersuchung zum Kampf für die jüdischen Bücher mit einem Nachdruck der 'Defensio praestantissimi viri Joannis Reuchlin' (1517) von Georgius Benignus (Juraj Dragišić)* (Bamberg: Bayerische Verlagsanstalt, 1989), 92.

Therefore, I beseech you to defend my three children, still tender, who, as I fear, will immediately find themselves among wolves. Run eagerly, I say, for I now entrust to you tasks you desire, not burdens. You know my Georgium Benignum Salviatum, who long ago, with keen insight, grasped that truth whose traces you now pursue everywhere in your hunting. He, like the Sun, illuminates his brothers – being himself the greater, he enlightens the lesser. To him, therefore, if you hear any howling of wolves, report it at once. That most valiant Georgius will easily put all the wolves to flight, for he once pierced even a mighty dragon. He, then, will free me from anxiety and, at the same time, relieve you of care.¹⁴

The influential Florentine humanist likens Benignus to his namesake, Saint George, revered in both Eastern and Western traditions for his courage in defeating the dragon. The metaphor reflects Benignus's tireless defense of supreme humanist ideals, including those of Pico della Mirandola. He is guided by the knowledge of the truth and by his unwavering commitment to the respect and tolerance of various worldviews. In this regard, he is greater than the "Sun" itself, with his warmth and light he warms and illuminates the other weaker brothers. The principal of the Academy extols the courage of Georgius in combating discord, standing for peace, and defending the oppressed against those who seek to silence them.

It is striking that a philosopher at the height of his fame, after translating Plato's works and publishing his seminal *Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animorum* (*Platonic Theology on the Immortality of the Soul*) in 1482, placed such confidence in Benignus. Ficino's admiration underscores the respect that this distinguished humanist enjoyed. The notable Florentine professor of logic, metaphysics, and theology still inspires deep reverence for his courage, integrity, shrewdness, and selfless willingness to fight for truth and justice in defense of the persecuted. The knowledge of truth attributed to him refers to the humanistic ideal of free study of different cultures, such as the Greek philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, the scholasticism of Thomas and Scotus, the Holy Scriptures and

¹⁴ Marsilio Ficino, *De vita libris tres. Opera*, vol. I, 575, quoted according to Banić-Pajnić, "Juraj Dragišić," 11: "Habet quin etiam suos Academia canes, huc vos ut velocissimi cursores advoco. Treis enim est. Treis ergo nunc meos precor defendite liberos adhuc teneriores, inter lupos (ut vereor) e vestigio prodituros. Currite, inquam, alacres, negotia enim nunc vobis optata mando, non curas. Georgium Benignum Salviatum cognoscitis meum, qui veritatem illam, per cuius nunc vos vestigia passim venando discuritis, iam dius est sagaciter assequutus. Qui, et fratres suos Solis instar, maior ipse minores illustrat. Huic igitur, si quem luporum ululatum audieritis, nunciate. Fortissimus ille Georgius omnes facile fugabit lupos, qui et vastum draconem quandoque transfixit. Ille me igitur, ille sollicitudine simul et vos cura lavabit."

patristic writings, but also the Kabbalah, Hermetic literature, and Jewish books.

The concepts of free will and human dignity are the links that connect Benignus's philosophy with Pico's humanistic vision in a special way. Already in his earlier treatises, for example, *Fridericus. De animae regni principae*, Benignus highlights free will as a determining factor for humanity. His anthropology, with an exceptional position for humans among all beings, ideologically belongs to humanistic Neoplatonism. By interpreting the treatise *Fridericus*, Zvonimir Šojat demonstrates "the value and originality of Benignus's theory of will."¹⁵ It reveals Benignus's unique contribution to the humanist vision of Renaissance Neoplatonism.

Georgius defends Pico's ideas with conviction, as he shares related humanistic and Neoplatonic thoughts. By pleading in favor of the freedom of the human will, he affirms the central role of the human being in the wholeness of existence. He justifies human dignity with the ability of the will to act freely and morally. In his treatise on the ruler of the realm of the human soul, he laid the foundation for a new vision of the human being. Šojat concludes that Benignus's treatise "represents a kind of contribution to the humanistic vision of man; or more precisely, his work marks a step forward in terms of scholastic understanding by enriching it with the humanist vision."¹⁶ By demonstrating the high value of human freedom, Georgius joins Pico's mission to elevate human dignity as the basis for human's exalted status in the created world.

The emphasis on the freedom of the human will introduces an optimistic dimension to the anthropology of Humanist Neoplatonism. Benignus made a significant contribution to the revival of humanism by bringing together under one roof in his "anthropological" treatise arguments that were "scattered over various problem chapters (questiones) in the works of other authors."¹⁷ In philosophical terms, he consolidated the notion of human dignity by grounding it in the ability of the will to act freely and morally.

The anthropological treatise shows the freedom of the will in an "integralist" way, in the spirit of humanism. The dualistic structure of the human being, with its two opposing principles, is reconciled in the definition. For Benignus, the human being goes beyond the metaphysical determination of rational beings and is supplemented by the fundamental concept of freedom. He/she is "a living being endowed with a will" – *animal voluntate praeditum*. The will always involves reason and presupposes it. The human being is therefore defined by the interaction of will

¹⁵ Zvonimir Šojat, "Dragišićeva teorija o volji," *Prilozi za istraživanje hrvatske filozofske baštine*, no. 3-4 (1976): 64.

¹⁶ Šojat, "Dragišićeva teorija o volji," 43.

¹⁷ Šojat, "Dragišićeva teorija o volji," 43.

and reason. With reference to Aristotle, Benignus demonstrates the inseparable bond between the intellectual and volitional aspects of the soul: “The rational soul alone is free, not by reason, but by the will. Hence the free agent often acts repeatedly in accordance with the same purpose.”¹⁸

By demonstrating that freedom is “the most precious thing” (*pretiosissima res*) for humans, Benignus summarizes the arguments on which Pico’s manifesto on human dignity is based. Just as Pico grounds human dignity in the capacity for change through free will, Benignus shows that freedom is the most sublime capacity, elevating humans above all other beings in the created world. Only free will “moves to action without the presence of an object” (*voluntas sola nulla cuiusvis obiecti praesentia progreditur ad operandum*).¹⁹ In the words of *Fridericus*, Benignus draws a conclusion that could easily find a place in Pico’s *Oration*: “For among these lower beings, only man acts freely, being nobler than any natural agent, just as the end relates to the things that belong to it; ‘we are indeed, in a certain sense, the end of all things’, as the Philosopher says in the same place.”²⁰

It can be concluded from the above that Lorenzo the Magnificent and Marsilio Ficino were right to have confidence in the discernment of the judgment and the philosophical persuasiveness of Benignus’s defense of Pico’s theses. For the humanist from Srebrenica had already developed the ideas on the freedom of the human will as a prerequisite for dignity in his writings. He was, therefore, able to defend the author of *Oration on the Dignity of Man* not only as a member of the same circle of acquaintances and friends at the Florentine Academy, but above all on the grounds of his conviction of the sublimity of the human vocation, human intellectuality, and the state of human beings in the world.

Apology of Girolamo Savonarola

Georgius Benignus composed his third seminal apology, a widely acclaimed treatise *Propheticae solutiones* (*Prophetic Solutions*), in defense of the Florentine charismatic preacher Girolamo Savonarola (1452 – 1498), during his stay in Dubrovnik. In the capital of the Republic of Ragusa, the learned exile from the Tuscan province taught philosophy and delivered theological sermons from 1496 to 1500. The first work he wrote

¹⁸ Georgius Benignus, *Fridericus*, *De animae regni principae*, Capitulum 10, in *Juraj Dragišić (Georgius Benignus)*, eds. Banić-Pajnić et al., 250: “Anima vero rationalis sola libera est, non tamen ratione, sed voluntate. Unde agens liberum sive a proposito pro eodem saepenumero accipit.”

¹⁹ Benignus, *Fridericus*, *De animae regni principae*, 250.

²⁰ Benignus, *Fridericus*, *De animae regni principae*, 250: “In his enim inferioribus solus homo libere agit, qui nobilior est quocumque agente naturali sicut et finis his quae ad ipsum; ‘nos vero sumus finis quodammodo omnium’, ut ibidem ait Philosophus.”

in the city under the patronage of St. Blaise was dedicated to the turbulent events in Florence and in support of its renowned preacher Girolamo Savonarola. He called him the “new prophet,” or “our prophet” – *vates noster*.

Playing with the etymology of the city’s name, derived from the Latin verb *florere*, meaning “to blossom,” he asserts that it is the most flourishing city. It is, therefore, conceivable that such a flourishing center of Humanism and the Renaissance would witness the appearance of a prophet with an epochal mission: “Indeed, we are wasting words on a matter that is entirely obvious. Let us instead examine and consider, dearest Ubertinus, this man’s arrival to the most flourishing city, and his mission will become clearly apparent.”²¹ Thus, from the other side of the Adriatic, from Dubrovnik, the doctor of the Florentine people was able to gain an even clearer view of the significance of historical events in the city where the Renaissance was born.

Written in the form of a dialogue with his Florentine student and faithful follower, Ubertinus Risalitus, the apologia was penned at the instigation of Dubrovnik citizens. There were evidently many in the city who were eagerly awaiting a renewal of faith through spiritual resistance to despotic rule, corruption, and the exploitation of the poor. These were visions announced by a new prophet. The book was printed in Florence on April 8, 1497, amidst a tumultuous period in the city’s history and a particularly trying time for the charismatic Dominican preacher of the desperate.

Although public opinion from both spiritual and secular authorities was not favorable to the new prophet, Benignus did not hesitate to come to the aid of the persecuted fellow preacher. From the tranquility of his “African idleness” in the *Silvana urbs* (City of Oaks), as he poetically referred to Dubrovnik in his letter to his disciple Ubertinus,²² he boldly took under his protection the maligned spiritual leader of the Florentine Republic, who was already under a ban. Ever since his stay in England, Benignus had been preoccupied with interpreting the millenarian vision of a renewal of faith and the ascension of Christianity to a universal world community. He saw signs of such crossroad times in the Florentine movement of faith renewal.

²¹ Georgius Benignus, *Propheticae solutiones* II, 4, 288: “Enimvero in re manifestissima consumimus verba. Inspiciamus idem et consideremus, amantissime Ubertine, adventum huius viri ad florentissimam urbem et videbitur apperte missio ipsius.”

²² Georgius Benignus, *De natura caelestium spirituum quos angelos vocamus*, Florentiae, XIII Kalendas Augusti MCCCCLXXXIX. Cf. Martinović, “Filozofske teme u Dragišićevu djelu *De natura angelica*,” 20: “Nihil enim post Italiae atque meas calamitates mihi muneris relictum video quam quod in urbe quetissima vacua mente et Africano illo ocio solus et ocus vivam, sed audeo dicere me nunquam minus solum minusque ociosum vixisse.”

Benignus's apology sought to attest to Savonarola's credibility as a true prophet for Florence. This very city was proclaimed by the charismatic prophet the world center of renewed Christianity. In his famous sermon on April 1, 1495, the prophet described his vision of Florence as a "New Jerusalem" in which peace and order would reign. In response to the question of Ubertinus why Brother Jerome from Ferrara was sent specifically to the city of Florence rather than to other cities, Benignus refers to the restorative mission of the prophet. He strives to demonstrate the preacher's credibility as a true restorer of Christianity in the following words:

Therefore, I am not at all astonished by the mission of this prophet; rather, I am amazed that more – and others – were not sent. For this renewal will resemble that of the early Church: now there will be a universal union of Christ with His Church; now the Gospel will be preached throughout the whole world; now our faith will truly be called Catholic – that is, common to all and universal. What, then, is so surprising if our Jerome was destined for so great and illustrious a deed?²³

Engaging in widespread disputations of contemporaries about the phenomenon of the appealing soothsayer, *Prophetic Solutions* was intended to delineate the criteria for distinguishing true prophets from false ones. The philosopher relies on his own logical and epistemological methods, which he puts at the service of discerning truth. On the final page, Benignus explained its purpose: "On the method of distinguishing a false prophet from a true one, for the purpose of examining the false prophecy and the opinions of brother Girolamo [Savonarola]."²⁴ In the dialogue, he does not fail to mention that he himself knew the fellow preacher and listened to his sermons.

In his defense, Benignus argued that the "preacher of the desperate," whose sermons foretold dire events, was, in fact, a genuine and trust-worthy prophet. Savonarola had inspired many prominent philosophers, theologians, and artists with his sermons. Among Savonarola's fervent listeners and adherents was also Benignus's previous defendant, "the

²³ Georgius Benignus, *Propheticae solutiones* II. 1., in Juraj Dragišić (Georgius Benignus), eds. Banić-Pajnić et al., 282: "Non itaque ergo ulla teneor admiratione de huius prophetae missione, quanto potius miror plures et alios non esse missos. Haec namque renovatio similis erit illi primitivae ecclesiae: nunc erit universalis copulatio Christi cum ecclesia sua, nunc praedicabitur Evangelium in toto orbe, nunc vere fides nostra catholica, hoc est communis omnibus et universalis, appellabitur. Quid ergo mirum si ad tantum tamque praeclarum facinus Hieronymus noster destinatus est?"

²⁴ Georgius Benignus, *Propheticae solutiones* (Florentiae: Impressae per Ser Laurentium de Morgianis, 1497), f. c7r, quoted according to Martinović, "Filozofske teme u Dragišićevu djelu *De natura angelica*," 220.

humanist philosopher-prince” Pico della Mirandola. Savonarola’s reference to the Epistle of John and the Book of Revelation, which compared the events of that age with the spiritual revival of the world, was certainly inspiring for contemporaries during the height of the Renaissance.

However, for the apologist Benignus, it is crucial to philosophically examine the relationship between the foreknowledge (*praescientia*) of future events and the free will of humans. He proves that God’s reliable knowledge of the future does not contradict human freedom. This proof was achieved through his humanistic philosophy of reconciling the Thomistic approach (*via Thomae*) and the Scotist method (*via Scoti*). Savonarola’s prophetic vision, derived from divine enlightenment, justifies the possibility of God’s reason to observe all things simultaneously. Explaining Scotus’s objection that what does not exist cannot coexist, he points to what connects the mind and the will. This is where the space for the operation of free will opens up.

It is true, Ubertinus, that this method is attacked in many ways by the aforementioned doctor; yet perhaps, Thomas and Scotus could be reconciled, at least on this point. However, I consider this something that should be passed over for the present. If I say this one thing now, I shall be thought to have said enough: that the divine intellect, since it is eternal, beholds each thing all at once, according to its proper duration.²⁵

The crowning proof that reconciles the paths of Thomas and Scotus, reason and freedom of will, lies in the fact that God does not observe things from one place to another, nor does He perceive things from one time to another. Rather, God actually exists and coexists at the same time, and thus observes the entire duration of the world inseparably. Therefore, His will is both, His own and that of all people. In explaining cognition in this way, the humanist from Srebrenica also proved the original freedom of human will.

Benignus used philosophical arguments in favor of human knowledge and free will to defend the prophet who was destined for a great act of faith renewal. He therefore called Savonarola “the messenger of these new events” (*nuntius horum novorum*). However, despite Benignus’s efforts, there was no salvation for the renegade preacher. Savonarola was excommunicated from the Church on May 12, 1497, just one month after the publication of the apology sent from Dubrovnik.

Despite the fact that “our new prophet” later withdrew from public preaching and wrote his own *Apologia* entitled *Triumphus crucis* (*The*

²⁵ Georgius Benignus, *Propheticae solutiones* I. 11., in Juraj Dragišić (*Georgius Benignus*), eds. Banić-Pajnić et al., 280: “Verum est, Ubertine, illum modum a supradicto doctore multifariam impugnari, forsan tamen posset conciliari Thomas et Scotus vel eo in loco, sed haec praetereunda in praesenti duco. Hoc unum, si nunc dixero, satis dixisse putabor: divinum intellectum eu quod aeternus unamquamque rem simul tota pro suo periodo inspicere.”

Triumph of the Cross), it was not sufficient to refute the heavy accusations of heresy. The “prophet without weapons,” as Machiavelli described him, was imprisoned, tortured, condemned, and executed on May 23, 1498 in the main square of the city that was most flourishing in humanism.

Once again, the good-natured defender found himself in the difficult position of advocating for a man condemned and executed for heresy. Yet, Benignus continued to promote his own humanist vision of reconciliation of various worldviews and paths to discovering the secrets of the world and contemplating the future events. He was guided by his unwavering faith in God, who unites rather than divides. His apologies were based on the belief that there was a higher truth beyond human judgment.

Apology of Johann Reuchlin

Benignus’s final apology was prepared in defense of the illustrious German scholar of Hebrew and Greek, the *doctor trilinguis* Johann Reuchlin (1455 – 1522). This masterpiece of the apologetic genre, written in the Platonic favorite form of dialogue, is entitled *Defensio praestantissimi viri Ioannis Reuchlin, Legum Doctoris*. The book’s cover, published in 1517, probably in Cologne, features the author’s title as Nazarene Archbishop of Rome: *a reverendo patre Georgio Benigno Nazareno archiep[iscop]o Romae per modum dialogi edita*.²⁶

A further note indicates that the edition was prepared in accordance with the opinions of 18 members who had judged Reuchlin’s book *Augenspiegel* (*Ocular Speculum*) by order of Pope Leo X: *atque ex opinione decem et octo gravissimorum virorum ad examinandum Oculare speculum a Sanctissimo Domino nostro Leone P. M. deputatorum*. Benignus was the first to deliver his opinion according to the decree: *inter quos ipse primus ex ordine votum emiserat*. On July 2, 1517, the Roman Commission issued a positive decision in favor of Reuchlin, with only one dissenting vote.²⁷

The book was dedicated to the Roman Emperor Maximilian: *scripta Divoque Maximiliano Romanorum Imperatori Augusto dicata*. Alongside Benignus’s dialogue with Reuchlin, two letters and an authorial dedication to Emperor Maximilian are printed at the book’s beginning: *Ad Maximum Maximilianum Caesarem Romanorum imperatorem semper augustum Georgius Benignus archiepiscopus Nazarenus*. The first letter, from German humanist theologian Hermannus Nuenar, who had the book

²⁶ Georgius Benignus, *Defensio praestantissimi viri Ioannis Reuchlin*, in Erdmann-Pandžić and Pandžić, *Juraj Dragišić und Johannes Reuchlin*, 98 ff.; *Juraj Dragišić (Georgius Benignus)*, eds. Banić-Pajnić et al., 342–369. Cf. Ivana Skuhala, “Dragišićeva obrana Johanna Reuchlina,” in *Juraj Dragišić (Georgius Benignus)*, eds. Banić-Pajnić et al., 173–188.

²⁷ Cf. Erdmann-Pandžić and Pandžić, *Juraj Dragišić und Johannes Reuchlin*, 100.

printed, is addressed to the canon of Mainz, Theoderich Zobel. The second letter, from Reuchlin's attorney Martin Gröning, is directed to Emperor Maximilian. The focus of the work is a disputation regarding the Jewish holy scriptures, whose preservation Reuchlin advocated in his treatise *Ocular Speculum*.

Gröning reports that Benignus decided to publish his defense after learning that Reuchlin's opponents had refused to accept the Commission's opinion:

Thus, he did not consider it inappropriate to claim for himself the leading role in defending the Reuchlin cause, once he had learned that his rivals, despite the fairest and duly cast votes, were most unwilling to acquiesce.²⁸

Much like the case of Pico della Mirandola, the courageous George, praised by Marsilio Ficino, did not hesitate to step forward onto the battlefield and confront Reuchlin's persecutors. He reaffirmed the humanist principle that true humanists defend the dignity of the persecuted while safeguarding the invaluable knowledge contained in Jewish religious texts.

