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**BEYOND CULTURES**  
**Perceiving a Common Humanity**

**Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, III**

by  
*Kwame Gyekye*

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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## **PREFACE**

KWAME GYEKYE, FGA

The text published here is substantially the three lectures I delivered on February 22-24, 1999 as the 32nd Series of the J. B. Danquah Memorial Lectures and the Anniversary Address I delivered on November 22, 2003, both under the auspices of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences. I say 'substantially' because some material has been added to that originally presented in the lectures. This addition was necessitated by three factors: the intention or need to fill out certain lacunae or reinstate passages that were deliberately omitted in the original lectures due to pressure of time, the need to make logical amplifications and clarifications of some of the statements or views expressed in the original lectures; and the desire to respond critically to some views expressed in a handful of books and articles that came to my notice after the lectures had been delivered but that bear on the theme of the lectures. Despite the additions, however, the position and conclusions of the original lectures remain unchanged. The original title of the Anniversary Address was "Understanding Globalization." The Address is published here as Lecture IV under the title of "Our One World: Some Thoughts on Globalization."

Acquaintance with the writings of Dr. Danquah convinces one that he was undoubtedly a man of broad erudition and philosophical perspicacity. For more on the intellectual and political stature of the man whose memory the J. B. Danquah Lectures are intended to celebrate, I ask the reader to read the remarks made by the chairman for my first lecture and which, with his permission, are reproduced in the following Foreword.

I am greatly honored to have been invited by the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences to deliver this year's series of the J. B. Danquah Memorial Lectures, which hold a very important place in the Academy's annual activities. The Analytical Table of Contents provide a bird's eye view of the views and arguments presented in the text.

It remains for me now to record my gratitude and appreciation to a few people. Dr. Helen Lauer, my colleague in the Department of Philosophy of the University of Ghana, found time to read the first drafts of the lectures; she offered me elaborate critical comments and suggestions that I found extremely helpful. I am deeply indebted to her, for her trenchant comments compelled me to amplify, clarify, and refine my own position. The famous American philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, previously of Brown University and now of the University of Chicago read the lectures after they had been delivered; I found the comments she sent delightful and exhilarating. I wish to thank Professor Mary-Esther Kropp-Dakubu of the University of Ghana and a Fellow of the Ghana Academy, whose copyediting of the final manuscript resulted in many stylistic improvements. I would like to express my profound gratitude to the following Fellows of the Academy who graciously chaired the three Danquah lectures: Professor Alexander A. Kwabong (the first lecture), Nana Dr. S.K.B. Asante, the Academy's Vice-President for Arts (the second lecture), and The Very Rt. Rev. Professor Kwesi A. Dickson, a former President of the Academy (the third lecture). I would thank also Professor Fred T. Sai, the President of the Academy, who chaired the Anniversary Lecture.

I wish, finally, to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to Professor George F. McLean of The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy at the Catholic University of America for agreeing to publish these lectures under "The Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change" series of the Council. His editorial suggestions have considerably improved the stylistic presentation of this expanded edition of the book.

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**FOREWORD**  
**THE J. B. DANQUAH MEMORIAL LECTURES**  
ALEXANDER A. KWAPONG

The general theme of these Lectures is: "Beyond Cultures: Perceiving a Common Humanity." This subject is dear to the hearts of many and is, I believe, of critical importance to our national integration and development; yet it has often not been given the sufficient attention by policy makers and development practitioners that it deserves. It is therefore with much appreciation that look forward to this year's Danquah Memorial Lectures on this important subject.

Professor Kwame Gyekye is without a doubt one of the leading and erudite African scholars of philosophy that Legon has produced. He has brought much distinction and understanding to the teaching, research and exposition of African philosophy during the past two decades.

The Ghana Academy of Arts and Academy was established nearly forty years ago in November 1959 on the initiative of the then Prime Minister, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, its first Chairman. Its three-fold aims and objectives are to promote the study, extension and dissemination of knowledge of all the sciences and learning; to uphold proper standards of endeavor in all fields of sciences and learning in Ghana; and to recognize outstanding contributions to the advancement of the sciences and learning in Ghana. These aims and objectives have continued to animate the work and programs of the Academy since its foundation.

Of the original twenty persons selected to be foundation members, Dr. Joseph Boakye Danquah was one of the most distinguished. Dr. Danquah and Dr. Nkrumah were then bitter political opponents. However, the apparent promise of scholarly cooperation between them that common membership of the Academy seemed to augur was not to be fulfilled. Dr. Danquah was detained twice and died tragically on February 4, 1965 during his second incarceration.

One of the highlights of the Academy's achievements has been the series of lectures instituted in 1967, two years after his tragic death in prison. The series commemorate the life and work of Dr. J. B. Danquah, truly one of the greatest sons whom this soil has ever produced. Twenty years ago, on the occasion of the twelfth Danquah Memorial lectures which I had the honor to deliver, I made the following observation in my introductory remarks:

Perhaps we are still too near in time and place to Dr. Danquah. . . . All of us alive in Ghana today, whether political foes or allies, owe him a deep debt of gratitude for the very example of his life. Now that the dust of the political conflicts and intolerance, which led to his untimely death, is beginning to settle, we can see from his life and his death what the true African genius can be. Few Ghanaians have ranged so widely, so deeply or so boldly in their scholarship; few were so cosmopolitan or so interested in foreign ways and ideas, yet few were so steeped in, or proud of, their African culture. Few can compare with him in his unflagging commitment to the democratic process and courageous devotion to freedom. He was acutely aware of the need to sustain thought by practical action in all spheres of life. He was willing to lay down his life for the ideals by which he stood and for which he died. All Ghana and Africa, and, indeed, the whole world, owe a deep debt of gratitude to the many-sided genius of Dr. Danquah.

Except for the somewhat sanguine optimism of the phrase "the dust of political conflicts and intolerance beginning to settle," that assessment has well stood the test of time.

This year's lectures are the thirty-second in the series. They continue to be an enduring memorial to the many-sided genius of Dr. Danquah and have ranged widely over the whole spectrum of all the sciences and of learning. Dr. J. B. Danquah, the doyen of African philosophers, was undoubtedly particularly interested in the general theme of this year's Memorial Lectures which deal with issues concerning culture, human nature and human values. What is their central importance and relevance to development, the unity of humankind, and respect for all people of all cultures as we enter the third millennium.

Professor Gyekye has entitled his first lecture: "Our Human Nature, Our Human Values: Looking Over the Cultural Wall. Clearly," he will explain to us in this Lecture what he conceives to be the vision of our human nature, our human values and our common humanity, to which he will lead us over the dividing wall of our cultural identities. It should be an exciting three days, for Professor Gyekye is not only an excellent philosophical scholar and researcher who has done so much to advance his specialty in African philosophy and culture. He has as well an exceptional facility and gift for exposition and for explaining complex issues and ideas in clear, lucid language that the average lay man can follow.

*Foundation Fellow of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences  
and, formerly, Professor of Classics,  
University of Ghana*

# INTRODUCTION

GEORGE F. McLEAN

Professor Kwame Gyekye, in this work *Beyond Culture: Perceiving a Common Humanity*, has taken up a philosophical issue that is foundational for this newly global age.

In the past peoples have lived far from one another separated by great geographical distances and the physical barriers of mountain ranges and treacherous oceans. What was communicated from one people to another was precious due to its rarity. Today, we have an opposite experience. The electronic media make all places present and in real time, and the easy exchange of goods and services makes them inexpensive and ubiquitous. We have come in a very short time to constitute one world, and this fact is now shaping the lives of all.

With regard to cultures and our common humanity some indicators for a response can be found in earlier experience. One is sociological data on families migrating to a newly pluralistic context. The first generation born in the new land tends to reject radically the cultures from which they came and to insist, even more passionately than their teenage colleagues, on dressing and acting exactly like their peers. Often they intend to distance themselves from the culture from which their parents sprang. Once fully assimilated and unencumbered by their parents' insecurities regarding their identity, however, the next generation of offspring develops deeper questions regarding their identity and shows renewed interest in their distinctive culture of origin. Another indicator is the common experience that, though each person must venture forth from family to be socialized in the common ways of the broader village or city life, when mature they return to play a responsible role as a more fully aware member of their family.

Analogously, as philosophy and philosophers today find themselves in a new and fully diverse global context they face in new ways the fundamental philosophical issue of "the one and the many," of "unity and diversity". All come from a culture and civilization which developed its distinctive character over vast temporal and geographical distances; they enter now a global forum of exchange of goods and information to which successful adaptation is a first requisite for survival. The deeper challenge, however, is to rediscover their identity within the new unity.

Like the classical problem of the one and the many the problem of a common humanity has two components: unity and diversity. This work of Professor Gyekye focuses upon the first. Bringing to bear the full sophistication of the process of abstraction first introduced by Aristotle, it moves swiftly beyond cultures to identify the human essence or nature that is common and foundational to all cultures. This is shown to be not only a chance convergence or an overlapping consensus, but a set of prerequisites for any community life. Thus, killing and dishonesty are basically destructive of life altogether, as are anarchism and disdain for elders who bear the human experience and exemplify the social learning of their people. This work argues strongly for the consensus across peoples on these fundamental building blocks of social life in any age. Few have stated the argument as clearly and forcefully as does Professor Gyekye. His is a basic text for every culture and civilization; it should be read, pondered and followed by all.

Yet, we are in but the very first decades of the new post ideological global unity, having broken beyond a bipolar world structure only in the very last decade of the last century. On entering the new millennium we find ourselves in a vastly different world which we tend to approach with the philosophical tools and instincts of the past. Hence we see with eyes trained by the modern scientific – even scientific – character of our education which to abstract from

the differences in order to get to "the heart of the matter". Univocity and universality are our keys to meaning and our assurance of truth, as Kant pointed out not only in his first critique on pure reason, but in his second critique on practical reason. Conversely, Western philosophy is little experienced in the motifs of harmony explored in Kant's third – and till recently ignored – critique of aesthetic judgement. It is precisely this, however, which characterises the rest of the world's civilizations

This suggests that philosophy today is at the beginning of a long and exciting road for which this work of Professor Gyekye on the unity of humankind lays a firm foundation. The task ahead will be to reinforce this unity by incorporating the different modes or cultures in terms of which alone life can be lived. The global community must become an open community able to leave room for, to take account of, and to respect the experiences and free creativity of all.

Different cultures do exist, notes Professor Gyekye, but may have been closed to us. In this global age, as these cultures are newly encountered, the task will be to discover and develop the human abilities of mind and heart to recognize, value and engage them. For this new modes of human awareness will be required. We will need to apply phenomenological methods to take us more deeply into human consciousness in order to discover the deeper creative sources, and the true nature, of cultures. We must find ways to understand them, not as walls which constrict (a simile both repeated and rejected here), but as lenses by which we are enabled to look out, and through which we can both engage and be enriched by other cultures and horizons.

It is a basic insight of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics that we are born and raised in a particular locale, language and symbol system, culture and civilization, through which we are enabled to understand and relate to others. Finite beings have no privileged position to which all things are present or in which they are present to all. In our human condition everyone has to be somewhere. What we need to discover is how we can be enabled by our distinctive culture and begin to make it work for us in interacting with others.

This suggests the need to return afresh to metaphysics for a new and more humanized approach to the problem of the one and the many, beginning not from the lofty ideas of a Plato, the universals of an Aristotle, or a set of politically dictated abstract rights. The place to begin, or rebegin, is the essentially unique exercise of human freedom by our forebears in facing human challenges and forming their hopes. Their creativity established the ways of cultivating one's life and raising one's offspring—one etymology of the term "culture"—with which alone we are endowed.

This generates neither an abstract rationalist "approach from nowhere," nor one that is essentially Greek. Instead, the peoples dispersed across the world must be able to join the new global dialogue from wherever they are, make their own contribution, and be enriched by all other cultures. As a result in the future philosophy must be modelled not on a flute as are the monolithic deductive rationalisms of modernity, but on an organ with the full range of sonorities of the world's cultures. The result, it can be hoped, will be not a philosophic tradition that is hegemonic imposing itself universally, but one composed, as in the image of Isaiah, of the many peoples converging each along its own path to the holy mountain.

For this, important theoretical tools can be found in the long development of the metaphysics of analogy. Cornelio Fabro described this as the language of participation, whereby Plato reintroduced diversity into Parmenides' high philosophic unity. This is discussed in the latter part of Chapter VII of my *Person, Peoples and Cultures in a Global Age* in this series (see [www.crvp.org](http://www.crvp.org)).

Practically, this convergence of unique cultures has been emerging through the more than 100 studies of this series: "Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change". Generally the volumes have been written by research teams, each working on a present problem of its own people and drawing in response upon its cultural tradition. The commonly shared challenges of community life, particularly in our time of global change, are their central concern. To these the responses are as differentiated as is the free cultural creativity of the many peoples coming from the all points of the compass.

Yet there are philosophical resources which give founded hope that these people can be convergent rather than conflictual. These are found at a level deeper than formal and abstract ethical principles; they must be rooted rather in the common point of emergence and convergence of all human life, and indeed of all creation. If so then in this work, *Beyond Cultures: Perceiving a Common Humanity*, devoted to unity in diversity, Professor Gyekye has assured the basis for the major project of our day, namely, to build upon our essential unity-in-diversity an existential diversity-in-unity in which all can celebrate their own life with, and through, that of others.

*Washington, D.C.*

*October 2003*

# LECTURE I

## OUR HUMAN NATURE, OUR HUMAN VALUES: Looking Over the Cultural Wall

### INTRODUCTION

Imagine a group of people—men, women, and children—in some natural environment, or a group of people who find themselves in a particular geographic space in the wake of, say, a shipwreck or a disaster of some sort, or in pursuit of a sheer determination to relocate in order to fulfill certain existential needs. Imagine, also, that these people come from different lineages or ethnic backgrounds, related to one another by both kinship and non-kinship ties. Now they have come or been coerced to live a settled life. They will immediately feel the need to evolve a shared life and establish a social framework within which they can function as human beings. To fulfill this need, they will evolve certain values, practices, institutions—in short, common forms or ways of life. They will nurture certain values, practices, meanings, and other symbols concomitant to a shared life. When these values and practices come in the course of time to gain currency in their patterns of thought and ways of acting and behaving, they would not only guide and influence their life, but in many ways they would come to condition their behavior. A social, conceptual, and normative framework would have thus emerged, embodying the people's way of life in its totality: this framework would be the *culture* of the people. Culture is thus an enactment of a community of people, created and fashioned in response to the whole gamut of problems or questions that arise in the context of a people's particular situation. The problems or questions themselves are universal, even though the approaches to dealing with them may be particular or specific, and may differ from society to society.

Thus, there may be different approaches to dealing with the problems of material existence—problems of providing food, clothing, shelter, and other material needs. The kind of food, shelter, and clothing that would be provided would be greatly influenced or even determined by climatic or environmental factors and by the knowledge and skills available to a particular group of people, and these in their different ways would in turn influence the techniques of obtaining food, the style of architecture, the type of preferable clothing material (for instance, winter clothing cannot sensibly be used in the tropics) and the style of dress that would be fashioned. There may be different approaches to dealing with the ordering of human relations engendered by different conceptions of both human nature and the nature of human society and how these (conceptions) are to be realized or made explicit in concrete social structures.

A social structure may be evolved that stresses the primacy of the status of the individual vis-a-vis that of the community, or that stresses the ontological priority of the community over the individual, or that sees the two (i.e., the individual and the community) as of equal moral standing. An organized human society would require the creation of political principles, systems, and institutions to deal with matters of governance, just as it would require—and so would have to develop—legal and moral codes in order to regulate the behavior of the members of the society and to bring about social stability, harmony, and peace. To deal with the problem of communicating with one another, language would be developed. Artistic forms, such as music and dance, would emerge as ways not only of expressing their creative talents but also of communicating their thoughts and feelings. The group's perceptions or experiences of the

universe might in time lead to questions about its origin and the postulation of some ultimate being (or beings) beyond the universe as the foundation of the universe and the establishment of a worshipful attitude to this being: herein lies the beginnings of religion.

The human capacity to wonder—a capacity that is universal—may give rise to two different attitudes: one is superstitious leading to beliefs and presuppositions that can hardly be rationally and scientifically grounded; the other is rational leading to beliefs and explanations that can be grounded in reason. The rational attitude leads some individuals in various cultures to raise fundamental questions about human experience. This engages philosophical reflection, a central part of which is metaphysical relating to a theory about the nature of being or existence. Thus, every culture produces dogmas concerning the human soul and its destiny and the existence of some ultimate being. The activity of wonder can lead to the creation of myths and fictional tales that serve as vehicles for abstract thought. Every culture abounds in philosophically oriented myths and tales; but these may differ in their meaning and purpose. All these approaches are responses to the varied experiences of a people; they are ways of negotiating the problems and enigmas encountered in human life. In many ways the problems, questions or perplexities that worry human beings can be seen as universal, even though answers or responses to them by various societies may differ. But it must be borne in mind that the original, as well as ultimate aim in creating culture—whether material or mental—is *human well-being*.

In evolving and nurturing approaches or solutions to deal with the variety of problems or questions affecting their social, moral, political, economic, intellectual, and spiritual well-being, a group of people in fact creates a culture: the approaches or solutions nurtured over time mature as features of the culture. Even so, I do not imply by any means that the culture created or evolved by a people is to be perceived as a homogeneous culture that features a monolithic set of ideas, feelings, outlooks, or world-views. On the contrary, there are interminable debates and conversations even within the same culture. Often these derive from the exercise of the creative capacities and endowments of the participants of the culture. They may reflect as well the different ways in which individuals or groups of the present or successive generations respond to the various experiences they encounter as participants of the culture. Given the different conceptions individuals generally hold about human nature, society, and the world, these debates and conversations are inevitable, but can be also appropriate and fruitful. In the absence of the dynamic debates, conversations, as well as struggles internal to a culture, that culture becomes stunted, losing its vibrancy and buoyancy. Indeed, the growth of a human culture, its capacity to avoid atrophy, decadence, and dysfunction and to adapt itself to new situations and demands is due to fresh ideas and orientations that follow upon such debates and struggles. This said, however, we must recognize that the organizational and functional structure of a human society derives from this thing called culture. This fact suggests the conviction that some degree of convergence on some basic values and practices of a culture would be inevitable if human society is at all to function and human life is to flourish.

## **DESCRIPTIVE AND NORMATIVE CULTURAL RELATIVISM**

There is no denying that there would be—and in fact indeed are—diversities in the elements and features of cultures created by human beings. These diversities merely reflect the approaches or solutions fashioned by a particular society to the various problems or questions posed for it by climate and environment, and the normative and conceptual framework desired by a group of people. They reflect also the aesthetic endowments of the members of a group. Different social

contexts spawn diverse cultural values, practices, and institutions, even though I believe that the diversity among human cultures is often exaggerated. Some scholars interpret cultural diversity as leading to relativism. The kind of relativism I am concerned with in this lecture is *cultural* relativism, which must include the relativity of moral values. (Moral relativism is an offshoot of cultural relativism, the reason being that, since any morality contains elements of custom, convention, and practice which clearly are among the main constituents of culture, it follows that cultural relativism entails moral relativism.) Cultural relativism denies the universality or objectivity of cultural values. It asserts that values are relative to particular cultures in the sense that values held by a particular society or culture are true and valid for that culture or society. In consequence, any culturally dominant conception of the good is as valid as any other, there being no single or common culture-neutral (or transcultural) standard by which the various goods or values can be evaluated.

The position of the relativist appears to be established in the conclusions drawn by many anthropologists. The well-known American cultural anthropologist, Melville J. Herskovits, thought that the field of cultural anthropology as a whole confirms "the validity of each set of norms for the people whose lives are guided by them and the values they represent."<sup>1</sup> What appears to me as incorrect and disputable, however, is not the fact of cultural diversity; this is based on some empirical observations and is uncontroversial. It is rather the further assertion that the cultural or moral norms, practices and institutions of one society are as good and valid as those of another society, that if the values of two different societies clash, both can claim to be right, or alternatively, neither can be judged wrong. I refer to relativism that is based on the sheer fact of cultural diversity as descriptive cultural relativism: for instance, the fact that female genital circumcision is practiced in a known particular society while it is rejected (i.e., not practiced) in another society, or that some societies maintain extended family structures while others maintain nuclear (or primary) family structures, or that some societies are communal in their social structures while others are individualistic. I refer to the kind of relativism that asserts the unqualified validity or correctness of the different practices of various societies as normative cultural relativism. The former is an innocuous, first order, non-evaluative observation that bears a banal truth. It is the latter, second order evaluative view of different human cultures that cannot stand up to analysis. This is the object of my criticisms, for its limits need to be pointed out, these limits may be a basis for the conviction that the opposed position, namely, cultural universalism, can rationally be defended. Philosophical defenders of (cultural) relativism have normative cultural relativism in mind, not just the empirical fact of diversity among cultures.

Normative cultural relativism implies that we cannot judge or criticize the actions of a society that is different from our own. Members of one society, S1, would have no moral or intellectual warrant for judging the beliefs and actions of another society, S2. For to do so is to claim to understand the other culture or society from within; such a claim cannot, according to relativism, be well founded, since the one making the claim would be doing so from outside a given culture and would thus be employing different values and standards that would only skew one's understanding of the other culture or society. All this is true to some extent. Even so, the position of normative cultural relativism, as glib as it is, cannot be defended for several reasons.

## **A CRITIQUE OF NORMATIVE CULTURAL RELATIVISM**

Firstly, by arguing that cultures and societies must be understood in their own terms and are therefore off-limits to evaluation or criticism by people outside those particular cultures,

normative cultural relativism presents itself as an uncritical celebration of difference or otherness, without due regard to the qualities or characteristics of the different things. From the statement "S1 is different from S2", it does not necessarily follow that S1 and S2 must necessarily be held as of equal standing in all respects when they are considered from certain angles. As two different systems of cultural values, beliefs, practices, and institutions, they would naturally have different characteristics, possibilities, or approaches to doing things: they would thus differ in certain respects. Yet a critical examination of them will most likely yield results that would suggest a preference of one over the other by reason of its greater worth, achievement, functionality, potential in fulfilling certain demands and expectations—particularly those that affect human well-being generally. If S1 practices human sacrifice while S2 does not, most people—both from within and without that society or culture—would criticize and condemn that practice on moral grounds; they would surely not say that because S1 is different from S2 therefore the former's practice of human sacrifice is morally acceptable on the grounds simply that it is a practice of that culture.

The two different cultural systems can be judged against certain backgrounds, the ultimate background being, to my mind, the possibilities each can exude for enhancing human well-being. Advocates of normative relativism imply that 'anything goes.' In maintaining such a position, they betray themselves as uncritical celebrants of difference, an attitude that I argue cannot be defended on moral or functional grounds. It cannot be defended morally because it appreciates factors that may be deleterious to human well-being; nor can it be defended on functional or practical grounds because it appreciates factors or characteristics the pursuit of which cannot assist the achievement of the practical goals—social, economic, political, and so on—that a culture is created to achieve.

Second, the position of normative relativism to disallow evaluation of cultures is vulnerable to criticism. The arguments for disallowing evaluation of other cultures are, as I see it, threefold. One argument is that, since the values and practices of each culture or society are valid for that society or culture, any attempt by someone outside that culture to evaluate it would be irrelevant, otiose, inconsequential, and an unjustified interference. Another argument involves challenging the basis of anyone's claim to understand other cultures beyond his own. Since, as the relativist argument goes, it is impossible for an 'outsider' to fully appreciate the nuances of the meanings and symbols of a different cultural system, there would be no basis for anyone's judging and evaluating another culture. A further argument, which is a corollary of the one just stated, is that, since an 'outsider' would have no real basis for evaluating another—alien—culture, any attempt on their part to do so would always and unavoidably be conditioned by their own background values and beliefs. This would result in a necessary distortion of the judgements that would be made as these can only reflect the 'outsider's' own cultural norms and perspectives. Let us briefly look at these arguments.

It would be correct to aver that the values and practices of human cultures are created with a view, originally, to enhancing human well-being *generally*. This is a basic presupposition in creating a culture, even though we know that, due to several factors that include human limitations and lack of foresight, some of the values and practices turn out to be malignant and dysfunctional. But what this generally means is that whether or not a cultural value or practice maintained by a particular society is valid depends on the consequences for human well-being of the pursuit of that practice or value. The underlying functionalist thrust here cannot at all be disregarded in view of the fact that the values, practices, and institutions of a society (moral, social, political, aesthetic, etc.) are established for some *purpose*, to serve some function, such as

the achievement of social harmony or human flourishing. The fact that a value or practice is upheld by a particular culture does not seem to be a good reason for considering it as valid and off-limits to criticism or evaluation by others outside that culture. Thus, if the pursuit of a particular cultural value turns out to be detrimental to basic human interests and well-being—if it derogates human fulfillment—the fact that it is maintained by a particular society cannot redeem or vindicate it, for a belief or practice even if maintained by an entire society could be wrong from some point of view, such as one that pays adequate regard to human values or welfare. It is worth noting that it is possible for a society, held in thrall by either its atavistic values and sensibilities or the moral incapacities of its members, to be almost totally oblivious to certain pernicious beliefs or practices of its culture, notwithstanding the deleterious consequences for human well-being of the pursuit of such beliefs and practices.