In his dedication to Emperor Maximilian, Benignus defended the dignity of Reuchlin, advocating for the honor of a man who had greatly benefited his country. He argued persuasively that foreigners recognized Reuchlin's greatness and appealed for his countrymen to do the same, likening Reuchlin to a "light" that should not be extinguished:

And so, should not the country itself illuminate, glorify, and magnify the man who has so greatly enlightened, glorified, and magnified it? If foreigners commend him, why do his own people not embrace him? Why do they cast aside their own light?²⁹

Gröning took over Benignus's defense work in Rome and sent it to Nuenar, who printed about 1,000 copies. This exceptional humanist masterpiece advocating religious tolerance was published in September 1517. The humanist Johannes Caesarius sent two copies to Erasmus of Rotterdam on September 22, 1517, writing: "Our Neaetius (of Nova Aquila) has,

²⁸ Erdmann-Pandžić and Pandžić, *Juraj Dragišić und Johannes Reuchlin*, 100: "Ita non alienum arbitratus est sibi primas etiam Reuchlinae causae defendendi partes vindicare posteaquam aemulos his acquissimis riteque datis suffragis neuissime acquiescere nolle accepit."

²⁹ Defensio, C I. Erdmann-Pandžić and Pandžić, *Juraj Dragišić und Johannes Reuchlin*, 103: "Eum itaque virum, qui tantopere illustravit, glorificavit, ac magnificavit patriam, nonne ipsa patria illustrare, glorificare et magnificare deberet? Quem alieni commendant, cur sui non suscipiunt? Cur suam lucem abiiciunt?"

in recent days, arranged for the printing of a certain booklet brought from the City, entitled *Defense of Reuchlin*, in a thousand or more copies, two of which are being sent to you.”³⁰

The book was soon sold out in Germany, and a second edition was printed in early 1518. In 1517, the year of its initial publication, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the court church in Wittenberg, igniting a new schism within Western Christianity. In contrast, the learned Nazarene Archbishop from Srebrenica sought to renew faith not through rupture but through reconciliation and rapprochement. In his pursuit of *concordia* – harmony – among diverse ways of worshipping God and universal humanist ideals, he emphasized the importance of granting Hebrew holy books their rightful place and appreciation. This reflects the humanistic ideal of preserving the truths revealed within diverse religious heritages.

Benignus and Reuchlin moved within the same Neoplatonic philosophical circles, although they apparently never met in person. In Florence, they encountered Marsilio Ficino, who translated the works of Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, and the *Corpus Hermeticum* into Latin. Building on a renewed understanding of human dignity, Pico della Mirandola, in his syncretic humanism, laid the foundations of Christian Kabbalah. It is believed that Pico introduced Reuchlin to the secrets of Kabbalah and encouraged his study of Hebrew. Reuchlin acknowledges Pico’s influence in his treatise *De arte cabalistica*.

There is speculation that Reuchlin and Benignus may have attended the same humanistic gatherings during Reuchlin’s second stay in Florence in 1490. However, as no documents or testimonies confirm this possibility, the hypothesis can be set aside for now.³¹ Nevertheless, it is highly likely that they were aware of one another and shared common humanistic views. Regardless, Benignus’s readiness and determination to defend Reuchlin when he came under attack from Johannes Pfefferkorn is admirable. The good-natured George bravely stepped forward, expressing his positive assessment as the first member of the Papal Theological Commission. He defended primarily the philosophical and humanist principles they shared, as well as his own convictions.

As noted earlier, Benignus cultivated amicable relationships with the Jewish citizens. In Florence, he advocated for their well-being with his former student, Piero de Medici, then head of the family and the de facto ruler of the city. In a letter from Pisa dated January 9, 1493, Benignus conveyed their requests for tax relief to the powerful banker and political

³⁰ Erdmann-Pandžić and Pandžić, *Juraj Dragišić und Johannes Reuchlin*, 101: “Ne-aetius (de Nova aquila) noster curavit his diebus imprimi libellum quemdam ex urbe allatum, titulo Defensionis Reuchlini, in mille et amplius exemplaria ex his duo ad te mittuntur.”

³¹ Cf. Erdmann-Pandžić and Pandžić, *Juraj Dragišić und Johannes Reuchlin*, 10f.

leader. Expressing compassion for them, the humanist from Srebrenica stated that he felt obliged to support their cause. He was also evidently sympathetic to Jewish books and the tenets of their faith. In this regard, he was close to Reuchlin's stance against the burning of Jewish holy books, including the Talmud, arguing that these texts were not anti-Christian and could contribute to religious rapprochement.

Benignus's position aligned with the broader intellectual goals of the Florentine Neoplatonic circle, which sought to harmonize Christian spirituality with Chaldean-Hermetic, Orphic, Pythagorean, Hebrew, and Kabbalistic traditions. The exile from Bosnia felt a natural affinity for this syncretic project, striving to transcend divisions and foster unity among philosophies and religions.

As highlighted above, the Archbishop of Nazareth became the first member of the Commission to publicly argue for the preservation of the Talmud, contending that such texts could enhance Christian exegesis and pave the way for non-violent conversion. The dialogue's primary focus centers on whether the Jewish books, referred to as the Talmud, should be "suppressed or kept and preserved."³² The Commission's judgment, significantly shaped by Benignus's contributions and his philosophically grounded defense, influenced the tolerant outcome of the dispute. His advocacy of tolerance was instrumental in Pope Leo X's decision to permit the printing of the Talmud in 1520, and it also delayed the papal verdict against Reuchlin's work.

In the dialogue featured in Benignus's book, Reuchlin and Benignus address each other as a lawyer and a theologian, systematically assessing and refuting objections to book burning. The core argument asserts that non-Christian books and spiritual traditions should not be destroyed but rather utilized to deepen Christian faith and renew its foundations. Benignus, a humanist proponent of tolerance, reinforces Reuchlin's legal reasoning that the free observance of other religious ceremonies should be protected. By extension, the religious texts underpinning these practices should not be obliterated.

This humanist and tolerant approach resonated deeply within intellectual circles, earning Benignus the support of the eminent scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam. Displeased by the inquisitor Jacob van Hoogstraten's invocation of his name in the dispute, Erasmus felt compelled to distance himself explicitly from Hoogstraten and to endorse Benignus's views.

As with his defense of Savonarola, the dialogical form enabled Benignus to refine and sharpen his dialectical arguments. In a particularly poignant moment, Reuchlin cautioned Benignus about the personal risks

³² Defensio, C F. Erdmann-Pandžić and Pandžić, *Juraj Dragišić und Johannes Reuchlin*, 103 f: "An Iudaeorum libri, quos Thalmud appellant, sint potius supprimendi quam tenendi et conservandi?"

he faced due to his bold stance, highlighting the Bosnian scholar's remarkable bravery in championing tolerance and intellectual freedom. Within the treatise, Benignus fearlessly expressed his support for Reuchlin's disputed views on preserving Jewish texts, using the dialogical format to effectively convey their shared convictions. At one point, he provocatively declared:

Georgius Benignus: It seemed to your adversaries that you had committed the crime of high treason by equating arguments drawn from the Talmud with those taken from the Bible. Moreover, you have now demonstrated that the former are even more effective. I further declare that, by the term Bible, you understand not only the Old Testament but also the New Testament, and that you not only hold the opinion but firmly assert that Talmudic testimonies are more effective in convincing the Jews than those of the Gospels and the Apostles. Indeed, the testimonies of the New Law are of no value against them, since they do not accept but reject them. In fact, all who have read these books provide exceedingly clear testimonies from them in support of our faith.³³

To this bold assertion, Reuchlin responded with a cautionary note, advising Benignus to exercise greater caution. He warned that their adversaries would slander Benignus just as they had slandered himself. Nevertheless, Reuchlin acknowledged the logical clarity of Benignus's argumentation, which their opponents would find difficult to refute. His warning underscored the personal risk Georgius faced in defending such controversial positions.

Yet, Benignus remained resolute, driven by his conviction that faith in God should unite rather than divide. To him, Jewish books were not a threat to Christianity; on the contrary, their preservation provided an opportunity to deepen the understanding of both faiths. Benignus concluded by affirming that Reuchlin had "correctly defended the truth" (*recte veritate defendisti*).³⁴

The dialogue culminated in a profound closing speech by Reuchlin, subtly influenced by Benignus's dialectical skill. Together, they argued that preserving Hebrew books enriched the comprehension of Holy Scripture for both Christians and Jews. Benignus summarized their position with a compelling conclusion: "From this, I wished to conclude that such

³³ Georgius Benignus, *Defensio*, in, Juraj Dragišić (*Georgius Benignus*), eds. Banić-Pajnić et al., 361.

³⁴ Benignus, *Defensio*, in, Juraj Dragišić, 363.

necessary books ought not to be removed.”³⁵ This statement encapsulated Benignus’s broader vision of reconciliation and his unwavering commitment to fostering unity in faith. His defense not only influenced a more conciliatory stance toward Reuchlin but also underscored the enduring importance of dialogue and tolerance in religious discourse.

A central pillar of Georgius’s argument is that Jewish books should be preserved because their study can enhance and fortify Christian exegesis. He presents evidence that the Church Fathers engaged with Jewish traditions and regarded them as valuable for Christians. Echoing Reuchlin’s insight, Benignus asserts that Christianity can be revitalized by delving deeper into its foundational sources. He believed that the authors of the Holy Scriptures synthesized diverse traditions, which is why non-Christian books and spiritual knowledge should not be destroyed but rather used to restore and strengthen the Christian faith.

The remarkable argument in favor of tolerance deserves special emphasis, as it reflects the timeless relevance of Benignus’s vision for interfaith understanding and mutual respect. “But just as we tolerate them [the rites of those abroad], we ought also to tolerate the books by which they sustain themselves.”³⁶

With his sharp dialectics, Benignus helps Reuchlin defend his point of view even more clearly. Deliberative dialectic allows interlocutors to complement each other and strengthen their arguments. Benignus does not conceal his affection and alignment with Reuchlin’s concern for the preservation of books and the value of Jewish religious wisdom. A true humanist advocates a tolerant attitude toward others and defends the right to diversity in both rituals and cultural heritage.

Benignus came to Reuchlin’s aid as a humanist theologian, revising his legal arguments to strengthen and complete them. He assumed the role of *advocatus diaboli* in order to neutralize his opponent’s theological objections regarding the heresy of Jewish books. In conclusion, he reaches a consensus with his interlocutor on the necessity of preserving these books.

Moreover, he turned the objections into evidence of the usefulness of Jewish books for Christian exegesis. In doing so, he clearly defended the dignity of his humanist interlocutor, who stood up for the preservation of Jewish texts. This approach led the humanist theologian from Srebrenica into the intellectual orbit of the humanist Reuchlin, who, like Pico, was moving toward a vision of a concord of world religions.

³⁵ Benignus, *Defensio*, in, Juraj Dragišić, 369: “Ex quo, ut eiusmodi libri tam necessarii non supprimerentur, concludere volui.”

³⁶ Benignus, *Defensio*, in, Juraj Dragišić, 348: “Sed quosque eos toleramus [ritus eorum qui foris sunt], etiam libros quibus se tuentur tolerare deberemus.”

Conclusion

In closing, it is worth underscoring the perils the philosopher exposed himself to in his defense of human dignity. By navigating the precarious ground of defending the accused and persecuted, Benignus showcased a philosophy of freedom and tolerance aimed at transcending boundaries and uniting cultures. In line with Renaissance ideals, he promoted spiritual renewal through the reconciliation of diverse philosophical perspectives, aiming to unite Christianity and ultimately bring all faiths closer to the Creator.

With regard to Bessarion, Benignus defended his protector's stance by advocating for a reconciliation between the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. He referenced Aristotle's argument in the *Metaphysics*, where truth is deemed more important than personal alliances, with truth sought even in contradicting perspectives. Although he was close to his friends within the Florentine Neoplatonist circle, Aristotle's ideas are the most prevalent among the philosophers in his works, particularly in *Logic*. Just as his mentor Bessarion was conciliatory toward Aristotle when he considered Plato's ideas to be complementary, Benignus strove for truth by taking from both of them what he considered to be compatible.

Similarly, he endeavored to reconcile the differences between the leading scholastic authorities, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. While he respected Scotus, he valued the truth even more, recognizing it in the works of Aquinas as well. This attitude toward truth characterizes his philosophical approach.

In his apologies, the exiled scholar from Srebrenica exhibited an exceptionally tolerant and conciliatory attitude toward different philosophical views, as well as diverse forms of worship and faith in God. He even held a certain admiration for astrology. Above all, he valued freedom of expression. Erasmus of Rotterdam spoke extremely highly of him and unequivocally supported his defense of Reuchlin.

The subtle philosophical argumentation of the great thinker from Srebrenica contains fertile seeds of tolerance in philosophical and religious matters, which could have been inherited by the European Enlightenment and elevated to one of the fundamental principles in the ordering of society. This is why I believe that his philosophical apologies of human dignity, based on the freedom of human will, could still serve as a model today in the search for philosophical paths that transcend boundaries.

The theses and achievements of Georgius Benignus reveal him as an extraordinary and courageous figure in European intellectual history. As a double exile – first from his homeland of Bosnia and then from Florence – and a scholar often placed in peril, this committed Renaissance humanist consistently used his position to advocate for the persecuted and for principles of pacification and dialogue.

Benignus's remarkable commitment to defending those under attack earned him renown as an author of "defense books." His guiding principle, encapsulated in the phrase *veritas itaque semper in amore praestat* (truth always prevails in love), underscores his philosophical and theological approach. He sought reconciliation and unity, driven by compassion for those who suffered. Ivica Martinović succinctly captured the essence of Benignus' apologetic legacy in the following words:

The experience of double persecution – first from his native land of Bosnia and then from a religious family in Florence – strengthened Dragišić, compelling him to persist in defending the persecuted and the suspected, even when silence might have been the easier path. This brings us to the question: what did Bessarion, Pico, Savonarola and Reuchlin mean to Dragišić? His philosophical and theological judgments were both anticipated and rightly recognized by his esteemed contemporaries – the architects of European humanism: Bessarion, Ficino, and Erasmus.³⁷

This delicate balancing act between competing traditions underscores Benignus's commitment to intellectual synthesis and his broader mission of fostering dialogue and reconciliation. His legacy as a defender of human dignity, freedom, tolerance, harmony, and spiritual renewal marks him as a pivotal figure in the intellectual circles and humanistic movements of his era. In his eloquent apologies, he defended both his friends and those he had only heard about, yet always prioritized their dignity above all, grounded in the shared values of humanism.

Benignus's humanist life motto can be succinctly expressed as: *Truth, always reconciling human dignity through love, dialogue, and tolerance.*

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³⁷ Martinović, "Humanist, filozof i teolog Juraj Dragišić," 230.

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Part III

Experiences of Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

Asian Shared Spirituality and the Spirit of Dialogue: Transcending the Boundaries of Religions

Jove Jim S. Aguas

Introduction

Asia is home to the major religions in the world – the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and the non-monotheistic religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and other religions. Each of these religions has its own doctrines, beliefs, rituals, practices, and moral codes that create a kind of natural boundary for these religions. While the teaching of religion is to be a good person, it has also caused division, tension, and even violence. Religious conflicts and tensions in Asia have a long history, including conflicts between Muslims and Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims, Christians and Muslims, and between these major religions and other indigenous ones. These conflicts are not just rooted in religious diversity and differences; they can also be rooted in discrimination against religious minorities, leading to radicalization, social and economic changes, which, in turn, can contribute to religious conflicts and rival interests over land, water, money, labor, power, status, or values rooted in colonialism. This is very true, especially in Southeast Asia, which is home to different religions. In some cases, unfortunately, religious diversity and differences cause conflicts that sometimes lead to violence. When it comes to peace and violence, two of the most challenging problems of Southeast Asia are ethnic separatism and religious extremism, which are experienced in varying intensity and scope. Religious tensions in Asia are as common as they are complex and multifaceted. These conflicts and tensions caused by religious differences undermine peace and order in the region. In Southeast Asia, while people and religious groups are generally not in conflict and live in mutual tolerance and understanding and interact in public spaces, markets, work, and schools, even in their small communities, tens of thousands of people have died in specific areas where there are conflicts involving religion. Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims have all been, and are still involved in major and minor disputes, conflicts, and killings for ostensibly religious reasons. A persistent unease exists between religions and ethnic groups, and conflicts do occur.¹

¹ Matthew Kosuta, "Postcolonial Religious Conflict in Southeast Asia," *Education About ASIA* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 24.

The history of religious tensions in Asia dates back to the colonial era, when European powers imposed their own systems of governance, law, and religion on colonized territories. This led to the suppression of indigenous cultures and religions, creating tensions between different religious groups. For example, in the Philippines, Spanish colonization in the 16th century brought Christianity to the archipelago. The Spanish colonization of the archipelago meant the Christianization of the Philippines and de-Islamization on the part of the Moros – the Muslims in the southern Philippines; this naturally caused tension between Christians, Muslims, and the indigenous people in the region.²

In Indonesia, the Dutch colonial powers favored Christian converts over Muslims, leading to resentment and tensions between Christians and Muslims. Although it was not a serious attempt to convert the native people to Christianity, as the Portuguese and Spanish had done before, the colonial powers, through the Dutch East Indian Company, provided some kind of help to those who lived under their direct control. In fact, the Governor General supported the giving of half a kilo of rice per day to those who attended Christian schools.³ The Dutch government allowed for Catholic and Protestant missions in Indonesia, even though the governors and plantation owners tended to fear that overt support for the Christian missionaries would add to hostility and resistance to Dutch rule.⁴

In India, in 1871, the British colonial rulers made a census to define India by religious categories, that is, to define religions by their potential to support colonial capitalism or revolt against colonialism. The British used the strategy of “divide and rule” to provoke hostility between Hindus and Muslims and used religion to drive a wedge between Indians, which eventually resulted in the death and displacement of millions of people.⁵ Large-scale conflicts between Hindus and Muslims only began under colonial rule; many other kinds of social strife were labeled as religious due

² For a concise history of Islam in the Philippines, see Hannibal Bara, *The History of the Muslim in the Philippines* (n.d.), <https://ncca.gov.ph/about-ncca-3/subcommissions/sub-commission-on-cultural-communities-and-traditional-arts-sccta/central-cultural-communities/the-history-of-the-muslim-in-the-philippines/> (accessed February 25, 2025).

³ Ismail Hakki Goksoy, “The Policy of the Dutch Government towards Islam in Indonesia,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 19, no. 1 (2002): 74

⁴ M.J.M Maussen, *Constructing Mosques: The Governance of Islam in France and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, Digital Academic Repository, 2009), 92.

⁵ Aziz Rahman, Mohsin Ali, and Saad Kahn, “The British Art of Colonialism in India: Subjugation and Division,” *Peace and Conflict Studies* 25, no. 1 (2018): 1-26, <https://nsu.works.nova.edu/pcs/vol25/iss1/5> (accessed February 25, 2025).

to the colonists' orientalist assumption that religion was the fundamental division in Indian society.⁶

Religious conflicts and tensions on the continent have persisted and even escalated in recent years, undermining peace and progress. For instance, the never-ending Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Middle East, and the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, where a Muslim minority group has faced decades of persecution and violence. In 2017, a military crackdown led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, sparking international condemnation. The Aceh conflict in Indonesia is a decades-long insurgency led by the Free Aceh Movement, which sought independence for the Aceh region. This conflict also resulted in deaths and displacements of hundreds of thousands of Achenes. The religious tensions in Thailand between Buddhists and Muslims, particularly in the southern provinces, have also resulted in thousands of deaths and displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

With a long history of religious conflicts and tensions, interreligious dialogues and cooperation in Asia may seem to be arduous and complicated. Although these tensions and conflicts are persistent and even escalating, religious differences and diversity cannot be ignored and must be respected. At the outset, we mentioned that the purpose of religion is to teach people to be good. What goodness can be brought out from people, especially from Asians, is their spirituality or their shared recognition of the divine or spiritual, both in external and physical reality and in themselves. This shared spirituality among Asians can be a focal point in transcending the boundaries of religions and mitigating, if not totally avoiding, religious conflicts and tensions. In this paper, I focus on the shared spirituality of Asians and how it can be a focal point in transcending the boundaries of religion in the spirit of dialogue.

Spirituality, Faith, and Religion

Before embarking on the main focus of this paper, some preliminary discussion on the underlying concepts that this paper is anchored on, namely, spirituality, faith, and religion, is needed. Spirituality is present in all religions in the sense that all religions have reference to the spiritual realm or spiritual beings.⁷ There may be some differences in the way religions regard spirituality, but they generally have an awareness of a connection to something greater or a higher power, like a God or gods, and attribute meaning and purpose to finding significance and direction in life

⁶ Shashi Tharoor, "'But what about the railways...?' The myth of Britain's gifts to India," *The Guardian* (March 8, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/08/india-britain-empire-railways-myths-gifts> (accessed February 25, 2025).

⁷ Louise P. Pojman, *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1994), xi.

from the spiritual realm or spiritual experience. And such an experience can carry or enable one to experience transcendence or a state beyond ordinary consciousness. Religions, whether personal or institutionalized, advance spiritual development and self-awareness. One can find common spiritual practices in religions, like meditation, prayer, rituals, service, etc. Spirituality is not about whether or not one's belief is true and valid because it regards all faiths as valid, like the analogy of many paths leading to the same goal. Spirituality embraces all the world's religions, yet it is not constrained by any religious dogmas or forms. It is less concerned with outer rituals, but with seekers' inner attitude. Through practicing spirituality, one develops an inner shrine in one's own heart.

One can find the spiritual both within oneself and outside of oneself. It is in the realm where one can find the spiritual beings – the God or gods, the deities, the spirits, and other otherworldly or divine beings. But the spiritual can also be found in oneself – soul, spirit, mind, or consciousness that is considered spiritual rather than physical or material. It is this spiritual within oneself that allows him or her to have communion or connection with the spiritual external to oneself. If we consider the spiritual to be logos, there are logoi both outside and inside that can be connected and related. It is this connection and relation of external and internal spirituality that allows one to experience the spiritual outside of oneself.

Faith and spirituality are usually related; they can overlap, but they can also differ. When we relate faith and spirituality, we can see some differences. In general, faith is confidence or trust in a higher power, a belief in a doctrine or philosophy; as such, faith can be structured and organized, while spirituality cannot. Faith has an element of arbitrariness because it operates within the realm of choice. One chooses to believe or to put his/her trust in something or somebody higher. If faith is an assent, then it is the choice of a person to assent to the object of one's faith. Whether we regard it as inclination, desire, or choice, it is initiated by us through our choice. Thus, a religion based on one's faith is always grounded on a conscious choice, which is expressed through the profession of faith and adherence to doctrines, teachings, dogmas, beliefs, and moral codes of such religion.

Spirituality is not arbitrary; it does not require faith or profession or adherence to certain doctrines, teachings, dogmas, or moral codes. Spirituality does not always lead to religion, although religion, in general, has a reference to the spiritual. Hence, a person, by virtue of his/her spirit and awareness or consciousness of the spiritual, is always oriented to spirituality (unless, of course, he/she does not believe or recognize the spirit within him/herself and the spirituality of reality). However, one will not always be oriented to faith or adherence to a particular religion because adherence to such a religion is a matter of desire or inclination.

Spirituality is not just an awareness or consciousness of the spiritual or an empty orientation toward the spiritual or divine. Rather, it is transformed into an inner disposition or attitude that allows the person to look into him/herself as a spiritual being and relate with the spiritual reality outside of him/herself. Based on personal experience, this is clearly expressed in Christian spirituality, anchored in the Christian faith. Christians believe in a divine or spiritual being, God, and channel their spirituality through their faith in God and establish an intimate relationship with God. Such an intimate relationship enables Christians to have an intimate relationship with their fellow beings, who are also seen as spiritual. Of course, we can also find similar beliefs and experiences in other monotheistic religions – Judaism and Islam.

As a Christian, I consider myself a child of God, and also see others, regardless of their religions or faiths, as children of God because I recognize the spiritual in them. Although we may belong to different faiths and religions, we all share the same worth and dignity as children of God. If one reveres the spiritual being and recognizes such being as the creator or cause of all or the underlying principle of all, then one must show respect to all creatures or all things. This is what I regard as genuine spirituality, a spirituality that shows reverence to the divine or supreme being and respect for my fellow beings and all of creation. One need not be a Christian to have such a genuine spirituality.

Genuine spirituality enables one to have a personal relationship with God or with the transcendent. But if the god that one refers to is mundane and temporal, then how can it be genuine spirituality? Genuine spirituality should help us understand who we truly are as individuals and become better persons. Genuine spirituality should involve certain transformations on the part of the individual, and it should be manifested in certain virtues like charity, humility, patience, kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Without these virtues, one cannot claim one is spiritual.

Genuine spirituality is more than just a spiritual feeling, more than just an inner discovery, and more than a self-serving condition of the spirit; rather, it must consider other people as oneself and make personal relations with others part of one's spirituality. If one only focuses on one's spiritual well-being, one has not grasped holistic spirituality. Furthermore, genuine spirituality enables us to go beyond human-centeredness; it helps us develop a positive attitude toward nature and the whole of creation. If one is truly spiritual, one cares not only for oneself but also for the environment and nature. Genuine spirituality lets us see that we are only part of the entire creation, thus we need to care for all. Any spirituality that does not subscribe to or manifest all of these can be dismissed as pseudo-spirituality.

Asian Shared Spirituality

The religious diversity of Asia is manifested in the multiplicity of cultural expressions, religious practices, rituals, languages, artistic expressions, and works in literature, music, etc. These different expressions give rise to cultural and religious diversity and the multiplicity of cultural and religious identities of Asians. At the core of religious diversity and differences lie their interpretations of the divine reality, which form the basis of diverse religious beliefs and doctrines. Eastern and Western religions have differing views about such a divine reality. In Western religions, particularly Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the Ultimate Reality is conceived as a personal, supreme, and perfect being – a God. In Eastern or Asian religions, notably Buddhism, Taoism, and the Advaita Vedanta school of Hinduism, the Ultimate Reality is understood as a state of being, not a personal being.⁸ Aside from these major religions, there are countless folk or indigenous religions in many parts of Asia.

Indeed, despite its diversity, this extensive region has been “the mother to many races and peoples and the pantheon of the world’s great religions, which have resulted from the Asian peoples’ long search for the meaning and destiny of humanity and the universe.” Some of “the most profound and elaborate religious, philosophical, social, and linguistic systems and organizations known in history have come about as a result of Asian sages, saints, and religious visionaries from time immemorial. These have guided the destinies of millions of peoples through centuries and millennia.”⁹

Amidst the diversity of ethnic origins, cultures, religions, and languages, Asians share some common characteristics. In general, Asians are deeply spiritual people, and their spirituality encompasses various philosophical and religious traditions emphasizing harmony, balance, and interconnectedness. They acknowledge their close relationship and affinity with divine and spiritual beings. This is manifested in their common practices like prayers, meditation, worship, festivals, and rituals. Asians are more inclined toward the spiritual than to the material. Life is understood and lived in relation to the spiritual, and human life is evaluated in terms of humans’ relationship with the Divine, which could include ancestors and local deities. The fullness of life is not realized here in this world but in the afterlife. Hence, while the physical world is important, it is more

⁸ Jove Jim S. Aguas, “A Critical Look at Religious Diversity and Responding to Its Challenges,” in *Philosophies of Appropriated Religions: Perspectives from Southeast Asia*, eds. Soraj Hongladarom, Jeremiah Joven Joaquin, and Frank J. Hoffman (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2023), 337–350.

⁹ Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Lineamenta*, #2, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_01081996_asia-lineam_en.html (accessed February 25, 2025).

important to direct one's life toward the beyond, toward the afterlife. For instance, the *Bhagavad Gita* is a great source and guide to spiritual life and duty. Shinto scriptures are rich in mythology, rituals, and ethics. Right concentration and mindfulness are parts of the core teachings of the *Dhammapada*.

Asians' respective deep religiosity is manifested in every aspect of human life, which is given or acquires some religious meaning and roots. Festivals and rituals are celebrated during lunar cycles, harvests, and spiritual and religious events. A common fixture in homes and even in public places is a prominent religious figure, such as the Buddha, an image or icon of saints, deities, and other religious articles or items. Some public occasions have religious underpinnings, and religious holidays are considered public holidays, like Christmas and Ramadan. Thus, religion becomes the outward expression of their deep spirituality. This is the manifestation of the Asians' surrender and obedience to the Divine.

This deep spirituality and religiosity are complemented by the Asians' inwardness and holistic view of life. They integrate physical, mental, and spiritual well-being and embrace the cycles of life, from birth to death, rebirth, or reincarnation. Always inward-looking, Asians have the common tendency to look into their inner selves, through introspection and meditation. While material possessions are important, the purification of the inner self or the soul is much more important. Moreover, Asians recognize the interconnectedness of things and the unity and harmony among all living beings. They share a great affinity and respect for nature. Nature is the source of life and, therefore, must be preserved. Nature is something that should not be controlled or manipulated. Asians tend to prefer communing with and being one with nature. The *Tao Te Ching*, for example, teaches harmony with nature.

Pope John Paul II recognized Asia's rich religious and cultural values and spirituality. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, echoing *Lineamenta* of the Asian of the Synod of Bishops, he writes:

The people of Asia take pride in their religious and cultural values, such as love of silence and contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, the spirit of hard work, discipline, frugal living, the thirst for learning and philosophical enquiry. They hold dear the values of respect for life, compassion for all beings, closeness to nature, filial piety towards parents, elders and ancestors, and a highly developed sense of community.¹⁰

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, #6, <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apostexhortations/documents/hfjp-iiexh06111999ecclesia-in-asia.html> (accessed February 25, 2025).

The Holy Father also recognized that Asians “hold the family to be a vital source of strength, a closely knit community with a powerful sense of solidarity“ and that they are “known for their spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence.” While it cannot be denied that there are bitter tensions and violent conflicts, “it can still be said that Asia has often demonstrated a remarkable capacity for accommodation and a natural openness to the mutual enrichment of peoples in the midst of a plurality of religions and cultures.” Moreover, despite the influence of modernization and secularization, “Asian religions are showing signs of great vitality and a capacity for renewal, as seen in reform movements within the various religious groups. Many people, especially the young, experience a deep thirst for spiritual values, as the rise of new religious movements clearly demonstrates.”¹¹

Religious Identities as Boundaries and Shared Spirituality

Religious identity refers to how individuals define themselves as belonging to a specific religious group or church, according to their religious beliefs, practices, and experiences. It provides their sense of self within a community of believers and a sense of connection through the acceptance of specific doctrines, teachings, and creeds, participation in rituals, ceremonies, and daily spiritual practices, and the adoption of moral principles and values derived from religious teachings. Given the diversity of religions, there is also diversity in terms of religious identities. Diversity is somehow related to identity since diversity is only possible when we recognize that things that are different have their respective identities. Similarly, religious diversity is grounded in religious identity. A Muslim’s identity is based on his/her belief in Allah, the Almighty God; he/she is expected to behave well in his/her personal and social interactions. He/she is expected to do the Salat (ṣalāh) or the Islamic prayer five times a day: Fajr (dawn), Dhuhr (noon), Asr (afternoon), Maghrib (evening), and Isha (night). He/she is required to do ritual fasting during the month of Ramadan. In their appearance, Muslims can be identified by their modest clothing: Muslim men wear a long robe over white cotton pants, a white cotton undershirt, and a rope band underneath the headdress, and Muslim women wear an abaya – a long, loose-fitting, robe-like garment that covers the entire body, except, for the face, hands and feet; a headscarf or hijab is another way that Muslim women should wear. From their appearance, Muslims are different from followers of other religions, like Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism.

When we say that Christianity is different from other religions and that there is a host of different religions, it means that each religion has its

¹¹ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, #6.

distinct identity. Religious identities would seem to create some kind of a “boundary.” Identity may make something similar, different, or unique from others and thus creates a “separation” or boundary between one thing and another. The same could be said about religious identity. In terms of appearance, their clothing is one obvious difference between a Muslim and a Christian, which creates a semblance of “separation.” Even among Muslims, there are differences, for instance, is a kind of separation between Shiites and Sunnis. While their prayer rituals are nearly identical, Shiites stand with their hands at their sides, while Sunnis put their hands crossed over their stomachs. As a Catholic, I see myself as different from other Christians and even from other Catholics. I have a different way of expressing my Christian beliefs from other Christians; for example, I have a profound veneration of the saints, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, and recite the Rosary. In that context, I “separate” myself from other Christians who may not practice praying the Rosary. As a Filipino Catholic, I have a different way of expressing my Catholic faith. In the Philippines, we have a different way of commemorating the Holy Week, that is, the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. We celebrate Christmas or the Season of Advent differently from other cultures. It is well-known that Filipinos have the longest celebration of Christmas.

Hence, when we look deeper into the religious identities of people, we can see a kind of “demarcation,” “boundary,” or “separation” that makes them unique. Such uniqueness should be respected and accepted because it is just the way people express their religiosity or spirituality. Their religious expressions are an integral part of their religious identity.

However, such religious identity, although it is interpreted as a kind of “boundary” or “separation,” should not be interpreted as a wall that prevents relationship or interconnection. I venerate the Blessed Virgin Mary and pray the Rosary, while my fellow Christians do not, but this does not mean that we cannot relate to each other. Although we Filipino Catholics have a special cultural expression in the way we commemorate the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, that does not mean that we cannot share our religious experiences with other Catholics. For Christians and Muslims then can still share their religious experiences even though they have different doctrines and practices. Differences in rituals and practices are not walls but expressions of religious identities. Doctrinal differences can be understood as differences in the expressions of their religious experiences.

It is common to interpret and imagine the Christian and Muslim interaction as violent, given the history of wars between these two religions, starting with the Holy Wars or Crusades during the Middle Ages. But there were also silver linings in the past. In the 9th century, Baghdad, which was the center of the Muslim Abbasid empire and one of the world’s wealthiest and most progressive cities, was a gathering place of Muslim, Christian,

and Jewish scholars, who articulated a powerful symbiosis of faith and reason. In the 10th century, this scholarly collaboration among Christians, Jews, and Muslims in medicine and philosophy, even in music, art, and trade, continued in Cordoba, Spain. In 1219, we saw the encounter between Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malik al-Kamil in Damietta amid the Crusades. These encounters among these religions are examples that boundaries or differences need not always be walls or divisions, much less cause of conflicts and tensions.

The popular view is that the relationship between Buddhism and Islam is often one of violence, with each side destroying the holy sites and artifacts of the other. In recent years, this view has been problematized by the reality of Buddhist ethnic cleansing and the genocide of Muslims in Sri Lanka and Myanmar. However, just like the encounter between Christians and Muslims, the meeting between Buddhists and Muslims was not only one of confrontation, but also involved much else, including artistic, cultural, economic, and intellectual exchanges.¹² This has been going on for more than one thousand years across the length and breadth of Asia (from Iran to China and Indonesia to Siberia).

These silver linings mean that differences and diversity do not always lead to conflicts and tensions and that identities as boundaries are not a hard demarcation that is difficult to cross. Religious identities as “separation” or “boundary” are not unbridgeable; they can be “transcended” or “crossed,” paving the way for relationships and interconnections. It is not a concrete wall but is like lines drawn in water. In other words, depending on the attitude of the person who may have a different religious identity or expression, one can, in fact, cross over and share in the religious experience of the other. If there are irreconcilable doctrinal differences, they can be overcome by an appeal to the shared spirituality since all of us are Asians. All religions are animated by the desire to relate with the divine. The divine can be experienced in any situation and with different people, even those with whom one does not share a common belief or doctrine. We can pray together with our different forms of prayers; we show reverence to our scriptures when we read our different scriptural texts.

As a Catholic, I read the Bible with the same reverence a Muslim does to the Holy Quran. In one of my travels to Constanta, Romania, I had the great opportunity to visit a Muslim Mosque, and I felt the presence of God in that holy place. Indeed, the physical appearance and structure of the Mosque are different from that of a Church, but the religious feeling or the feeling of divine presence is almost the same, because feelings are

¹² Johan Elverskog, “Buddhist and Muslim Interactions in Asian History,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), <https://oxfordre.com/asianhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-418> (accessed February 24, 2025).

conditioned by the physical environment. This is what I meant by religious identities as “separation” or “boundary” drawn in water. We can cross the line of religious boundaries because, like water, it is fluid. Yes, there are doctrinal differences, but our spirituality enables us to experience the spiritual or divine reality in the same manner. On this level of shared spirituality in Asia, while Asians have different religious beliefs, practices, doctrines, and even rituals, they can rely on their recognition of the divine and dependence on the spiritual realm or being, which cuts across the various religions. If these lines drawn in the water are something permanent and difficult to cross, then we can use our shared spirituality as a bridge by which we can cross the human-made boundary or separation.

Transcending Religious Boundaries through Dialogue

In Asia, religious diversity and differences, unfortunately, in some cases, cause conflicts and tensions that sometimes result in violence. However, although religious boundaries can cause conflicts and even violence, they can still be crossed and transcended because we have a common bond. How can we cross this boundary or separation? What means or bridge can be used? The shared spirituality of Asians is the bridge or means to cross or transcend religious differences and religious identities. Nevertheless, the bridge can only be crossed with the right attitude, namely the spirit of dialogue, which means an openness to the other in mutual respect and trust and in the spirit of solidarity. In an interreligious dialogue, both parties are open to the differences and diversity of beliefs, perspectives, doctrines, and expressions of one another. While interreligious dialogue may occur at the communal level, any dialogue, strictly speaking, does not really happen at the level of societies or communities, but among people with their own unique identities and personalities.¹³ Participants in an interreligious dialogue are real people, not abstract beings with their own distinctive personalities, thoughts, beliefs, motives, and intentions. Each person represents his/her own religion, thoughts, feelings, values, and actions.

Interreligious dialogue is an open relationship and interaction among religions or religious people based on respect, understanding, openness, hospitality, and solidarity. In a religious setting, there is a mechanism that can counter religious violence. For example, the four forms of dialogue (dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, dialogue of religious experience) established by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue categorize how people of different faiths inter-

¹³ Jove Jim S. Aguas, “Cultural Pluralism and Cultural Dialogue,” *Melintas* (March 2008): 378.

act.¹⁴ Such a mechanism can promote harmony and peace, for it fosters mutual knowledge and enrichment, lessens tensions and misunderstandings, and promotes common goals and collaborations among followers of different religions.¹⁵ Francis Cardinal Arinze, President of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue from 1985 to 2002, provides a clear definition of interreligious dialogue:

This term is meant to cover the various forms of relations with people of different religious traditions. Such interaction and collaboration, hopefully, positive and constructive, can be aimed at better mutual knowledge, more exact information on the other, mutual enrichment, lessening or removal of tensions and understandings, and promotion of common projects undertaken to make this world a better place in which to live.¹⁶

Cardinal Arinze further explains the four forms of inter-religious dialogue. There is dialogue at the level of daily life, where people of different religions interact in the family, in the workplace, or in recreation, and in society in general, drawing from the ideals of their religions without discussing specific religious questions. There is the dialogue of social work by which believers of different religions join hands to promote some projects for the benefit of the community. There is dialogue as an intellectual exchange in which learned people expose their religious beliefs, moral codes, and rituals and hold a debate with their interlocutors. However, this form of doctrinal discourse may not be beneficial, especially if those involved are not prepared enough and have not reached a certain level of mutual trust. The fourth is the exchange of religious experiences, where people who are deeply committed to their religious beliefs share their experiences on topics such as union with God, prayer, silence, self-control, and surrender to God or the Absolute.¹⁷ The Cardinal describes these four as the “dialogue of life” referring to contacts at the level of daily life; the “dialogue of social engagement” to “promote the integral development and the liberation of people”; “dialogue of theological exchange” between religious specialists and the “dialogue of religious experience” in

¹⁴ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, #42, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html (accessed February 25, 2025).