People outside a particular culture who may look at the beliefs or practices of that culture with disapproval may be doing so on the basis of other considerations than the peculiarities of their own culture (or cultures); indeed their own culture (or cultures) may even be pursuing those same pernicious beliefs or practices. Even so, their critical attitude to features of another culture (or other cultures) should not be rejected with the standard rebuke asking them to remove first the beam from their own eyes. In other words, a critical attitude to some practices or features of another culture may be motivated by genuine concerns for human well-being in the other culture as well as in the critic's own culture. It must be noted, though, that the motivating factors in judging other cultures can be complex. The critical judgments of those from within the culture may be motivated by moral or practical considerations: they may come to the conclusion that the cultural beliefs and practices of their society are morally reprehensible as well as practically dysfunctional. The moral considerations would appeal to values that we would regard as human values.

Moreover, it is not true—certainly not entirely true—to say that we *always* see other cultures through our own cultural lenses, that we express appreciation of the values and practices of the other culture (or cultures) only because those same values and practices exist in our own culture, and that we evince negative attitudes because the features—some features—of the other culture are incompatible with our own. The reason is that we do express appreciation and evince positive evaluative attitudes to features of an alien culture (or alien cultures) even when we do not have those features in our culture. In such a case, the appreciation or positive evaluation cannot be said to reflect or derive from the values of our own culture *as such*—and cannot thus be said to be culturally determined. A positive evaluative attitude to (some) features of an alien culture may derive rather from an appreciation either of the aesthetics of those features for their own sake or of their highly functional worth, which may in fact lead us to want to adopt them. The latter reason for positive evaluation is indeed the whole basis of cultural borrowing, a common phenomenon in the cultural history of human societies. (I shall return to this phenomenon in due course.) The forgoing arguments are intended to show that it would not be entirely correct to assert that judgments about other cultures are always and ineluctably conditioned by one's own local background values and beliefs, and therefore that those judgments are necessarily distorted. It is possible to climb over the cloistering walls of one's cultural values and beliefs to ruminate on and show concern about values that can be said to be culture-neutral. I will call such culture-neutral values human values. This possibility adumbrates a distinction between cultural and *human* values which I will elaborate shortly. But it must be noted for the moment that critical evaluations, by people both from within and outside a particular culture, can be said to be inspired essentially or ultimately by concerns for human values.

Another—a third—argument I wish to deploy in my criticism of normative (cultural) relativism derives from the empirical fact that people of one culture *do* feel scandalized when some morally outrageous actions are committed in societies or cultures outside their own, and consequently *do* make critical judgments about those actions or situations. There is no denying that scathing criticisms have been made of societies that practice racial segregation, slavery (of any kind), female genital mutilation, and other practices that palpably derogate human dignity. Critical judgments about actions or practices of other cultures by people outside those cultures can—and fairly often do—have effects, even if not immediately. This fact, to my mind, has significant implication for the regard people may, consciously or unconsciously, have for the transcultural (or culture-neutral) status of the moral values invariably involved in those actions or situations that are being critically judged. This means that they do not regard such values as deriving simply from a local culture and therefore as having only local relevance or importance, as of interest or concern only to the local people, i.e., the people of some particular society. It is interesting, however, to note that it is only such practices of a particular culture as are clearly careless and destructive of human dignity or well-being that generally come under criticism by others outside that culture, not just any cultural practice or institution. If all this is true, what is its basis? What is the underlying assumption? What is the justification, if any? Why do people genuinely feel greatly morally outraged by actions or practices pursued in cultures or societies outside their own? These questions need to be explored. But, before taking them up, I would like, for a moment, to turn my attention to a thesis that may be regarded as a conceptual affiliate of relativism, but perhaps more correctly is its offshoot. This claim or thesis is the incommensurability of cultures or conceptual systems.

## **THE INCOMMENSURABILITY THESIS**

The word ‘incommensurability’ has its roots in the Latin word *mensura*, which means ‘measure,’ ‘scale,’ or ‘standard.’ “Incommensurable” thus means having no common basis or standard in terms of which different things such as different belief systems, conceptual systems, cultural values, moral goods, and so on, can be evaluated and compared. A and B, as moral or cultural values, are incommensurable if there is no standard or quality in virtue of which they may be measured or compared. Several philosophers claim that the diversity and plurality of cultural values, beliefs, and practices make these values, beliefs, and practices incommensurable. They are incommensurable because they are held to be so radically or irreducibly different that there is, consequently, no single or common measure on the basis of which they can be evaluated. If A and B are so radically different, then all that others can or will have to do is merely to recognize the fact of the difference, to see them as simply two different conceptual systems or cultural values or forms of life, not to attempt a critical evaluation of them. Any such attempt would, in the supposed absence of a common measuring scale, not be appropriate or justifiable. The incommensurability thesis would therefore consider inappropriate, irrelevant or meaningless such relativistic expressions as ‘better than,’ or ‘worse than,’ ‘inferior to,’ or ‘superior to,’ that clearly make reference to judgments of quality or value. It would also consider impossible the terms ‘equal,’ or ‘unequal’ as applied to different cultural values or forms of life, since there would be no basis for measuring their equality or inequality. The thesis is thus clearly an uncritical, an obtuse celebration of difference or otherness.

One of the earliest and perhaps the most famous proponents of the incommensurability thesis is the eighteenth century German philosopher and poet Johann G. Herder, who “insisted

upon and celebrated the uniqueness of national cultures, above all their incommensurability."<sup>2</sup> According to Sir Isaiah Berlin, Herder held that, "There are no immutable, universal, eternal rules or criteria of judgement in terms of which different cultures and nations can be graded in some single order of excellence. . . . Our culture is our own; cultures are incommensurable; each is as it is, each of infinite value, as souls are in the sight of God."<sup>3</sup> In Herder's view there is no single overarching standard of value—no single measuring-rod—in terms of which cultures or civilizations can be evaluated. The position of Herder may be taken as representing the quintessence of the incommensurability claim.

The word 'incommensurable' is used to refer to situations in which we either have to make a rational choice between values or principles that conflict or evaluate and make judgment about the moral values, outlooks, and practices of different cultures and traditions. I am, however, more interested and concerned in this lecture about the incommensurability claim made about values and practices across cultural boundaries. The claim, here too, as we have noted and is forthrightly and unambiguously asserted by Herder, is that there is no common measure or scale for evaluating different cultures. According to the incommensurability thesis, culture cannot be placed in a single normative scale for they cannot be weighed from the same respects; there is no common ground between them. What we are therefore required to do is simply to recognize and come to terms with the differences between cultures, not to judge or evaluate them. In due course I will challenge this thesis as applied to the value and belief systems of cultures.

Culture, and we must always bear in mind this banal truth, is created by human beings to serve the purposes and interests of human beings. For this reason, the basic or ultimate criterion for evaluating cultures is *human well-being*, the extent to which a particular culture is set to fulfill the conditions that make for human well-being. All cultures evolve practices, beliefs, values, and institutions; these beliefs, values, practices, and institutions may differ from one culture to another. Some beliefs, practices, or institutions of a culture may be said to be innocuous from the point of view of human well-being. A culture may believe in myriads of spirits or supernatural beings without this belief having negative consequences on the well-being of the practitioners of that culture. I would have no justifiable grounds for criticizing such a cultural belief. But there are beliefs, practices, values, and institutions of a culture that clearly are obnoxious and destructive of human interests or welfare; these cannot be morally accommodated. For instance: if a belief in myriads of spirits leads to human sacrifice or to the murder of human beings for ritual purposes, or if a belief in a certain form of life in the hereafter leads to human sacrifice in the wake of the death of some 'great' man, such a belief cannot be defended on moral grounds. A metaphysic that breeds a practice detrimental to human well-being ought to be repudiated; and the culture that fosters it can justifiably be criticized. Similarly, a culture that under the inspiration of false, weird or skewed theories of anthropology enslaves other people or discriminates against sections of its members and thus lacerates their human dignity cannot be given high marks.

Also, since cultures or ways of life are created directly to serve the people who create them, the question that immediately comes up is whether or not a given culture functions satisfactorily. That is, does it have a viable framework within which its participants can flourish and lead fulfilling lives, and can the society so develop on a sustainable basis in ways that satisfy basic human needs. If a culture spawns and nurtures attitudes, beliefs, practices, mental outlooks, and behavioral patterns that can be shown to hinder its development or effective functioning, then it can be said that that culture, as presently constituted, can hardly serve as an adequate framework for the fulfillment of the basic needs of its participants.

A culture that may be said to have in many ways succeeded in establishing a framework that enables its participants to flourish can be discriminated from one so bedeviled or encumbered by its own customs, beliefs, values, and practices that it does not seem to have made as much headway in terms of creating an adequate social setting for human fulfillment. The basis of the discrimination is clear: success, viability, and functionality. In this connection, a caveat may be entered against the Akan saying or maxim that "customs are not to be destroyed" (*amammre wonsee no*).<sup>4</sup> The view expressed in the statement cannot be held as absolutely correct, for a normative, critical assessment of the Akan culture can lead to the conclusion that some features of that culture need not merely be pruned but should be abandoned and expunged from the cultural life and thought of the people. I have discussed some of such features in a recent publication.<sup>5</sup> To abandon (some) features of a culture or to allow such features to fall into desuetude is in effect to 'destroy' them. The growth of a human culture is in part a function of the critical re-evaluation of the values and practices of the culture, a re-evaluation that could lead to the abandonment—and therefore destruction—of some features of a culture.

There is a world of difference between a belief or practice whose pursuit enhances human well-being, and one whose pursuit does violence to human well-being. But the difference between the two kinds of belief or practice is *not* incommensurable, as relativists suppose. For both can be considered from the perspective of the common standard of human well-being or interest. In other words, the common ground or measure of human well-being makes the two different beliefs or practices commensurable. On this showing, differences in beliefs, practices, or institutions do not have to be brought into a relation of comparison and may not be evaluated where such differences are innocuous from the perspective of human well-being. Music and dance forms of various cultures may—and in fact often do—differ. They may arouse the aesthetic enjoyment and appreciation of people outside the cultures that produce them. Ways of preparing food differ among cultures; and so do some other practices or creative productions of the various cultures of the humankind. But beyond such generally harmless differences in cultural practices or productions there are such values as human dignity and liberty and, indeed, life itself, which are *not* the creation of a culture as such, but which every human culture is rather required to recognize, respect, protect, and promote; such values are thus human values. Differences in the way the latter cluster of values is perceived and pursued can be critically evaluated, using the notion of human well-being as the common measure or standard.

## **ON THE NOTION OF HUMAN WELL-BEING**

It must be clear that the notion of human well-being is crucially important in establishing the normative basis for my rejection of the incommensurability claim between cultures; this notion is relevant also to the claims I make in the third lecture to follow. It is appropriate therefore to say something about my understanding of it. The notion of well-being, despite its great importance for morality and politics, certainly is not an easy notion to elucidate or specify in a way that will be acceptable to all people. It is thus expected that people, both within the same culture as well as across different cultures, will have different views about it. This being so, only a general, rather than specific, characterization of it can be put forward with a view to allowing space for people to chart their own course in accord with different conceptions of it. I have no doubt, however, that given our human nature and its basic needs and goals there will be large areas of agreement between the various conceptions of well-being. Here are some suggestions. Earlier, I used the terms "basic human needs" and "human fulfillment." I believe that the notion of well-

being must be understood in those terms comprehensively conceived, that is, conceived in terms that go beyond the purely material or physical to include such non-sensible values as dignity, liberty, and opportunity for self-development (including opportunity for spiritual or religious self-development). Basic needs, qua basic, are those that can be said to be intrinsic to the functioning of human beings as human beings; they are the things that make human life at all worth living. Such needs are distinguishable from the specific desires of the particular human beings that we are. James Griffin also defines well-being in terms of basic needs,<sup>6</sup> considering them to be "things that are both necessary to, and sufficient for, a recognizably human existence."<sup>7</sup> The comprehensive conception of basic needs which I would support is implicit in Griffin's phrase "human existence," as comprehensive in the sense of taking into account the whole being or existence of the person. The conception appears also in John Finnis' notion of "integral human fulfillment."<sup>8</sup> Thus conceived, well-being is not to be identified with happiness, which is a psychological state, even though this is included in integral fulfillment.

In making human well-being the common measure by which cultures can be evaluated, I am claiming that this value is most fundamental, even within the framework of a plurality of values, that all things or activities are valuable only insofar as they enhance human well-being (i.e., the well-being of each individual person). For that reason, all other values are reducible *ultimately* to the value of well-being. For these reasons, well-being can be considered a 'master value,' to borrow an expression of T.M. Scanlon's, which he does not, however, consider a very correct description of the value of well-being in a constellation of values.<sup>9</sup>

Adequate considerations of human well-being will cast serious doubt on the unqualified assertion of the cultural relativist that any value or practice of a culture is valid for that culture and cannot therefore be critically evaluated by others outside that culture. It would be more correct to assert, rather, that our common humanity—which is grounded in our human nature—on the one hand sets limits to normative cultural relativism and its progeny, the incommensurability thesis. For it often disposes us to see beyond the boundaries of our own cultures, to express our moral dismay or disgust at certain actions being pursued by other cultures or societies, and justifiably—on moral grounds—to make critical judgments about those actions. Our common humanity, on the other hand, grounds (or should ground) the culture-neutrality or at least some degree of universality of values that can appropriately be characterized as human values, to which people who make critical judgments about another culture would wittingly be appealing. In other words, given that relativism is opposed to universalism (or, the existence of objective values), recognition of the limits of relativism opens the way for a viable conception of universal (human) values; it opens a window through which we can appreciate a defensible conception of universal values. A discussion of the possibility of universal values constitutes the next segment of the lecture.

It can hardly be denied that people of different cultures *do* make critical judgments about actions or practices that obtain in other cultures in a contemporary world as well as about actions or practices that obtained in past cultures or societies. The apartheid system was criticized and roundly condemned by most societies of the world; the practice of human sacrifice by some societies in Ghana and perhaps elsewhere was criticized by others; the female circumcision practiced in some cultures has been criticized by people outside those cultures who are morally outraged by that practice; and so on. Critical judgments made against the practices and actions of a culture are not necessarily and invariably inspired merely by the particular cultural values (such as the local values of the critics) as their justificatory basis. At least sometimes they appeal to values that can be said to transcend the peculiarities of a particular culture or cultures.

The critical response to practices or actions of different cultures has at least seven implications. These are: (i) that from the standpoint of a deeper, non-superficial, level, the relativist has unduly exaggerated the differences between cultures; (ii) that no culture is unique and practiced by people whose thoughts, activities, and other types of experience are never completely unrelated to those of people belonging to other cultures; (iii) that, in consequence of (ii), the 'wall' in my metaphorical expression 'cultural wall' can only be regarded as a *thin* wall that is intended merely to point to the differences in cultures; (iv) that human beings typically do not believe or say that they have been shepherded into cloistering thick cultural walls to live lives unrelated in all respects to those of other human beings beyond those walls, but that boundaries between human cultures are fluid and porous; (v) that the particularities of cultures, as human creations need not be perceived as weird phenomena that are arcane, recondite, or morally inaccessible to human beings other than those who practice them; (vi) that no single human culture is a morally impenetrable wall; and (vii) most importantly as far as the arguments that I am going to advance are concerned, that there are universal values which, because they transcend particular cultural boundaries, can be characterized as human values.

## **IN DEFENSE OF CULTURAL UNIVERSALISM**

On the basis of assertions made in the foregoing paragraph, a case can, I believe, be made for the universality of cultural (including moral) values, values that thus go beyond cultures. I use the expression "beyond cultures" to convey the idea that there are beliefs, perceptions, outlooks, values, and practices that are not features, properties or characteristics of a particular culture as such, but can be seen rather as transcending cultural particularities. They show up as universal or common to the various cultures fashioned by humankind. The argument I am going to advance in defense of universalism (at least of a moderate type) is two-pronged, one empirical—based on observation, and the other conceptual—based on the notion of an organized human society.

Let us take the empirical points first. The investigations and accounts of cultural anthropologists are the major sources of an empirical argument for the universality of cultural values. Time will not allow references to many of the works of cultural anthropologists; but the spirit or essential meaning of their accounts is instructive and noteworthy. It would appear from those accounts that the social needs (moral, political, economic, etc.) and other kinds of human experience have led the various cultures of the world to evolve values and practices many—but by no means all—of which can be said to be common in their underlying essential meanings, though not necessarily in their elaborate forms and in all respects. Let us mention some of the values and practices spawned by the various cultures that can be said to be universal.

It would be correct to assert that every culture has:

- a doctrine on the metaphysical constitution of the human being—a conception of the human personality, i.e., of the soul and its mundane or post-mundane destiny; each culture has ceremonies that pertain to the fact of death;
- a taboo on incest;
- a Weltanschauung or a world-view that derives from its perception of the world;
- the nuclear (primary) family institution;
- kinship relations;

- as a result of the need for sheer existential survival through the satisfaction of material needs, an explanation of the division of labor and of social roles that are features of the economic organization;
- a moral code as well as legal rules to regulate the conduct of its members in order to make possible cooperative living possible (though there may be differences in the contents of the moral codes, there are many similarities that I will discuss shortly);
- a system of socio-political hierarchy responsible for making social decisions at different levels;
- shared values, which give meaning to a common life;- myths and fables or legends that deal with questions of a society's past and provide psychological basis for solidarity and belonging;
- the cultivation of friendships between members of a society;
- work toward common goals; and
- the nurture of a sense of the past that cherishes its traditions and roots.<sup>10</sup>

In the view of Philippa Foot, "Granted that it is wrong to assume identity of aims between people of different cultures; nevertheless there is a great deal that all men have in common. All need affection, the cooperation of others, a place in a community and help in trouble."<sup>11</sup> Sir Isaiah Berlin avers that "all men have a basic sense of good and evil, no matter what cultures they belong to."<sup>12</sup> The moral ideas implicit in, or related to, the Golden Rule appear in different cultures,<sup>13</sup> even though they may be formulated differently in the various languages.

The foregoing are among the values, outlooks, beliefs, and practices that can be said to be common to all human cultures. There is no suggestion or implication, however, that each value is held with the same commitment and that each practice is of the same form in all cultures or societies. What this means, though, is that what obtains in each culture can be a variation on a common theme or phenomenon, an instantiation of some universal principle or value. The social act of greeting, for instance, which is a universal social value, manifests itself, that is, is performed, in different ways in different cultures. But the important thing here is that the various cultures recognize the act of greeting as a social value, as an act that enhances human or social relations. The fact of a particular style or form of greeting is inconsequential and does not detract from the universal recognition of that social practice as a social value. I would thus acknowledge that the basic universal values are to some extent differently conceptualized and therefore differently experienced in different cultures. To insist on the absence of local variation as a necessary requirement of universality, to expect universality in *all* spheres of the cultural life manifested in all human societies, is not only to blithely ignore the fact of the specific creative talents and endowments of individual human beings, but also to disregard the essential need to respond to certain specific problems of people in a particular human society. The different aesthetic talents of human beings as well as different ways of coming to grips with the existential problems posed by different environments gives rise to a cultural tapestry on the global cultural landscape, rather than to a cultural monolith. The fact of a great overlap between the basic values of the different cultures, however, cannot be blithely set at naught.

Now, it will be seen that there are values that, even if they appear to be reached through the empirical account of the cultural anthropologist, can nevertheless, on reflection, be considered as necessary or intrinsic features of the moral arrangement of a society, even before the actual investigation into the values and practices of a particular society is undertaken. That is to say, each society can be conceived of as maintaining or cherishing those values as part of its corpus

of values and practices. This leads me to my second approach to demonstrating the universality of cultural values: the conceptual approach.

The argument here is structured on the notion of an *organized* and *functioning* human society: it simply says that any organized and functioning human society would need to recognize, appreciate, and pursue certain basic values, *if* it is to survive at all as a human society. A human society must be organized—and can only function—on certain principles and values: such principles and values must therefore be common to each human society. One gets the impression that the assertions by the two cultural anthropologists, A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, that "No culture tolerates indiscriminate lying, stealing, or violence within the in-group . . . [or] . . . places a value upon suffering as an end in itself"<sup>14</sup> are merely empirical assertions, based on actual observations of the social and moral practices of various cultures. It can be said, however, that the prohibition of lying is one of the moral values or principles upon which any society is organized and can function as such. In a society that does not prohibit, but *tolerates*, lying, no meaningful or serious promises, agreements, or contracts can be made; no satisfactory relationships (including friendships) can be established between the members; there would be no basis for trust.

It is doubtful whether such a society can really claim to be an organized and satisfactorily functioning human society. In all societies people expect promises to be kept; the fact that they are not always kept is irrelevant. Again, one cannot conceive of a society that normally does not, as a matter of principle, maintain the ethic of respect for human life and where wanton killing is the order of the day. That society cannot survive as a *human* society for any length of time. I am not suggesting by any means that wanton killings do not occur in (some) societies; but if in fact wanton killing were accepted in a society as an established principle or norm in social relations, life in that society simply could not be lived. (The Rwandan society would most probably have disappeared if the internecine feuds had gone on for a very long time). Genocidal conflicts in multiethnic societies are extreme cases that can surely be said not to be a morally acceptable feature of any social arrangement. Similarly, the concepts of individual property and the enjoyment of the benefits of one's labor would have no meaning if a society countenanced stealing as a principle of individual or group action, just as life would not be worth living if a society tolerated violence within itself. It would be an oxymoron—a contradiction in terms—for a society aimed ultimately at enhancing the well-being of its members to place a value on suffering as an end in itself.

## **DISTINGUISHING CULTURAL FROM HUMAN VALUES**

The absurdities of a society's not recognizing certain values seem to suggest, if indirectly, that there are certain values that are intrinsic or concomitant to the notion of an organized and functioning human society. If in fact there are values that can be said to transcend cultural particularities, values that are—and have to be—maintained by a human society, values that are the desiderata of an organized human society, then more appropriately such values should be regarded rather as *human* than purely cultural values. They are human values, not cultural, because each culture or organized society upholds—or should uphold—them. Even if the greatest majority of the members of a society engaged in slavery of any kind, that act would not justify slavery: it would not imply that slavery was morally right and acceptable, for that act goes against the grain of human dignity and all that makes life worth living. Human dignity is certainly a basic human value. Human values must, thus, be distinguished from cultural values,

even though they (i.e., human values) find their way into the texture of the culture of a people. Thus, human values, such as love, compassion, generosity, sympathy, kindness, and benevolence are found articulated in such features or elements of culture as folk-tales, proverbs, myths, and moral codes. The possibility of a human society—any human society—must be grounded on the reality of a fundamental core of human values, the pursuit of which makes for the continual existence, stability, and smooth and harmonious functioning of society. Human values, qua *human* values, must be universal.

Human values are values that are essential for the flourishing—the well-being—of human beings and their societies and transcend the particularities of cultures. Similarities palpable in human cultural experiences can be explained in terms most probably of the notion of human values, a notion that is at the base of the universal search for human fulfillment. Human values constitute the foundation of what are now referred to as human rights (which prior to twentieth century were known as ‘natural rights’). Values are to be distinguished from rights in that rights can be asserted or claimed against the state or some group or institution and cannot be taken away, whereas values are not always adhered to and maintained and can, thus, be set at naught or outweighed by other values. Nevertheless it would be correct to say that rights—human rights—*originated* from values and therefore are grounded or rooted in values. What are called human rights, then, are simply special or fundamental *human* values, generally or ultimately of a moral nature. Like human values, human rights are *human* rights, not cultural rights; they belong to the human being not by virtue of membership a particular culture, but simply by virtue of being human. Given the close, perhaps intrinsic, connection between human rights and human nature then, it is bizarre and incomprehensible for contemporary Western scholars to be skeptical about the notion of human nature while at the same time defending and making the human rights concept a central plank of their political platform. Also, by reason of its being derived from human nature or essence, the human rights concept is clearly an *essentialist* concept and is, as such, a universalist concept. It would clearly be inconsistent therefore to advocate and defend the human rights concept and at the same time reject universalism (essentialism).

### *Human Nature and Human Values*

The two concepts of human values and human rights themselves appear to be allied to, or inspired by, or rooted in, the concept of human nature, a concept that has been burlesqued and travestied by several philosophers mainly because of what they regard as its obscure metaphysical grounding. The metaphysical grounding here is in fact linked to doctrines about the existence of God or some ultimate superhuman entity, the assumption being that, if there is human nature, it would have been fixed only by a creator—God. The concept of human nature thus immediately gets mired in controversies surrounding the existence of a supreme being—God. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), the late French atheist existentialist, is one of the famous philosophers who deny that there is any such thing as human nature or human essence: "There is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it."<sup>15</sup> Yet he also maintains that to be human means to be free, that it is a feature of the human condition to be free. In his words, "Man is free, man is freedom;"<sup>16</sup> in one of his memorable statements Sartre says that human beings are "condemned to be free."<sup>17</sup> Sartre is thus committed to the view that freedom is intrinsic to our being as humans; freedom then is an essential attribute of human nature. (Incidentally, by "freedom", Sartre does not mean political freedom, even though eventually political freedom is an aspect of it. Freedom here is to be understood in the metaphysical sense of

having a free will, the source of which is, according to existentialism, not external to us and on the basis of which we define ourselves—our identities—and choose our values, forms of life, and so on.) Since the attribute of freedom is claimed by Sartre for *all* humans, he cannot, on pain of contradiction, entirely deny the reality of human nature. In saying that the essence of man is to be free, Sartre is committed to universalism. If it is possible to delineate one essential attribute that belongs to all humans, it is certainly conceivable that other attributes or characteristics common to all humankind can be recognized and delineated. That would affirm that there is something called human nature. In Sartre's statement, "When we say that man chooses his own self, we mean *every one of us* must choose himself."<sup>18</sup> The expression "every one of us" clearly suggests the universality of a human characteristic, a characteristic that is a consequence of human nature.

And, while Sartre does not find the notion of human nature intelligible, he surprisingly entertains a concept of the 'human condition.' He writes: "Although it is impossible to find in each and every man a universal essence that can be called human nature, there is nevertheless a human universality of *condition*."<sup>19</sup> He explains that the 'condition' is a reference to "all the *limitations* which *a priori* define man's fundamental situation in the universe."<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note, (i) that what Sartre refers to as limitations are common to man (humankind), and (ii) that a human being's "fundamental situation in the universe" is defined *a priori*. It can hardly be denied that (i) involves a reference to universality, while (ii) seems to be at odds with the basic existentialist principle that "existence precedes essence", for an *a priori* definition speaks to essence—to attributes essential or intrinsic to an object. In his notion of condition, then, Sartre, perhaps unwittingly, affirms human essence or nature, which is universal to humankind. Thus he is able to assert that "Every purpose, however individual it may be, is of *universal* value. Every purpose, even that of a Chinese, an Indian or a Negro, can be understood by a European. . . . In every purpose there is *universality*, in this sense that every purpose is comprehensible to every man."<sup>21</sup> No human purpose is therefore "wholly foreign".<sup>22</sup>: that is why a European can understand a Chinese or an Indian or an African. Sartre is saying, or seems to be saying, that universality (i.e., of human purpose, goals, aspirations, sentiments, etc.) forms the basis of understanding among different peoples or cultures. Thus, he does use a universalist language, even though for him human universality "is not something given; it is being *perpetually* made."<sup>23</sup>

In the context of Sartre's arguments, it would be correct to say that the universality that is "being perpetually made" may be considered or interpreted as a contingent universality. But even if Sartre's statement can be so parsed, we would need to look for a reason—a background—for this contingent universality: a reason for this *perpetuity*. Sartre would probably say that this universality emerges from understanding the purposes of different peoples; but this begs the question against the reality or possibility of perpetually understanding the purposes of peoples of different societies or cultures. Our human nature (or, what I regard as its conceptual affiliate, namely, our common humanity) is crucially important in inter-cultural understanding or communication.

The ambivalence of Sartre's position indicates pretty clearly, I think, that it is not easy—perhaps not possible—to deny that there is a set of attributes or characteristics that can be said to be common to humankind as such. Such characteristics must be held as culture-neutral—that is, as transcending human cultures and thus, not specifically fashioned by a particular culture (or a particular group of cultures). Yet it would be correct to assert that some cultures rather than others have created and nurtured practices, institutions, and outlooks that are more conducive to

the exercise, realization, and fulfillment of the positive characteristics (or values) on one hand, and to deal with the negative ones (or disvalues), on the other. Our human nature disposes us to a social experience that, in turn, leads us to have in common not only certain basic value experiences, such as love, sympathy, affection from others, pleasure, joy, contentment, peace, and desire for success and freedom—all of which human beings seek. They lead us also to certain basic disvalue experiences such as pain, suffering, sadness, shame, disappointment, despair, fear, loneliness, frustration, and others—all of which human beings would want to avoid.<sup>24</sup> There are many attitudes, responses and actions that we adopt in respect of individuals and groups which genuinely spring from our consciousness of such value or disvalue experiences which are characteristics of human nature. Because of the human aversion for suffering, most people would go to the help of some person who is writhing in pain; in the wake of a disaster of some kind, most people would do what is needed to ease distress, suffering, and despair; in the event of some devastating natural disasters such as earthquakes, many of the world's communities demonstrate sympathy, some in concrete and practical fashion such as donations of food, medicine, blankets, and money. People generally tend to feel chagrined and outraged by unnecessary sufferings inflicted on some humans by others in some positions of power.

It may be correct to say that we can in many cases anticipate or predict what human beings will do in certain human situations. The basis of the anticipation or prediction is surely certain kinds of experiences that can be said to derive from our human nature. If there were no human nature—no basic value or disvalue experiences—responses of some human beings to other human beings in respect of the latter's situations would be random and generally unpredictable. Consciousness of the characteristics of human nature engenders degrees of spontaneity in attitudes of some humans toward others: I show sympathy to someone in distress because I anticipate that he would, as a feature of his being human, want some relief from pain or some difficult situation.

The value and disvalue experiences of human beings generate common human understanding, what the eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant called *sensus communis*.<sup>25</sup> This notion can be seen to function at two levels: at the level of a specific human society and at the level of transcultural or intercultural conversations. At the former level, it can be said that common human understanding is at the very base of an organized and functioning human society and culture. The reason is that, if there is a human society, if human beings do live together in some form of politically organized settings despite their individual or particular personalities, dispositions, ways of thinking and behaving, and so on, then the existence of a common understanding of what is basically good—or perceived as good—for its members can be held as the underlying presupposition. The creation of values and institutions to serve the purposes of life in a community is certainly a function of common human understanding, even though it must be noted at once that the common understanding would be in respect of a fundamental core of certain principles, moral, political, and so on therefore it would not cover all aspects of an individual's desires, wants, and goals, in regard to which divergences soon emerge. Thus, the core character of these principles allows for divergences, disagreements, and preferences on other spheres of the human activity and thought. *A sensus communis* (common human understanding) can therefore be regarded as that which inspires the creation of a moral, social, or political system aimed at enhancing the well-being of people in a society generally. It may be said, in fact, that common human understanding underlies and explains the emergence and development of the culture or cultural tradition of a people.

*Sensus communis* is at play also at the level of intercultural conversations, which indicates, of course, that there must be communication among cultures. Intercultural communication itself must be explained in terms of the pursuit of common human purposes. Cultural borrowing or appropriation is the result of intercultural communication that follows upon common human understanding, itself grounded in that which is common to humans. As Sir Isaiah Berlin puts it, "Intercommunication between cultures in time and space is only possible because what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them."<sup>26</sup> Our common human nature, expressed manifestly in our common value and disvalue experiences, is at the base of *sensus communis* that provides the grounds for intercultural communication.

In this connection, I wish to say that I find a remarkable insight made in a well-known paper by Donald Davidson to be very relevant to my position against the incommensurability thesis. Even more importantly, it supports my conviction that some understanding of utterances of human beings of different cultures or belief systems and normative commitments can be held as implying some appreciation of sufficiently common purposes or perspectives, even if this understanding or sense—from Davidson's convincing arguments—manifested itself in agreement or disagreement. We could neither agree nor disagree if we could not make sense of cross-cultural utterances or arguments. But the possibility of making sense of cross-cultural utterances or arguments is grounded on shared perspectives on at least some aspects of the human experience.

Thus, Davidson notes: "Different points of view make sense, but only if there is *a common coordinate system* on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability."<sup>27</sup> In terms of his insight, we would have to posit a shared rationality in order to make sense of someone else's utterances, even if that person's cultural background is different from our own. It would follow, then, that there is a limit to which conceptual systems of various cultures differ. This is because a shared rationality will more likely than not dispose human beings belonging to different cultures to have *some* common perceptions of the world, as well as of morality and other features of the human experience. Thus, clearly inspired by Davidson's insight, Michele-Moody Adams contends that "moral disagreement is possible only where there is quite substantial agreement about many of the basic concepts that are relevant to moral reflection,"<sup>28</sup> and that in cross-cultural cases "there must be some *common ground* shared by diverse cultures in order for there even to be a genuine moral disagreement."<sup>29</sup> The common ground constitutes a limit to moral disagreement. It is logically impossible for human beings, whether within the same culture or across different cultures, to disagree on *every* moral issue, otherwise moral discourse of any kind, and on any issue, could be undertaken at all; human beings would only be talking at cross purposes. But this surely is not a feature of our shared humanity, or indeed of any human society if it is to function as a human society.

The understanding by a present generation of the cultural creations of their own past, as well as of other distant cultures or times derives from the values we share as human beings, values that can be said to be consequential to our common human nature. This is a major reason why a later generation may seek to preserve or appropriate at least some of the cultural creations of the past, be they values, practices, institutions, outlooks, ideas, or ideals. On this showing, Williams' view that "past forms of life are not a real option for the present"<sup>30</sup> cannot be fully defended. It may be true of *some* aspects of the life of a present generation. But, if forms of life can be said not to exclude—and I do not see how they would exclude—what I refer to as human values as ingredients or elements, then it would not be correct to maintain that *entire* past forms of life

cannot be opted and cherished by a present. If we—that is, human beings of a present generation—did not share at least certain values or ideas with people of past or previous generations, we would not understand them; nor would we ever consider adopting or continuing with the values and practices of the past which are worthwhile for our lives in the present. We could not say anything one way or another about those past forms of life and so be able to appreciate or condemn them; nor would a present generation have any reason to hope that their values, practices, and ideals would be appreciated, respected, cherished, and preserved by a future generation.

In consequence, if a view such as that of Williams were to be upheld, the notion of cultural *heritage* would have no meaning, and the notion of *tradition* would be incoherent. But our ability to understand and, particularly, to judge the past indicates the falsity of normative cultural relativism; it also makes Williams' notion of "the relativism of distance"<sup>31</sup> (i.e., historical distance) not acceptable in its entirety. Human values are not time-bound. We appreciate the literature of some past age because its contents speak to common human sensibilities, aspirations, and goals. We generally appreciate the yearnings and struggles of a people for freedom and deliverance from slavery, for it is not only an innate but also a common desire of the human being to be free. Many wars have been fought in human history in defense or pursuit of freedom (or liberty). The moral judgments we make of other societies, including historically distant societies, *ultimately* stem from, and are inspired by, our perception of human nature or human values. All this indicates that the concept of human nature or human values has a great deal of meaning and significance and so cannot seriously and off-handedly be rejected or even doubted. It constitutes much of the foundation of our morality, law, politics, social relationships, and the beliefs in human rights.

## **ON THE NOTION OF THE COMMON GOOD**

The concepts of human nature, common humanity, common human understanding, common human purposes, and shared values—all of them, jointly or severally, point or give rise to the notion of the common good. Such a good can be said to be commonly—universally—shared by all human individuals, and to be essential for the ordinary or basic functioning of the human person in a human society. The common good is not a surrogate for the sum of the different individual goods or preferences, as is maintained by some Western liberal thinkers.<sup>32</sup> It is, instead, that set of goods that is essentially or fundamentally good for human beings as such. This set of essential or fundamental goods which all human beings desire and to which they ought to have access is referred to as the common good. The common good, then, is identical with *human* good. The understanding and unrelenting support for such moral concepts as sympathy, compassion, concern for others, respect for persons, social justice, equality, the rights of individuals (human rights)—even if they are conceptualized in somewhat different ways and pursued with different degrees of commitment in different human societies—are certainly inspired by beliefs in the common good. The pursuit of the values of social justice and equality—even if not every society succeeds in achieving or realizing them—is intended to bring about certain basic goods that every individual person needs in order to function satisfactorily as a human being in a human society.

The establishment in all human societies of moral, legal, economic, political, and other institutions is surely inspired and guided by a system of shared values—a common good that itself is structured on a common understanding of the interests, needs, goals, and aspirations of

the members of a society. These institutions are set up in pursuit of certain commonly shared values and goals—i.e., a common good—that a human society would like to achieve for all of its members. The institution, for instance, of a government or a legal system is surely based on a common understanding of the importance of the societal values of social order and social peace. These values that can be said to be transcultural and thus shared by all societies and cultures. Thus, we can feel confident about the meaningfulness and importance of the concept of the common good if we reflected on our intuitions about the *telos* of organizing a human society, as well as the well-being of every individual member of the society.

## **THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL ATTITUDE**

I have in previous writings argued the universality of the intellectual enterprise called philosophy: that philosophical reflection on basic human problems has been pursued in all cultures and times.<sup>33</sup> Philosophy, it has been acknowledged, begins in wonder. The human capacity to wonder is universal in the sense that it is not the preserve of certain individuals belonging to certain cultures. The context of our wonder is, of course, human experience, broadly. We wonder about who or what we are, about the existence of some ultimate being, and about many other aspects of our experience that are not immediately rationally explicable to us. The source or reason for our wonder is the limitations of human intelligence, knowledge, and foresight, which hinder our full comprehension—and hence explanation—of the puzzles and enigmas of human experience. It must be noted, however, that wonder may lead to two entirely different attitudes or responses, one superstitious, the other rational. The rational attitude leads some individuals in the various human cultures, past and present, to raise fundamental questions about human life in all its complexities, to reflect on them deeply and critically, and, thus, to engage in philosophical activity. It is the philosophical attitude, the curiosity or propensity on the part of some individuals in various cultures to raise fundamental questions about human life and experience, that is universal, not necessarily the doctrines or positions that result from the reflections of those individuals.

However, even though human experience is felt most directly within a particular cultural context, it does not follow at all that the concerns and problems to be attended to and investigated by philosophers are necessarily unique to a specific culture and can be seen as being—or as having been—grappled with *only* by philosophers belonging to that culture. For some reason or other, many of these problems and concerns—which are generally of a basic character—tend to feature in the preoccupations of thinkers of other cultures. So it is, that despite the fact that peoples of the world may be said to belong to different cultures, there is nevertheless a common ground—a commensurable ground—of shared human experiences. The fact of the community of human experiences explains the similarity of some basic questions regarding their existence on this planet that resonate in the different human cultures. Such questions are bound to exercise their minds as *humans*, and thus may be described as necessary questions. Such necessary questions can be said to be universal and so to transcend cultural particularities. That is why it would not be surprising to discover that a number of problems or topics raised and explored in the philosophy of one culture can be found also in the philosophy of another culture. Even though they do not elicit the same answers and proposals from thinkers of different cultures, the relevance or significance of the philosophical doctrines that emerge from a specific cultural and historical experience is not to be tethered to that specific culture, for those answers and proposals can be of interest and relevance to other cultures. This is evidenced not only in the

appreciation and positive assessment by one culture of ideas produced by another culture (or other cultures), but also in the historical phenomenon of cultural borrowing or exchange. Our common human purposes, affiliated to a *sensus communis* (common human understanding), must be at the base of all this.

It is, of course, not logically impossible for a thinker, even if his (or her) thoughts and orientations have an originate in a particular cultural ambience, to focus attention on wider human concerns as such, and to put forward ideas and theses that will be attractive to people outside—and beyond—the cultural origins of those ideas. The reason is that, even though the cultural and historical experiences of human beings do differ in some respects, yet the value and disvalue experiences, discussed a while ago, that derive from sedimented common human purposes, may not widely differ. The experiences of people and cultures that have been exploited or enslaved or subjected to foreign political domination or discriminated against can be said to be largely commensurable among themselves: they would share a common ground of, for instance, resentment at the denigration of their humanity. To the extent that the cultures that inflict inhuman treatments on others would not like to be treated in similar fashion and would therefore like to avoid (or escape) those inhuman treatments themselves, it can be said that they also have some idea of what those experiences would be like, even if they have not directly had them. On this showing, human experiences can be said to be essentially or fundamentally commensurable: sharing for instance a common scale of the desire for respect for their human dignity, for instance. The background of the commensurability is the existence of certain basic values and attributes so intrinsic to the nature and life of human beings that they can be considered common to all humans. The fact that the philosopher is unavoidably embedded in a culture does not necessarily preclude the possibility of his philosophical reflections taking off from problems sensibly related to our common human nature and thus appealing to certain fundamental values of humanity. A philosophical inquiry into such human values should be of interest and benefit to all people irrespective of their culture.

## CONCLUSION

It has been argued in this lecture that culture is created to serve the purposes of humankind and that therefore the fundamental test for the validity of a culture is the well-being of its participants, that is, the extent to which its values, practices, and institutions conduce to human flourishing. On this showing, let us take a materialistic culture that disposes its participants to exploit other human beings, enslaves others, tortures, discriminates; or a spiritualistic culture that evolves a metaphysic the pursuit of which leads to the destruction of human lives as in human sacrifice or ritual murder. The cultural relativist cannot seriously argue that such practices of a culture must be considered valuable and valid for that culture simply because they *are* the practices of that culture, or because they have persisted over generations and thus are not subject to critical evaluation. Neither can the incommensurability thesis seriously deny the existence of any common standard by which such practices can normatively be measured. In a critical response to the twin doctrines, it can be said that human well-being is the measure of all the values and practices of a culture. It is thus clear that cultural relativism, together with its progeny, the thesis of incommensurability, has clear-cut limits, a fact that points to the truth of (at least a moderate kind of) universalism, which itself rests mainly on values that we can characterize as human values. Implicit here, is a distinction between cultural and human values. The former (i.e., cultural values), even though they may resonate on many other cultural terrains,

can nevertheless be particularized and so lose some of their universal character; human values, which are affiliated to our human nature and derive from common and fundamental human purposes and have substantially found themselves into the texture of human cultures, truly constitute the foundation of cultural universalism. Thus, what you see when you look over the cultural wall is a common humanity, bearing human values in its bosom.

## LECTURE II

# THE EMPTINESS OF ETHNOCENTRISM

### INTRODUCTION

In the first lecture, several arguments were deployed to demonstrate that human values—values that are essential to the functioning of rational and moral human beings in a human society—have found their way into the texture of all human cultures, thus providing a most credible foundation for cultural universalism. This places severe limits on the truth of the competing position of the glib cultural relativism that asserts that each culture is unique and is ultimately incommensurable with another culture. The values and practices of each culture or society, according to normative cultural relativism, are valid or true for that culture or society irrespective of the consequences of the pursuit of those values and practices on human well-being, which is a basic moral imperative. Such values and practices cannot, according to the relativist, be judged or evaluated by others outside the culture. The view that judgment of one culture by the participants of another, different culture cannot appropriately be made is more forthrightly asserted by the doctrine of incommensurability, a doctrine that is born of relativism and that states unmistakably that there is no common measure or standard which can form a sure basis for any such evaluation. It will be seen that, even though the relativist thesis does not officially make the understanding of other cultures impossible, nevertheless it would not explicitly and vigorously promote transcultural communication and understanding, since it directly urges each culture to recognize its own values, practices, and philosophy as valid and worthwhile. The recognition of the limits of relativism opens the way for universalism (at least of a moderate kind), which in turn, as I will argue, constitutes a firm and unshakable ground for the cultivation of humanity.

There is a certain cultural mind-set or mentality, born eventually of relativism of an extreme or vulgar kind that surely hamstring credible attempts toward the cultivation of humanity. This cultural mentality is called ethnocentrism. The Greek word *ethnos* that forms the first part of the term ‘ethnocentrism’ means "a number of people living together, company, body of men; nation, people; class of men, caste, tribe."<sup>1</sup> What appears to be suggested by the Greek word is the idea of people living together. When people live together for a very long time, they evolve common goals, values, and practices, a common language, a sense of history and of solidarity, and other features concomitant to a shared life lived over a very long period of time. Thus, they evolve a culture. The Greek word *ethnos*, then, denotes a cultural community rather than an ethnic group, which standardly is defined by common descent or biological ties.<sup>2</sup> (Of course an ethnic group, if there is any such thing, can also evolve a culture). When the members of a cultural community become so inward-looking that they suppose or imagine their own cultural values or traditions as defining what is culturally worthy, and so perceive and judge the values and practices of other cultures in terms only—exclusively—of their values or traditions, they are said to be ethnocentric.

### DEFINING ETHNOCENTRISM

In elaborating a characterization of ethnocentrism, I would like to start by stating with what is not. Ethnocentrism is not demonstrating preference for one’s own culture or expressing

appreciation for—even celebrating—the atavistic values that have been developed and maintained by a cultural tradition or civilization. People have feelings of self-importance that derive, at least in part, from their perception of the worth of their inherited values and the achievements of their cultural traditions or civilization. Peoples are brought up in a particular cultural milieu, are accustomed to its beliefs, values and practices which one would have internalized in the process of socialization, functioning, flourishing, and benefit from the whole range of values and possibilities made available in one's cultural environment. They derive their identity and a sense of belonging from that cultural environment. Hence, normally they prefer their own culture. Nor is it ethnocentric merely to pass value judgments, positively or negatively, about other cultures on the basis of one's own cultural values or by appealing to some transcultural values, such as human values. Thus, in my opinion, Richard Barrett is wrong when he defines ethnocentrism as "the tendency to evaluate other cultural practices from the vantage point of one's own culture."<sup>3</sup> Evaluation of the practices of other cultures may be positive or negative, but whether or not a negative or critical judgment of other cultural practices is appropriate and defensible depends on the morality or functionality of the practice that is being critically evaluated. It would *not* be ethnocentric for a person from a culture that does not itself practice, say, human sacrifice or slavery, to pass critical judgment upon a culture that does engage in such practices. As noted in the previous lecture, a practice of another culture that is the object of criticism may in fact also exist in the culture of the critic, who in such a situation sees both practices (that is, the one in his own culture and that in the alien culture) as wrong. It is also conceivable that the critical evaluation may not necessarily derive "from the vantage point of one's own culture" (i.e., that of the critic), as Barrett supposes, but from considerations of general human well-being. All this indicates that we do not have to consider a critic of the practices of another culture as necessarily implying that his or her own culture is faultless and best and, therefore, as being ethnocentric. What, then, is ethnocentrism?

Ethnocentrism is a cultural mind-set or mentality that regards one's own culture, just because it is one's own culture, as superior to other cultures and, consequently, as a model for all cultures. The ethnocentric person regards the values, beliefs, practices, and institutions of one's own culture as the most worthwhile, and is neither prepared to wean oneself from the imagined beauty and goodness of those values, nor able to look over the walls of one's culture. One thus fails to see one's culture as one—and only one—form of life among others. That mentality leads one to evaluate other cultures almost invariably in negative terms. Thus one cavalierly denigrates any worth that can be said to be possessed by these other cultures and their achievements, supposing that one's own culture provides the best answers to all human problems. Appreciation of the values of other cultures is almost hesitant and does not come easily and naturally to the ethnocentric mentality. Inebriated by the values and achievements of one's own culture, one is, by contrast, given to exalting these, oblivious of the palpable weaknesses and other negative features of that culture, as well as the limitations of the human creative capacity. Perceiving the entire cultural world of humankind through the narrow prisms of one's own culture, and given to diminishing and slighting the values and achievements of other cultures, ethnocentricity is clearly an impediment to the understanding of other cultures and, consequently, to the cultivation of humanity.

## **THE EMERGENCE OF ETHNOCENTRISM**

Having provided, some brief characterization of ethnocentrism, I wish to inquire into what could be its alleged basis. What leads to the development or emergence of the ethnocentric mentality? How do participants in some particular culture come to hold up its values, practices, and institutions as the best and superior to other cultures and as a model for these other cultures? The development of ethnocentricity may be ascribed to several factors, some of which were hinted at just moments ago in my characterization of the ethnocentric person or mentality. One factor is the overestimation of the worth or values and institutions of one's own culture, coupled with an arrogance occasioned by the consciousness of its achievements. Overestimating the worth of one's culture can engender a self-adulatory perception of the greatness of that culture and consequently can generate an attitude or feeling of *hubris*—arrogance—in participants. This state of mind would, in turn, lead to imagining that in terms of the cultural narratives of a contemporary world—in comparison with the values, institutions and achievements of other cultural traditions—there would be no real options outside their own. Nothing really culturally worthwhile can be adopted or borrowed from other contemporary cultures or from the past histories of other cultures.

Correlatively, ethnocentricity often derives from the failure to recognize the simple fact that every human culture has both positive *and* negative features. These may be considered valuable and worthwhile or disvalues from the normative perspective of human well-being. The negative features or imperfections of a culture are to be put down to the limitations of the human intelligence that may give rise to false or defective theories and beliefs; they may result also from the limitations of human foresight. Even though it would not be correct to say that one with an ethnocentric mental outlook is unaware of the imperfections and shortcomings of his or her culture, nevertheless one supposes that the positive features and achievements of one's own culture constitute sufficient grounds for locking oneself into the ethnocentric prison. One plays up the positive and valuable features of one's culture, while playing down—in fact discounting—its negative features. At the same time, however, one disdains what could well be valuable features of a culture different from one's own. For, from this point of view, the valuable features and products of a different culture are inconsequential, hardly matching the quality and significance of the values, practices, and products of one's own culture.