¹⁵ Aguas, “A Critical Look at Religious Diversity,” 349.

¹⁶ Francis Cardinal Arinze, “Christian Humanism and Inter-religious Dialogue,” *Ad Veritatem* 1, no. 2 (March 2002): 301.

¹⁷ Arinze, “Christian Humanism and Inter-religious Dialogue,” 301–302.

which believers share their spiritual traditions with regard to prayer, meditation, contemplation, and ways for searching God.¹⁸

All faiths share a common openness to God's action, a sincere search for religious truth and values, openness to other people and respect for differences, a readiness for self-examination and criticism, and a willingness to work and collaborate with others.¹⁹ The following are certain values and attitudes that are indispensable in interreligious dialogues: a) love and respect for the human person, b) understanding and sensitivity to differences, especially in religious convictions and beliefs, and c) genuine concern, trust, and sincerity, and the attitude of solidarity.

Pope St. John Paul II stressed that those engaged in interreligious dialogue "must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretense or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility, and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side."²⁰ Pope Paul VI, in the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" (*Nostra Aetate*) in 1965, declares that "the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions" and that in her task of promoting unity and love among people and nations, she considers above all what people have in common and what draws them to fellowship. "One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God." We expect various religions to answer the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of people: What is the human being? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve?²¹ All of these "spells out some pastoral guidelines for the faithful to engage in dialogue with people of other religions," and "recognizes and accepts the objective reality of religious traditions, with esteem and respect, the reality which goes beyond individual religious believers."²²

¹⁸ Francis Arinze, "The Church and Interreligious Dialogue," *Logos* 4, no. 1 (2001): 158–159.

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Message for World Day of Peace* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19821208_xvi-world-day-for-peace.html (accessed September 30, 2025).

²⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), https://www.vatican.va/content/johnpaul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_0712_1990_redemptoris-missio.html (accessed February 24, 2025).

²¹ Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), #1, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (accessed February 24, 2025).

²² Felix Machado, *Living the Christian Faith in an Inter-religious and Multi-cultural Context* (January 2019), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/incontri/rc_con_cfaith_20190115_machado_en.html (accessed November 23, 2024).

In several documents, the Catholic Church has stressed the fundamental reasons why dialogue is essential in the life of the Church. First is the conviction that we all belong to one human family. This is a principle widely shared by religions all over the world. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue states that “the whole of humankind forms one family due to the common origin of all men and women, created by God in his own image. Correspondingly, all are called to a common destiny, the fullness of life in God.”²³ Dialogue enables each religion not only to understand itself in relation to other religions but also to understand the various spiritual and faith traditions. There is always a common ground of shared values among diverse faiths to show that despite diversity, we are one human family.

This view about common values and the ground is also shared by the Dalai Lama, who expresses that on a deeper plane, nations, cultures, and individuals connect through their shared human nature and that major religions confront the same perennial questions, though each has distinct forms of expression – Who am I? Where do I come from? Where will I go after death? This diversity of insight has the potential for inspiring dialogue, which can enrich everyone’s pursuit of wisdom. According to the Dalai Lama, genuine interreligious harmony is not dependent on accepting that all religions are fundamentally the same but that their fundamentally different metaphysical teachings could give rise to an ethics based on compassion as a guiding principle for living a good life.²⁴ He acknowledged that when he was young, he thought his own Buddhist religion was the best in the world: “I thought that there simply could not be any other faith tradition that could rival the depth, sophistication, and inspirational power of Buddhism.”²⁵ But as he met serious practitioners of other religious traditions, particularly after he fled Tibet and went into exile, he changed his opinion. He recalled how, in the late 1960s, he met Father Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk who explored Eastern religious traditions and wrote about his practice of Christianity. Merton thought he could remain true to his Christian monastic commitment while also learning from Buddhist and other religious disciplines. The Dalai Lama came to believe this was also true for Buddhist monks like himself, that they could also learn from non-Buddhist religious practices and disciplines while remaining true to Buddhist commitments.

A dialogue between Buddhism and Islam may be more complicated because of the doctrinal differences. From a theological perspective, there is a common ground between Christianity and Islam, being both mono-

²³ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, #28.

²⁴ Dalai Lama, *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths: How the World’s Religions Can Come Together* (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2010), xii.

²⁵ Dalai Lama, *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths*, 1.

theistic, and both show reverence to common figures like Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary. The monotheistic aspect is not much of a problem between Buddhism and Christianity because there are other common grounds, like the notion of benevolence and compassion, that are so explicit between these two religions. However, the concept of one God as the creator and sustainer of creation and of the human, as opposed to the belief that the divine is irrelevant in attaining Nirvana, could be a major obstacle to dialogue between Buddhism and Islam. Nevertheless, there are other commonalities between Islam and Buddhism that can be the foundations for constructive interreligious dialogue. For one, both Muslims and Buddhists consider the importance of the consequences of their actions. For Muslims, all humans will be judged for their right or wrong actions after their deaths on Judgment Day, as the Quran states, "Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it" (Quran 99:7-8). Hence, those who have a higher weight of good deeds will enter eternal Paradise, while those with a higher weight of evil deeds will reside in Hellfire (Quran 101:6-11). The virtuous Muslim should act rightly while in this world, which is only temporary and inferior in terms of his desire to go to Paradise after death. In Buddhism, one of the Noble Truths teaches that life is transitory and inevitably contains suffering. The way to escape suffering and achieve Nirvana is to detach from the world and follow the Eightfold Path. One of the components of this path is right action, governed by the law of karma, which means that right actions bear good results or consequences, whereas bad actions bear bad results or consequences. The notion of judgment in Islam and karma in Buddhism indicates that every good action will eventually be rewarded, and every bad one will be punished. Of course, a similar belief is found in the other two monotheistic religions, Christianity and Judaism. The notion of good works or actions and the corresponding good rewards, whether in this life or in the afterlife, can be a good motivation to pursue peace and harmony among religions through interreligious dialogue.

There are still other motivations for Muslims to dialogue with other religions. The Quran states, "If Allah had so willed, He would have made [humankind] a single religion [or community], but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: therefore, strive to race each other in all virtues" (Quran 5:48). This implies for many Muslims that God has willed to create diversity among humankind's nations in order to foster righteous action and dialogue among religions or communities. It is about doing good and virtuous works.

A common sense of spirituality can be the underlying foundation for dialogue among religions as a way of transcending boundaries and avoiding conflicts and tensions. Every human being has a spiritual sense, a sense of the divine, which can be expressed in different ways according to different faith traditions. Even those who do not believe in a particular

religion have this sense since the spiritual or the sacred is fundamental to human experience. For example, Asians' shared spirituality is a natural conduit to interreligious dialogue.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, states that because all religions respect the dignity of the human person as the child of God, interreligious dialogue can "contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society."²⁶ He further adds that the goal of interreligious dialogue is "to establish friendship, peace, and fraternity, and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love."²⁷

Besides the sense of spirituality, another reason for interreligious dialogue is our shared responsibility for the common good. *Nostra Aetate* stresses the fundamental unity of the human race: "All men form but one community."²⁸ Moreover, we need to have a clear idea of "being together" or "living together" in mutual respect, harmony, and peace. We have the capacity to work together for the common good, which can come only through compassion and mercy and the ability to empathize with one another, especially those who are in need. Confucian political philosophy emphasizes the importance of society, especially the family, and subordinates individual interest to that of the group or collectivity, which facilitates the achievement of the common good. According to Confucius, personal development and cultivation happen in the context of human relationships, particularly in society. So, a fully developed person is one who maintains a good relationship with others and is a good member of society. Ritual and filial piety are the manners in which one should act and relate with others based on the attitude of benevolence. When Confucius was asked about benevolence, the Master answered: "It is to love all men."²⁹

There may be boundaries among Asian religions, but there are definitely common grounds by or through which these boundaries can be transcended or bridged. Since Asians share a recognition of the spiritual or divine and common values, these are already grounds for interreligious dialogue based on mutual respect and trust, openness, and solidarity. This could result in dialogue and cooperation where people of diverse religious orientations and traditions can express their views and exchange ideas with one another in a harmonious manner. A genuine dialogue, one where there is respect, trust, openness, compassion, and generosity, can be fostered among people of diverse religions. If there is a venue for personal

²⁶ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020), #271, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html (accessed September 12, 2024).

²⁷ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, #271.

²⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*, 1965, #1.

²⁹ Confucius, *The Analects (Lun Yu)*, trans. James Legge (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), Book XII, chap. XXII. 1.

and even philosophical reflections and sharing of experiences, then the tensions and conflicts that are sometimes brought by religious differences can be fleshed out in a gentle, accommodating, and respectful manner. Each religious and even cultural identity has always something to share for a common responsibility for peace and concern for the common good.

Interreligious Dialogue in the Philippines: A Case in Point

The Philippines, like other Asian countries, is religiously diversified. The social-religious landscape of the Filipinos is divided into three distinct identities defined by their own religious and socio-cultural traditions: Christians-Catholics and other Christian denominations, Muslims or the Moros, and the Indigenous Peoples. Christianity is the majority faith in the Philippines, making up approximately 90% of the population. Almost 80% of the population is Roman Catholic. The rest belong to various nationalized Christian religions and over 100 Protestant denominations. In addition to the Christian majority, there is a vigorous 6+% Muslim minority concentrated on the southern islands of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. The Filipinos are known for their deep spirituality and religiosity – religion and its practice matter to most Filipinos.

Long before Islam reached the archipelago and Spanish colonizers came, the natives of the archipelago, which would later be named Las Islas Filipinas or the Philippines in honor of the King of Spain, King Philip, already practiced religion. The pre-colonial Filipinos believed in a supreme being called *Bathala* or *Maykapal*. *Bathala* is the creator and ruler of the universe.³⁰ In the modern era, *Bathala* is also applied to lesser beings. It was after the Spanish missionaries came to the Philippines that *Bathala* or *Maykapal*, became known as a Christian God. Later, the term was replaced by the words *Panginoon* (Lord) and *Diyos* (God).³¹ Other belief systems, such as Hindu and Buddhist influences, also came in around the 9th to 10th century, brought in spontaneously and non-systematically by traders and migrants from China, India, and nearby countries.

Confucianism is influential in terms of social and familial relationships. The religious zeal of the Filipinos brings with it a diversity of religious beliefs. Furthermore, when we add folk religiosity into the mix, we find an interesting mix of diverse religious beliefs and practices. Their faith has nourished them and strengthened their spirits. There were many upheavals in the past, but if there is one thing that has remained constant and has served as a beacon of light, it is religious faith.

³⁰ Ramon Reyes, "Religious Experience in the Philippines: From Mythos Through Logos to Kairos," *Philippines Studies* 33 (1985): 203.

³¹ Reyes, "Religious Experience in the Philippines: From Mythos Through Logos to Kairos," 206.

During the pre-colonization period, the natives of the islands practiced animism as a form of religion. The Islamization period brought Islam to the islands, and the Moros, generally referred to as the Muslims or believers of Islam, practiced their religion. During the Spanish colonization, Catholicism was introduced, influencing relations with indigenous and Muslim populations. It paved the way for two additional distinct and separate dominant ethno-religious identities: the Muslims and the Christians. The Spanish colonization of the archipelago meant the Christianization of the Philippines and de-Islamization on the part of the Moros. During the American colonial period, Protestantism was introduced, adding diversity to religion. In the post-WWII period, the introduction of interfaith dialogue emerged, focusing on social issues.

The three religious identities mentioned above encounter and relate to one another in various social, political, and religious settings. The ethno-religious identity is considered a key factor that underlies their encounters and relations, whether in social, cultural, political, economic, or other aspects. These three ethno-religious identities are generally perceived as belonging to different races and create a kind of invisible wall that divides them. Colonization has led to the formation of separate identities and defined future relations between Muslims and Christians. The colonial policy of assimilation and integration has resulted in further marginalization of the Moros and the Indigenous Peoples. Under a government dominated by Christians, the Muslims and Indigenous Peoples feel marginalized and oppressed. Religious identities, particularly for the Muslim-Christian relation, take on political nationalistic underpinnings because of the conflicts between these two ethno-religious groups in the past.

To address the challenges, conflicts, and tensions brought about by religious diversity and differences, programs and initiatives have been undertaken in the Philippines. Such programs and initiatives to promote interreligious dialogue were implemented to reduce tension, build trust, and cross religious boundaries among or between ethno-religious identities.

One common practice is the interfaith prayer, which is usually done during interreligious activities. There are interfaith prayer gatherings or calls for interfaith prayer for peace and reconciliation and promoting unity. The following are a few examples. On February 2, 2023, the Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Schools Office of Campus Ministry, invited all Filipinos of every creed and denomination to join in praying for the country in commemoration of the Day for the Synchronized National Interfaith Prayer for Peace and Reconciliation.³² On December 20, 2024, the

³² Ateneo de Manila University, "Synchronized National Interfaith Prayer for Peace and Reconciliation, February 2, 2023," <https://www.ateneo.edu/news/2023/02/02/synchronized-national-interfaith-prayer-peace-reconciliation> (accessed February 25, 2025).

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), during the commemoration of its 89th Anniversary, held an interfaith prayer service followed by a flag-raising ceremony. The solemn service, which brought together leaders of various faiths to offer prayers for the AFP's continued strength, the safety of its personnel, and the peace and security of the nation, was attended by AFP personnel, partners, and stakeholders, highlighted the institution's commitment to unity, inclusivity, and spiritual resilience. It served as a prelude for the anniversary activities, which highlighted the AFP's accomplishment of its mission of defending the country and ensuring peace and stability.³³ The Interfaith Network of the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines joined with the National Council of Churches in the Philippines to call for an international interfaith day of prayer for a Just Peace in the Philippines on September 1, 2024. This day of prayer coincided with the commemoration of the signing of the Hague Joint Declaration of 1992, an important agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines that set the purpose of peace talks to achieve a peace that is just and lasting in the Philippines.³⁴

Dialogue workshops are organized and focused on social issues, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding. One particular example is the program of the Initiative for International Dialogue (IID), a regional advocacy institution doing policy, campaigns, and solidarity work to advocate for people-to-people solidarity through its peacebuilding and thematic work in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. Its peace process program aims to highlight various civil society engagement and advocacy initiatives on both formal and community-based peace processes happening in the Philippines as well as those in the region.³⁵ On May 8-9, 2024, the IID, with the support of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), conducted two sessions of "Training on Transitional Justice and Reconciliation." The training was designed to equip participants with essential knowledge and skills in navigating the complex landscape of transitional justice and reconciliation, with a specific focus on the Bangsamoro context. Through engaging sessions, participants gained a deep understanding of key concepts such as Transitional Justice and Reconciliation, Human Security, Human Rights, and International Human Rights

³³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "AFP Marks 89th Anniversary with Interfaith Prayer Service and Flag Raising Ceremony, December 20, 2024," <https://www.afp.mil.ph/news/afp-marks-89th-anniversary-with-interfaith-prayer-service-and-flag-raising-ceremony> (accessed February 25, 2025).

³⁴ International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, "International Interfaith Day of Prayer for Just Peace in the Philippines, September 1, 2024" <https://ichrp.net/dayofprayer/> (accessed February 25, 2025).

³⁵ Initiatives for International Dialogue, "What we Do, 2024" <https://iidnet.org/what-we-do/> (accessed February 25, 2025).

Law. These trainings brought together stakeholders from diverse sectors, including CSO representatives, community leaders, security personnel, government representatives, members of the academe, and religious leaders.³⁶

Joint community service projects are planned for collaborative initiatives for social development. One good example is the Madaris Volunteer Program, a joint initiative of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines and the Ateneo de Davao University to promote interreligious and intrareligious dialogue. In the southern Philippines, where the majority of the population is Muslim, the Ateneo, a Catholic university run by the Jesuits, has been promoting dialogue and social peace through education for some years. The Madaris, traditional Islamic schools that teach Arabic, the Koran, and Islamic principles, the Office of the Presidential Adviser for Peace, Reconciliation and Unity, and the National Association for Bangsamoro Education support the Jesuit initiative in collaboration with the regional government of Mindanao. According to Fr. Joel E. Tabora, SJ, the goal was to support and promote education as it is essential to advance the culture of respect between denominations, common well-being, and peace.³⁷

Peacebuilding projects or initiatives are organized and aimed at addressing conflicts. One example of this is the *Silsilah* Movement (the Arabic word *silsilah* (سلسلة) means “chain,” “link,” or “connection”). The *Silsilah* is a movement for dialogue founded in Mindanao by Fr. Sebastiano D’Ambra, PIME, with the hope of improving and developing Muslim-Christian relations in the southern Philippines in a harmonious way. It was a response after the Zamboanga crisis (Zamboanga is a city in Mindanao in southern Philippines), brought about by the fighting between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and a faction of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which resulted in 38 people killed during the 21-day siege that included 20 soldiers, five policemen, and 13 civilians. That siege caused so much pain, hatred, and death, and many still live in fear, according to the *Silsilah* movement. But there are also stories of people who talk about their experience of good relations between Christians and Muslims. *Silsilah* says: “There is also great affection among Muslims and Christians in Zamboanga. We can live together in peace if we love each other and accept the differences in our faiths and cultures. God has planted in us all the same seed of love. We are brothers and sisters, with

³⁶ Initiatives for International Dialogue, “Training on Transitional Justice & Reconciliation, May 11, 2024,” <https://iidnet.org/training-on-transitional-justice-reconciliation/> (accessed February 25, 2025).

³⁷ Santosh Digal, “Mindanao: Jesuits promote peace and interreligious dialogue through education,” *PIME Asia News*, July 20, 2023, <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Mindanao%3A-Jesuits-promote-peace-and-interreligious-dialogue-through-education-58836.html> (accessed February 25, 2025).

the same spiritual desire in life. Desire is also a dream: to live in harmony, solidarity, and peace as part of the same human family. Together, we can transform Zamboanga into a land of hope.” The movement said that “the creation of lasting peace in Mindanao will be a good thing for all, Muslims and Christians.”³⁸

At the forefront of these interreligious dialogue initiatives are various religious groups and institutions, such as the Catholic Bishops Conference (CBCP), which engages in interfaith dialogue. In preparation for the celebration of the five hundred years of Christianity in the Philippines in 2021-2022, the CBCP wanted the Church to focus its attention on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue throughout 2020. Hence, it declared that the Church would celebrate 2020 as the Year of Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue. It was a time to look back and seek forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing for the wounds that resulted from the absence of tolerance and dialogue.³⁹

Other religious groups or churches that are active in promoting interreligious dialogues are the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC), which promotes unity among Evangelical churches; the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) – uniting mainline Protestant churches; Islamic Da’wah Council of the Philippines (IDCP) – representing Muslim interests; the Philippine Interfaith Network (PIN) – fostering dialogue among diverse faiths; The Bishop-Ulama Conference (BUC), now known as Mindanao Religious Leaders Conference (MiR-LeC), works to initiate dialogue aimed at improving understanding between Muslims and Christians.

Conclusion

Religious diversity can cause boundaries, walls, and even tensions and conflicts. History has shown that in Asia, such religious diversity has been the cause of some tensions and even violent confrontations. However, there is hope and optimism amidst this situation because the boundaries or even walls can be transcended and crossed through Asian shared spirituality and the spirit of dialogue. Focusing on shared values and common spiritual grounds, coupled with a genuine interreligious dialogue based on mutual respect, openness, trust, solidarity, and generosity, can help us transcend the seeming boundary or demarcation of religions in

³⁸ Agenzia Fides, “From the crisis of Zamboanga, a hope for Muslim-Christian relations” (Friday, September 11, 2015), https://www.fides.org/en/news/38452-ASIA_PHILIPPINES_From_the_crisis_of_Zamboanga_a_hope_for_Muslim_Christian_relations (accessed February 25, 2025).