Another factor that explains the ethnocentric mentality is inherently related to the last statement of the foregoing paragraph: the unconscionable reluctance to recognize the valuable features and products of other cultural traditions or civilizations and to praise them. My rejection of cultural relativism in the previous lecture was not intended to deny by any means that there are—and would be—elements of a culture that may be considered valuable and worthwhile, of which its participants can legitimately be proud and which could elicit the deep appreciation and praise of others outside that culture. The condition is that my concern is that others really be willing to look beyond their cultural wall and provide some degree of objective assessment of those elements. It is worth noting, in this connection, that anthropological accounts of the various cultures of the world are replete with positive and praiseworthy assessments of some aspect or other of those cultures. There is hardly any anthropological account of a culture that roundly and totally fails to point up one or another aspect of it as worthy of praise and commendation. To illustrate my point, let me here refer to the views of but a handful of anthropologists.

The British anthropologist, R.S. Rattray, who spent over two decades in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) to study the culture of the Ashante people, commended their pursuit of the value of equality. He wrote: "Here then we have a far more real equality than any which our [British] laws confer upon us. To the Ashanti our equality would seem a fictitious fellowship."<sup>4</sup> Another

Briton, Dugald Campbell, who studied the cultural practices of the people of central Africa from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the early part of this [twentieth] century, also made quite similar observations regarding the African appreciation and practice of the value of equality: "The social status of equality observed by the primitive peoples of mankind is now the aim and ambition of the most highly civilized communities; and in central Africa we have a complete object lesson before us of the result of life under conditions of equality."<sup>5</sup> Campbell, like Rattray, is extolling an aspect of the socio-ethical thought and practice of some African people, who, in spite of their being described as "the primitive peoples of mankind," have, nonetheless, been able to evolve a system or practice sought by "the most highly civilized communities."

Rattray made laudatory remarks also about the democratic character of the Ashante political culture. Nominally autocratic," he wrote, "the Ashanti constitution was in practice democratic to a degree. I have already on several occasions used this word 'democratic', and it is time to explain what the term implies in this part of Africa. We pride ourselves, I believe, on being a democratic people and flatter ourselves that our institutions are of a like nature. An Ashanti who was familiar alike with his own and our [British] Constitution would deny absolutely our right to apply this term either to ourselves or to our Constitution. To him a democracy implies that the affairs of the Tribe (the state) must rest, not in the keeping of the few, but in the hands of the many. . . . To him [i.e., the Ashante] the state is literally a *Res publica*; it is everyone's business. . . . In England, the Government and House of Commons stand between ourselves and the making of our laws, but among the Ashanti there was not any such thing as government apart from the people."<sup>6</sup>

Rattray is implying that, if democracy is a government of the people and by the people, then this political ideal or value was exemplified more in the Ashante political practice than in the British. Rattray was also "astonished at the words of wisdom" contained in Ashante proverbs, an astonishment that would make the ethnocentric or biased reader "refuse to credit that a 'savage' or 'primitive' people could possibly have possessed the rude philosophers, theologians, moralists, naturalists, and even, it will be seen, philologists which many of these proverbs prove them to have had among them."<sup>7</sup> Rattray is here extolling the profundity of the Ashante intellect that created the proverbs or maxims. The fact that Rattray says that he was "astonished" at the words of wisdom does not itself make him or his judgement ethnocentric; one would not be ethnocentric if one admired or extolled the values of an alien culture; the ethnocentric is, indeed, given to doing the opposite. The most one can say, in this connection, is that he was previously prejudiced against the level of the philosophical perspicacity of the Ashante, but had rid himself of his prejudice when he perceived the wisdom contained in the Ashante proverbs.

References to the works of anthropologists and other scholars that speak of some virtues or praiseworthy qualities they perceive in the traditions of peoples whose cultures are the subject of their investigations could be multiplied but for lack of time. Such positive anthropological judgments and assessments of other cultures are in many ways devoid of the ethnocentric predicament and should lead to a new orientation out of our ethnocentric self-immurement and, eventually, to the eradication of the ethnocentric mentality. The ethnocentric, however, refuses or fails to derive some light or guidance from such positive accounts and assessments of the worth or achievements of other cultures. Thus, a factor that nurtures the ethnocentric mentality is the unwillingness to open up intellectually and recognize the creative endowments and potentials of other human beings and their cultures. A possible consequence, that is, of the unconscionable reluctance to acknowledge that other human beings can also be creative, is to deny, despite

overwhelming historical evidence, that a civilization or a historic cultural achievement could have been made by some particular people.

The ethnocentric mentality can be nurtured by distorted and tendentious interpretation of the cultural traditions of other people, including their thought systems. Such an action can (or is intended to) not only denigrate and burlesque some features of those traditions, but also overstress the 'us-them' distinction in terms of cultural values and achievements. Let me refer to two examples that illustrate the inaccurate and tendentious interpretation of the cultural traditions of other people.<sup>8</sup> John Locke, the seventeenth century English philosopher, characterized Indian philosophy as holding the myth that the earth was supported by an elephant which was in turn supported by a tortoise. If only "the poor Indian philosopher" had had the concept of substance, as "our European philosophers,"<sup>9</sup> Locke continued, he (the "poor" Indian philosopher) would not have entertained such a mythical view of how the earth was sustained. A modern Indian philosopher, Bimal Matilal, observed, however, that the elephant-tortoise image existed in an old Indian religious myth—not in philosophy—and that "it would be impossible to find a text in classical Indian *philosophy* where the elephant-tortoise device is put forward as a philosophical explanation of the support of the earth."<sup>10</sup> Locke thus took a view held in a religious myth as being held also in a philosophy, and in this way ended up ridiculing the philosophy of "the poor Indian philosopher." Martha Nussbaum, remarking on this, says: "Modern [Western] analytic philosophers sometimes continue the same error, first characterizing Indian philosophy inaccurately as altogether mystical and antilogical, then condemning it for that alleged fact."<sup>11</sup>

Allan Bloom, a contemporary American political philosopher, ridicules non-Western cultural traditions when he asserts: "Only in the Western nations, i.e., those influenced by Greek philosophy, is there some willingness to doubt the identification of the good with one's own way."<sup>12</sup> This off-handed assertion—infected with *hubris*—implies that non-Western nations or peoples lack a critical tradition. But this is entirely erroneous and can only result from inaccurate, facile, and distorted characterization of non-Western cultural traditions. The critical attitude is certainly not a special preserve of Western cultures: it is manifested in the philosophical cultures of all peoples. If one had adequate knowledge of the philosophical systems of non-Western cultures, one would not make such an unguarded statement as Bloom's, the basis of which is clearly superficial and weak. "On this shaky basis," observes Nussbaum, "Bloom then judges the West to be superior and the non-West to be not worth studying."<sup>13</sup> The person with the ethnocentric mind-set is given to apotheosizing features of his or her culture, while running down other cultures, even if they too manifest similar features.

Cultural borrowing is a historical phenomenon. Through encounters between peoples, cultures have borrowed from one another, appropriating values, ideas, and institutions from other cultures. The consequence of all this is that every human culture has widespread roots or sources, many of which can be traced to other cultural traditions. This means that not all the elements of a people's culture or tradition are autochthonous in their genesis; not all of them were necessarily originated by those people and can be said to be unique to them. Even though those originally alien elements that were appropriated and maintained by another people over several centuries can later be said to have gained root in the life and thought of those people and thus to have become a part of their cultural tradition, nevertheless, any claims to originality, distinctiveness or uniqueness would have weak, if not false, basis. In other words, people should not be oblivious to the fact that several elements of their culture were appropriated from other sources, but should rather recognize that their own ancestors were not the original creators of those cultural

elements. A knowledge of the undistorted history of their culture, devoid of tendentious interpretation, should make this fact clear to them.

I might mention, for instance, that none of the world's great religions originally emerged out of the metaphysical soil of the West. Christianity, which is the major religion of the West, was imported there, having originated in the Near East. Accepted by the Western people, who in the Middle Ages became its crusaders and in modern times its missionaries, it took root in their religious culture and became not only the main religion of the West but the foundation of much of its metaphysics, morals, and law.<sup>14</sup> But the fact that, for the Western people, it was originally a borrowed religious culture is noteworthy.

The historical evidence, based on ancient Greek sources, that ancient Greek intellectual culture benefited a great deal from what it appropriated from ancient Egyptian civilization is overwhelming and indisputable. (Whether the celebrated ancient Egyptian civilization was a creation of some African or Asiatic people is irrelevant for the purpose of the present argument.) It has been pointed out that the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were deeply influenced by Buddhism and that these two philosophers in turn influenced artists such as Richard Wagner and D.H. Lawrence.<sup>15</sup> It has also been observed that the European Enlightenment did have some non-Western sources and that some aspects of it had non-Western parallels.<sup>16</sup> As for the cultures that were invaded by the West and upon which Western cultural values were foisted, their cultural matrices become even more complex and ramifying.

Thus, the widespread character of the roots of human cultures, including philosophical systems, is salient and indubitable: a feature of the cultural history of any people. Ignorance or lack of awareness of this fact is also a factor that can breed ethnocentrism. It is true: that amendments and refinements are made to appropriated alien cultural elements that may lead to the local coloration of those appropriated cultural elements; that advances are sometimes made to received alien cultural elements; and that present practitioners of a cultural tradition do not often inquire into, or even care about, the historical background or makings of that tradition, perhaps considering such an occupation irrelevant. Nevertheless, these banalities do not lead to the total effacement of the original complex matrix that gave rise to the culture. What often emerges is a civilizational trajectory originally fired by that matrix. All this diminishes or undermines the basis of ethnocentrism.

To encapsulate the factors I have indicated in the foregoing as engendering the ethnocentric mentality are:

- overestimating and consequently raising the values and achievement of one's culture to the status of an apotheosis;
- failure to recognize the weaknesses and defects of one's own culture, while pointing up those of other cultures; failure or unwillingness to appreciate the worth of other cultures and to give due praise or respect to at least certain features of those cultures; and
- lack of awareness of the widespread and complex historical roots of every human culture in the wake of cultural borrowing or influence, which, according to historical evidence, does not flow in one direction only.

These factors are, of course, causally interconnected, one factor leading to the other or following from the other, but jointly nurturing an ethnocentric mental outlook. These factors, all of which are surely negative from the perspective of reaching out to other peoples and cultures, would not enhance the cultivation of humanity.

## OVERCOMING OR ESCAPING ETHNOCENTRISM

The saliency of the negative effects of the ethnocentric mentality on cultivating humanity need not be emphasized. In as much as the ethnocentric mentality stands in the way of understanding cultures and appreciating their elegant features, it hinders the cultivation of humanity. It makes sense, to assert that perceiving our common humanity should lead to recognizing not only the creative talents and capacities of other human beings, but also the possibilities of cultures created by others humans to contain some positive and worthwhile features that can enhance human fulfillment. As the Roman poet Terence puts it, "*Nihil humani a me alienum puto*" ("Nothing human is alien to me", i.e., to me as a human being, and thus to any human being). What the poet means or implies is that within any human being are all human possibilities; no human being is bereft of those possibilities: thus, to be a human being is to possess within oneself all human possibilities. Even though it is human beings who create cultures, the actualization of those possibilities nonetheless results in differentiating individuals and cultures. But, as noted in the first of these lectures, the normativity of each culture is yet to be assessed by reference, ultimately, to the extent to which it fulfills human well-being. Ethnocentrism hinders our appreciating or recognizing the implications of the notion of our common humanity. This is not to say, though, that all human beings have the same talents and endowments—for we know that we don't, or that our common humanity reduces us to the same level of intellectual or creative capacity—for we know that we have different intellectual or creative capacities. Even so, however, it would be correct to say that perceiving a common humanity is a credible ground for cultivating humanity; the latter pursuit requires overcoming ethnocentrism. But can ethnocentrism be overcome, and if so how? Can we escape it, or is it inescapable? The remaining part of this lecture will explore this cluster of questions.

Some philosophers opine that ethnocentrism is inescapable, for it is only in our own terms, by reference to our received cultural values—our cultural lights—that we can understand and judge other people and their cultures. I refer briefly to the views of three American philosophers. Harvard's well-known philosopher, Hilary Putnam, says that "the whole justification of an interpretive scheme . . . is that it renders the behavior of others at least minimally reasonable by *our lights*."<sup>17</sup> Another distinguished American philosopher, the erudite Richard Rorty, commenting on this says that, "It would seem natural to go on from this to say that we cannot get outside the range of those lights"<sup>18</sup> and also that "to say that we must work by our own lights, *that we must be ethnocentric*, is merely to say that beliefs suggested by another culture must be tested by trying to weave them together with beliefs we already have."<sup>19</sup> Rorty asserts in fact that "there is much truth in ethnocentrism: we cannot justify our beliefs (in physics, ethics, or any other area) to everybody, but only to those whose beliefs overlap ours to some appropriate extent."<sup>20</sup> And, finally, Michael Krausz also says, "In sum, while critical comparison between interpretations of cultures is possible, it is ineliminably tied to one's own culture. Whatever good reasons that can be generated for one's preference for a given interpretation must arise within one's own culture. Who else's would they be?"<sup>21</sup>

These statements pointing to the inescapability of ethnocentrism call for critical comments. First, what Putnam refers to as "our lights" may not be idiosyncratically or uniquely "ours", having derived (apart from our internal or local cultural and historical experiences) *also* from other sources in the wake of cultural contacts and appropriation that may follow therefrom; in other words, the rays of "our" lights would have different and complex sources. Hence, when we judge other people and their cultures, we do so through sources some of which will go beyond

our own, sources that thus are not purely or wholly 'internal' to us, that is, to our particular culture or cultural experience. Moreover, the sources of our lights will not be purely cultural; at least some—probably many—of them will be *human* and will make reference or call attention to human well-being. If we were to see things always from the perspective of "our lights," we would not be able—always using the same lights—to criticize or re-evaluate our own culture in a way that would lead to rejecting or amending or refining some features of it. And, yet, participants in a culture do critically re-evaluate their culture, even though the extent and frequency differs from culture to culture. The impetus to critically re-evaluate our culture may derive from comprehensive considerations of human values—from our moral sense as moral human beings—rather than always from our own local cultural lights. It would be correct to say that some individuals in human societies of the past and present, who advocate the abolition of slavery, human sacrifice, or female genital mutilation, are inspired in their action almost invariably by loftier moral ideals than by the lights that emanate from their particular cultures. How such moral or human ideals come to be entertained by some individuals in a culture, and not by all the participants in that culture, it is not easy to say. But what is easy to say is that practitioners of a culture do not all think alike or have the same moral perceptions. Deep reflections on the essence of our humanity or personhood—not simply our cultural lights—can result in entertaining such moral convictions and ideals. Realizing all this can lead one to second thoughts about developing the ethnocentric perspective.

Second, contrary to Rorty's view, it is not entirely true that we test the beliefs of another culture by weaving them together with beliefs we already hold. The reason is that we do accept, though not indiscriminately, beliefs—political, religious, and so on—that we did not previously have or hold. Cultural borrowing—at least the borrowing of ideas and beliefs, which is a historical phenomenon—will be otiose, and would not in fact occur, if those borrowed ideas and beliefs were such as were already held by, or overlapped in all respects with those of, the borrowing culture. Immersed in a culturally plural world, it cannot be true that what is available to us is our own cultural perspectives, that other perspectives are totally closed to us, and that we cannot see beyond our own cultural wall, except in terms, invariably and inevitably, of our own cultural lights, which may be somewhat dimmed by several factors, including the limitations of human intelligence and foresight. Thus, our so-called lights do not—cannot—provide adequate, unshakable grounds for ethnocentrism, in the sense of both perceiving our particular culture as the best and most beautiful and elevating it to the status of a model for all other cultures and judging these other cultures in its terms.

As to Krausz's view that whatever good reasons we may have for preferring a particular interpretation of a culture derive from one's own culture and nobody else's, it cannot be supported on two grounds: first, the reasons may be externally induced because of influences from outside from which no human culture can be said to be free; second, the reasons may derive from considerations of human values which are not the preserve of a particular culture, but the common moral language of humankind.

I must assert, in contrast to other philosophers, that ethnocentrism, as defined earlier, can be overcome and I shall suggest some steps toward overcoming it. One obvious way to escape ethnocentrism is to come to grips with the factors that I indicated as engendering and fostering it. If the lack of awareness of the widespread and ramifying sources of one's cultural tradition is, a factor that nurtures the ethnocentric mentality, then an important step will be to find ways of making people aware of such a fact in the development of their culture. Such an awareness can reduce arrogance and produce a humbling effect. However, instead of dealing directly with those

factors, I will put forward somewhat different proposals or ideas which, in their consequence, will involve responses to those factors.

Because ethnocentrism involves certain attitudes to both one's own culture and the cultures of other people, attitudes that generally are adulatory of one's own culture but disdainful of other cultures, it has been supposed by some that the doctrine of normative cultural relativism will be its antidote. Thus, the American sociologist, Jon Shepard, asserts that "One way to combat ethnocentrism is through a perspective known as cultural relativism."<sup>22</sup> This approach to dealing with ethnocentrism is widely shared particularly among sociologists and anthropologists. The African-American philosopher, Alain Locke (1885-1954), an advocate of cultural pluralism, which he thought would provide a status for African-American culture and its contribution to the total American culture, asserted that value relativism "reveals our values in proper objective perspective with other sets of values. Through this we may arrive at some clearer recognition of the basic unity or correspondence of our values with those of other men."<sup>23</sup> Alain Locke believed that value relativism "has a point of view able to lift us out of the ethnocentric predicament."<sup>24</sup> Thus, for him also, cultural relativism will provide a means of overcoming ethnocentrism.

Cultural relativism, remember, is the view that there are no objective or universally valid values—values that can be said to be true for all cultures—but that a value or practice held by a society or culture is true or valid for that society or culture. The position of those who advocate relativism as a way out of the ethnocentric mentality is simply this: If people appreciated and stuck stubbornly to their own values and practices, while allowing or expecting others to do the same for their cultural values, and demonstrated reciprocal respect for each other's culture, ethnocentrism will be overcome. In terms of this position, we can escape from our ethnocentrism if we remain cloistered within our particular cultural walls.

But, as a way of overcoming ethnocentrism, the argument of the cultural relativist is surely unconvincing, for the following reasons. A relativist cultural life means that the cultural world of a people is what will be revealed to them through their reflection on, and practice of, their own values; it means further that their cultural values and practices will constitute the pivot of their cultural sense or understanding. The consequence of all this is that they will come to understand others only through the circumscribed prisms of their own culture, thus telescoping the whole of the human cultural world to theirs. Normative relativism is thus more likely to induce ethnocentrism than not; it will result in people becoming infected with an ethnocentric bias. When people are given to overestimating and expressing appreciation for *only* their own cultural values and, consequently, get themselves locked up in an ethnocentric prison, they will hardly come to entertain new ideas and values. I would therefore disagree with Alain Locke when he asserts that "the only way of freeing our minds from such hypostasizing [i.e., from exalting our own values and traditions], from its provincial limitations and dogmatic bias, is by way of relativism."<sup>25</sup> This position is untenable because normative cultural relativism will bring about the opposite effect: it will rather augment our provincial limitations and deepen the dogmatic bias. Thus, it is simply not true, as Alain Locke thinks, that "Relativism . . . contradicts value dogmatism and counteracts value bigotry."<sup>26</sup>

A little reflection will establish that relativism will rather nurture dogmatism and value bigotry than eliminate them. Thus, to advocate relativism as a means for overcoming ethnocentrism will result in a paradox, and will thus not achieve its purpose. Cultural relativism cannot therefore provide a means for escaping ethnocentrism; on the contrary, it will worsen the ethnocentric predicament. One can still be ethnocentric—and of an extreme kind at that—even if

one accepted the truth of normative cultural relativism. Cultural relativism merely invites attention to recognize that the values and practices of a culture are valid for that culture; it does not in any way preclude the possibility of a practitioner of this culture's estimating its values and practices as of greater worth than those of other cultures, while denigrating the values and practices of other cultures at the same time.

Having rejected cultural relativism as a credible way of overcoming ethnocentrism, would resorting to the doctrine that is opposed to it, namely, cultural universalism, be a more fruitful approach to dealing with that problem? It seems to me that the answer to this question will be yes. Universalism requires taking a really comprehensive view of the possibilities and creative endowments of human beings, not just of the endowments of a specific group of human beings (Terence's statement, quoted above, may be recalled). One can assume a universalist outlook if one realizes that one is only a part of a very complex whole. A universalist perception of the world and the experiences of all its peoples will widen our mental horizons and enable us to see things in metacultural dimensions. It will enable us to see that the cultural values of a people are not unique and unreplicable, that, as I stressed in the previous lecture, there are certain cultural values and human sensibilities that we share as human beings, and that the survival of every human society or culture is, indeed, a function of values we would regard as human rather than cultural, even though human values are often integrated into cultural values. Thus, a universalist perception of human experience can lead a participant in one culture to realize that a value, practice, or idea maintained and pursued by his culture may also be found in another culture. This is especially true if one allows for respective differences in the way that value or idea is made to function or the level of understanding and the intensity of commitment to it demonstrated by its practitioners. What this means or implies is that a value or practice of a particular culture is in many cases a variation on the same theme and a search for similar goals. Moreover, it means also that the concrete manifestation of those values does not take or require the same form or structure.

Take, for example, the case of the value or idea of individual fulfillment. A society or culture characterized by the individualist ethos can argue that the pursuit of individualism as a socio-ethical doctrine is what will conduce maximally to the fulfillment of the individual and the realization of her potential. A society or culture characterized by the communalist ethos can similarly argue that the pursuit of communalism that emphasizes a sense of community among its members is that which provides a more viable framework for the fulfillment of the human individual. The goal is identical, even if the social formation in pursuit of the realization of that goal is not. It can be asserted, however, that a culture that is complacent about its entire structure or achievements, and so estimates its standing in the constellation of cultures more highly, may be found wanting from the perspective of certain areas of individual fulfillment or human well-being. No human culture fully exemplifies the ideal form of human life, whatever this may be conceived to be; the concept of progress compels recognizing human cultures as approximations of—as attempts at achieving—the ideal form of human life. Recognizing the limitations of human culture can be a way to overcoming ethnocentrism. On this basis, mere differences in social formation cannot offer grounds for ethnocentrism on the part of one culture or another.

John Searle is clearly right, in my view, when he suggests the need "to see one's own culture as one possible form of life and sensibility among others."<sup>27</sup> Seeing one's own culture as one, and only one, possible form of life will lead to the realization not only that that particular form of life is not the natural form, notwithstanding some of its admirable features, but also that there are admirable features, as well as possibilities, in other cultures. Culture nurtures habits of thought

and action (or behavior); but the habitual ways of a people need not be supposed as the natural or the best or the most appropriate.

The awareness of human possibilities will lead to an appreciation of the worth of other cultures and their achievements in at least some aspects of the human enterprise and aspiration. Due to the limitations of human ingenuity and foresight, it would be correct to say that no human culture can lay an exclusive claim to possessing or to having discovered ultimate truths about the *best* forms of life. Nor can it be supposed that anyone culture has evolved *all* ultimate cultural values and practices that make life worth living and thus be used as the basis for denigrating other values. In terms of excellence and the enactment of all that makes life worth living, then, it seems that each culture has limitations. That is to say, the achievements of each human culture must be perceived or assessed from the perspective of certain spheres or aspects of the human enterprise. The limitations of human ingenuity that I referred to constitute the grounds for seriously considering the achievement or success of a culture from some specific aspects of the human experience. This is what I call the 'aspectual character' of cultural achievement. The awareness of the aspectual character of a cultural achievement can constrain the move toward ethnocentricity. In other words, if we allow ourselves to be carried over the cultural wall by the universalist perception, we may conceivably see—and judge—other cultural values and practices which we may assess as worthy from the point of view of, say, human fulfillment. It must be pretty clear by now that a relativist's perception of the cultural landscape will certainly not lift us over our own particular cultural wall, but will only confine us complacently therein. The perception of the greater worth of the values, achievements, and goals of other cultures is the whole basis, the dynamic impetus, of the historical phenomenon of cultural borrowing.

## **OVERCOMING ETHNOCENTRISM: CULTURAL BORROWING AND REAL OPTIONS**

It would be correct to say that the growth of human cultures has resulted in part from the historical phenomenon of cultural borrowing. One major implication of this historical phenomenon is surely that practitioners of one culture perceive and appreciate the greater worth of another culture and convince themselves that appropriating certain aspects or elements of that culture will enhance their own cultural life or development. Those aspects or elements of the alien culture are thus considered by the members of the borrowing culture as real options. The term "real option" was used by the well-known British philosopher, Bernard Williams, in an influential paper that defends ethical relativism. Williams' argument goes like this: Given two systems of belief, two Ss—S1 and S2, S2 is or becomes a real option for S1 if "the question is one of whether to *go over* to the other S,"<sup>28</sup> i.e., S2. He states: "S2 is a real option for a group if either it is their [own] S or it is possible for them to go over to S2."<sup>29</sup> For S1 to go over to S2 means at least that the former considers that it will enhance their life prospects "to live within, or hold, S2 and retain their hold on reality"<sup>30</sup> and that there can be a rational comparison between S2 and their present outlook (i.e., that of S1).

Williams does not specify which areas of belief are comprehended by a system of belief, by an S. We do talk of a system of religious or moral or political or cosmological belief. It is not clear whether he means his S to be a system of, say, moral belief or religious belief, or to encompass all of these kinds of belief. Because he uses such expressions as "their life" and "an alien *way of life*"<sup>31</sup> and, given that any system of belief is a creation of a society or a group of

people, one would be correct in interpreting his S in comprehensive terms that make it coterminous with culture. Thus, I take Williams' S as elliptical for culture and would talk of cultures (Cs) rather than systems of belief (Ss).

Now, a real option results from what Williams also calls a "real confrontation,"<sup>32</sup> a confrontation or encounter with an alien culture, C2, at least some of whose features are such as *could* seriously be considered by C1 as worth its while to appropriate. (The reason why I use the expression "some of whose features" rather than "(all of) whose features" will be stated presently.) In a situation of real confrontation, there will be a real option if C1 entertains the question whether to go over to C2. Unless a confrontation translates into a real option, questions of appraisal, according to Williams, "do not genuinely arise."<sup>33</sup> In such a situation, there would be no basis for appraisal and, thus, no choice. In the absence of real confrontation and, thus, no real option, what obtains is "notional confrontation."<sup>34</sup>

As regards the notion of real option between two Ss in Williams' scheme or two Cs in mine, I will raise two objections against what he says. The first objection is about the possibility of a group that belongs to C1 going over to C2, that is, adopting or appropriating C2. I do not think that the possibility of an *entire* C1 going over to C2 is ever conceivable, for that would involve abandoning their entire cultural heritage, root and branch, without any sediments of that heritage at all remaining, and embracing C2 in its *entirety*. I think it will be more appropriate, in this connection, to talk in terms of elements or features or aspects of a culture than to talk in terms of cultural wholes. That is, it will be more correct to talk of a group taking on *some* aspects of an alien culture if, on some rational or normative grounds, it considers those aspects worthwhile for their own cultural life and development, than to talk of that group donning the whole regalia of an alien culture, bearing in mind that a culture encompasses the entire life of a people. I have referred to cultural borrowing or exchange as a historical phenomenon. Historically, groups of people have adopted certain elements or aspects of an alien culture of which they have reason to be enamored. Usually the aspects they consider will enhance the development of their own culture. There have been no cases, I have reason to believe, where an entire culture has optionally gone over to another culture. This explains my use, in the preceding paragraph, of the expression "some of whose features" rather than "all of whose features." The former expression is intended to mean that it is only *some* aspects (certainly not all aspects) of a culture that will be attractive to another culture and that this other culture may desire to appropriate.

My second objection is against what Williams refers to as "asymmetrically related options". As an example of such "asymmetries" between cultures, he says: "Some version of modern technological life and its outlooks has become a real option for members of some traditional societies, but their life is not, despite the passionate nostalgia of many, a real option for us."<sup>35</sup> (By "us" Williams must be referring to Europeans). The last part of the quoted statement, namely, "their life is not...a real option for us" reeks of the ethnocentric mind-set, a position supported by Richard Rorty who, commenting on this part of William's argument states: "These [i.e., primitive tribes people] are the people whose beliefs on certain topics overlap so little with ours that their inability to agree with us raises no doubt in our minds about the *correctness of our own beliefs*."<sup>36</sup> Rorty's statement is as bizarre as it is incredible. The fact that the beliefs of some people differ from—overlap so little with—yours does not by itself, and without any argument, make yours correct, unless you have already made up your mind—are already biased—in favor of the correctness of your own beliefs. Such a claim would be extravagant, just as it would be if it were made by the other people, these of primitive tribes.

Even if the asymmetry Williams is talking about seems, as Bimal Matilal interprets it, "to be simply the asymmetry of time or history, which is usually expressed in such clichés as 'we cannot re-create the past'"<sup>37</sup> Williams' position will not be defensible, in view of the fact that modern (Western) culture surely does not break with the past, but maintains and cherishes a great deal of the ideas, values, practices, and institutions of its own past;<sup>38</sup> people, including the Western people, generally show great pride in their cultural traditions. Also, by "traditional societies," Williams appears to refer to the earlier, pre-modern European societies. He is referring to non-Western societies, contrasting a modern Western industrial/technological society with the life of the non-Western "traditional society." He is saying that, since the life (or culture) of the traditional society cannot be a real option for people in the modern technological society (of the West), therefore the options between the two are asymmetrical, the option is only uni-directional: the traditional society opting for the modern technological society, while the latter opts for nothing from the former. Thus, the asymmetry Williams has in mind is one between the values, practices, and outlooks of different cultures or ways of life of contemporary societies. I believe that the individualistic and secular outlooks of Western cultures that are outstanding features of the technological life of Western societies do not appear to be real options for non-Western societies. A technological culture that does not give adequate consideration to human values, but sets them at naught, would hardly be a real option for human beings, qua human beings.

Williams' view of the asymmetrically related options between cultures (or systems of belief) clearly flies in the face of both historical and contemporary evidence. The reason is that asymmetry totally throws overboard as inconsequential the historical phenomenon of cultural borrowing or exchange involving the various cultures created by humankind. It mistakenly, and blithely, considers the various cultures or societies of the world as windowless monads or sealed units or completely self-contained, developing on their own original terms without any influences whatsoever from outside; but human cultures are none of these.<sup>39</sup> Williams says that systems of belief are "to some extent self-contained."<sup>40</sup> The phrase "to some extent" as used here indicates that systems of belief (or cultures) are not completely self-contained, which implies surely that they can—and it is common knowledge that they do—take on elements from other cultures, that they are open to influences from other cultures, and that they at least from time to time depend on other cultures for their growth and nourishment (in addition to internal criticism or re-evaluation of the culture, which also enhances cultural growth). Thus, C1 can in some limited sense "go over" to C2.

In view of the phenomenon of cultural borrowing or exchange and the resulting cultural diffusion, symmetrically related options between cultural values and practices cannot insouciantly be laughed out of court. I must quickly add, however, that symmetrically related option makes sense and will have correct application by reference only to aspectuality. That is to say, real options are not one-to-one: if C1 borrows or adopts a dance form from C2, it does not at all follow that C2 will also borrow some dance form from C1; it may borrow some other cultural product from C1, any of C1's cultural creations or features that it (i.e., C2) will consider worthwhile for the development of its own cultural life. This is what I mean by *aspectuality*: in cultural borrowing, exchange, real options, or judgments of other cultures, we can sensibly talk *only* of aspects or features or elements of cultures, rather than of *cultural wholes*.

Robin Horton, the well-known contemporary British anthropologist and philosopher, in his most influential paper on African thought and Western science, says plainly that, despite the weaknesses he sees in African thought, he chose to live in "a still-heavily-traditional Africa

rather than in the scientifically-oriented Western subculture I was brought up in." He says that "one certain reason [for his choice] is the discovery of things lost at home. An intensely poetic quality in everyday life and thought, and a vivid enjoyment of the passing moment—both driven out of sophisticated Western life by . . . the faith in progress."<sup>41</sup> These words of Horton suggest the conviction that each particular human culture, when looked at from different perspectives or purposes, has some virtues that can hold attraction or significance for people belonging to other cultures. His words suggest, furthermore, that no human culture has the capacity to offer total satisfaction for a complex human nature. It is a matter of common knowledge that some people who belong to contemporary Western cultures (I do not know how many) are greatly enthused about Eastern religions, such as Buddhism, and practice them. For such individuals or groups brought up within Western cultures, Eastern religions are real spiritual options, as they believe that Eastern religions offer more satisfying spiritual experience than the religions evolved by their own (Western) cultures. These predilections by practitioners of Western cultures for alien (non-Western) forms of life may be inspired by, to use a phrase of Williams in a different context, "passionate nostalgia."<sup>42</sup> But nostalgia is not necessarily an irrational attitude to the past or to a contemporary alien cultural life that an "outsider" may have experienced before. One can rationally and normatively be nostalgic about the moral and social life of a past historical era or some other contemporary form of life by contrasting it with manifestations of the social fragmentation, moral decadence, and possible spiritual emptiness of, for instance, a modern technological society. Edward Shils, an American social scientist, observes that, "The laying open of Africa to explorers and colonizers was followed by the bringing back to Europe of works of African art which were assimilated into and changed greatly the tradition of European painting and sculpture."<sup>43</sup> And Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins also say that "Picasso initiated modernism when he brought the images of African masks, then on exhibit in Paris, into the iconography of traditional European art."<sup>44</sup> Here are works of art—aspects of non-Western culture—that can be said to have been real options for Western artistic culture. Technology is undoubtedly an indispensable agent in the creation of material comforts for humans. But if it is allowed to detract from fundamental human values—if it is allowed, for instance, to destroy human life or lead to the fragmentation of human society—some version of modern technological life may not be a real option for (most) societies in the non-Western world.

If we can truly talk of the historical fact of genuine cultural borrowing in the wake of encounters between different cultures, of the enthusiasm and predilection for aspects of alien cultural forms or products, and if the notion of symmetrically related option makes sense to us, there would be no psychological anchor or sanctuary for ethnocentrism. In this connection, escaping from the ethnocentric prison requires that we give up such a notion as asymmetrically related options. The escape will certainly be bolstered if, from time to time, we embark on critical re-evaluation of our own culture and identified its limitations and shortcomings, or its cruel or inhuman features.

## **UNDERSTANDING OTHER CULTURES**

Understanding other cultures is most probably a potent means of overcoming ethnocentrism. But what is it to understand other cultures and how can this be achieved in practice? On the notion of understanding other people and their cultures, a celebrated paper by Peter Winch has been most influential, and I will make it the point of departure for my analysis here. This does not mean by any means that I agree with everything he says. The subject matter for his

discussion relates especially to the magical beliefs and rites of the Azande people, as presented in the renowned British anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard's famous work on witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande.<sup>45</sup> Winch's concern is how such beliefs and rites are to be perceived by others beside the Azande, who are said to be "immersed in a sea of mystical notions."<sup>46</sup> The main thrust of Winch's conception of understanding other cultures seems to focus on the need to appreciate the significance that a belief or practice has for the life of those who hold that belief or pursue that practice. He thus invites us to "note how Zande rites emphasize the importance of certain fundamental features of their life."<sup>47</sup> For Winch the notion of relating the practices of a culture, such as magical rites, to "a sense of the significance of human life" is "indispensable to any account of what is involved in understanding and learning from an alien culture."<sup>48</sup> The interesting and remarkable thing about Winch's account is his recognizing that cultures other than our own present us with possibilities of different ways of doing things, different possibilities of making sense of human life, different ideas that are generated by man as he contemplates the meaning or point of his life. Those who are given to overestimating the worth of their cultures, while disdaining the worth of other cultures, are oblivious to the status or importance of such possibilities of making sense of human life.

Winch's aim is, among other things, to launch an attack on the ethnocentrism of (most) Western scholars, anthropologists, and philosophers in particular, whom he chides when he says: "Our blindness to the *point* of primitive modes of life is a corollary of the *pointlessness of much of our own* [European] *life*."<sup>49</sup> That is to say, we fail to see the point or significance of a belief or practice of some "primitive" culture because much of our own life may have little sense or purpose or may be based on some extravagant claims. According to Richard Bernstein, Winch seems to suggest that "in order to understand and interpret alien or primitive societies we not only have to bracket our prejudices and biases, but have to suspend our own Western standards and criteria of rationality."<sup>50</sup> I do not think Winch makes or implies any such suggestion. Winch says instead that, "Since it is we [Europeans] who want to understand the Zande category, it appears that the onus is on us to extend our understanding so as to make room for the Zande category, rather than to insist on seeing it in terms of our own ready-made distinction between science and non-science."<sup>51</sup> To extend one's understanding is surely not necessarily to suspend one's standards of rationality, but to try to explore the possibility of bringing some alien belief or practice into the ambit of one's own standards of rationality. When Winch talks of the need to see the significance or point of a belief or practice of an alien culture *for human life*, we have reason to take it that that significance derives from some acceptable form of rationality. Winch believes strongly, or implies, that understanding other cultures is the greatest therapeutic to developing the ethnocentric mentality.

One outstanding feature of the cultural life of non-Western peoples, particularly those described as primitive, often misunderstood and made fun of in the writings of Western social scientists and scholars of religion, relates to their beliefs about magic, oracles, and other manifestations of supernaturalism. (It is to be noted, however, that the Oracle of Delphi in ancient Greece is among the earliest oracles in the world founded by ancient Greek culture, a culture that is acknowledged by the West as the historical fountainhead of its own civilization.) We are made to understand that Western peoples, being modern, rational, enlightened, and scientific, have no truck with such beliefs of the 'primitive' people. It is supposed that concepts or phenomena, such as magic and oracles, do not feature in the religious perceptions and practices of the modern West. Thus, as Winch says, "A much more important fact to emphasize is that we [Europeans] do not initially have a category that looks at all like the Zande category of

magic."52 Magic belongs to the category of non-science, he would say, whereas modern Western cultural life is based on science.

Magic, I would say, is not religion. For while religion focuses, generally, on supernatural personal beings, magic works through a panoply of impersonal forces. But magic is a manifestation of a certain feature of the religious mentality and the mystical experience. It is the result of a belief in the existence of some supernatural agents whose powers can, it is believed, be purposively exploited or manipulated for beneficial or evil ends. Magical rites may not be equated with religious rites. Yet magical rites as well as oracles, like religious rites, all belong to the comprehensive and complex category of the supernatural: magical practices are supernatural, just as are religious practices. To understand magical practices and oracles is to understand them as manifestations of the mystical or the supernatural. Phenomena such as spiritual healing and extrasensory perceptions (ESP) are, indeed, features of the modern Western experience of the mystical and the supernatural, and thus must not, truly speaking, appear weird and uncanny to the people of the West. If all aspects of the cultural life of the modern West were wholly scientific and totally devoid of the supernatural outlook—as the impression is often given—then religious beliefs would be (or, should have been) expunged from the mentality of the Western man; but we know that this is not so. But, religious beliefs, remember, are an aspect of supernaturalism. (It is interesting and instructive to note that the beginnings of the missionary activities of European Christianity overseas in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century coincided with the emphasis on *rationality* in modern European intellectual culture. This means, surely, that religion, a feature of supernaturalism, is not held by the Western people as incompatible with rationality.)

The great virtue of Winch's thesis, however, as I see it, is in inviting us to appreciate the significance or point of a cultural belief or practice for the life of those who participate in those beliefs and practices. All this said, however, the real worth of cultural beliefs and practices must be evaluated in terms of their consequences on human well-being. From the perspective of human well-being a cultural practice such as human sacrifice, for example, cannot be morally endorsed. Thus, suppose it were to be said that the sacrifice of one human being for ritual purposes does have a significance or point for a people of some culture by reason of the fact that that act would save the life of a whole population and that (therefore) it should be understood and accepted as such. I would demur. My position here is grounded on my advocacy of a humanistic ethic which I distinguish from pure utilitarianism, even though that ethic bears marks of consequentialism (see next lecture). A humanistic ethic is, for me, concerned with the well-being of *every* individual human being, not with a certain number of human beings.

It must be borne in mind that understanding an alien culture does not necessarily mean approving or endorsing or agreeing with or adopting the beliefs, values, and practices of that culture; even though it could mean that. Nor are the different possibilities of making sense of human life that may, a la Winch, be said to be embedded in a culture necessarily all valid and beyond reproach or criticism. Yet, appreciating the significance of a belief or practice of a culture is surely at the base of cultural borrowing or exchange or considering some aspect of a culture as a real option. Such an appreciation has, for instance, led some groups of people from the West to take to, and "go over to," Eastern religions.

## **THE ROLE OF COMPARISON IN UNDERSTANDING OTHER CULTURES**

In a seminal and instructive article on cultural relativism the American social scientist David Bidney averred that "The only antidote to ethnocentric prejudice is comparative knowledge of one's own and other cultures."<sup>53</sup> The role of comparison (or comparative knowledge) in understanding other cultures and, thus, dealing with the ethnocentric prejudice has been taken up also by Charles Taylor who asserts that comparison or contrast is crucial to understanding other cultures, and that, through comparison, we can escape ethnocentrism.<sup>54</sup> Comparison is, indeed, involved in the phenomenon of cultural borrowing. This presupposes not only some sort of understanding on the part of the borrowing culture, but also the recognition that certain cultural values, practices, or institutions of the culture (C1) from which some 'things' are borrowed are better than or superior to those of the borrowing culture (C2). They are considered more functional, and so will enhance aspects of the life of the participants of C2. I refer to such cases as CB1. In some cases, however, such relative expressions as "better than" or "superior to" may not even apply at all, because a feature or an item of C1 may not exist in C2; comparison cannot therefore be really made in such cases. For instance, p1 as a cultural practice of C1 may not at all be (or, have been) a cultural practice of C2 and, hence, one cannot compare the p1 of C1 with "the p1" of C2 (note that "the p1 of C2 does not exist). Yet C2 may be attracted to p1 and aspire after it because of its importance for C2's cultural life. I refer to such cases as CB2. Real comparison takes place in cases of CB1 rather than of CB2, even though both of them can lead to cultural borrowing. Let me restate my case here in a nutshell: to my mind, a culture (C1) in its entirety—in all of its aspects—cannot be compared with another culture (C2) in its entirety, that is, in all of its aspects. It is *specific* aspects of C1 (such as, techniques of farming or nurturing children) that can be compared with *specific* aspects of C2.

All this said, however, the role of comparison in understanding other cultures and thus diminishing the ethnocentric predicament cannot be underestimated. I feel uncomfortable, however, about Taylor's view of comparison as "*basic* to understanding."<sup>55</sup> The place of comparison in understanding other cultures depends very much on how open people are in comparing or contrasting the beliefs and practices of other cultures with those of their own, that is, how willing they are to consider or receive new ideas or propositions from alien cultural quarters. Where there is some openness, this may lead to understanding the contrasted other; even more than that, it may lead to appreciation, admiration, attraction and even possible adoption of some aspects of the contrasted culture. But this openness may not be a guaranteed feature of people's attitudes to the values and practices of other people and their culture. In the absence of openness, comparison may paradoxically confirm the prejudices and biases against a contrasted culture and result in augmenting the ethnocentric perspective and disdain for the other culture. The question, though, is this: is it openness that leads—or, as it were, opens the door—to understanding or is it understanding that leads to openness? That is, which comes (or should come) first, as it were? I would respond to this question by saying that it is openness that makes comparison a fruitful undertaking. But if openness is considered not a guaranteed feature of people's attitudes to the practices of other cultures, how can it be achieved or take place? I think the answer to this rather important question may be grounded in the Roman poet Terence's view (already referred to<sup>56</sup>) about the availability of human possibilities to all human beings and Winch's idea about the possibilities of different ways of doing things and different possibilities of making sense of human life that I discussed in the preceding section.

Even so, comparison may not be considered a *sine qua non* for understanding other people and their culture, that is, for grasping the meaning, significance, purpose, and worth of their beliefs, values, and practices. And Taylor seems to contradict himself when he says in the

paragraph immediately following that from which the above quotation is taken: "People can only be understood against the background of their (presumed) world."<sup>57</sup> If this is so, then comparison is not necessary; it is not basic. I myself think that we do not have to compare the values or practices of an alien culture with our own before we make the effort to understand them, for there may not be a basis for making the comparison. As I said earlier, we may not have in our own culture a corresponding belief or practice that we may encounter in another (i.e., alien) culture, and vice-versa; in that situation, there would be no overlap, and thus no basis for comparison. Or, at best we may notice some practice or value in the alien culture that merely resembles, or appears to be a variant of, something in our own culture.

In my view, a more positive and telling path to understanding other people and their culture is to recognize that other forms of life created and pursued by other *human beings* are, again following Terence and Winch, conceivable, that other possibilities of making sense of human life do exist which may be closed to us—which we may not be aware of—and which may yet benefit us in several ways, possibilities that may evoke positive wonder in us—positive in the sense of egging us on to explore the meaning or significance of some wonderful thing we are encountering rather than dismissing it off-handedly and disparagingly. I am not saying, however, that we should understand each culture in its own terms—terms most of which people outside the culture would not fully appreciate or comprehend. Any suggestion that each culture must be understood in its own terms makes a culture off-limits to critical judgment by people outside that culture; such a suggestion is at variance with my emphasis, in the previous lecture, on human well-being as the ultimate measure of the worth of any human culture. Understanding other cultures requires us to be inquisitive in regard to the beliefs, values, and practices of an alien culture and thus to soft-pedal the demonstration of negative, disdainful, and dismissive attitudes thereto—which attitudes are often ethnocentric.

In terms of the conception of understanding other cultures I am putting forward, we do not have to suspend our own standards and criteria of rationality (as Bernstein suggests or attributes to Winch—most probably wrongly). We need only recognize that all human cultures share certain basic human goals and basic needs, that they evolve different ways of realizing those needs and achieving those common goals, that they are all attempting to deal with complex questions of human life, and that our standards of rationality or goodness or beauty do not by any means constitute an exclusive measure. But there may be other perspectives awareness of which can widen our own cloistered horizons in many areas of our life—in aesthetics, morality, politics, ways of thinking, human relations, and so on—and so enhance the fulfillment of our lives. Recognition that no human culture is a self-contained windowless monad can bolster the course of understanding other cultures. I believe, also, that a non-relativist perspective on the values and practices of human cultures can facilitate our understanding of cultures other than our own; it can lead us to see that the values and practices of other cultures are not incommensurably bizarre and out of this world.

## CONCLUSION

In the wake of the historical phenomenon of the conscious and purposive appropriation of the values, practices, and achievements of one culture by another, it would be correct to say:

- that no human culture has been (or will be) impervious to influences from alien cultures—a fact that renders the notion of symmetrically related options in cultural values sensible; that every culture has widespread roots;

- that limitations and shortcomings are a feature of every culture—whatever be its claims to advancement or enlightenment,

- that those limitations make it inconceivable for a people to fashion a cultural structure that will succeed in coming to grips comprehensively with the complex nature of human life and its basic desires and needs; and

- that recognizing and exploring the possibilities of making sense of other forms of life will lead to appreciating their worth (even if it is of a limited kind). All this points up the rational and normative *emptiness* of ethnocentrism, indicating no grounds, on one hand, for overestimating the worth of one's culture and holding it up—in its entirety—as a model for all others and, on the other hand, for adopting disdainful attitudes to other cultures. By telescoping the whole of the human cultural world to the blinkered cultural world of an ethnocentric people, resulting in the failure to understand and appreciate the worth of other cultures, ethnocentrism hinders the cultivation of humanity; and ways ought seriously to be found to overcome it. Ethnocentrism can be overcome or escaped. But perhaps this is not so easily done; for it gives some people a good feeling about themselves and their culture. One can feel good, however, about oneself and one's culture even while recognizing and respecting the worth, achievements, and possibilities of other, i.e., alien, cultures.

## LECTURE III

# THE MORALITY OF A SHARED HUMANITY

### INTRODUCTION

In the previous two lectures, having argued that there is a universal human essence or common human nature, that there are value and disvalue experiences that human beings share, that there are certain basic desires, goals, and aspirations common to human beings, which constitute the ground for human values: that, in short, there is a shared humanity, what would or should be the moral implications of perceiving humanity as a shared humanity? It is this question about the morality of a shared humanity that I would explore in this lecture.

Every human society has instituted some devices for regulating the conduct of its members. Morality is one such device; law is another. Thus, when we talk of morality, we are talking of a set of principles, values, and norms that guide or are intended to guide the conduct of people in a society. We are talking about people's beliefs about right or wrong conduct that issue in rules and norms; but we are also talking about good or bad character which is ultimately crucial in the observance of the rules and in conforming to the norms. Regulating the behavior of members of society has the aim of bringing about social harmony and cooperative living through the individual's adjusting his interests to those of others in a society. Morality prescribes what is taken to be necessary for social living. All this clearly means that right from the outset, morality is intrinsically a social phenomenon. Morality arises only out of the relations between individuals and, thus, in the context of a human society. It is this context that gives rise to moral rules and principles and makes meaningful such moral values or virtues as compassion, friendship, generosity, kindness, love, and other other-regarding virtues, all of which can be pursued or exercised only in favor of human beings *in society*.

### THE MORALITY OF HUMAN WELL-BEING

On some widely accepted views, morality makes human well-being the basic or ultimate standard of the moral worth of human action; there is, on this showing, a moral dimension to any situation that affects human well-being.<sup>1</sup> And anything—any human action or behavior—that upholds or conforms to this ultimate standard is considered morally right, while that which violates it is considered morally wrong. This implies that whenever human well-being is at stake, whenever a situation arises that puts basic human needs or interests at risk—that involves good or harm—a moral issue arises. In other words, moral vocabulary is related, ultimately, to the basic desires and needs of human beings. There may be other characterizations or conceptions of morality besides those I have delineated here; but these, to be sure, are all oriented, directly or indirectly, toward human well-being or human good, the good or well-being of the human individual.<sup>2</sup> There is, thus, a consequentialist thrust to the institution of morality: morality is instituted for a purpose—a *telos*—which fundamentally is human well-being. It is, thus, appropriate to advocate a *humanistic* ethics, as I do in this lecture.