³⁹ Amado Picardal, “2020: The Year of Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue,” *CBCP News*, 2019, <https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/2020-the-year-of-ecumenical-and-interreligious-dialogue/> (accessed February 25, 2025).

Asia. The Philippine case is a good example. Moreover, while a dialogue can happen at the personal, communal, academic or scholarly, and global levels, a scholarly and global exchange could be a personal encounter among the scholars, making the dialogue not just on the intellectual but also on the personal level. Thus, academic or scholarly encounters will ultimately result in a more profound understanding of each other's cultural and religious identities and beliefs and will also enable academics and scholars to transcend the boundaries of their respective religions. At the communal level, this is already happening in many parts of the world. My hope is that this will happen on the global level, especially in areas of conflict, tension, and violence – in Ukraine, Palestine, and other parts of the world where there is tension and conflict.

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The Significance of Cross-Cultural Communication in Kazakhstan's Search for a Modern National Identity Model

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Introduction

This study examines the transformation of Kazakhstan's modern national identity under the influence of cross-cultural communication, focusing on the evolving interpretations of justice in Kazakhstani public consciousness. The choice of the category of justice is not accidental, as one of the key ideological concepts of the country's development today is the idea of a "Just Kazakhstan," proposed by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and broadly supported by a significant number of Kazakhstanis. The value of justice is recognized by most of the population due to various internal and external factors. First and foremost, the formation of a just society – one that has "departed" from an unjust state – can be interpreted through an analogy with the Islamic transition from Dar al-Harb to Dar al-Islam.¹ The establishment of such a just society has historically served as a fundamental ontological and historical basis for the emergence of the Kazakh nation over centuries. The very term Qazaq (қазақ) means "free, independent," a people striving for justice. This was first documented in the treatise *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* by the medieval historian Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat in 1543-1546,² describing the events of 1456-1466, the period of the formation of the Kazakh Khanate, when certain nomadic tribes, calling themselves Kazakhs, established an independent state.

Secondly, it is important to recognize that Kazakh nomads, throughout the development of their independent statehood and corresponding national identity, experienced diverse civilizational shifts shaped by cross-cultural communication, which also influenced their perception of justice. This study will touch upon certain aspects of how justice has been interpreted at the intersection of Eastern and Western values that also influences the understanding of justice in modern Kazakh society.

Historically, Kazakhstan has always been situated in an area of intense cross-cultural contact between various civilizations, at the geo-

¹ Dar al-Islam (Arabic: دار الإسلام) refers to territories where Islamic law prevails and where Muslims hold political dominance. Its opposite is Dar al-Kufr (the land of unbelief) or Dar al-Harb (the land of war).

² M.M.H. Dughlat, *The Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, trans. E. Denison Ross (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1895).

graphical center of Eurasia, to which Mackinder famously referred as the “Heartland.”³ For instance, Kazakhstan has been significantly influenced by the value systems of Russia, China, and the broader Muslim world. Today, the influence of the West is undoubtedly strong in shaping Kazakhstan’s contemporary model of political, economic, and social modernization. This also extends to the interpretation of justice and the concept of a just society. Currently, Kazakhstanis are forming a social model that reflects the nation’s aspiration for an internal value-based harmony while simultaneously responding to external cultural influences from various civilizational worlds.

In this regard, it is worth noting that one of the key characteristics of the value system of Kazakh nomads – the predecessors of Kazakhstan’s modern statehood and culture – was their ability to integrate diverse vectors of cultural development, pragmatically incorporating values from different traditions and generating flexible formats of synergy. This adaptability has allowed Kazakhstan, even in the modern era, to create a highly resilient social value system capable of easily assimilating and adapting various ideological and axiological perspectives. Practically speaking, Kazakhstan exists at the crossroads of contemporary cultural flows. In the everyday culture of modern Kazakhs, one can easily identify elements of a wide range of value systems, which are perceived as inherently their own, despite the conscious recognition of their external origins, as long as they contribute to a prosperous and comfortable life here and now.

In this context, it is crucial to interpret how the meaning of justice evolves through the prism of diverse cross-cultural interactions and how its ideological connotations shift depending on different social perspectives, political structures, and economic models.

The Concept of Justice from a Social-Philosophical Perspective

When discussing the phenomenon of justice from a socio-philosophical perspective, it is important to note that justice primarily represents an essential qualitative state of society – a certain social ideal of relations between individuals, as well as the alignment of people’s expectations with governmental policies that either fulfill or disappoint their hopes for a prosperous life. Thus, a crucial factor is the nature of the socio-political structure and the spiritual-religious versus atheistic orientation of society (for example, during the Soviet period of state atheism among the peoples of the USSR), as well as the value-based choice of an independent national identity in the process of sovereignty-building, where the concept

³ H. Mackinder, *The Geographical Pivot of History*, trans. V. Zhelninov (Moscow: AST, 2021).

of justice is central. Justice, in this sense, reflects the proportionality of social relations, the collective unconscious perception of what is appropriate, and people's behavior and attitudes toward each other. As a political concept justice encapsulates the people's expectations from the government and their demand for dignified decision-making to ensure a good life – both from the ruling authorities and through their own participation in matters of societal importance. It carries a strong cultural-historical connotation as it emerges through ethnic cultural genesis, shaped by active socio-cultural communication within a specific anthropomorphic environment. Justice also holds deep ethical and philosophical significance as it forms the core of proper individual behavior, corresponding to the social ideals of a particular era and culture. The peculiarities of the cultural-economic environment determine how justice is interpreted.

For example, the nomadic way of life, which dynamically involves adapting to natural conditions, fosters a flexible worldview, an ability to shift between faith symbols, and socially appropriate behavior. This differs from the concept of justice introduced by settled cultures. The military-hierarchical leadership structure of nomadic political systems was based not only on the constant demonstration of a leader's right to power through force but also on ethical and ancestral legitimacy, often linked to lineage and destiny. This was particularly evident in the case of the descendants of Genghis Khan, the so-called "white bone" (aristocracy of the steppe), whose rule was accepted as a just and natural system of social organization.

The first condition that determined the rightful interpretation and application of the principle of justice was noble lineage, a key concept in Kazakh nomadic tradition, known as *тектілік* (noble ancestry). Kazakh nomadic genealogy was built upon the knowledge of the seven generations – *жері ара* – a system that prohibited marriage within this kinship range. This model not only prevented inbreeding but also maintained an orderly inter-clan hierarchy, structured into tribal unions called *jüz* (the Senior, Middle, and Junior Hordes). Despite their division into *jüz*, all Kazakhs were part of a unified nation, ruled during the khanate period by direct descendants of Genghis Khan, specifically his eldest son, Jochi. This tribal structure was considered lawful and, therefore, just until the abolition of the khanate system when Kazakh tribes fell under the protectorate of the Russian Empire.

Colonization led not only to the dismantling of the traditional Kazakh way of life and socio-political structures but also to the disruption of their ethical code and the concept of a just social order. The destruction of the nomadic lifestyle and political organization also fundamentally altered the worldview of the nomads, their symbols of faith, and their ideals of proper and just behavior. As previously mentioned, within the military-nomadic

hierarchy, the leader's position was central to the "role model" of just governance, reflecting a socially accepted stereotype of behavior. Steppe virtues such as boldness, honesty, and directness – often with an uncompromising approach – shaped the ideal behavior of a leader who knew no fear and followed only the "straight path" in securing the safety and prosperity of his clan and tribe. A leader who met these ethical criteria was considered just and was recognized as a true public leader.

Ancient Turkic epitaphs document the fundamental duty of a ruler-khagan: "The khagan's duty is to ensure the well-being and dignity of his people" (inscription in honor of Tonyukuk). Justice is not only a political concept tied to the phenomenon of *bilik* (rule) but also a socio-ethical and legal norm. This is evident in the expectation of a fair and rightful judicial decision that aligns with the customary steppe law. A central figure in this process, besides the leader responsible for delivering just decisions, was the *bi* – a sage who embodied the highest form of justice. The *bi* played a key role in khan's councils, often voicing principled opinions, sometimes even in opposition to the ruler. With the spread of Islam in the region, this figure was gradually replaced by the imam or qadi, who based their rulings on Islamic law. Later, during the period of Russian colonization, this role was assumed by the newly appointed volost leader – a representative of the colonial administration, whose primary function was to enforce the interests of the imperial center.

However, in the Soviet era, the role of justice enforcer shifted to the party official – an ideologically driven bureaucrat endowed with power. In modern postcolonial discourse, despite the transition away from the dominance of a single Communist Party, bureaucratic rule has largely retained its position and privileges, adapting only partially to the rhetoric of the market economy. The current discourse on the "deep state" – a bureaucratic structure that continues to dominate governance – is quite familiar to Kazakhstanis.

This is why, when examining the idea of justice in the context of Kazakh ethnogenesis, it is essential to pay close attention to how its meaning has evolved through intercultural communication over time. From a Kazakh's perspective, discrepancies or convergences in cultural matrices that define an action or social behavior as just or unjust are not only political issues – although that is the primary professional focus of the Kazakhstanis. They are particularly interested in how a nation's value foundation is shaped and how a linguistically diverse, ideologically heterogeneous, politically and culturally pluralistic national social field integrates as a cohesive entity and a multifaceted structure. Cross-cultural communication can serve both as an integrating and a divisive force in different contexts.

In the philosophical and poetic tradition of the Great Steppe, the idea of justice was deeply embedded in the people's yearning for social

harmony throughout different stages of national history. A striking example is the Epoch of Sorrow (*Zar Zaman*), when poets and storytellers (*akyns*) of that period lamented in their works the “tragic separation from the past era of heroic nomadic triumph” and their longing for lost social harmony. In Kazakh poetic tradition, the “Golden Age of the Nomads” is depicted as a time of prosperity, justice, and human dignity, a period described as “when birds nested on the backs of sheep” (*қой үстінде бозторғай жұмыртқалаған кез*). The Epoch of Sorrow⁴ in Kazakhstan’s political history is also associated with the Dzungar invasions and the geopolitical entrapment of the Kazakhs in the struggle between the Russian Empire and Qing China. This is why it is crucial to examine the influence of Russian, Chinese, and Muslim vectors of cross-cultural communication, as they have significantly shaped the cultural and value-based self-identification of the Kazakh people.

Even after Kazakhstan gained sovereignty in the post-Soviet era, the Kazakh people remain at a crossroads of cross-cultural communication vectors, experiencing significant influences from both global powers – Russia and China – as well as from the Muslim world, which many in the country perceive as a “spiritual homeland” shaping Kazakh cultural identity. Russia, driven by Putin’s ideology of “Russia rising from its knees” and its ambition to reassert dominance over former imperial territories, employs an aggressive and intrusive cultural policy, particularly through hybrid informational and ideological influence. In contrast, China’s growing influence – as an economic and technological powerhouse – operates in a more subtle but highly effective manner. Beijing expands its sphere of influence through soft power instruments such as unconditional investments, the restructuring of post-Soviet Central Asia’s information-technology landscape, and the development of transport and logistics corridors through Kazakhstan, connecting China to the wealthy markets of Europe and the Middle East. Despite the sharp global rivalry between China and the United States, Kazakhstan remains a priority and “model” partner for Beijing, serving as a key strategic outpost in China’s continental foreign policy track.

These external influences contribute to significant ideological transformations within Kazakh society. For instance, there is an intensified political discourse around historical justice, particularly in Kazakhstan’s relationship with Russia. This debate is framed within the postcolonial paradigm, reflecting the ongoing reassessment of the former colonial power’s role and its shared “historical fate” with Kazakhstan.

⁴ *Zar Zaman*, or *The Times of Hardship*, refers to the period when the Russian imperial government abolished the Kazakh Khanate in the 19th century, following the introduction of the 1867-1868 Regulations on the Administration of Kazakhs, which established a new colonial order.

For instance, Russian propaganda frequently emphasizes the “Great Victory” in World War II as a collective triumph of the Soviet peoples – while omitting the immense suffering inflicted on Kazakhs by the Soviet social experiment. The forced sedentarization, artificial famine (Holodomor), and suppression of traditional Kazakh social structures led to the near-eradication of the nomadic way of life and the imposition of a political regime that fundamentally altered the nation’s cultural code. This transformation affected Kazakhs’ perception of justice, disrupting the organic development of social relations based on traditional hierarchies, where individuals and tribal communities inherently understood their rightful place within the social structure.

While social media discussions frequently debate alternative models of evolutionary modernization that could have been pursued in Kazakhstan, history, as the saying goes, does not operate in the subjunctive. What happened, happened. Today, Kazakh society is fragmented along various cultural and ideological lines, necessitating a new “nation-building process” – primarily in the socio-cultural realm. In this context, the growing role of the Chinese model and the “Muslim project” remains to be fully understood. The Chinese model of social engineering, based on collective, community-oriented social ties within the broader Asian cultural-civilizational paradigm, closely aligns with Kazakh tribal consciousness and behavior. This includes the perception of justice as something “moderated” by the state, reinforcing a paternalistic political culture where many Kazakhs place their hopes in a just government. The preference for communal values, a redistribution-oriented approach to property, and expectations of state-led economic equality are deeply embedded in public consciousness.

A significant portion of Kazakhstan’s population views China’s modernization model positively, nostalgically believing that the Soviet Union could have adopted a similar approach – harmonizing a market economy with a socially responsible state. China’s contemporary technological and modernization trajectory is increasingly becoming a new “role model” for Kazakhstan’s social engineering efforts.

At the same time, many Kazakhs see the preservation of their ethnic and cultural identity through adherence to Muslim traditions and the Islamic model of social justice. This trend is evident in the growing integration of religious norms into secular life: increased observance of Islamic holidays, adoption of Islamic attire, especially among younger generations, religious discourse in social media promoting specific social behaviors, the rise of Islamic banking and ethical finance models, the reinforcement of traditional Muslim customs in weddings, funerals, and other social rituals. For many, these elements represent a restoration of social justice within the framework of Muslim identity.

According to a sociological survey conducted by the Kazakhstan Institute of Public Development in October 2024, justice remains the most significant and sought-after value among Kazakhstan's population, with 56.6% of respondents identifying it as a core principle. Their specific perceptions of justice are as follows:

- (1) Equality of all citizens before the law (71.8%)
- (2) Accessibility and quality of healthcare (43.2%)
- (3) Fair wages for all types of labor (42.9%)
- (4) Employment opportunities for all able-bodied citizens (42.2%)
- (5) Affordable and high-quality education at all levels (35.1%)
- (6) Strong social support for vulnerable groups (24.8%)
- (7) Income distribution based on individual contributions to economic development (24.5%)
- (8) Objective and impartial judicial processes (17.8%)
- (9) Effective protection of rights and freedoms by law enforcement agencies (15.4%)

These results indicate that Kazakhstanis primarily perceive justice in legal and social terms. At the same time, the lower levels of trust in the judiciary and law enforcement suggest widespread skepticism toward these institutions.⁵

The process of cultural communication shaping Kazakhstan's social capital reveals various coexisting trends, images, and formats within national identity. While diverse ethnic and cultural substrates interact within a unified national framework, there is no strong indication that the country's current multicultural trajectory will shift drastically in any single direction. Given the state's vigilance in maintaining cultural balance and social stability, Kazakhstan is likely to continue navigating between multiple influences – balancing Russian, Chinese, and Muslim factors – while preserving its unique identity.

Kazakhstan in the Context of Russian Cultural Discourse

For a significant period, Kazakhstan remained under Russian protectorate, which profoundly shaped its worldview and way of life. The country emerged as a sovereign modern state within the framework of intensive socio-economic, political, and cultural interactions with Russia. Over nearly three centuries, Kazakhs have endured and overcome the colonial paradigm imposed by both the Russian Empire and the Soviet state. Therefore, postcolonial studies serve as a crucial methodological

⁵ "National Values: A Strategic Overview," <https://ru.kipd.kz/article/analiticheskiy-doklad-na-temu-obcschenatsionalnye-tsennosti-obzor-strategicheskikh-orientirov>.

tool for analyzing the process of national self-identification among contemporary Kazakhs. Among the most well-known works on post-colonialism are Edward Said's *Orientalism*,⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's studies,⁷ as well as works by Stuart Hall,⁸ Frantz Fanon,⁹ and Homi Bhabha.¹⁰ In Kazakhstan, relevant research includes Ainas Mustoyapova's *Decolonization of Kazakhstan*, Zemfira Erzhan's *Postcolonial Theory and Kazakhstan's Auto-Colonization Practices*, and Alima Bisenova's *Metropolitan Pressure and the Quiet Nationalism of Academic Practices*, among others. These works critically assess various periods of national history, highlighting the radical transformation of values and the way of life of Kazakh nomads. They analyze the process of forced sedentarization and the transition to a new socio-economic order, which not only led to profound mental shifts but also resulted in the deaths of millions of people.

In her research, Ainas Mustoyapova emphasizes the inhumane consequences of Russian colonialism – its oppression and subjugation of the Kazakh people – which ultimately led to the erosion of the nation's ethical code, behavioral patterns, values, and aspirations. In practice, the Kazakh people lost much of their ethnocultural uniqueness: their traditional symbols of faith and hope were erased, and the natural, evolutionary course of nomadic history was disrupted. As a result, Kazakhstan became a testing ground for large-scale social experiments. The Soviet period is viewed as an era of neocolonialism that, alongside modernization, brought the loss of Kazakh nomadic cultural identity. The population adopted new habits and behavioral stereotypes that hindered the full expression of their cultural potential, language, spiritual traditions, and faith. Soviet state atheism, aggressively imposed by the regime, eradicated belief in God and universal ethical norms, replacing them with the so-called Communist Morality Code. The artificial famine (Holodomor) and political repressions of the 1930s claimed millions of lives, while reckless industrialization and collectivization depleted the natural habitat of free nomads.

⁶ E.W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, trans. A.V. Govorunov (St. Petersburg: Vladimir Dal, 2012); Idem, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, trans. A.V. Govorunov (St. Petersburg: Russian Mir, 2016).

⁷ G.C. Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1987); Idem, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Idem, *Nationalism and the Imagination* (London: Seagull Books, 2010); Idem, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, trans. A.V. Govorunov (Moscow: V-A-C Press, 2022).

⁸ Stuart Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996).

⁹ Frantz Fanon, *On Violence* (Excerpts from *Anthology of Contemporary Anarchism and Left Radicalism*, vol. 2) (Moscow: Ultraculture, 2003).

¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, F. Daftari, and O. Pamuk, *Without Boundary* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006).

To strengthen Soviet military capabilities, the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site was established in eastern Kazakhstan, where decades of nuclear tests devastated the region's ecology. The Baikonur Cosmodrome in central Kazakhstan, along with numerous military testing grounds, severely damaged the land, rendering vast areas uninhabitable. As a result, many Kazakhs were forced to leave their ancestral lands, with millions ending up in neighboring countries under unfamiliar cultural and political conditions, often subject to strict authoritarian regimes.¹¹

One particularly significant aspect of Russian influence is its impact on how Kazakhs interpret Western values and the concept of justice. Russia, at different stages of its history, has positioned itself both as a Western, European power and as an anti-Western force. This duality has shaped Kazakhstani perceptions of the West in the post-Soviet era. This dynamic remains highly relevant today, especially amid the unprecedented confrontation between the West, Europe, and the Russian Federation. Kazakhstan, as a historically and culturally intertwined neighbor of Russia, continues to navigate its position in this geopolitical landscape, assessing the legacy of Russian influence while shaping its own sovereign identity.