To talk of the good or well-being of the human individual is by no means to imply that each individual human being ought to seek his or her own good or interest to the disregard of the interests of other persons, which is what egoism means. It is quite natural and, in fact, expected that, because the individual person has a life to live, he will attend to his own interests, will find

and pursue ways that will assist the realization of his potential and the fulfillment of his goals in life. It is expected, in other words, that the individual will pay attention to duties to him- or herself. As individuals, we, of course, have duties to ourselves and must try to fulfill them. There is no justification for requiring that the individual person totally abandon his interests for the sake of the good of others. Yet, we are more likely than not to denounce the person who is known always to seek his own interests, while disregarding the interests of others, as selfish and, for that reason, as immoral. Morality is thus held by most people to be opposed to egoism, which fails to give due and genuine consideration to the consideration of the good of others—which, most people will say, is what morality is about.

But the question that immediately arises is this: if in fact it is natural and expected that the individual human being will attend to his interests and welfare, why should he be branded an immoral person when he pursues just that, when, that is, he constantly does that which promotes his own good? Is there any justification for such denunciation of his action or character? An elaborate answer to these questions will launch us into a profound and extensive analysis of the implications of the intrinsically social character of morality that I mentioned in my opening paragraph.

The fundamentally social character of morality simply springs, I here said, from the fact that it is an institution of a politically organized human society in which human beings have to live together, but have not only different aims, interests, desires, and life projects, but also different capacities and endowments. From the concept of our common humanity, we can infer a concept of a common human good (as I pointed out in my first lecture) as well as a concept of basic human needs or interests. On this showing, the differences in individual conceptions of the good are often exaggerated by individualist (or, 'liberal') thinkers of the West. Any adequate conception of morality, then, must reflect a concern for others and/or a consideration of the common or social good. By 'social good', however, I am not referring to the utilitarian notion of the overall social good, the greatest good of the greatest number, the application of which can result in the subversion or unjustifiable sacrifice (by the society or some political authority) of the rights of some individuals. I am referring, instead, to the good of all, which includes the good—the well-being—of every individual member of the society. The social character of morality requires that the individual, ever mindful of his interests, adjust those interests to the interests of others. The adjustment implies his giving due consideration to the interests and welfare of others. And so it is that, necessarily embedded in a human community, the individual person has a dual responsibility: for him or herself as an individual and for others as co-members of the entire *human* community—not merely his own local collective—with whom he shares certain basic needs and interests. I must immediately add that the validity of the point I have just made depends on the acceptance, as a premise, of Aristotle's famous dictum that "The human being is by nature a political [i.e., social] animal", that is, that a human being is by nature a member of a *polis*, a community. This view finds a variant in the convictions of a traditional Akan thinker, who asserts that "When a person descends from the heavens, he descends into a human habitation." Both statements unmistakably assert the natural sociality of the human individual.

Now, our natural sociality mandates relationality of a fundamental and indispensable kind; it insistently suggests that the human individual is naturally oriented toward other human beings with whom she must not only live but also have functional and fruitful relationships. Part of the relationship is one of interdependence and reciprocity. The natural relationality or sociality of the individual immediately involves one in some social and moral roles in the form of obligations,

commitments, and duties (or responsibilities) to other members of his or her community and even beyond it, which one must fulfill. In other words, atomism—that is, leading an isolated, individualistic life that bears no relation to others—can be imagined not to involve the individual in any trans-individual moral roles, such as will, for instance, impose moral duties to be fulfilled in respect of other persons. But social relations directly embed the individual member in a moral universe. The fundamentally social character of human life makes it a shared life that prescribes an other-regarding perspective on morality, a morality that mandates concern for the interests and welfare of one's fellows in one's community and beyond. A real and serious expression of this concern is the fulfillment of duty toward, or responsibility for, other persons. A shared life mandated by our natural sociality or relationality must have serious and far-reaching implications. One such implication, to my mind, is that a blinkered obsession with individual rights would not be a most appropriate principle for human conduct.

A rights-based morality appears to be the kind of morality that is mostly advocated and pursued by Western societies with their individualistic ethos. And this has led to the institution of a panoply, of rights—individual rights—as the foundation of contemporary political and moral thought and action of Western societies. That there are individual rights cannot of course be denied; such rights, as I said in my first lecture, derive from the most fundamental of our human values. It must be noted that rights are weighted in favor of the individual's personal development and welfare, indispensable for his or her own good as a human individual. Such individual rights ought to be respected. A shared life, however, does not warrant an obsessional emphasis on rights to the detriment of responsibilities and obligations in respect of other persons; on the contrary, a panoply *also* of altruistic duties and responsibilities and of other-regarding moral virtues is, and ought to be, concomitant to a shared life. To participate in such a shared life, therefore, a person ought to recognize his duties (or responsibilities) to his fellows.

## **ON THE NOTIONS OF COMMUNITY AND HUMANITY**

As I have been using the expressions "community" and "humanity." It is now appropriate to give some analytic attention to the concepts denoted by these expressions. First, community can be distinguished into three senses: one moral, one spatial, and the other sharing features of both. The spatial sense of community, which happens to be what most people generally have in mind when they use the term, denotes a geographic (or spatial) entity and seems to be used frequently to refer to a neighborhood, village, small town, or specific locality. Deriving from, or rather affiliated to, this spatial sense, community has also acquired a demographic sense that confines its use to small populations. I will refer to this spatial meaning of community to refer to narrow geographic settings as community<sup>2</sup>. But the spatial sense of the term also appears in such expressions as "the international community," "the world community," and "the global community," even though the latter set of expressions seems to have ideological overtones, as I will point out before long. I will refer to this comprehensive, all-encompassing use of the term as community<sup>3</sup>. (I am yet to delineate the primary sense of community, that is, community<sup>1</sup>.) Members of community<sup>2</sup> may share some interpersonal bonds which may or may not be biological, as in a village or small town. It is to be assumed that members of community in the secondary and tertiary sense (community<sup>2</sup> and community<sup>3</sup>) share some common values, interests, and goals. This assumption brings me to another, a third, sense of community.

The notion of the common good is, to my mind, intrinsically linked to the notion of a community. The notion of the common good was developed in detail in the first lecture. Here I

would but note that the notion of the common good can be equated with a notion of a set of goods that is essentially good for human beings as such. Access to these goods assists the fulfillment of human life, and thus these goods ought to be available to every individual if one is to function satisfactorily in a human community. The common good, in short, can be equated with the human good. A fundamental meaning of community is the sharing of an overall way of life, which can be said to be inspired by the understanding of the notion of the common good. It expresses itself in each member's acknowledging the existence of common values, obligations, and understandings as well as demonstrating a loyalty and commitment to the interests of the community. Sharing an overall way of life involves demonstrating a concern not only for the social good, but also for the well-being of one another, bearing each other up. Thus, it enjoins certain obligations and responsibilities on each member of the community with respect to the interests and welfare of others. While not in any way implying a disregard for one's own personal interests and goals, it nevertheless insists on paying regard and attention to the interests of other persons as well. I regard this moral or normative sense of community as primary, thus, as community<sup>1</sup>. It is, in my opinion, the fundamental meaning of the concept of community. On this showing, community<sup>1</sup> represents a moral value that is opposed to a social organization characterized by the individualist ethos that stresses self-interest, with little concern, if at all, for others. It is thus a moral value that ought to be cherished and practiced in all human societies irrespective of their sizes and their stages of development.

When people talk of a society as having no sense of community or as having no community life, it is clearly community<sup>1</sup>—this normative sense of community—that they certainly have in mind. It is thus possible to have a community in the spatial sense (i.e., community<sup>2</sup> or community<sup>3</sup>), without community in the moral or normative sense (i.e., community<sup>1</sup>). Such condition would reduce that community to a mere association of individual persons, without meaningful interaction and a sense of responsibility and concern for each other. If a village or a neighborhood fails to evolve social relationships based on moral sensibilities or positive moral responses, mutual sympathies, and shared understanding of common interests and goals, it cannot, despite its small size, claim to be a community in this primary, fundamental sense of community (community<sup>1</sup>). This fundamental sense of community will seem to prescribe a morality that manifestly and appropriately recognizes the worth of every human being, a moral perception that therefore speaks to the essence of humanity.

Now, I turn to the notion of humanity, on which the arguments of these lectures center. A French scholar, De Benoist, makes the following assertion:

*Toutes les cultures du monde se voient reconnaître leur droit à l'existence. Celui-ci étant indissociable du maintien des particularités socioculturelles collectives. Il n'y a pas d'au-delà de la pluralité des cultures: l' "humanité est une notion zoologique, une commodité langagière ou un concept vide de sens."*<sup>3</sup>

("All cultures of the world recognize that fact that they have the right to exist, cultures being inseparable from the existence of collective socio-cultural particularities. *There is nothing beyond the plurality of cultures: 'humanity' is a zoological notion, a linguistic convenience, or a concept empty of any meaning.*")

The second statement of this quotation (with my emphasis) is as bizarre as it is incredible. There indeed are cultures, of course, and a plurality of them at that. But these cultures, as human cultures, are obviously the creations of humans. Despite the diversities among the cultures

created by humans, diversities that can be explained away, there manifestly are cultural universals, some of which take their rise from values that can be considered fundamental human values, values that, as I tried to point out in the first lecture, are intrinsic to the functioning of *any* human society and the fulfillment of human life and can, therefore, be said to be common to all human cultures. The existence of fundamental human values and of human capacities and dispositions, the value and disvalue experiences that all human beings share: all this attests to the reality of human nature, in terms of which the idea of humanity can be defined. The notion of humanity is thus a surrogate for a whole gamut of intrinsic, fundamental attributes and characteristics, as well as ideals, that make for the fulfillment of the individual person.

Perhaps a reflection on the Akan statement "*onnye onipa*" ("he is not human" or "he is not a human being") may throw some light on the perception of humanity. In the Akan moral language, when the conduct of an individual consistently appears cruel, wicked, selfish, unsympathetic, ungenerous, or insensitive to the plight of others, when, in short, he consistently fails to act in ways that promote the well-being of others, the Akan would say of that individual that "he is not human" (or, "he is not a human being", *onnye onipa*). This statement would be made of any individual irrespective of that individual's cultural, national (or 'ethnic'), or racial background. But when it is said of an individual that "he is not human", it does not imply of course that that individual is a beast or a tree. Implicit in the statement is the emphatic assumption—in fact a conviction—that there are certain basic values, norms, and ideals which should inspire and find reflection in the behavior of an individual, *if* he is a human being. The evaluative statement opposite to this is "he is human" (*oye onipa*) or "he is truly human" (*oye onipa paa*). Now, the moral significance, on one hand, of denying humanity to a human being on the grounds that his actions are known to be dissonant with certain fundamental moral norms and, on the other hand, of affirming his true humanity by reason of his exhibiting certain moral virtues in his behavior, is instructive. It points up humanity as a normative concept in that it prescribes certain ideal attributes and ideal forms of behavior.

The notion of humanity explains the affinities between human cultures; it is this notion that grounds the human world as an ideological *system*, rather than as a haphazard, random, and tentative phenomenon. As an ideological or normative system, the human world can only result only from the activities of groups of beings or agents that have fairly common capacities and characteristics and that share values, goals, aspirations, and ideals. It would be correct therefore to maintain that humanity is a meaningful, *not* an empty, concept. It is a concept that is encapsulated in some sedimented characteristics, values, ideals, and propensities of some beings in this world called human beings.

In this connection, the concept of "crimes against humanity" has both legal and moral meaning and significance. Even though such crimes are committed against *certain* individual human beings or groups of human beings and in *some* specific parts of the world, nevertheless they are described as *crimes against humanity*. Theft, forgery, incest, and bribery are crimes; but they are not regarded as crimes against humanity, as are such crimes as genocide and torture. The question of why are they so regarded or described the answer it would seem to me is because such crimes strike against the basic moral sensibilities and instincts of human beings, against the foundations of our personhood and of our worth as humans rather than beasts; they are crimes that deeply rend the human heart and cause human despair. Those crimes represent experiences that human beings simply do not want to have, experiences to which human beings have the greatest aversion, experiences which even those who perpetrate those crimes would like not to suffer if they could escape them. Those who enslave others would feel their personhood and

humanity lacerated should they find themselves in the circumstances of slaves; and those who committed the Holocaust would flee if should they face the prospect of a similar treatment by others. Crimes against humanity are, thus, to be understood and interpreted against the background of the fundamental value and disvalue experiences of human beings. It is thus clear that the concept of "crimes against humanity" is meaningful and appreciated because of a body of attributes, characteristics, and values that constitute themselves into what is appropriately called humanity.

Now, given that there surely are fundamental value and disvalue experiences that can be said to be common to all human beings, it would be appropriate to speak of a common or shared humanity. The concept of a shared humanity is clearly involved in, and inspires, references to "the international community", "the world community", "the global community" (community in the above categorization). An outstanding idea or proposition implicit in these references is that they speak to the various cultures to which different peoples belong; that is, they are over and above the particular cultures evolved by the different societies of the world, suggesting the conviction that all human beings, irrespective of their local cultures, share some fundamental values and that they are not just members of a single large human community<sup>3</sup>. In other words, these references are not particularly spatial, but essentially normative: they point up the unity of all people, strongly suggesting that all human beings belong to one species, one universal human family with shared basic values, hopes, and desires.

This perception of the unity or brotherhood of all human beings is emphatically expressed in the Akan proverb: *honam mu nni nhanoa*, translated literally by K.A. Busia as, "In human flesh there is no edge of cultivation—no boundary", but interpreted by him as meaning that "all humankind is one species."<sup>4</sup> The proverb can thus be rendered as "Humanity has no boundary." Its meaning is that, while there is a limit—a boundary—to the area of cultivation of land, there is no such boundary (or limit) in the cultivation of the friendship and fellowship of human beings; the boundaries of that form of cultivation are limitless. Humanity is here perceived as embracing all other peoples beyond the narrow geographic confines of particular cultures or societies, as constituting all human beings into one universal family of humankind. Even though this family is fragmented into a multiplicity of peoples and cultures, nevertheless it is a shared family—a shared humanity—the relationships between whose members ought to feature a certain kind of morality.

## **RESPONSIBILITY AS THE CORNERSTONE OF THE MORALITY OF A SHARED HUMANITY**

What kind of morality should a shared humanity evolve? If sociality or community life is natural to humans—which means that human beings do not have a choice not to live in a human society; if there is a core of values and disvalues that can be considered common to human beings and, being core, are most essential for the fulfillment of their lives as human beings; then how should they, as members of an extensive human community<sup>3</sup>, respond to one another morally? And, how will or should their moral thought and action be influenced or guided by the normative sense of community (i.e., community<sup>1</sup>)? We will explore these questions at some length.

The kind of morality that is to be evolved by a shared humanity is not only implicit in much of what I have said in the foregoing but must be inspired by it. On that basis, it would be correct to assert at once that our shared humanity constitutes the foundation for a morality that stresses

responsibilities and obligations toward others, whether as members of our own particular community<sup>2</sup> or as members of the extensive community<sup>3</sup>. This morality that stresses sensitivity to the needs and well-being of others; it is an other-regarding and capacious morality. The crucial point of this altruistic morality is that, by underlining the notion of responsibilities, it elevates our responsibilities (or duties) toward others to a status equal to that of rights and urges that the former be taken as seriously as the latter. A shared humanity, conceived as a universal family of humankind, mandates, not a rights-based morality as the quintessence of the ethical life—the kind of moral outlook obsessed with concern for individual rights. It mandates rather a kind of moral outlook animated by the awareness of the needs and interests of others and the demonstration of sensitivity to those needs. To say this, though, is not by any means to denigrate the notion of individual rights, which can sometimes be exercised in favor of others as well; thus, rights are not necessarily opposed to responsibilities. However, an obsessive and belligerent preoccupation with our individual rights can lead to egoism and the concern for our own individual welfare, to the disregard of the needs and interests of others. Such a moral outlook subverts the notion of community<sup>1</sup> and, consequently, of a shared humanity. In the final analysis it could self-destruct, as it could deprive the individual of the goodwill and assistance of others at a time when these are badly needed for that individual's own welfare.

## **THE ALLEGED CORRELATION BETWEEN DUTIES AND RIGHTS**

It is often maintained that our duties (responsibilities) are based on the rights of others. This means that to fulfill our responsibilities to others is to fulfill a requirement imposed by the rights of these others; that it is in the attempt to uphold the rights of others that we carry out certain responsibilities toward them. This position derives from the alleged correlation between rights and responsibilities, the position that if there are rights, then there must be corresponding duties or responsibilities, and vice-versa. Joseph Raz, for instance, says that "[s]ince a right is a ground for duties there is a good deal of truth in this kind of correlativity thesis."<sup>5</sup> He says also that "[r]ights are the grounds of duties in the sense that one way of justifying holding a person to be subject to a duty is that this serves the interest on which another's right is based."<sup>6</sup> The position maintained by Raz is not wholly true. It is true in respect of two categories of duties: duties enjoined upon the state or society, which would have to be performed specifically by public institutions and agencies such as the government or upon individuals who occupy specific roles in the society or state, and duties prescribed by negative moral imperatives, such as we should not harm or kill others. Negative moral imperatives are related to what are regarded as negative rights, rights that require other people to refrain from acting in ways that will result in their subversion. The performance of these two categories of duties will be required by corresponding rights: thus they are duties that are correlated with rights.

Ordinarily, however, moral responsibilities that we nonpublic persons carry out in respect of others, including the enterprises undertaken by altruistic persons and charitable organizations, do *not* have their grounds in the rights of others; such moral acts are performed not simply because of the rights of those for whose sake those acts are performed. If I give my seat on a bus to an older person in any city in the world, I do not do so because this older person has a right against me—a right correlated with a duty I ought to perform by giving my seat to him or her. The older person and I have equal rights to have seats on the bus. He or she entered the bus when there was no vacant seat and had to stand. In giving my seat to this older person, I certainly never supposed that I was helping to fulfill or defend his or her right. What about my own right to the

seat? I gave my seat to the older person only because I realized that, being too weak to stand, he or she might collapse before long. Thus, it was a consideration only of her need—her well-being—rather than her right that led me to decide to give my seat to her. Again, if a group of people in some state considers it their duty to help relieve the burden of poverty in another state, they do not do so because they are obligated to respect or respond to the demands or rights of those weighed down by poverty. The poor in that state can assert their rights against their own government. But, as far as those outside that state who consider it their duty to bring some relief to the poor are concerned, it is the needs and well-being of the poor, rather than their rights, that are the compelling reasons.

One may ask, however, whether in pursuing actions that help fulfill the needs of (some) people we are not in fact doing the things that are demanded by their rights. The questions that immediately follow are: what is the relation of needs to rights? Are needs rights, or not? It can hardly be denied that some needs—basic needs—give rise to rights and so acquire the status of rights. They are basic in the sense that they are the needs that are indispensable to the fulfillment of ordinary, bearable human life; they would include food, shelter, health care, security, freedom, and education. Undoubtedly there are needs that are so intrinsic to living the human life that their not being satisfied would harm that life. But surely there are other needs that are not so intrinsic to human life. I wish, however, to avoid, for now, a discussion about the legitimate distinction often drawn between objective and subjective needs. Basic needs, as (basic) rights, ought to be satisfied. It is, of course, incumbent primarily on the society or state acting through its institutions to make provision for the satisfaction of the basic needs of its people. In other words, it is the duty primarily of the state, which in such cases, means the government and other public institutions, to see to the basic needs of its people and, in doing so, to respond appropriately to the justifiable demands of their rights: the right to life, liberty, security of person, and others. Thus, basic needs, in their capacity as rights, have correlative duties. But these duties, I say, can be enjoined primarily and directly upon the public institutions of the state. This is the reason why (some) citizens in a country may, in pursuit of certain rights, demonstrate against *their* own government or some institutions in their own country, rather than the governments of all the countries of the world.

Duties (or responsibilities) carried out by nonpublic persons or organizations for people, except those performed in respect of negative rights, derive not from the rights of those people, but from sources or factors other than the positive rights of people. In fulfilling certain responsibilities to others, people are motivated, not by awareness of their rights, but by such other considerations as their goodwill, compassion, and the sheer desire to do that which promotes the well-being of those people. For example many individuals and organizations from different countries of the world went to Turkey to help relieve pain and suffering in the wake of a most devastating earthquake that claimed the lives of tens of thousands of the Turkish people and injured hundreds of thousands more. It was not consideration of the rights of the Turkish people that led those foreign assistants, with possible risks to their own lives, to enter that country in order to assist its people to cope with the consequences of this natural disaster. They went there on humanitarian grounds, and were, thus, motivated by considerations of human well-being. It should be borne in mind that, particularly since the second World War, rights have been incarnated in the constitution—the basic law of the state—specifically as bills of rights. In consequence, rights have assumed a legal patina; the obligations generated by them are essentially legal obligations. Public institutions, including governments, may be dragged into court if they falter in the duties they should perform in response to the justifiable demands of the

rights of the citizens. But it cannot seriously be argued that the responsibilities or duties that nonpublic persons and agencies, and charitable organizations carry out in response to the needs and interests of people, near and far, are mandated by the law; they are not. They are moral mandates, if you will, or self-imposed moral prescriptions that derive from moral convictions. This is the reason why, if the nonpublic persons and charitable organizations fail to demonstrate sensitivity to the needs of their own compatriots as well as others outside their national environs, they will *not* face the sanctions of the law. In situations in which individuals, nonpublic groups, and charitable organizations act in ways that bring relief to some suffering people, it would be correct to say that the impelling factors are compassion, charity, and other moral virtues, rather than their consciousness of the rights of those suffering people. A law that may be regarded as necessary may yet, for some reasons or other, be refused to be enacted by those in political authority; and, when finally compelled to enact it, they may reluctantly and feebly enforce it. Furthermore, the law (of any nation) has its limitations in that it cannot cover *every* aspect of human conduct or relations. There is, therefore, much room for the exercise of other-regarding moral virtues. Human sympathies are capacious and spontaneous, often they are manifest prior to the enactment of a law or even where a specific or relevant law does not at all exist. One recognizes, though, that human sympathies may not, for practical reasons, be given concrete expressions in all situations.

Based on the foregoing arguments, I think that Raz is wrong in asserting that "all duties derive from rights,"<sup>7</sup> that "rights justify duties,"<sup>8</sup> and that "[t]he duty's purpose is to protect the interest of the right-holder."<sup>9</sup> The reason is that in many situations when we want to do things for others, such as helping those in distress, the desire to do so comes quite spontaneously, without being engendered by the consciousness of rights of others we are required to help protect or realize. In such situations we are impelled rather, and invariably, by the consciousness of their interests and needs. I agree, however, with Raz that "we all owe a duty to protect and promote the well-being of *all* people" and that there are "duties of well-being we owe each other."<sup>10</sup> From the perspective of the concerns of the morality of a shared humanity, Raz's statements just quoted are relevant and acceptable, even though one may not be too sure how the duties of well-being can be given adequate concrete expression if one advocated or emphasized the correlation between duties and rights. Are the duties of well-being we owe each other imposed by their rights? Raz may say yes. In the limited sense where negative rights are involved he may be right. It is my view, however, that the duties of well-being that we, as ordinary people—not as people occupying certain public roles or statuses—owe each other and all people do not derive from, nor are they justified by, the positive rights of each person. They are rather duties we owe people because we feel it our moral responsibility simply to do that which will enhance the well-being of fellow human beings. Raz is also right in saying that "duties are *fetters* and restrict people's ability to do as they wish."<sup>11</sup> Duties are, indeed, fetters or restrictions, but like a two-edged sword. They constrain us, on one hand, to avoid doing that which will do violence to the well-being of people and, on the other hand, to do that which will promote their well-being. The fetters are a feature of the sacrifice involved in any altruistic moral conduct, in the pursuit of an act that conduces to the well-being of the other or of others.

Thus, a shared humanity should prescribe a morality that grounds the decision to perform duties to fellow human beings, not on their rights, but on the raw and spontaneous desire to help fulfill their needs and well-being. This is the moral mandate or a moral *desideratum*—of a shared humanity. Such duties or responsibilities to fellow human beings, whatever they are, need not be regarded as special or saintly or heroic, and hence as strictly not a moral requirement. This brings

me, finally, to a discussion of a class of duties or actions regarded by some—perhaps many—moral philosophers as supererogatory. Before I embark on that discussion, however, I would like to make further observations on the grounds of our duties or responsibilities to others.

It is often supposed that duties are linked to only specific roles or positions that people occupy in the society or state. Thus, Bernard Williams asserts that "duties have characteristically been connected with a role, position, or relationship" and that, for this reason, duties in general "are not acquired voluntarily."<sup>12</sup> They are not acquired voluntarily because they are enjoined or imposed by one's social or public role or position: one is compelled to undertake certain duties by virtue of a role or position one occupies. So understood, duty "looks backwards, or at least sideways," as Williams puts it; this is because the reasons for undertaking a duty lie in the past or present, that is, in "the position I am already in."<sup>13</sup> Even though our intuitions lead to such an understanding of duty, I do not find such a view of duty acceptable for at least two reasons. One is that it takes too narrow an approach to the notion of duty in a society or world of human beings, the demonstration of whose moral concerns for many others can hardly be said to be connected with one's role or position, or relationship. It is surely not impossible or inappropriate to have a conception of duty *outside* the various roles people occupy in society. It would be correct to say that the roles and positions people occupy are generally local, provincial, or national; relationships also are nearly all matters of place. It would follow that our duties to others will also be local or provincial or national. And, yet it can hardly be denied, I think, that the moral pursuits of many individuals in the various societies of our world, including the moral obligations they may feel toward others, do not derive from, nor are they connected with, any specific roles or positions they hold in the world or any well-defined relationships they have with other people in the world.

The other reason, not unrelated to the last statement of the foregoing paragraph, is that a role-or position-connected conception of duty misinterprets or misunderstands people's reasons for pursuing certain moral actions. It can be said for a fact that a great number of people pursue certain moral actions—perform certain moral duties—for purely humanitarian reasons, reasons that in most cases are not in any way related to, or imposed on them by, their local or provincial roles or positions, but reasons that, to the contrary, can be said to derive from their consciousness of the needs and well-being of others. Within the various societies of the world, as well as on the global scene, people do fulfill non-role-connected duties, free floating duties, as it were, that are not anchored to specific social or public roles or positions. The morality of a shared humanity will not tether duties that people perform in favor of others to the severely circumscribed roles or positions or relationships of those who perform them.

## **ARE THERE ACTS OF SUPEREROGATION?**

There are moral philosophers who seek to narrow the scope of the moral duties (responsibilities) human beings owe to each other by making a distinction between a set of acts that is clearly perceived by them as 'proper' moral duties and another set of acts described as supererogatory or acts of supererogation, which, in their view, are not strictly moral duties.<sup>14</sup> From its Latin root, *super erogatio* (which means performing more than is required), a supererogatory act is defined as an act that is 'beyond the call of duty', an act that is over and above what a person is required to do as a moral agent. It can be inferred from this definition that an act of supererogation is neither morally obligatory nor forbidden, that it is not wrong to omit or neglect doing it, even though it is a good and commendable act by virtue of its intrinsic value

and its consequences. Even though it is considered a meritorious act, nevertheless it is supposed to be an optional act, one that may be performed if the spirit moves you, but need not be performed. In being considered good, or morally commendable, or pursued for the well-being of another person, the act of supererogation is clearly a *moral* act, which, like all moral acts, it is right to perform. Yet, in the view of many moral philosophers, the (supposed) optional, nonobligatory character of the supererogatory act makes it a different sort of moral requirement, one that may or may not be performed, one that is at once devoid of the impartial or impersonal character of a strictly moral duty. We would normally think that a morally good or right act ought to be performed, that there is an equation between goodness and oughtness. Theories of supererogation would consider that equation correct but applicable only to moral duty "proper", not to an act that is considered beyond the call of duty. There is some kind of tension, something odd, to regard an act as morally good and commendable and yet as belonging to a different category of moral duty, one that does not strictly exact obligation or compel performance.

Implicit in the notion that acts exist that are beyond the call of duty is the assumption that there are limits to what we, as human beings, can reasonably consider as our proper moral duties and obligations, that our moral duties are thus clearly defined or circumscribed, and that some acts that we perform or feel like performing are, strictly speaking, beyond the limits of our legitimate moral duties. We cannot fulfill, or are not obliged to fulfill, those duties that are beyond our limits. I will in due course explore the question of whether in fact there are limits to our moral duties or responsibilities, given the context of a shared humanity. For the moment, however, I wish to turn my attention to a problem that immediately arises, namely: if limits can be set to our moral responsibilities, then how do we set these limits? That is, by what criteria do we demarcate our 'real' moral duties—those that are, as it were, within the call of obligation or of duty (i.e., within our moral limits)—from those that are considered beyond the call of duty? In other words, how do we come to determine that such-and-such acts are beyond the call of duty?

I will discuss three criteria that may be established to demarcate our supposed proper moral obligations and duties from supererogatory acts, those which are commendable but optional. One criterion relates to the practicability of certain acts, i.e., whether or not those acts are such that we, as human beings, are capable or are in a position to perform. Thus, we may not be able to fulfill the desire or wish to give help to people in distress who are physically distanced from us; similarly, we may not be able to fulfill a desire or wish to provide financial or other forms of aid to people experiencing famine, whether near or far, simply because we are financially handicapped ourselves. The impracticability of such acts, or rather our inability to perform them, tends to make us feel that those acts are beyond the call of duty and therefore absolves us from performing them.

James Griffin, for instance, is of the opinion that "Commonsense morality permits partiality to particular persons, groups, and causes; it tailors moral duties to our capacities."<sup>15</sup> He asserts, further, that "There are no moral norms outside the boundary set by our capacities. A moral standard that ignores human capacities is not an 'ideal' standard; it is no standard at all."<sup>16</sup> The view that morality permits partiality to particular persons or groups palpably flies in the face of the fundamental principle of the categorical imperative enunciated by Kant, a principle that rather mandates *impartiality* and, thus universality, in our moral conduct. This principle, rooted in the golden rule, is conceivably common to the moral codes of all human societies. A morality that advocates partiality, that thus urges us, for instance, to demonstrate love or compassion for *some* people and not for others will be at fundamental odds with what social and humanistic ethic requires of us; within the context of a shared humanity, it is inappropriate to urge partiality

as a *principle* of moral conduct. Morality must essentially be social and humanistic, if it is to be meaningful and important for human beings. For this reason, the demonstration of moral sensitivity cannot be confined to particular persons or groups, such as our relatives, compatriots, co-ethnics, or people who share the same culture, language, religion, or political views with us.

By "commonsense morality," I think Griffin means the kind of morality that, besides advocating partiality, also prescribes only that which is practicable or doable by a person. But this criterion, that is, of practicability, that is held as making certain acts supererogatory, cannot be upheld by itself. The reason is that our inability to perform acts that we should regard as moral duties but which for some practical and other reasons we cannot carry out does not—should not—make them supererogatory. There are, indeed, some responsibilities that we recognize as within our moral limits and that we do not therefore regard as beyond the call of duty, but which, nevertheless, we are not able to fulfill; but we do not say, with regard to such responsibilities, that they are supererogatory by reason simply of our inability to carry them out. So, our incapacity to fulfill a duty, however complicated it may be and for whatever reason, cannot be a proper ground for being shrugged off as supererogatory.

Another criterion relates to actions or rules the pursuit of which makes social life possible or tolerable. In a well-known and influential paper titled "Saints and Heroes", the British philosopher, J. O. Urmson, maintains that we should be concerned to prohibit "behavior that is intolerable if men are to live together in society," and to demand "the minimum of cooperation toward the same end."<sup>17</sup> For Urmson, all that is required to achieve a tolerable basis of social life is a set of what he refers to as "basic rules" or "basic duties."<sup>18</sup> Urmson's concern about social life, about human beings living together in society and cooperating in achieving their collective welfare is, of course, commendable. But his notion of basic duties as a prop to, or condition for, tolerable social life seems to deflate the seriousness of that concern. This is because basic duties, being basic, must be severely limited in scope and would circumscribe the responsibilities that people who live together in society ought to carry out with respect to others. A moral society—as well as a shared humanity—ought to prescribe much more than 'basic' duties. It is precisely because of its limited character that Urmson's notion of basic duties cannot function adequately for a human society. If social arrangement is to maximize the good for all, then that arrangement will have to include rules and duties the pursuit of which will lead to the attainment of collective welfare and, within the normative framework of a shared humanity, of the well-being of all people. The third criterion that may be established to set limits to moral duties derives from conceptions of the autonomy of the individual and of individual rights. Thus, David Heyd asserts that "supererogation is justified by showing that some supererogatory acts must exist because society cannot require of the individual every act that would promote the general good, and because the individual has the right to satisfy his wants and to achieve his ends and ideals regardless of their social utility (with some obvious limitations, of course)."<sup>19</sup> In Heyd's view, then, the existence and exercise of the individual's autonomy and rights justify supererogationism, for they set limits to what the individual, concerned with the fulfillment of his own needs and welfare, can be expected to do in meeting the needs of others. The rejection of supererogationism, Heyd would say, implies an inappropriate extension of the individual's moral responsibility and the consequent sacrifice or subversion of his autonomy and personal needs. And, for John Rawls, if moral duty is allowed to contain supererogatory acts, it would involve risk and loss to the agent. Thus Rawls: "It is good to do these [supererogatory] actions but it is not one's duty or obligation. Supererogatory acts are not required, though normally they would be were it not for the loss or risk involved for the agent himself." According to Rawls, "While we

have a *natural duty* to bring about a great good, say, if we can do so relatively easily, we are *released from this duty when the cost to ourselves is considerable*."20

The views of Heyd and Rawls just quoted, which are the common views of the advocates of supererogationism, reflect a certain conception of the nature of morality or moral responsibility, which is that moral responsibility is to be confined to acts that human beings can or want conveniently—"relatively easily" (in Rawls' terms)—to perform and that will promote their own individual welfare. It is not that supererogationists necessarily think morality is self-regarding and that all self-sacrifice should be expunged from morality. It is, rather, that they think some form of self-sacrifice cannot be required of any and every moral agent. But the question is: which form of self-sacrifice can or should be required of the moral agent, and how do we determine that? Some people would consider providing the slightest assistance to someone in distress a self-sacrifice—and a great one at that; others, however, will not consider such acts as sending huge amounts of money to help people in famine-stricken areas within their nation or outside it, or helping to get someone out of real danger, or providing money to help someone undergo a surgical operation, as involving great sacrifice and, hence, as heroic or saintly. What all this means is that the scope of our moral responsibilities or duties should not be circumscribed. The moral life, which essentially involves paying regard to the needs, interests, and well-being of others—adjusting to the interests of others, already implies self-sacrifice and loss, that is, loss of something: one's time, interests, money, strength, and so on. There is no need, therefore, to place limits on the form of the self-sacrifice and, hence, the extent of our moral responsibilities. The field of our moral duties or responsibilities should be left open. An adequate morality for a shared humanity should therefore seek to collapse what are considered our 'proper' moral duties and what are considered acts beyond the call of duty (supererogatory acts). In the light of the foregoing position, there is no justification for Heyd to think that "a doctor who goes to a remote tribe to cure a rare disease is doing a supererogatory act." In Heyd's view, the doctor who acts in this way "goes beyond his *natural duty*, which in that case is confined to the fulfillment of his social duty as a doctor in *his* community."21 In opposition to Heyd's view, I wish to say that morality requires us to pay some attention to the interests and needs of people not only in our immediate environs, such as our local communities or nations, but that, given the beliefs in our common humanity—with all that this concept implies for the fundamental needs, feelings, and interests of all human beings irrespective of their specific communities and cultures—our moral sensitivities should extend to people beyond our immediate communities (communities in the spatial sense, i.e., community2). That is to say, the moral sense of community (community1) ought to characterize the moral ideas, sentiments, and actions of community in the sense both of community2 and community3. And, contrary to Heyd's view, the world-wide medical activities of the French medical group called "*Medicine sans Frontieres*" ("Doctors without Borders") in sending medical relief to people in various places of the world, outside their own communities, indicate clearly that, in the view of the members of the group, to send medical relief to other people besides one's own is a legitimate *moral duty*, not an act beyond the call of duty. The same is true of the activities of doctors from several Rotary Clubs in the world who go to various countries of the world to bring medical relief to people. These doctors do not think that they are going beyond their "natural duty" (whatever this means) as Heyd and Rawls suppose, that their actions are beyond the call of duty. The same thing can be said of the moral perspective of the members of numerous national and international charitable organizations.

In this connection, I wish to turn to the moral considerations that led Dr. Albert Schweitzer to study medicine at age 30 in order to practice medicine in the forests of Africa, as recorded in his own autobiography. The quotations I am going to make are quite extensive:

On October 13th, 1905, a Friday, I dropped into a letter-box in the Avenue de la Grande Armée in Paris letters to my parents and to some of my most intimate acquaintances, telling them that at the beginning of the winter term I should enter myself as a medical student, in order to go later on to Equatorial Africa as a doctor. . . . The plan which I meant now to put into execution had been in my mind for a long time, having been conceived so long ago as my student days. It struck me as incomprehensible that I should be allowed to lead such a happy life, while I saw many people around me wrestling with care and suffering. . . . While at the University and enjoying the happiness of being able to study and even to produce some results in art and science, I could not help thinking continually of others who were denied that happiness by their material circumstances or their health. . . . What seemed to my friends the most irrational thing in my plan was that I wanted to go to Africa, not as a missionary, but as a doctor, and thus when already thirty years of age burdened myself as a beginning with a long period of laborious study. And that this study would mean for me a tremendous effort, I had no manner of doubt. I did, in truth, look forward to the next few years with dread. But the reasons which determined me to follow the way of service I had chosen, as a doctor, weighed so heavily that other considerations were as dust in the balance.<sup>22</sup>

One interesting and remarkable thing about the altruistic moral reasoning that lay behind Dr. Schweitzer's decision to study medicine in order to practice it in Africa was that he had "no thought of heroism, but just recognized a *duty* undertaken with sober enthusiasm."<sup>23</sup> In other words, he himself never regarded his decision or act as heroic or saintly. This fact needs to be pointed out, because those who advocate supererogationism think that the acts performed by some people which are described as beyond the call of duty are heroic and saintly. According to those among (sections of) humankind convinced of the existence of a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others, however, such acts are ordinary, not extraordinary or heroic or saintly; they are required by the morality of a shared humanity. Altruistic considerations were at the base of Dr. Schweitzer's moral motivation; and that is significant for my argument. As I will indicate before I come to the end of this lecture, the moral convictions and outlook of Dr. Schweitzer exemplify the perceptions of people who are deeply concerned about the well-being of their fellow human beings, even though advocates of supererogation would regard his moral convictions and actions not as part of his "natural duty."

## **NATURAL DUTY AND MORALITY**

It is not very clear what the term "natural duty" (used by both Heyd and Rawls) means or refers to. Perhaps it refers to duties that we are naturally inclined to perform, duties that our intuitions lead us to fulfill. It may be pointed out, however, that morality is instituted generally to countervail or "straighten up" our natural inclinations. In most instances our "natural duty" would have been duty to ourselves, members of our immediate and extended families, and

perhaps neighbors and friends. But this is not all that morality really or essentially requires of us. More often than not, morality requires us to go against the grain. J. O. Urmson says that as part of the notion of duty, "I may demand that you keep your promises to me . . . and I may reproach you if you transgress. But however admirable the tending of strangers in sickness may be, it is not a basic duty, and we are not entitled to reproach those to whom we are strangers if they do not tend us in sickness."<sup>24</sup> It seems surprising that Urmson should say that tending strangers in sickness is not a basic duty (or responsibility) the transgression of which should attract censure, when he holds that "morality . . . is something that should serve *human needs*."<sup>25</sup> Most people, I think, will agree that to tend a stranger in sickness is to serve a *human* need and hence ought to be considered a basic moral duty. It can be said as a fact that strangers in different societies or nations seek, expect, require, and demand that they be tended to in sickness by their hosts, whether as individuals or groups. The expectation and demand on the part of strangers suggest that they believe, surely, that it is the moral duty of their hosts to tend them in sickness. They are right. They would have the expectation and make the demand simply because they are human beings and happen to be among human beings. We would be demeaning ourselves as moral agents, we would in fact be throwing overboard important ideals of our humanity, if we considered "human needs" to be the needs *only* of people in our own family or neighborhood or local community (community<sup>2</sup>) or of our friends, if, that is, we so severely restricted our moral duties or responsibilities as Griffin by his morality of partiality would have us do.

It seems that those who define certain acts as not natural and thus beyond the call of duty think that only a few human beings have the capacity and the desire to practice basic moral virtues such as love, charity, benevolence, and sensitivity to the needs of others, and hence only a few people—those consumed with moral ideals or, in the words of Urmson, "the higher flights of morality"<sup>26</sup>—can perform a certain category of acts, namely, supererogatory acts. Consequently, they advocate a dual nature of morality: basic duty and ideal moral duty (or responsibility). Thus, Heyd: "Many ethical theorists believe in the dual nature of morality: on the one hand, there is the morality of duty, obligation, and justice, which is essentially social and formulated in universal principles. . . . On the other hand, there is ideal morality, the morality of love, virtue, and aspiration, which is not formulated in universalizable principles."<sup>27</sup>

The morality of a shared humanity will collapse the so-called two moralities into one and thus consider duty, obligation, love, virtue, and compassion and other moral categories as belonging to one morality, adherence to which will enhance the fulfillment of human beings. The supererogationist distinction between "proper" moral duty and ideal morality of love and virtue seems to be predicated on the assumption, which I have already referred to, that only a few human beings can be idealistic or charitable; but this is to hold a low opinion of humankind. The potential for altruistic conduct can be said to exist in all people, even though it is not actualized always and in all circumstances. I think that human beings, both religious and irreligious, both theistic and atheistic, could be conceived generally as capable of love and altruistic sensitivity in favor of other human beings and as having the capacity or disposition to practice or act on moral virtues. They are capable of this *without* thinking that doing so goes beyond their call of duty, or that they are doing what most human beings cannot or are not disposed to do, or that they are being simply idealistic or saintly.

## **PERCEPTIONS OF ALTRUISM**

I wish to refer, if briefly, to the views expressed by some individuals who performed altruistic acts, including rescuing Jews during second World War and thus braving the wrath of Hitler and the Nazis. Their views are based on extended interviews conducted by a professor of political psychology.<sup>28</sup> The responses of those interviewed are revealing and instructive. It must be borne in mind that the reference to the responses of individual agents is not to be construed as a conflation of an objective basis for classifying actions with the self-assessment of the agents. It is to be noted, instead, that an objective analysis can be borne out by empirical inquiries or statements made by moral agents, an objective conclusion of moral philosophy that can be confirmed also by exploiting facts of moral psychology. For good reason that Aristotle places ethics (or moral philosophy) in the category of the 'practical sciences.' In its arguments, philosophy never detaches itself entirely from empirical matters, though neither does it base its conclusions wholly and purely on empirical matters either. Hence, I regard as important and relevant the views expressed in the responses of *moral* agents to some questions of the moral life raised in the extended interviews. From the elaborate responses provided by those altruistic individuals, we may delineate three main features of their perceptions of themselves in relation to others and of the character of their actions.

The first is that those individuals do not see themselves as extraordinary people and that they, instead, consider their demonstration of concern for the well-being of others as only normal and ordinary, neither extraordinary nor remarkable, neither heroic nor saintly. There is no real reason why others should think that those acts were extraordinary, even if they were admirable. An elderly woman who succeeded in freeing a young woman who was being raped on a street corner by attacking the rapist, later said: "I don't think I'm so unusual. I know I am someone who's willing to take on a lot of responsibility in the world. But I don't think I'm anything special."<sup>29</sup> Asked whether he considered himself a hero, a rescuer of Jews during the last world war said "No". He was asked the following question, "Well, most people would say that what you did was an extraordinarily good deed and that you should be rewarded for it; do you think you did anything unusual?" He responded: "I don't think that I did anything that special. I think what I did is what everybody normally *should* be doing. We all *should* help each other. It's common sense and common caring for people."<sup>30</sup> Those rescuers or helpers did not regard their moral actions as supererogatory—as beyond the call of duty—or as idealistic or extraordinary. The normative or prescriptive overtones of their statements are remarkable.

The second category of responses also indicates that some people are sensitive to the needs of others and act out of concern for them. They consider their actions as duties. Asked the question, "How important is duty in all of this? Do you have a duty to help people who are in distress?", a philanthropist responded thus: "Yes. I think so. I think we *all* do. I think we *all should*. . . . I think *it's very definitely a duty*."<sup>31</sup> After a lengthy answer to a question, one of the many rescuers of Jews in Europe made the following observation to conclude his answer: "So I do think people have a social responsibility to help people in need."<sup>32</sup> In answer to a further question, he said: "You do things because you are *human*, and because *there is need*."<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting that duty, in the perceptions of these altruists, is not related to a person's specific role, position, or relationship at all; nor is it to be performed in response simply, and invariably, to the demands for the fulfillment of the rights of those in different kinds of difficult situations.

The third category of the responses clearly reveals the perceptions of humanity held by people who concern themselves with the needs and well-being of other people. They do have perceptions of a shared humanity, believe in this concept, see themselves as linked to others through a common humanity, and, indeed, perceive all humankind as connected through a

common humanity. "We all belong to one human family,"<sup>34</sup> said a Polish rescuer of many Jews, a view that resonates with that expressed in an already-quoted Akan proverb, "Humanity has no boundary."

The idea that all human beings are related and that all are dependent on each other was articulated by those altruists who participated in the interview. "You should always be aware that every other person is basically you. You should always treat people as though it is you, and that goes for evil Nazis as well as for Jewish friends who are in trouble. You should always . . . see yourself in those people."<sup>35</sup> It need not be emphasized that a conception of a universalist ethic is at the base of altruistic behavior; it is the ethic that makes all people, irrespective of their cultures or societies, objects of moral concern. Also, it is worth noting that those altruists interviewed talked seriously about duty to others, social responsibility, need, helping each other, and common humanity as the grounds of their actions; none of them claimed to have grounded their actions on the rights of the people they were rescuing or helping out of distress.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the discussion of the behavior of altruists, then, is that supererogationism, the view that there are acts that are beyond the call of duty, cannot be defended. If concern for the well-being of a person is an acceptable moral value, then no act that a person should perform that will enhance the well-being of another person should, in principle, be considered beyond the call of duty.

## CONCLUSION

I have said that the focus of morality—and in fact the *raison d'être* for its institution—is the centrality of human needs and concerns. Morality, most people will agree, is essentially a social phenomenon, for it is a necessary feature of a human society, whose satisfactory functioning requires that it be organized on some principles and values. So perceived, morality creates duties and obligations, which the individual should fulfill in favor of the other or others. That each individual person will attend to his or her own interests and needs is so natural that it is taken for granted and so does not feature as a requirement of morality. But in a world of shared humanity, in a world in which human beings, as human beings, can be assumed to share certain fundamental needs, values, desires, and aspirations, altruistic concern (that is, concern for others) ought to be held as the supreme moral value. Such a prescription makes or should make duty or responsibility the central plank in the moral platform for human beings both within and without a specific society or culture. There are times when we do not have the capacity to perform certain responsibilities. Yet, the incapacity to perform those responsibilities, which are erroneously regarded as heroic or saintly ideals, does not make those responsibilities supererogatory. From the point of view of morality, which most people will say is instituted in pursuit of attaining human well-being and harmonious living, no act can be said to go beyond the call of duty. The fact that such an act may be beyond our immediate capacity to perform is irrelevant; what is relevant and important is to recognize that act as in principle within the domain of our moral responsibility.

The performance by some people of acts or duties that enhance the well-being of others need not be engendered by a consciousness of the rights of the beneficiaries. The morality of a shared humanity would require that human beings demonstrate concern for the well-being of others (among themselves) even outside the framework of—or without recourse to—rights-talk. In other words, talk about rights need not figure conspicuously in a morality of a shared humanity, as that which constitutes the spirit that moves some human beings to perform duties that would

enhance the well-being of others. As nonpublic persons and groups, we can show concern for the well-being of others, not because they have a right against us as such (except in respect of negative rights), but because we have a desire, for instance, to help alleviate their plight. The morality I have suggested in this lecture as the morality of a shared humanity is a *humanistic* morality that seeks to promote the well-being of all people as its sole aim. It appears to bear marks of utilitarianism (consequentialism), inasmuch as it is concerned with the consequences of human actions on human well-being. Yet it differs from utilitarianism in at least one important respect: it focuses, not on the overall social good as such, which is the central perspective of classical utilitarianism, but on the good—the well-being—of each and every individual member of the human society—indeed of the human family. No individual person's interests and needs are neglected or sacrificed on the altar of the "principle of the greatest number."

Over the past half century (i.e., since the middle of the twentieth century), we have heard and learnt a great deal about "The Universal Declaration of Human *Rights*." A shared humanity should also mandate "The Universal Declaration of Human *Responsibilities*," not to replace the one about our rights, to be sure, but to complement it and, in this way, make our humanity *morally* richer and the life of every human being *more* fulfilling.

## LECTURE IV

# OUR ONE WORLD: SOME THOUGHTS ON GLOBALIZATION

### INTRODUCTION

Globalization, which is indeed a historical phenomenon, is predicated on the assumption that there is a fundamental core of values and virtues commonly shared by all the inhabitants of the globe, and that there are certain basic needs that they would want to fulfill in pursuit of the realization of their lives. Globalization thus speaks to our common humanity and to the common yearnings and hopes that must necessarily be generated by it—our common humanity. It involves an awareness of the world as a single, capacious space. Our one world is inhabited by human beings with different talents, endowments, and capacities. These generate assets that can, nevertheless, be considered common and to be collectively shared. To the extent that the impulses to globalization are driven by considerations of basic human values, I consider the subject matter of this lecture on globalization to be of a piece with the theme chosen earlier for the J. B. Danquah Memorial Lectures, namely, human values concomitant with our common humanity.