The Great Steppe of Central Eurasia, the geographical homeland of the Kazakh people, was at the heart of the Axial Age, a concept introduced by Karl Jaspers.¹² This era fundamentally shaped the value frameworks of the modern civilized world, intertwining diverse socio-cultural development models – including the concept of justice. The history of our continent has been marked by both direct and complementary interactions, as well as intense confrontations between European and Asian ethno-cultural elements. These interactions have given rise to a Eurasian mentality characterized by deep contradictions: on the one hand, a relentless pursuit of boundless freedom and justice; on the other, extreme despotism, blind obedience to rulers, and a resigned acceptance of injustice as a divine decree. This duality fostered a culture of divided consciousness and overlapping value priorities, yet it also spurred a high degree of passionarity (a term coined by Lev Gumilev).¹³ This passionarity has manifested in both an active quest for self-knowledge and a determined drive to realize the Kazakh nation's energetic social potential. Kazakhs have demonstrated an ability to integrate divergent civilizations of East and West – whether through the conquest campaigns of nomadic hordes or the transmission of philosophical wisdom from Central Asian thinkers. These scholars contributed significantly to both Eastern and Western intellectual

¹¹ G. Layas, *The Great Exodus of the Kazakhs*, trans. G. Layas (Almaty: AmalBooks, 2022).

¹² Karl Jaspers, *The Meaning and Purpose of History* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991).

¹³ Lev N. Gumilev, *Ethnosphere: The History of People and the History of Nature* (Moscow: Ekopros, 1993).

traditions, particularly in medicine, astronomy, and algebra during the Islamic medieval period.

Russian Westernization, which was pursued during the reign of Peter the Great and later through Lenin's Bolshevik experiment in Soviet Russia, had a complex impact on how the West was perceived by inorodtsy (non-Russian indigenous peoples), including the Kazakhs. Western liberal social and political perspectives played a crucial role at certain points in Kazakh history, particularly in the nation's aspirations to establish an independent statehood based on its own vision of a just society. One of the most striking examples of this search for a modern national identity was the emergence of the Alash and Turkestan autonomies at the turn of the 20th century. The political programs of these sovereign entities – later dismantled by Soviet Russia – clearly reflected elements of Western liberal democracy, the commitment to human rights, and the pursuit of a political system based on social justice and equality.¹⁴

However, under Soviet rule, Kazakhstan was compelled to adopt the ideological template of the Soviet anti-Western discourse, which distorted the plurality of Western political-philosophical paradigms of justice. The Soviet Union's highly ideological political thought severely restricted the study of Western political philosophy, at best offering only a critical and evaluative perspective on the ways in which social justice was pursued in Western societies. Even Karl Marx's ideas were refracted through a biased Soviet interpretation, prioritizing economic base over ideological superstructure. According to this view, the highest stage of socio-economic development was the communist system, where collective ownership of property was the only means of achieving justice. However, the forced collectivization of property among Kazakh nomads in the 1930s led to one of the darkest chapters in Kazakhstan's history – the catastrophic famine (Holodomor) that claimed the lives of nearly a third of the Kazakh population. This historical experience underscores the devastating consequences of ideological experiments that disregarded the organic evolution of social justice principles within the unique cultural and economic realities of the Kazakh people.

Russia's current departure from Western civilizational values presents a dual connotation for Kazakhstan. On the one hand, it reinforces an unacceptable colonial discourse – one that denies liberal freedoms to the former colonies of the Soviet Russian Empire. On the other, the anti-globalist narrative, which seeks national self-affirmation for Russians by rejecting the liberal and neoliberal frameworks imposed by the West, is somewhat understandable. At the same time, contemporary Russia is also perceived as a potential threat – a vengeful force against nations that once

¹⁴ D. Amanzholova, *Kazakh Autonomism and Russia: The History of the Alash Movement* (Moscow: Rossiia Molodiia, 1994).

belonged to the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union, particularly those seeking to step beyond the confines of the so-called *Russkiy Mir* ("Russian World") in search of their own unknown homeland (a term coined by Merab Mamardashvili).

Given these complexities, Kazakhstan must carefully navigate its relationship with Russia. Instead of ought antagonism, it is perhaps more appropriate to regard today's Russia as the "sick man of Eurasia" – a nation in need of healing and care rather than confrontation. This perspective explains the political balancing act in Kazakhstan's relations with Putin's Russia, as engagement with the current regime remains an unavoidable discourse in bilateral interactions. However, Kazakhstan clearly distinguishes Putinism from Russia itself and its broader cultural tradition. Rejecting the political ideology of the Kremlin does not equate to rejecting the significance of Russian culture for Kazakhs.

Is Kazakhstan ready to fully disengage from its historically complex relationship with Russia? And if so, in what manner? These questions demand a thorough reassessment of nearly 300 years of intensive interaction, particularly the past three decades since Kazakhstan gained modern sovereignty. Yet, before Kazakhstan can forge a fully sovereign national identity, it must undergo a meticulous process of decolonial deconstruction of its inherited value system. This is a challenging and precarious endeavor – one that requires redefining the nation's identity while acknowledging historical realities. The contemporary divergence between Russia and the West, once perceived as a unified value system, is deeply unsettling for Kazakh national consciousness. This is because much of Kazakhstan's exposure to global intellectual and cultural heritage – especially Western philosophy and literature – came through Russia and the Russian language. The works of brilliant Russian writers, poets, and philosophers played a vital role in shaping Kazakhstan's intellectual landscape.

Furthermore, Kazakhstan's history within the Soviet Union left an indelible mark – both in terms of achievements and profound tragedies. The USSR's ideological framework homogenized the values, ideals, and aspirations of its member nations. Today, Kazakhstan's sovereignty process is marked by gradual decolonization, derussification, and the formation of a new national identity model. This model is increasingly built upon the reconstruction of an authentic Kazakh worldview and its modernization into a contemporary, viable form.

The Role of Islam in Kazakhstan's National Identity Formation

Islam has been one of the most influential value systems shaping Kazakhstan's national worldview. The integration of Islam into Kazakh society occurred in multiple waves from diverse sources, and this process

continues today. Historically, the Great Steppe saw the emergence of distinct Islamic doctrines, most notably the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam and Yassawi Sufism. The Kazakh theological tradition has faced significant challenges, particularly due to political, economic, and social transformations during Russian colonial rule and the atheistic policies of the Soviet Union. These external forces profoundly distorted both the religious beliefs of Kazakhs and the broader value system of the population. Many scholars argue that Kazakh worldview remains syncretic – a fusion of various ideological influences, including religious doctrines and the pragmatic mindset of nomads.

With the advent of independence, Kazakhstan embraced freedom of religion, offering individuals the liberty to choose their religious beliefs. The country has also established conditions for the peaceful coexistence of various religious and ethnocultural groups. However, tensions remain regarding the model of Islam that Kazakh Muslims should follow. Kazakhstan faces substantial pressure from transnational Islamic communities (ummah) abroad, particularly from Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Egypt. Many of these actors, disillusioned by the West's role in global geopolitics, seek to influence the religious landscape of Kazakhstan.

This external pressure manifests in the infiltration of radical jihadist ideologies into Kazakh society – posing a serious risk to social stability and the country's secular trajectory. As a result, the role of Islam in shaping Kazakhstan's modern national identity is highly complex and cannot be assessed in absolute terms.

Kazakhstan's evolving national ideology involves both secularization and the reemergence of Islam – sometimes in highly traditionalist forms. This religious resurgence is driven both internally and externally, with some movements seeking to re-Islamize Kazakh society in ways that contradict its secular state model.

In certain religious circles, an alternative historical worldview is emerging – one that interprets global civilization through an Islamic lens. This perspective promotes social justice as a divine principle – arguing that justice is best achieved through the unity of the Muslim ummah under principles of collective responsibility and moral solidarity. This framework often stands in direct opposition to Western concepts of individualism and liberal freedoms, particularly regarding gender equality and women's rights. While this ideological conflict remains largely latent within Kazakh society, there is a real risk of social fragmentation. If the state fails to maintain effective governance and uphold secular education, the harmonious balance between secular and religious values could be disrupted.

Interestingly, modern information technologies and artificial intelligence are increasingly being utilized by radical Islamist movements.

These digital tools allow extremists to embed their ideological narratives into the consciousness of believers – amplifying their influence within Kazakh society. Despite these challenges, Kazakhstan's leadership remains committed to religious tolerance, freedom of belief, and a democratic model of governance. The state is not only nominally secular but actively works to uphold the principle of separation of religion from politics while fostering interfaith harmony. Kazakhstan continues to position itself as a secular nation – not merely as a formal declaration but as a practical policy objective. The challenge lies in maintaining this delicate balance amidst competing influences from both the secular and Islamic spheres.

Influence and Prospects of China's Expanding Sphere in Kazakhstan

For centuries, China has played a significant role in shaping the political and cultural landscape of the Great Steppe. The formation of the Kazakh nomadic state over 500 years ago was accompanied by intense interactions with the Chinese world. Periods of military conflict alternated with expanding trade and spiritual exchanges, creating a shared Eurasian civilizational space with distinct value priorities aligned with the economic way of life of its people. Nomadic empires of Asia, in turn, influenced China's own civilizational structure, as exemplified by the Yuan and Qing dynasties, which embodied the dominance of nomadic social engineering narratives. There were also periods of isolation, best symbolized by the Great Wall of China, which physically and symbolically separated the Great Steppe from Chinese influence.

In modern history, China remained largely detached from global civilizational development until the late 20th and early 21st centuries when it gradually opened up to the world, including Kazakhstan. This period coincided with Kazakhstan's post-Soviet sovereignty and China's rapid economic modernization, which catapulted Beijing to the forefront of global economic and technological leadership. China's influence now extends far beyond its borders, expanding the Sinosphere not only through financial investments but also through ideas, concepts, technologies, and lifestyle models. The dynamic growth of Kazakh-Chinese relations and the open borders facilitating social exchanges between the two nations have created an increasingly complex value structure of interactions – ranging from Sinophobia to full acceptance of a China-centric global model, underpinned by Beijing's economic expansion.

The growing presence of China in Kazakhstan is not merely an economic phenomenon – it is also reshaping national identity. Chinese labor and trade ethics are gradually influencing Kazakh traditions and values. More broadly, Kazakhstan and other border states must consider

the long-term implications of adapting to China's model of globalization, officially framed in Beijing's ideology as the "Community of a Shared Future for Mankind." However, Kazakhstan's historical "cultural immunity" allows for selective adaptation of foreign influences, including those from China. While Central and Southeast Asia provide clear examples of the Sinicization of social spaces, Kazakhstan remains cautious in its approach.

Despite extensive trade and diplomatic ties, Sinophobia remains a persistent undercurrent in Kazakh society. The perception of China as an "other" – not necessarily hostile, but distinctly different – persists, particularly at the societal level. This apprehension is largely tied to China's economic expansion, which has both positive and negative consequences.

On the one hand, China's economic success – marked by infrastructure modernization, the promotion of entrepreneurial culture, and responsible state governance – is viewed favorably by many in Kazakhstan. In contrast to Western-led globalization, which faces growing resistance in the Global South, China's development model has gained appeal. On the other hand, China's policies of social unification and its efforts to erase cultural distinctions – particularly its treatment of non-Han ethnic minorities and Muslim communities – trigger negative reactions in Central Asian republics, including Kazakhstan. The massive population of China and the assertive promotion of its cultural and economic values create a complex and often contradictory backdrop for the perception of Chinese influence in Kazakhstan's cultural identity discourse.

Conclusion

The competition between different models of global development has not bypassed Central Asia – especially Kazakhstan, which maintains an open economic model and extensive international engagement. However, Kazakhstan's modern sovereignty was built upon constitutional principles and values rooted in the West, such as political pluralism and democratic governance, the separation of powers and institutional checks and balances, the adoption of Western educational standards, including the Bologna Process, which fosters a pro-Western human capital base. Kazakhstan's ongoing modernization efforts aim to expand personal freedoms and integrate liberal values into social and economic governance. However, this process is not without obstacles, as it is shaped by cross-cultural influences (including those from Russia, China, and the Muslim world), the non-linear nature of globalization, geopolitical turbulence and the struggle between competing cultural and ideological paradigms. While Westernization remains a key influence, it is no longer the only trajectory. The future of global cultural development is increasingly multipolar, and Kazakhstan – positioned at the intersection of

competing influences – serves as a crucial laboratory for cross-cultural synthesis.

A distinctive feature of Kazakhstan is its evolving soft yet complex value structure, which allows it to function as a sanctuary of cultural diversity and synthesis. This unique positioning enables Kazakhstan to withstand external pressures while fostering social stability. The country's approach to cross-cultural communication fosters neutral sophism (neutrosophy)¹⁵ – a flexible framework that integrates diverse cultural and ideological perspectives. This adaptability is key to building resilient social capital in the face of geopolitical shifts.

From a broader perspective, the study of cross-cultural communication is essential for understanding both global civilization and the future trajectory of specific regions – including Kazakhstan. As a young and active participant in international affairs, Kazakhstan must navigate the challenges of balancing sovereignty, modernization, and cultural preservation in an era of unprecedented global transformation.

The processes of competition among models for further global development have not bypassed Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan, which boasts a significant territory, adheres to an open economic development model, possesses political stability, and develops broad and diverse contacts in all areas of public life. It should also be acknowledged that the establishment of modern sovereign Kazakhstan is connected with constitutional formulations based on the fundamental principles and values of the West, such as the alternation of power and a system of checks and balances among its various branches, aimed at implementing a democratic political culture in society, which is the dominant trend in social engineering. Higher education is implemented based on the goals, criteria, and standards of Western culture, as expressed in the Bologna Process, which creates a social base of Western-oriented human capital that shares Western values in the long term. The modernization of Kazakhstan's political and socio-economic systems by its authorities involves expanding opportunities and freedoms for fully realizing the potential of liberal values. However, this process does not occur smoothly due to the aforementioned cross-cultural connections, the non-linear nature of development, post-global and geopolitical turbulence, and the struggle for dominance in the global order of various value-cultural development paradigms.

The perspective of Westernizing the world under new conditions is neither unequivocal nor the only alternative. Kazakhstan has maintained and enhanced its intercultural connections with Russia at this stage, overcoming the previous narrative of “metropole-colony” relations and gradually realizing the potential of its own national sovereign cultural identity.

¹⁵ F. Smarandache, *The Essence of Neutrosophy* (Phoenix, AZ: Neutrosophic Institute, 2006).

The main and steadfast ideological concept of the country's development is the further strengthening of national independence, cultural uniqueness, and political-economic stability. At the same time, it is necessary to recognize that the Russian modernization project concerning the so-called "national peripheries" of first the Russian and then the Soviet empires created broad opportunities for Kazakh nomads to become acquainted with the value world of the West, as interpreted by the Russian cultural tradition. Essentially, Kazakhstan, following Russia, adopted the ideological and cultural clichés about the West throughout centuries of coexistence, and today, in the context of confrontation with the West and the persistent search by Russia itself for its path, a new cultural image of the "Russian world" and its defense of its place in the world, Kazakhstan finds itself in a sufficiently conflictual space of cross-cultural interaction between Russia and the West. This situation not only places Kazakhstan before the choice of one or another cultural alternative but more so, requires the development of a new, more flexible and soft strategy for integrating advanced models of cultural identity into the "fabric of national self-awareness," regardless of their origin. And this process is evident not only in diplomatic arenas, where the country's leadership demonstrates commitment to a multi-vector and synergistic foreign policy, but also in various spheres of cultural policy concerning, for example, educational strategy, choice of social life standards, information ecosystem, and so on.

Kazakhstan, having a centuries-old close connection with the cultural-value worlds of the East, and the current global attention to the countries of the "global south," the dynamic growth of China's influence, is consistently and actively integrating into intensively developing infrastructural communication models involving China and the Muslim world. An example of this is Kazakhstan's participation in China's global initiative "Belt and Road" and the building of a Community of Shared Future for Mankind. This strategic initiative of China is intended not only as an economic strategy but also as a broad cultural initiative of the Celestial Empire, aimed not only at acquainting the world with the peculiarities of Chinese culture but also at presenting the world with alternative, non-liberal values and vectors of social engineering that correspond to the Asian mentality and cultural experience. The Chinese model of globalization aspires to new, more flexible forms of cultural identity that meet modern challenges, offering a more pliable cultural perspective to the world.

In this connection, it seems extremely important to research the entire complex of cross-cultural communications, in the process of which the synergy of interaction between diverse value and cultural worlds is realized. It is very important that in Kazakhstan, a sufficiently soft and increasingly complex structure of values is forming, allowing us to speak of Kazakhstan as a unique "abode" of cultural diversity, synthesis, and

“neutrosophy,” forming a sufficiently stable and resilient social capital to external influences.

Thus, from our point of view, the study of cross-cultural communications in the process of developing national values is extremely important from the perspective of understanding the prospects for the development of both global civilization and the fate of individual regions of the world, including the Republic of Kazakhstan, as a relatively young and active participant in international relations.

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Shadow Worlds and American Pragmatism: The Varieties of Religious Experience in the Light of the Kyoto School: A Study on Human Dignity

Sofia G. Simitzi

*Somewhere there's gotta be a better world.*¹

*In nihil ab nihilo quam cito recidimus.*²

I vividly recall a snowy afternoon long ago at a German university when a close friend shared her decision to embrace the Eastern way of life, abandoning the Western lifestyle and her academic career. Intrigued, I asked her about the appeal of Eastern traditions compared to European ones.

I believe in genuine self-awareness,³ rationality, and a profound sense of human gratitude. With this in mind, this essay aims to explore religious experience through the perspectives of American Pragmatism and the Philosophy of the Kyoto School, focusing specifically on the works of Nishida Kitaro and Keiji. Nishitani.

When examining religious experience, it is essential to consider it through the lens of Pragmatism. Both Pragmatism and the Kyoto School emphasize the unity of thought and action. According to the Kyoto School, religious experience transcends mere practice; it serves as a transformative elevation of ordinary life into art and ritual.

Metaphysical reality is viewed as a continuous flow of experience, where conceptual thinking often struggles to capture the ever-changing nature of existence. Religious experiences emerge from both natural and supernatural relationships, offering insights into everyday life and evidence of an invisible order underlying selfhood and existence.

This essay aims to demonstrate that Pragmatism, Kyoto Metaphysical Realism, and Pluralism are essential for understanding religious

¹ B.B. King, "Somewhere There's a Better World," the refrain of the song, recorded for the album *Blues Is King* (1966).

² *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* VI, no. 26003. In nihil ab nihilo quam cito recidimus (How quickly we fall back from nothing to nothing.)

³ Craig Eisendrath, *The Unifying Moment: The Psychological Philosophy of William James and Alfred North Whitehead* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 66–78.

experience,⁴ because they allow for the reconciliation of seemingly incongruous philosophical interests. This synthesis merges religious realism and pluralism through a humanistic lens, highlighting the philosophical dimensions of religion. Religious experience is not solely about connecting with the divine; it also involves bringing about change and shaping the course of life. It opens up new dimensions of reality and provides a foundation for theories of truth and existence.⁵ The continuous nature of religious experience challenges traditional dualities.

The primary objective for both the Kyoto School and Pragmatism is to maintain a spiritual-ethical worldview, acknowledging that the fulfillment of faith serves as the basis for moral value.

William James's profound influence on the Kyoto School⁶ revived the metaphysical and ontological ideals that philosophy had previously overlooked. Both American and Japanese philosophies search for a systematic theory that measures life's journey by individuals' evolution toward a deeper connection with the divine. The Kyoto School is deeply invested in national identity and religion, primarily of Buddhist origin, transforming philosophical discourse into an aesthetic ritual. Both American and Japanese thought share a longing for a systematic theory – a form of spiritual scientism – suggesting that life's trajectory should be assessed by individuals' progress toward a closer relationship with the religious experience. This self-awakening, wherein the process becomes evident, represents the purest form of mental intuition.

While Western philosophy has its roots in the concept of "ontological being," the Kyoto School developed a perspective that exists between Western notions of "being" and the Buddhist religious conception of "nothingness,"⁷ centering on pure experience.

In the context of World War II, the human condition was profoundly influenced by advancements in science, which led Japanese philosophy to seek comfort in a religious way of life. The depth of spiritual struggle serves as the measure of either philosophical triumph or defeat. The Kyoto School emphasized the challenges humanity faces and the deadlocks of

⁴ Robert E. Carter, *The Nothingness beyond God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitaro* (New York: Paragon House, 1980). Shimomura Torataro, "The Modernization of Japan, with Special Reference to Philosophy," *Philosophical Studies of Japan* 7 (1966): 16.

⁵ John Hick, "Religion as 'skillful means': A hint from Buddhism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 30, no. 3 (1991): 141–158. Jerry H. Gill: "John Hick and religious knowledge," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2, no. 3 (1971): 129–147.

⁶ Masao Abe, "Nishida: Philosophy of Place," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1998): 355–371.

⁷ James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Nanzan Library of Asian Religion and Culture) (Hawaii, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 68–75.

modernity. N. Kitaro and the Kyoto School explored the hidden dimensions of human experience, tackling philosophical mysteries and highlighting shared experiences in both Western and Eastern contexts. They advocate for a life led by Great Doubt, where reality and the ego confront uncertainties of existence.

In this postmodern age, a metaphysical perspective is crucial, as the breakdown of the symbolic order has revealed individuals to feelings of fear and isolation, sparking a quest for the meaning of sovereign infinity and the universe. This metaphysical foundation surrounding the religious experience encapsulates the true essence of the Divine. What makes life important? What is real?

In this spiritual odyssey, individuals are compelled to confront their experiences and make choices as they navigate between anxiety and nothingness. This liminal experience encourages a reevaluation of the value of human life and raises questions about scientific ethics and human dignity. It also prompts reflection on an individual's self-trust and the cultural influences on their life.

On the Edge of Philosophical Experience

A philosophical gesture is necessary to balance the real and the ideal, legitimizing the leap of faith as a profound and definitive choice. The Kyoto School of Philosophy addresses individual experiences and theological questions separately. It operates on multiple levels and is unified by the influential philosophy of Kitaro. This elliptical system revolves around the axes of existence and experience, creating inherent contradictions. The starting point of philosophical reflection is inner experience, which encounters human empirical perceptions that are more complex than mere logical knowledge. How do aesthetic experiences impact our empirical observations of things?

The Kyoto School advocates a philosophical methodology that embraces Radical Empiricism. It emphasizes the epistemology of experience and the significance of an individual's will in making conscious decisions and exercising freedom.

In the ethics of the Kyoto School, there are no absolute standards. Instead, the assessment of what is good or bad is a genuine expression of individual experience that incorporates emotional elements of the individual. Nishitani claims that all "views of the will" are ultimately connected to some form of egocentrism. The realm of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) is related to the religious form of life and is accessible only through absolute negativity. The non-dual view of *śūnyatā* is ultimately realized through an intuitive glimpse of wisdom that transcends the limits of subjective discourse common to both James and Nishitani. This represents an attempt to go beyond logic, providing a view of authentic knowledge.

Current East-West dialogues include an exploration of James's religious psychology. The concept of religious experience serves as a quasi-cognitive-theoretical tool within a post-theological framework and is present in both Western thought and Japanese life. It has common epistemological elements and ontological references, offering deep philosophical insights into essential questions about humanity and the world.

The success of both Kyoto School philosophy and Pragmatism in shaping a philosophical framework for the intangible is a topic worthy of exploration. The necessity of the philosophical pursuit cannot be easily dismissed. To advance philosophy beyond its Western-centric roots, it is imperative to broaden its quest for universality by embracing diverse cultural and metaphysical perspectives on religious experiences.

The profound moral implications of whether God can alleviate human suffering cannot be overlooked. If God is perceived as eternal, unchanging, compassionate, and loving toward humans, it is believed by Buddhists that fixation on God could impede the mental and moral discipline necessary to follow the Buddhist path. This fixation could lead individuals to be captivated by God's magnificence, diverting their focus from cultivating the emotional states essential for progress on that path.

The philosophies of the Kyoto School⁸ and Pragmatism⁹ do not adhere to a systematic theology. Both movements are highly naturalistic, although the concept of "nature" is not based on modern science, particularly in the case of Kitaro. They challenge us to reconsider how our Western understanding of "religion" is influenced by a model of metaphysical duality and opposition to the supernatural. Consequently, the philosophical dialogue between Pragmatism and the Kyoto School explores conceptual problems, outlines interpretive dilemmas, and discusses the human condition.

Our typical understanding of religion tends to focus on theology and primarily identifies religions by their beliefs. The nature of religion has sparked centuries of debate among theological scholars. In Chinese philosophy, nature is revered as the source of morality, which leads to diverse approaches to traditional religious matters. Confucianism examines the logical and evidential problems of evil, centering on socio-political and philosophical perspectives while drawing evidence from metaphysical sources. Indo-European theology encompasses doctrines related to spirit,

⁸ Keiji Nishitani, *chosakushū* 西谷啓治著作集 [Collected Writings of Nishitani Keiji], 26 vols. (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1986-1995).

⁹ Charles Sanders Peirce, "What Pragmatism Is," in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 5, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 274. William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, Intro. Ellen Kappy Suckiel, Pref. Ralph Barton Perry (Nebraska, NE: University of Nebraska, Press, 1912, [2011]), 33.

salvation, beginnings and endings, human nature, as well as worship and ethical principles.

Throughout history, periods of complex tension have often coincided with significant scientific progress, providing not just advancements but also new guiding frameworks for life. Today, in contrast to the past when the human condition may have seemed dystopian, divine enlightenment is not necessarily required to recover what was lost in both the West and the East nor to emphasize the need for a promise of a new Atlantis.

The philosophical dialogue between Pragmatism¹⁰ and the Kyoto School underscores the crucial importance of human experience. Since the European Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, the technologically advanced West¹¹ has exerted influence over Japan, sharing knowledge about scientific innovation.

When will Japanese (Far East) thoughts and values begin to impact Western society? The self-absorbed West seems trapped in a cycle of rhetoric and selective memory, unable to see the bigger picture. It is important to note that Asia comprises 65% of the world's population, which highlights the idea that contemporary Japan embodies the concept of difference as described in Jacques Derrida's "*De La Grammatologie*."¹²

Western Illusion and the Enlightenment Project

The European Enlightenment made a strategic retreat when it appeared to be the only proposed way of thinking and political option to prevent social conflict over human issues. The Enlightenment project, which did not achieve universal appeal, contrasts with the modern revival of older traditions. However, this return to the symbolic order is marred by excessive violence. What kind of coherent intellectual or political synthesis is possible at all?

The major socio-political changes occurring in Europe are irreversible. The analytical mindset, the linear approach to time, and deductive reasoning are increasingly associated with the Japanese concept of intuitive thinking, a holistic understanding of time, ritual aesthetics, and inductive reasoning.

The West's fascination with Oriental themes during the 18th and 20th centuries, along with the romanticization of theosophical exoticism and a longing for metaphysical grandeur, were primarily their obsessions.

¹⁰ Hillary Putnam, *Pragmatism an Open Question* (Malden, MA: Blackwell), 7. E.K. Suckiel, *The Pragmatic Philosophy of William James* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 5.

¹¹ E.K. Bramsted and K.J. Melhuish, *Western Liberalism: A History in Documents from Locke to Croce* (London: Longman, 1978), Preface, 29–34.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967). Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982).

Japanese culture is distinctly different from that of the West. Traditional Japanese culture emphasized ritualistic aesthetics and recognized the pursuit of power through suffering and social unrest before the advent of modernity. This stands in contrast to the analytical-deductive methods of Aristotle and the intuitive-inductive approaches of Confucius.

Japan struggles to reconcile various modes of human reasoning that produce truths and values widely accepted in many Asian cultures.¹³ These are complex issues with implications for both political realities and daily life. Understanding contemporary Japan requires a deep exploration of the sources of its socio-political conventions and a careful consideration of where theoretical and practical balances must be struck.

If centuries of efforts to improve human society based on abstract notions of justice and truth have resulted in a deterioration of life compared to pre-Enlightenment social systems, perhaps it is time to reconsider this approach and revert to traditional forms. Restarting the philosophical dialogue in both the West and the East may yield new insights. These traditional ways of life, including religious practices, may not be grounded in reason or empirical evidence, but they do have historical significance.

Reactionary theorists, ethno-nationalists, and techno-commercialists share a fundamental aversion to rational social reconstruction and individual agency. Their discussions are all influenced by history and its unwritten rules. It is surprising that the modern reality of “controlled chaos” seems to validate their perspectives.

Consequently, the predominant cultural lineage is largely religious, biocultural, or customary, originating outside the realm of self-reflection (enlightenment) and resistant to rational analysis. Belief, ritual, and custom cannot be easily dismissed through abstract criticism. Community identity cannot be confined to ideology. The fundamental structure of society – whatever it may be – is not subject to political intervention without potentially negative consequences.

Philosophy as a Form of Life

Philosophical inquiry boldly questions the impact of reason, individual rights, and democracy on social decay and dysfunction while recognizing the significant risks associated with proposing a shift toward more hierarchical and authoritarian forms of government.

Inspired by apophatic theology, pragmatic religious experience advocates the concept of “Exodus,” encouraging individuals to withdraw from dysfunctional or oppressive religious systems and create new spaces based on different principles. It also promotes “Acceleration,” highlighting the need for proactive intensification of technological, scientific, and

¹³ Peter Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (York: St. Martin Press, 1986).

socio-political change to overcome stagnation. However, this approach recognizes the potential for social, cultural, and political instability during the disruption of existing structures and norms.

The present text shifts the focus of contemporary political theology and philosophy from exploring what constitutes a fulfilling life, the essence of humanity, the nature of society, and the roles of culture and religion, to a more universally guided perspective on human nature that embodies various value systems and priorities in the West.

The world has not ended, and it remains impossible to predict how long the twilight of the postmodern age will last. One of the most significant contributions of political theology lies in its ability to sharpen awareness of the structural mismatches between theological-metaphysical constructs and socio-political frameworks.

The response to the current situation is vigorous on all sides. Society, fearing the loss of its privileges, will resort to various means of repression to crush anarchist and libertarian movements unless it can control and instrumentalize them. The measures currently being implemented to stifle alternative forms of individual expression are designed to provoke and strengthen dissent. It is a grave mistake to believe that persecutions are inherently beneficial to the ideas they target.

While dissenters may have differing opinions on the moral value and practical impact of individual actions – and there are indeed several opposing views – one truth remains certain: a society like bourgeois society, which is based on a vast collection of private interests and prejudices, cannot be overthrown by violent actions alone, such as bombings or stabbings. Its endurance relies more on the inertia of the masses and their ingrained habits of submission than on any exercise of violence. Philosophers must work diligently to cultivate a new mentality among the masses. Although the extraordinary actions of a few can contribute to this effort, they cannot replace the need for collective action. Such actions will only be effective when they arise from a unified movement that resonates with the masses, ensuring that they are understood, sympathized with, and supported. We will not achieve the emancipation of humanity through individual acts of heroism; it can only come from the persistent and united cooperation of all progressive individuals. What actions should we take at this time?

Freedom and Its Challenges

The level of freedom we experience and the extent of our exploitation do not depend solely on the wording of the law. They are primarily determined by the resistance we offer against those laws. We can indeed achieve a degree of freedom, even in the face of draconian legislation. Those philosophers who believe they can avoid backlash by distancing

themselves from reality exhibit a narrow perspective that is incompatible with a radical reorganization of the social system. Moreover, they foolishly undermine their interests. If we break, they will soon follow.

Above all, we must engage with people; this is the path to salvation for our cause. The attempt to imaginatively conceive a better organization of human society than the destructive and cruel chaos that has characterized human existence throughout history is not a modern idea. It dates back at least to Plato, whose *Republic* served as a model for the utopias envisioned by later philosophers. Anyone who views the world through the lens of an ideal – whether seeking intellect, art, εὐδαιμονία or a combination of these – cannot help but feel deep sorrow for the evils that humanity allows to persist. The uniqueness of the political movement lies in the connection between ideals and humanity's suffering, enabling significant movements and leaders to arise from individual aspirations.

The vast majority of men and women, in ordinary times, navigate life without reflecting on or criticizing their circumstances or those of the world at large. They are born into specific positions in society and accept what each day brings without much thought beyond the immediate present. Almost instinctively, like animals in the field, they seek to meet their immediate needs without considering that, with enough effort, they could change the general conditions of their lives.

Many of the most unfortunate segments of the population remain ignorant and apathetic due to excessive toil and fatigue, fearful of immediate punishment from those in power, and morally compromised due to the loss of self-respect resulting from their degradation.

The creation of a conscious and deliberate effort to seek general improvement often seems like a hopeless task. In the daily lives of most individuals, fear often holds greater influence than hope. People tend to focus more on what they might lose rather than on the joy they could bring to their own lives and the lives of others. Life should not be lived this way. Courage and the vision to live meaningfully, despite obstacles and discouragement, are essential. If individuals possessed these qualities, there would be no need for the world's regeneration to begin with political and economic reform. Instead, all necessary reforms would occur naturally and without resistance, thanks to the moral renewal of individuals. However, this is where the teachings of Religion come into play.

Among the many evils is the inflation of moral values. Antichrist as a Lord of the world becomes a possibility in this post-secular world. The post-Enlightenment romantic individual is seen as authentic and autonomous. The history of critical theory aims to liberate this authentic subject from oppression by tyrants (J.J. Rousseau), ideology (K.Marx), or repressed desires (S.Freud). However, post-Enlightenment culture hesitates to embrace imitation, as it threatens its core beliefs. After a century, we

can understand the mechanism for world dominance and this kind of a daimonium ex machina.

Enlightened rationalism values the wisdom of the people and advocates a dual approach to peace and security. We have firsthand experience of the consequences of a system that lacks a divine perspective. We have witnessed the chaos of a world without God, which has led to the creation of a new humanity plagued by terror, anguish, and apocalyptic devastation. According to René Girard, individuality is an illusion, as we are never fully autonomous and are constantly imitating the desires of others. Modern individualism often overlooks this dynamic, obscuring the connection between imitation and violence. Ultimately, this fragmentation results in chaos and monstrous behaviors, with evil flourishing and desires for retribution multiplying. If not addressed, the mimetic crisis can lead to the disintegration of the community.

We are worried about dialogue across cultures but we are not worried enough about the Charybdis of a globalized world. It will lead to a Malthusian political society. And it will point toward something much more totalitarian and autocratic. And the more probable the Apocalyptic worldview becomes, the less we discuss it. Therefore, philosophy has to awaken the religious cosmopolitan consciousness.

Humans are distinguished from other species by the great ability to live among miracles and we call these miracles religious experience. In our post-secular age, characterized by rapid globalization and cultural interconnectivity, the relationship between faith and reason has become once again an important topic of debate. As societies grow increasingly pluralistic, the intersection of various belief systems calls for intercultural dialogue. This essay argues that integrating faith and reason through such dialogue not only enhances individual perspectives but also fosters mutual understanding and respect among different cultures.

Historically, the relationship between faith and reason has often been depicted as a battleground, with supporters of rationalism frequently dismissing religious belief as irrational or outdated. However, this viewpoint overlooks the nuanced ways in which faith and reason can coexist and complement one another. Faith often provides individuals with a sense of purpose, a moral framework, and a sense of community, while reason serves as a critical tool for questioning, understanding, and articulating beliefs. In a post-secular context, the challenge is to reconcile these two dimensions of human experience without positioning one as subordinate to the other.

Intercultural dialogue¹⁴ is essential in this reconciliation process. By engaging with diverse worldviews, individuals can cultivate a deeper

¹⁴ Robert E. Carter, *The Kyoto School: An Introduction* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2013), 30–31.

understanding of their own beliefs while recognizing the validity of others' and discovering common ground. Such exchanges demonstrate that faith traditions can contribute to rational discourse by offering moral and ethical perspectives shaped by centuries of experience.

Intercultural dialogue fosters cognitive humility by encouraging participants to recognize their limitations in understanding complex issues. In an era where misinformation and dogmatism flourish, creating an environment where challenging questions are welcomed is crucial. It is within this space of mutual respect that faith and reason can come together, leading to a more comprehensive worldview. This integration allows for the acknowledgment of mystery and the unknown – elements central to many faith traditions – without dismissing the rigorous scrutiny that reason demands.

Critics may argue that faith, by its very nature, resists rational inquiry and therefore poses a barrier to genuine dialogue. However, this perspective fails to acknowledge the many ways in which faith can inform rational thought. Religious leaders and scholars have long engaged in philosophical exploration of their beliefs, showing that the quest for understanding encompasses faith-based convictions and rational thought. Conversely, a reason devoid of faith can lead to nihilism and a detachment from the communal and spiritual dimensions that often drive human progress.

Is Life Worth Living?

The dominant issue in the West and East remains, after so many centuries, the worth of human life and whether the world as a space of the acting subject is familiar and meaningful. This inquiry continues to resonate throughout history, challenging us to reflect on our existence, value, and emotional connection to the world around us. Each action we take contributes to this ongoing dialogue about meaning and significance in our lives, urging us to seek understanding in our shared human experience.

Pragmatism, alongside the principles of Empiricism, and the Kyoto School, emerges as a collaborative effort to synthesize cognitive activity while subtly incorporating elements of religion and ethics – albeit without explicitly naming ethics. The focus is significantly directed toward transforming human will and natural impulses into a life imbued with meaning, that aligns with socio-political realities.

At the heart of James's philosophical exploration lies a central inquiry: how can epistemology coexist with individual choice while simultaneously affirming human freedom? This intricate relationship serves as a cornerstone of his thought, inviting deeper reflection on how our understanding and decisions shape our existence in the broader social context.

In conclusion, navigating the complexities of faith and reason in a post-secular or post-modern era through intercultural dialogue offers a

promising pathway to greater understanding and cooperation. By embracing the interplay between these two realms, individuals and communities can create environments that celebrate diversity while seeking commonalities. Through dialogue, we can learn to appreciate the richness of varied beliefs, fostering a more harmonious coexistence in our increasingly interconnected world. As we move forward, the challenge lies not in choosing between faith and reason, but in recognizing how both can enrich our search for truth and meaning. As John Paul II said,

Christian truth is not of this kind. Since it is not an ideology, the Christian faith does not presume to imprison changing socio-political realities in a rigid schema, and it recognizes that human life is realized in conditions that are diverse and imperfect. Furthermore, in constantly reaffirming the transcendent dignity of the person, the Church's method is always that of respect for freedom.¹⁵

Her most significant contribution to civil society, and by extension to the political order, lies in her vision of human dignity, which is fully illuminated in the mystery of the Incarnate Word. "It is only through the mystery of the Incarnate Word that the mystery of man gains clarity."¹⁶

It may be time to reconsider our understanding of the future by highlighting the importance of religious experience in a postmodern world facing apocalyptic challenges. This focus is crucial to prevent humanity and the world from descending into chaos. We must create open spaces for redefining human existence.

No one can predict the future exactly, but we understand that change is inevitable. Whatever lies ahead, our vision and actions must remain anchored in today's reality. Embracing uncertainty can lead us to innovative solutions and pathways we might not have considered before. Let's focus on the present as we prepare for a future that promises to be different.: *Eucharistomen, ...A world in which love has overcome death.*¹⁷

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¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991).

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998).

¹⁷ Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis and of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2016).

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Index

A

Abbey, 149, 153
Adorno, 43, 48, 91, 92, 93, 100
Agamben, 4, 161, 171, 172, 173, 174, 177
Agenzia Fides, 257, 258
Aguas, 2, 6, 237, 242, 247, 248, 258
Amanzholova, 270, 277
Ambrosini, 170, 177, 182
Amrebayev, 2, 6, 261
Apel, 59, 131, 182
apology, 142, 212, 216, 217, 220, 222, 223, 224
Appiah, 150, 153
Aquinas, 21, 213, 214, 230
Archibugi, 150, 153
Arendt, 4, 42, 48, 171, 172, 177
Arinze, 248, 249, 258
Aristotle, 31, 32, 34, 36, 95, 101, 211, 215, 218, 220, 230, 284
Armed Forces of the Philippines, 255, 256, 258
autotelic, 199, 205, 206
Averintsev, 125, 131, 153
Avnon, 89, 99
Ayer, 290

B

Bajor, 202, 207
Bakhtin, 4, 107, 115, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 138, 139, 140, 153, 154
Banić-Pajnić, 211, 213, 214, 218, 220, 222, 223, 224, 228, 231, 232, 233
Bara, 238, 258
Barišić, 1, 5, 209, 212, 231, 232
Beck, 149, 154, 198, 207
Becka, 52, 68
Beierwaltes, 119, 154
Benedict XVI, 96, 289, 291
Benhabib, 149, 152, 154

Benignus, 1, 5, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233
Benjamin, 42, 48
Berger, 184, 185, 194
Bessarion, 1, 5, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 215, 230, 231, 232, 233
Bhabha, 268, 277
biopolitics, 4, 172, 173
Bobbio, 78, 81, 99
border, 142, 159, 160, 164, 165, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 200, 207, 273
boundaries, 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 23, 25, 34, 121, 130, 157, 159, 166, 173, 190, 192, 197, 198, 200, 201, 204, 205, 207, 209, 230, 237, 239, 246, 247, 251, 252, 254, 257, 315
Bramsted, 283, 290
Brems, 73, 99
Brooks, 104, 154
Brown, 16, 33, 34, 36
Brumann, 78, 99

C

Cantat, 170, 174, 175, 177
Carey, 11, 16, 29, 36
Carter, 280, 287, 290
Casmir, 204, 207
Castiglione, 12, 13, 19, 25, 34, 37, 38
Ćavar, 232
Chatterjee, 34, 35, 36
Chomsky, 172, 177
civilization, 3, 39, 40, 115, 141, 148, 153, 172, 187, 193, 204, 272, 275, 277
climate change, 3, 41
Cohen, 11, 32, 36

communication, 2, 6, 23, 83, 85,
86, 88, 129, 131, 135, 142, 143,
144, 149, 191, 193, 197, 202,
204, 205, 206, 261, 263, 264,
265, 267, 275, 276
concordia, 44, 45, 210, 226
Confucius, 190, 252, 258, 284
Conradi, 164, 177
contextualization, 61, 62, 152
Cosmopolitanism, 1, 4, 5, 149,
150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155,
156, 166, 178, 181, 188, 191,
193, 194, 195
cross-cultural, 152, 261, 262, 265,
274, 275, 276, 277
Culler, 283, 290
Czajka, 161, 162, 177

D

D'Amico Soggetti, 1, 3
Dąbrowski, 199, 200, 207
Daftari, 268, 277
Dalai Lama, 250, 259
Dale, 284, 290
Dallmayr, 103, 149, 150, 152, 153,
154, 188, 189, 192, 193, 194,
195
Dascal, 290
De Genova, 160, 167, 177
de Lubac, 94, 96
de Nanteuil, 42, 49
Del Soldato, 232
Delanty, 149, 151, 154
Demenchonok, 1, 4, 103, 140, 149,
152, 154, 155, 188, 189, 192,
193, 194, 195
Derrida, 4, 160, 161, 162, 163,
164, 165, 166, 173, 176, 177,
178, 179, 283, 290
dialogue, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 24, 35, 45,
46, 47, 48, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57,
59, 60, 61, 64, 85, 96, 99, 105,
106, 107, 122, 127, 128, 129,
130, 131, 133, 135, 138, 140,
143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148,
150, 151, 152, 153, 182, 189,
191, 192, 200, 202, 203, 205,
206, 210, 213, 214, 216, 221,

222, 224, 227, 228, 230, 231,
239, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251,
252, 254, 256, 257, 259, 282,
283, 284, 287, 288

Dieunedort, 178

Digal, 256, 259

Dilthey, 59

diversity, 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 14, 19, 28,
33, 41, 52, 53, 61, 73, 83, 99,
105, 106, 122, 123, 124, 125,
129, 131, 132, 133, 138, 139,
140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 147,
148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 154,
155, 185, 189, 191, 193, 194,
195, 200, 201, 202, 206, 229,
237, 239, 242, 244, 246, 247,
248, 250, 251, 253, 254, 257,
258, 275, 276, 289

Dostoevsky, 128, 154

Dragišić, 209, 211, 212, 213, 214,
217, 218, 220, 222, 223, 224,
228, 231, 232, 233

Dufourmantelle, 166, 178

Durkheim, 4, 83, 84, 85, 89, 90, 91

Dussel, 52, 144, 182, 183, 184, 194

E

Ehrlich, 202, 207

Eisendrath, 279, 290

Elhanan, 290

Ellacuría, 39, 43, 49

Ellul, 42, 49

Elverskog, 246, 259

Engels, 42, 49

Epstein, 132, 133, 135, 136, 137,
138, 139, 155

Erdmann-Pandžić, 224, 232

ethics, 2, 91, 105, 109, 127, 131,
146, 152, 164, 166, 187, 192,
243, 250, 273, 281, 288

ethnogenesis, 264

Etzkorn, 213, 232

exclusion, 3, 4, 17, 41, 56, 63, 160,
166, 170, 177, 202

F

faith, 7, 181, 239, 240, 249, 259,
287

Fanon, 268, 277
 fear, 160, 165, 168, 218, 238, 256, 264, 281, 286
 Ferguson, 159, 178
 Ferrarotti, 92, 100
 Ficino, 217, 218, 220, 225, 226, 231
 Fletcher, 31, 36
 Fornet-Betancourt, 1, 3, 39, 43, 44, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 106, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 155, 191, 194
 Forst, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36
 Foucault, 4, 52, 161, 171, 172, 177, 178
 Francis, 184, 194, 200, 208, 246, 248, 249, 252, 258, 259, 289, 291
 freedom, 1, 3, 4, 5, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 30, 33, 59, 60, 65, 79, 82, 86, 90, 93, 94, 97, 98, 107, 111, 112, 113, 114, 125, 126, 132, 134, 141, 149, 151, 153, 168, 178, 198, 202, 204, 206, 207, 210, 213, 219, 220, 223, 227, 230, 231, 269, 272, 273, 281, 285, 288, 289
 Freud, 2, 20, 21, 27, 29, 36, 37, 286
 Fromm, 42, 49
 Fukuyama, 184, 194, 200, 208

G
 Gadamer, 59, 126, 128
 Galeotti, 11, 15, 16, 17, 22, 25, 32, 33, 34, 37
 Galtung, 42, 49
 Gandhi, 193, 194
 Gidi, 87, 100
 Girard, 213, 232, 287, 290
 Glendon, 4, 73, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 85, 89, 93, 95, 98, 99, 100
 globalism, 193
 globalization, 3, 5, 51, 52, 54, 58, 62, 63, 66, 67, 68, 70, 140, 141,

144, 148, 150, 175, 181, 184, 185, 186, 190, 191, 193, 194, 197, 204, 274, 276, 287
 Goksoy, 238, 259
 Gramsci, 94, 98, 100
 Grasso, 170, 178
 Gumilev, 269, 277
 Gupta, 159, 178
 Gutiérrez, 53, 70

H
 Habermas, 59, 76, 77, 79, 81, 83, 84, 88, 92, 95, 99, 100, 131, 135, 182
 Hacker, 42, 49
 Hall, 268, 277
 Halman, 18, 19, 37
 harmony, 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 44, 45, 46, 47, 140, 152, 154, 155
 Hebblethwaite, 89, 100
 Hegel, 39, 43, 49
 Heidegger, 45, 47, 49, 59, 126, 188, 190
 Heisig, 280, 290
 Herman, 12, 19, 22, 25, 32, 33, 37
 Hersch, 85, 86, 87, 89, 93, 100
 Heyd, 11, 12, 31, 36, 37, 38
 Hick, 280, 290
 homogenization, 5, 105, 144, 147
 Honig, 149, 154
 Hopgood, 73, 100
 Horkheimer, 91, 92, 93, 100
 Horton, 12, 25, 29, 30, 35, 36, 37
 hospitality, 4, 161, 164, 165, 166, 173, 178
 human dignity, 1, 2, 5, 16, 24, 25, 28, 32, 33, 76, 77, 83, 100, 206, 209, 210, 216, 219, 220, 226, 229, 230, 231, 265, 281, 289
 Human Rights, 71, 73, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 85, 90, 91, 95, 96, 98, 99, 100, 101, 148, 181, 205, 208, 255, 259
 humanitarianism, 171, 173, 176, 179
 humility, 11, 133, 137, 241, 249, 288
 Hunt, 91, 100

Huntington, 185, 194

I

identity, 2, 6, 159, 178, 193, 195,
200, 208, 245
Ignatieff, 20, 22, 26, 27, 28, 37
indifference, 2, 11, 13, 30, 31, 35,
206
intercultural, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 39, 40,
42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49,
52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59,
60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67,
68, 69, 70, 106, 107, 122, 130,
131, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143,
144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149,
153, 154, 155, 156, 187, 189,
190, 191, 192, 193, 195, 200,
201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206,
207, 208, 264, 275, 287, 288
interculturality, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56,
57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65,
66, 67
interreligious, 2, 5, 6, 64, 203, 235,
239, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251,
252, 253, 254, 256, 257, 258,
259

J

Jackson, 290
Jagiellonian, 5, 201, 202, 203, 206,
207, 208
James, 7, 282, 290
Jaskuła, 205, 207, 208
Jaspers, 190, 195, 269, 277
Joas, 3, 71, 72, 75, 82, 83, 84, 85,
86, 88, 89, 90, 95, 98, 99, 100,
201, 208
John Paul II, 205, 208, 243, 249,
260, 289, 291
Johnson, 97, 100
Jonkers, 1, 2, 11, 315
justice, 3, 4, 19, 106, 107, 134,
136, 149, 150, 152, 153, 160,
169, 206, 218, 252, 255, 256,
259, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265,
266, 267, 269, 270, 272, 284

justification, 16, 24, 25, 33, 35, 76,
106, 114, 127, 131, 137, 162,
163

K

Kahn, 238, 260
Kakoliris, 161, 178
Kennedy, 27, 37
Khoruzhiy, 108, 155
Korporowicz, 1, 5, 197, 198, 202,
203, 205, 207, 208
Kosuta, 237, 259
Koziellecki, 199, 200, 208
Kymlicka, 149, 154
Kyoto School, 2, 6, 279, 280, 281,
282, 283, 287, 288, 290

L

Laborde, 34, 37
Lahusen, 170, 178
language, 6, 22, 29, 78, 96, 124,
129, 132, 134, 136, 164, 173,
201, 211, 268, 271
Layas, 269, 277
Lektorsky, 193, 195
Lenin, 42, 49
Levinas, 4, 52, 60, 163, 165, 166,
178, 182
liberation, 3, 52, 54, 56, 61, 67, 73,
97, 132, 133, 140, 144, 191,
193, 248
Losev, 4, 106, 108, 115, 116, 117,
118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123,
124, 125, 131, 153, 155, 156
Luxemburg, 42, 50
Lyotard, 134, 135, 136, 155

M

Machado, 249, 259
Mackinder, 262, 277
Maimonides, 87, 100
Mair, 104, 155
Mall, 63, 70, 139, 189, 190
Marcuse, 42, 50
Martí, 43, 45, 46, 50, 52, 141
Martinović, 211, 212, 213, 215,
217, 221, 222, 231, 232
Marx, 52, 270, 286

Matravers, 13, 37
 Maussen, 238, 259
 McKinnon, 12, 13, 19, 25, 34, 37, 38
 mechanistic, 3, 39, 40, 41, 46, 47
 Melhuish, 283, 290
 Mendieta, 149, 155
 Mendus, 11, 12, 13, 20, 26, 27, 28, 36, 37, 38
 mentality, 108, 197, 269, 276, 285
 Merleau-Ponty, 42, 50, 59
 Merton, 250
 Meyer, 175, 178
 Mignolo, 151, 156
 migration, 3, 4, 6, 159, 160, 161, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 174, 175, 176, 177
 Millett, 233
 Mirandola, 1, 5, 186, 210, 216, 218, 223, 225, 226
 modernity, 3, 4, 83, 120, 134, 138, 173, 281, 284
 modernization, 280, 291
 Mohsin, 238, 260
 Morsink, 4, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 89, 93, 95, 96, 99, 100
 Motroshilova, 110, 113, 115, 156
 Moyn, 73, 101
 multicultural, 2, 3, 13, 22, 25, 27, 204, 267

N

Nagel, 13, 24, 25, 37
 Nail, 159, 179
 narcissism, 2, 20, 27
 negativity, 3, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 281
 Nelson, 52, 70
 Nietzsche, 23, 24, 25, 29, 38
 Nikiforova, 1, 4, 159
 Nishida, 280, 281, 282, 289, 290
 Nishitani, 279, 281, 282, 290, 291
 Nussbaum, 95, 101

O

organicity, 3, 39, 40, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48

Other, 129
 Ožóg, 201, 208

P

Pamuk, 268, 277
 Pandžić, 217, 224, 232, 233
 Panikkar, 45, 46, 50, 60, 139
 Pareto, 42, 50
 Parsons, 3
 Paul VI, 96, 249, 252, 260
 Peirce, 282, 291
 person, 2, 4, 23, 25, 31, 32, 72, 79, 82, 83, 87, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 99, 113, 114, 123, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 164, 168, 169, 203, 205, 210, 226, 240, 241, 246, 247, 249, 252, 289
 Picardal, 257, 259
 Plato, 97, 98, 107, 117, 122, 190, 210, 211, 215, 218, 226, 230, 286
 Plethon, 210, 211, 233
 Plzzi, 148, 156
 Pojman, 239, 259
 politics, 1, 2, 6, 12, 27, 37, 41, 56, 60, 61, 71, 129, 161, 165, 172, 178, 182, 184, 200, 268, 273, 277
 Posner, 73, 101
 postmodern, 6, 59, 65, 133, 134, 137, 138, 139, 141, 281, 285, 289
 pragmatism, 2, 279, 280, 282, 283, 288, 290, 291
 Prazeres, 52, 70
 Prijatelj, 64, 70
 Proclus, 117, 118, 119, 156, 226
 Proudfoot, 291
 Putnam, 283, 291

R

Rahman, 238, 260
 Ramminger, 211, 233
 Raphael, 28, 32, 38
 Ratzinger, 72, 291
 reconciliation, 136, 210, 214, 215, 216, 224, 226, 228, 230, 231,

254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259,
280, 287
Reeskens, 18, 37
religion, 1, 7, 11, 15, 16, 20, 22,
27, 29, 30, 36, 82, 83, 85, 89,
98, 167, 168, 197, 237, 238,
239, 240, 241, 243, 244, 247,
250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 272,
273, 280, 282, 285, 288
renaissance, 5, 108
responsibility, 4, 81, 82, 86, 105,
120, 125, 126, 127, 143, 146,
160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165,
173, 176, 181, 199, 252, 253,
272
Reuchlin, 1, 5, 210, 217, 224, 225,
226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231,
232, 233
Reyes, 87, 100, 253, 260
Ricoeur, 11, 14, 17, 25, 26, 28, 34,
38, 59
Rogers, 93, 94, 98, 101
Rousseau, 286
Ryden, 205, 208

S
sacralization, 3, 82, 90, 99
Sadler, 163, 179
Said, 268, 277
Sartre, 42, 44, 50, 52, 59
Savonarola, 1, 5, 210, 220, 222,
223, 227, 231
Scanlon, 11, 19, 38
Schmitt, 291
Schulz, 211, 233
science, 1, 7, 141, 187, 192, 216,
280, 282
secularization, 84, 197, 244, 272
security, 4, 103, 160, 167, 168,
170, 171, 174, 176, 177, 185,
197, 200, 203, 255, 256, 287
self-transformation, 132
Selwyn, 206, 208
Sen., 95, 101
Sieben, 18, 37
Simitzi, 2, 6, 279
Skuhala, 224, 233
Smarandache, 275, 277

social capital, 171, 267, 275, 277
Šojat, 219, 233
solidarity, 4, 79, 84, 132, 139, 142,
145, 146, 150, 160, 165, 169,
170, 171, 173, 175, 176, 244,
247, 249, 252, 255, 257, 272
Solovyov, 4, 106, 108, 109, 110,
111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 124,
155, 156
Sommier, 42, 50
Sorel, 42, 50
sovereignty, 4, 90, 147, 159, 165,
169, 174, 175, 262, 265, 271,
273, 274, 275
Spector, 174, 179
spirituality, 3, 2, 6, 108, 227, 239,
240, 241, 242, 243, 245, 247,
251, 252, 253, 257
Spivak, 268, 277
State, 81, 87, 98, 100, 101, 169,
181, 187, 195
Steffens, 67, 70
Stein, 87, 101
Steiner, 77, 101
Stepanyants, 1, 5, 181, 190, 191,
192, 195
Stiglitz, 51, 70
Suckiel, 282, 283, 290, 291
Sunstein, 74, 75, 76, 77, 79, 81, 84,
95, 99, 101
Svetelj, 1, 3

T
Taylor, 19, 38
Taylory, 52, 70
technology, 1, 83, 197, 200, 206,
207, 208, 265
Teilhard de Chardin, 94, 95, 96, 97,
98, 99
Tharoor, 239, 260
Ticktin, 173, 179
tolerance, 2, 3, 5, 11, 12, 14, 15,
16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25,
26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33,
34, 35, 37, 38, 144, 166, 202,
209, 210, 218, 225, 227, 229,
230, 231, 237, 244, 257, 273
Torataro, 280, 291

Tournier, 18, 19, 38
 tradition, 5, 7, 25, 33, 77, 83, 87,
 107, 116, 123, 124, 125, 131,
 171, 214, 250, 263, 264, 271,
 272, 276
 Trebizond, 210, 211, 212
 Trigeaud, 80, 101
 Troitskiy, 116, 119, 124, 156
 Turkle, 207, 208
 Turner, 291

U

UNESCO, 11, 38, 76, 78, 85, 89,
 90, 94, 95, 98, 99, 100, 101, 181
 United Nations, 75, 79, 101, 103,
 148
 universal, 71, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80,
 81, 82, 85, 90, 96, 98, 99, 100,
 101, 111, 112, 148, 156, 184
 Universal Declaration of Human
 Rights (UDHR), 1, 3, 71, 72,
 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80, 81,
 82, 83, 84, 85, 88, 89, 90, 91,
 93, 95, 96, 98, 99, 101, 179
 universality, 4, 6, 25, 34, 72, 77,
 87, 93, 96, 106, 107, 113, 116,
 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137,
 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143,

144, 145, 146, 148, 150, 151,
 210, 282

V

violence, 3, 6, 20, 40, 41, 42, 44,
 46, 48, 49, 50, 65, 66, 125, 134,
 141, 169, 172, 187, 237, 239,
 243, 246, 247, 258, 268, 277,
 283, 285, 287
 virtue, 1, 2, 11, 12, 25, 29, 30, 31,
 35, 36, 37, 38

W

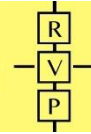
Waldron, 12, 25, 28, 38, 149, 154
 Walzer, 18, 38
 Weber, 87, 102
 Weil, 42, 50
 Wiegandt, 208
 Wielgus, 202, 208
 Williams, 12, 13, 15, 38
 wisdom, 2, 3, 7, 31, 32, 34, 44, 45,
 107, 229, 250, 269, 281, 287
 Włodkowic, 202, 204
 Wohlforth, 104, 154

Z

Zachner, 291
 Zarka, 30, 33, 38
 Zubiri, 59
 Zundert, 18, 37



Council for Research in Values and Philosophy



Purpose

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

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A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

1. *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change: Philosophical Foundations for Social Life*. Focused, mutually coordinated research teams in university centers prepare volumes as part of an integrated philosophic search for self-understanding differentiated by culture and civilization. These evolve more adequate understandings of the person in society and look to the cultural heritage of each for the resources to respond to the challenges of its own specific contemporary transformation.

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The personnel for these projects consists of established scholars willing to contribute their time and research as part of their professional commitment to life in contemporary society. For resources to implement this work the Council, as 501 C3 a non-profit organization incorporated in the District of Columbia, looks to various private foundations, public programs and enterprises.

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