### DEFINING GLOBALIZATION

Globalization has widely been understood in the economic terms of international trade, international finance, and international investment. Thus, Joseph Stiglitz, the winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2001, sees globalization as "the removal of barriers to free trade and the closer integration of national economies." <sup>1</sup> Horst Kohler, the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), also sees globalization as "the process through which an increasingly free flow of ideas, people, goods, services, and capital leads to the integration of economies and societies."<sup>2</sup> Deepak Nayyar also opines that globalization "is used in a positive sense to describe a process of increasing integration into the world economy."<sup>3</sup> So it is that attempts to define globalization found in the literature invariably feature the phrase "integration of national economies", or "integration into the global economy" or some variant of it as the essential element. Thus, globalization has widely been understood as economic globalization. For Thomas Friedman: "Globalization means the spread of free-market capitalism to virtually every country in the world."<sup>4</sup> Such an economic understanding or interpretation of globalization is, to my mind, a lopsided, truncated, and unsatisfactory understanding of globalization. There is nothing in the concept of globalization that logically mandates us to focus attention only on its economic features or to see it in such narrow terms, however important are economic matters to us.

In this presentation, therefore, I will look at globalization in more comprehensive terms that go beyond the purely economic or material, for it is clear that there is much more to globalization than economics. My position is guided by the logic of the concept of globalization itself: just as the globe comprehends everything on earth, so globalization ought to be conceived as comprehending all the spheres of human activity, spheres that cannot simply be telescoped into the economic. I will concern myself with the general nature of the concept of globalization. My intent will be to provide a philosophical background or foundations for globalization, not to discuss the economics of globalization, which is not within my academic purview.

To 'globalize' is to become or make something become a common or outstanding feature of the world through the spreading and sharing of ideas, values, institutions, methods or ways of doing things. The idea of 'becoming' indicates that globalization is a process that will result, eventually, in the spread of ideas, values, practices, perspectives, outlooks, etc. throughout the world, or much of it. But this process surely is not just starting, nor is it a phenomenon or feature of recent times, though it could be said that over the past few decades the process has reached an unprecedented level. The novelty of the term 'globalization' has given the impression that the process is something new. The term itself is, indeed, new, but not so the process or phenomenon it is used to describe, which is almost as old as the history of the human species. Globalization has been with us for centuries. We could, as Appiah succinctly puts it, "describe the history of the human species as a process of globalization."<sup>5</sup>

Traveling or migrating to other places of the world appears historically to be an outstanding feature of human activity. This is evidenced in the constant movements of people to and from distant lands in recorded history, in search of security, material comfort or ways to improve their lives. The result of this activity of travelling or migrating has been historical encounters between different peoples of the world and, thus, between cultures. People of different cultures from far regions of the world have, through their ideas, values, forms of life, practices, and objects, helped shape the intellectual and material lives of other people in other regions. In the wake of cultural encounters, cultural borrowing or appropriation occurs, as people appreciate the need to take on the ideas, values, and practices of others that they think will enhance their own lives. Cultural borrowing is an outstanding *historical* phenomenon in the development of all human cultures and has resulted in the enrichment and fulfillment of the lives of people's. As I will elaborate in due course, the process of globalization can be said to have resulted substantially from the historical phenomenon of cultural borrowing or appropriation, consciously pursued with the aim of enhancing the cultural life of a people. I use the expression 'cultural life' in a comprehensive sense that encompasses all spheres of human enterprise: political, economic, cultural, ethical, technological, artistic, and others.

## **MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT GLOBALIZATION**

Yet, the process or historical phenomenon of globalization has been quite widely misconceived—and by people from different cultural backgrounds. I would like to mention some of what I regard as misunderstandings or misinterpretations or confusions about globalization.

In most recent decades, an aspect of globalization called economic globalization is seen to be associated with the activities of international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and international (or multinational) corporations, which have the capital and goods that they can move across borders. In the wake of the activities of such institutions and corporations, this aspect of globalization has come to hold the preeminent place in the whole globalization equation. Consequently, globalization has come to be understood as another name for capitalism or the free market economy. Economic globalization is of course a species—only a species—of globalization and, even if it is a very important species, it should not be equated with globalization as such. It would be a logical blunder to substitute a part for the whole. The anti-globalization campaign that is being waged by some people is targeted at this economic species of globalization.

An American writer, Thomas Friedman, in his *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, now a popular book on globalization, characterizes globalization as "a new system,"<sup>6</sup> "the new era,"<sup>7</sup> "the

dominant international system that replaces the Cold War system after the fall of the Berlin Wall."<sup>8</sup> Friedman thinks that globalization began in 1989 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which heralded the end of the Cold War. There is historical evidence to indicate that it would not be correct to maintain that globalization is something new; the period over the past decade and a half did not usher in a new era of globalization. Friedman, like many others, thinks of globalization in terms solely of economic globalization. He is also wrong in describing globalization as a "system," "a new system." A system is a set of interrelated parts that form a complex whole. When a system (such as, an ideological system, an educational system, the free market system) is known to have spread to—or been appropriated by—many places in the world, we say that it has become global or it is globalized. Moreover, a system is consciously established; whereas globalization appears or evolves with the spreading of an idea, a method, a set of values, etc., to many places of the world. Globalization thus embodies systems, without itself being a system. Globalization, a historical process, is not, contrary to Friedman's assertion, what has replaced the Cold War (which occurred between 1945 and 1989); what has replaced the Cold War is American power or hegemony, not globalization.

In a symposium on "Black and African Cultures and Challenges of Globalization," organized under the auspices of the Center for Black and African Arts and Civilization of Nigeria, the well-known Nigerian historian, J. F. Ade Ajayi, in his remarks as chairman of the occasion, asserted that "globalization is about competition and struggle for dominance, which encourages, more than anything else, the continuation and expansion of Western imperialism in the new millennium."<sup>9</sup> In a discussion that followed, participants of the symposium noted:

"That globalization is characterized by keen competition and an aggressive quest for supremacy by various contending peoples and interest groups in the world;"

"That globalization fosters increasing disruption and marginalization of the arts and cultures of Black and African peoples;"

"That globalization imposes alien cultural values on African societies, thereby distorting the African value system and identity;"

"That globalization is a fresh phase in re-colonization of African societies which attempts to continue the promotion of Western linguistic heritage and literary and aesthetic canons at the expense of African indigenous languages and literature;"

"That African indigenous languages are facing a serious danger of extinction and that globalization can intensify the process of decline."<sup>10</sup>

The observations made by the participants of the symposium are, to my mind, a tissue of errors and perhaps groundless suspicions. They betray a sense of inadequacy, of passivity and inactivity, and of the inability to respond adequately to situations in defense or in pursuit of one's interests. They also seem to suggest that the consequences of globalization implicit in their observations, such as the marginalization of the arts and cultures of Africa, are inevitable and automatic. They are, of course, not inevitable consequences that no one can do anything about. It is not clear to me how globalization will marginalize the arts and cultures of Africa, if individual Africans endowed with artistic or aesthetic talents continue to exercise those talents to develop the arts to high degrees of excellence such as will appeal to the aesthetic sense of many others outside Africa, as in the past and, indeed, today. Globalization will not—cannot—subvert the exercise of artistic talents; nor is there a reason why African artists will have to totally abandon

their own indigenous artistic expressions in favor of, say, the European or the Chinese, or to abandon the cultivation of the music or dance forms of Africa.

Several decades ago in Ghana, British (or, European) music and dance forms such as the waltz, slow-fox-trot, and quick-step were played side by side with the indigenous Ghanaian music and dances such as the high-life. At most dances, when music for a quick step dance, for instance, was played only a few people—usually some elites and ‘been-to’s’ (those who had *been to* Britain)—would take to the dance floor. Whenever the Ghanaian high-life music was played, however, the floor was filled to capacity. It was clear then, as now, that very few of the Ghanaians appreciated and enjoyed the British (or, European) dance music. It is not surprising that such imported or adopted forms of music and dance have, to all intents and purposes, disappeared from dance halls in Ghana today.<sup>11</sup> Thus, contact or flirtation with—or even appreciation of—the music or dance forms created by other cultures does not necessarily lead to abandoning the forms created by one’s own culture. It would be correct to say, though, that in the growth of a culture some elements of it fall into oblivion, but this fact may not necessarily have to be put down to globalization or the appreciation and even acceptance of alien cultural products. It may be that the element that disappears or falls into oblivion has simply lost its aesthetic or intellectual appeal to the participants of the culture.

Thomas Friedman writes:

With the end of the Cold War, globalising is globalising Anglo-American style of capitalism. . . . It is globalising American culture and American cultural icons. It is globalising the best of America and the worst of America. It is globalising the American Revolution.<sup>12</sup>

Friedman himself, in spite of what the quoted statements suggest, does not actually think that globalization is Americanization. He says that that is how globalization is perceived in many quarters. It must be pointed out that American culture is not a unique culture, having ideas, values, and systems idiosyncratic to it, not found anywhere else prior to spreading to other places. Historically, American culture is a relatively new culture, even though it has achieved a great deal in the little over two hundred years of its existence. American culture has appropriated many elements from other cultures, European culture, of course, being the most outstanding source. Most of the ideas of the American Revolution originated from the seventeenth century English philosopher, John Locke. The free market capitalism and the democratic system of politics are not peculiarly American, even though one recognizes that it is America that vigorously trumpets these ideas in contemporary times. And, we read from Philippe Legrain that Hollywood is less American than it is made to be, that top film directors are often from outside America, and that some of the studios are foreign-owned.<sup>13</sup> Legrain says also that "To some extent, Hollywood is a global industry that just happens to be in America."<sup>14</sup> American McDonalds fast food restaurants are everywhere, yes; but so are Chinese restaurants, and Italian pizza.

I do not think it would be correct to say that globalization is globalizing American culture. That would be a simplistic assertion, in fact an exaggeration. Many nations of the world today are involved in developing information and communications technology, for instance. But I think it would be more fruitful, from the methodological or philosophical point of view, to look at the whole matter of globalizing a particular culture in the abstract, not in relation to American culture or the culture of any particular people as such. An abstract way of looking at things is

perhaps the most objective way of understanding the issues and seeing them in their proper perspective. So, I wish now to look at globalization from the abstract point of view.

## **GLOBALIZATION: AS METACONTEXTUALITY, APPROPRIATION, AND PARTICIPATION**

It can be said that the seeds of globalization were sown in our common humanity, in the limitations of human intelligence, in the differences in human talents and endowments, in man's insatiable desire for comfort, better life and happiness on earth. Our common humanity disposes us toward sharing some values or basic needs, entertaining common desires, hopes and aspirations that we would regard as fundamentally human, as making for our human fulfillment. Globalization derives, indeed, from the assumption that there is a core of common values that the inhabitants of the globe share, certain basic needs that they would want fulfilled, if they want to live a minimally bearable and tolerable life here on earth. The limitations of human intelligence whittle away any pretensions to autarky (self-sufficiency) and generate the need for interdependence. Differences in human talents and endowments lead to the pursuit and creation of different objects, which, nonetheless, would be of interest to many others beside the creators or originators of these objects. Man's insatiable desire for his mundane comfort in turn engenders the desire to look not only within, but also beyond, his cultural environs in search of what will satisfy his desires. It seems, then, that the impulses to globalization are anchored in the characteristics of the human species.

What I have said in the foregoing constitutes the background of a philosophical idea, a cultural value, practice, or institution becoming so attractive and influential as to win the embrace, in the course of time, of the rest of the peoples and cultures of the world. Such an idea or value or institution attains the status of universality or globality (if you will) by virtue of its historic significance or relevance or functionality or power of conviction or some such quality. Consequently, peoples outside the cultural origin of the idea or value become increasingly enamored of it for several reasons and accept, appropriate, and exploit it for their own purposes. At this point, that idea or value or practice would have become metacontextual, for it would have transcended its original cultural or historical context and would, thus, have gained the widest currency elsewhere.

The most important point that needs to be noted here is that every human culture puts out products—cultural products. I use the expression 'cultural products' to refer to the values, artistic products, political, legal, economic, and educational systems or institutions, technological products, philosophies, textiles, styles of dressing, techniques of farming, and so on. Some of these cultural products are taken over by other cultures that, for some reason, are attracted to them. This being so, the real question one would like to raise is this: Why should those products hold attraction to many or most cultures or places of the world? That is: why should an idea, value, practice, or institution spawned by a particular culture or people become global, i.e., spread to many other places on the globe through adoption by these places and increasingly become an outstanding feature of the thoughts and actions and goals of these places?

The basis for the attraction and adoption by some cultures of the cultural products put out by other cultures or places is the interest and enjoyment generated by those products, the conviction of their quality and importance, and of their functionality. I would like, however, to highlight the role of functionality in the whole enterprise of cultural adoption and appropriation. In terms of functionality, the conviction is that those cultural products to be adopted will work and so can

play meaningful and effective roles in the attainment of the goals and vision of the adopting cultures or places. If a practice or system is believed or known to work for some people, if it is believed or known to have assisted the development of some people and to have consequently brought improvements to their lives, there is a tendency to convince oneself that it will work for oneself as well. In this case, the evidence of the functional capability of the practice or system would appear to be overwhelming, as the adopting cultures would have become (or would have been made to become) aware that it has worked for many cultures or places in the world and therefore will work for them too. The conclusion here does not logically follow. But in the realm of politics—in the realm of practical human affairs—probabilities or possibilities are as convincing to people as certainties. The practice or system that is found wanting functionally is not adopted or loses its attraction (where there was one before) to the kind that functions (or, is known to function) successfully.

To give concrete examples: the collapse of the ideology of communism a little over a decade ago must be put down to its loss of attraction even to those nations that had much earlier been attracted to it. Its loss of attraction was itself explained in terms of its no longer being able to function successfully to bring about satisfactory social and economic improvements to the lives of people living under it. Communism could no longer 'deliver the goods,' as it were. Correlatively, the ideology of the liberal or market economy that defends private property rights was making gains and attracting many nations or governments around the world. Russia, for eight decades the citadel and bastion of the communist ideology, became one of the earliest converts to economic liberalism. Legrain observes that "Russian shareholders insist that managers run companies along Western lines."<sup>15</sup> And, Chinese farmers showed gleeful faces at the prospect of being able sell their own products at the market and keeping the profits to themselves, their produce no longer being seized as state property, their profits no longer being hurled into a public (or, collective) barn. The congress of the Chinese communist party held in September 2002 fully and without any reservations whatsoever adopted the free market capitalism as its new ideology—a kind of ideological revolution—even though they intend to soft-pedal the move toward the adoption of political liberalism, i.e., democracy, human rights, etc.

Whatever are the discontents or the moral weaknesses of the market economy, it seems to work for most people and to give them satisfaction. This is probably because private ownership or property, which is a feature or consequence, of the free market economic system, is considered a fundamental value by most people. People want to lay their hands on the economic or financial value of their labor and their sweat. Liberal economic practice will, it seems, continue to be in the ascendant and become the outstanding feature of the global economic system simply because it is known to work for most nations that adopt it. Its functional capability appears to be proven; hence its global appeal.

In this connection, I would like to mention that a book by the Ghanaian musicologist, J. H. Kwabena Nketia, titled *Music of Africa*<sup>16</sup> and many other of his articles on ethnomusicology of Africa by virtue of their qualities and importance have been translated into many languages of the world, including such distant ones as Japanese and Chinese. Presentations of African ethnomusicology have been made by this great and well-known African scholar of music in all the continents of the world. The ideas contained in his works have become the subject of doctoral dissertations in universities all over the globe. It must be noted that he did not invite himself to the places where he made those presentations; they invited him. It would be correct,

then, to say that the ideas of J. H. Kwabena Nketia have received a very wide metacontextual embrace: a global embrace, in fact.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has been described as Africa's most famous novel. Published in 1958, this novel had, by 1991, been translated into more than thirty Western and non-Western languages. In the words of Bernth Lindfors, a scholar of Achebe, "Few modern literary works achieve such impressive distribution and win universal critical acclaim. *Things Fall Apart* has already earned the status of a modern classic."<sup>17</sup> One measure of its high reputation is its regular adoption as a textbook in a variety of university and high school courses. It can certainly be said that, like Kwabena Nketia's *Music of Africa*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has won a very wide metacontextual embrace, indeed the status of globality. It is pretty clear from the Nketia and Achebe cases that academic or literary works of excellence produced by African scholars can also hold attraction to many distant places of the world and thus gain a place on the global train. This is what I mean by "active participation in the globalization process," which will result in contribution to the global cultural output.

One has reason to believe that the discovery by an African practitioner of herbal medicine of a scientifically approved cure for the deadly disease HIV/AIDS would instantly have a metacontextual recognition. It would undoubtedly become global, as all the inhabitants of the globe recognized the importance of this cure and would want to participate in its expansion and use. Far-reaching and comprehensive metacontextuality is the explanation for the global dominance of the ideas, values, and institutions fashioned by some particular peoples, cultures, or times of history. But this presupposes an open field of universality, to be populated by contributions from the various cultures evolved by humankind. This being so, it is possible for every culture, including those of Africa, to make contributions to the global system, whether in the field of ideas, values, institutions, etc., and for that contribution to gain appreciation and recognition far beyond the confines of its origin.

Appropriating and integrating the products of a culture will result in participating in the benefits that come with those products. The assumption here is that the things that are appropriated from a culture are things that are considered worthwhile by the participants of the appropriating culture, things they consider beneficial to their lives. When many cultures or nations enjoy the products of a culture (or, a group of cultures), those products, we say, are, or have become, global. Globalization thus involves participation in the appreciation and enjoyment of the products of a culture or group of cultures. But this kind of participation must be active, not passive. In passive participation in regard to the process of globalization, the participants merely look on as spectators, while enjoying the fruits of the creative enterprise of others; there is lack of concern for making a contribution. Passive participation results in the marginalization of a culture, reducing it to the fringes of global activities or processes: cultural, intellectual, economic, scientific, technological. In this case, marginalization would, at least in part, have been the consequence of some internal incapacity or a debilitating, bizarre mentality of the participants of the culture.

In active participation, on the other hand, the participants not only successfully appropriate, i.e., make their own, the cultural products of others, but they also contribute (or make the effort to contribute) in their own fashion to some spheres of the human activity. The degree of excellence must be not merely appreciated but appropriated by many of the cultures of the world. Active participation in the globalization process will result not only in contributing to the global cultural output, but also in being involved in the vertical as well as horizontal expansion of some idea or discovery of global importance. Ideally, all human cultures should be active participants

in the globalization process, not mere spectators or consumers of the products of others. No human society—not even a previously colonized society—is eternally condemned to be a mere passive participant in the evolution of a globalizing culture, unless it itself decides to be so. The reason is that all men are endowed with creative talents and faculties. The robust exercise of these talents and faculties will make possible the creation of cultural products that have qualities that can appeal to many others outside the culture (s) that created those products. What I have said about appropriation and participation points up the quintessence of globalization. This is the volitional drawing upon a system of ideas, values or practices evolved another culture or society on the basis of its worth and functional characteristics.

The element of volition is of the last consequence. Without this element i.e., where a society is forced by threats and conquest or imposition of some kind to depend on a system, the globalization process becomes vulgar rather than ideal, and without depth. Ideal globalization requires that nations or societies have the opportunity to choose which elements or features of an encountered culture they find attractive and consider worth adoption.

## **GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY**

Globalization, remember, is not a new phenomenon and has been with us—that is, the inhabitants of the globe, for many centuries. During this long period of time, peoples and societies have developed and fashioned cultures and have functioned within these cultures. But there is no reason to think that these cultures have remained the same ever since they were evolved. No human culture has been impervious to influences from outside and has remained the same in its pristine form. In the wake of encounters between cultures, participants in one culture, as I said, do borrow or appropriate elements from another culture, if they have reason to believe that those elements will enhance their own cultural life and development. Despite the historical fact of cultural borrowing, people still function in cultures that they consider their own and with which they identify, having succeeded in integrating borrowed elements into their existing cultural forms. Globalization does not—will not—drastically distort or deface the identity of a culture. No amount of Coca-Cola Ghanaians consume, no quantity of Kentucky Fried Chicken or fish and chips Ghanaians eat, will make them lose their national or cultural identity; people are not what they buy to eat or wear. The famous Indian economist and philosopher, Amartya Sen, recognizes the human "ability to learn from elsewhere without being overwhelmed by that experience."<sup>18</sup> Fears and anxieties about the loss of one's cultural identity in the context of globalization do not appear to be justified.

It is interesting to note that, while bemoaning the consequences of globalization on the arts and cultures of Black and African peoples, the participants in the symposium referred to above, some of whose observations I find overstated and objectionable, asserted curiously enough "That Africa has, through its music, made positive impact on the musical sensibilities of world cultures." This assertion, which is at variance with some of their own observations, indicates that the arts and cultures of a people can be developed, despite the process of globalization, to a level of excellence sufficient to have positive impact on others. In other words, the exercise of a people's musical talents—and, for that matter, of their endowments generally—cannot in any way be hamstrung by the spread of various ideas and cultural creations which is what globalization is really about. On the contrary, the culture of a people may in fact be enriched by appropriating elements from other sources. The historical background of any human culture is complex in terms of its sources. The growth of a human culture can be helped through rubbing

shoulders with other cultures and appropriating from them elements considered desirable by the appropriating culture. Which elements to appropriate from an alien culture or cultures is a matter of choice. In a non-colonial situation, such a choice can be said to be a real choice that any people or nation can make of its own volition.

Globalization should not detract from the preservation or pursuit of local or national cultures, for it is not aimed at cultural uniformity or conformity. Globalization will not negatively affect every sphere of the cultural life of a people. It will not, for instance, prevent Ghanaians from celebrating their cherished annual festivals if they choose to, any more than it will prevent the Irish in New York and Boston from celebrating St. Patrick's Day, or the Japanese from celebrating the Shinto festival.

Globalization appears to be concerned with basic needs and wants that are not only common, but also intrinsic to human fulfillment. The particularities of cultures will remain largely unscathed in spite of globalization. It will, indeed, be most appropriate for globalization not to pursue a monochromic culture, but to allow the exercise of the artistic talents of individuals in the various societies of the world. Imagine a world in which the ballet or the high-life is the only dance form, or the musical pieces of a Mozart or an Ephraim Amu (Ghanaian music composer) exhaust the musical productions and experiences of the inhabitants of the world: such an artistic or aesthetic world would not only be drab, but would forever cripple creativity. It would be worthwhile, then, for local or national arts and cultures to be seriously developed in order to make contributions to, and thus have positive and palpable impact upon, the aesthetic cultures of the globalized world.

With all this said, however, one cannot fail to see that the process of globalization will involve the homogenization of cultures in some respects. This immediately leads to a set of questions, important and apt. Won't the prospect of the homogenization of cultures at the global level conflict with the hope of preserving local or national cultures and identities? Won't homogenization involve the absorption of local or national cultures and so make it impossible to preserve them? Won't there, therefore, be a tension between the homogenization of cultures and the preservation of local cultures and identities? The answer to this set of questions is no. There would be no tension or conflict between global cultural homogenization and preservation of local cultures and identities, because homogenization will occur at the level of values that human beings have in common and the basic human needs that will need to be fulfilled, irrespective of the particularities of local or national cultures. Thus, oriented essentially to the fundamental values and needs of the inhabitants of the earth, globalization would allow a capacious space for the expression of diversity and the preservation and promotion of national cultural identities. On this showing, while the homogenized global culture would include such features as respect for human rights, democratic governance (with possible local nuances in form), market economic systems (with possible local variations), the pursuit of science and technology, and shared understandings of certain basic human problems. But it would not include such things as dance forms, festivals, inheritance systems, certain social structures, ceremonies for the dead, and many other customary practices of a local culture. The latter, i.e., dance forms, festivals, etc. would not be swept away by the homogenizing process. Thus, globalization will not destroy local or national cultures and identities, even though one is not necessarily implying that national cultures and identities would, in all of their features, remain permanently the same. Cultural globalization will involve—and will limit itself to—the former, i.e., to such things as human values or human rights, technology, free market systems, etc.

## ANTI-GLOBALIZATION PROTESTS

The process of globalization was and is to bring about the spreading and sharing of ideas among the peoples of the world, to put the achievements and discoveries of a culture or group of cultures at the disposal of other cultures, with the consequent participation in the enjoyment of those benefits and the enhancement of the general well-being of the inhabitants of the earth. Thus, it was and can be expected to be a good process that will bring about positive results for all people. Yet, in economic terms it does not seem to have functioned in this way, benefiting all people, rich and poor. Like other human ideas, globalization has been interpreted and pursued by some people in a manner that serves their interests to the detriment of the interests of others. Thus, an originally good idea has in some respects been skewed and bungled. Consequently, globalization has met with some amount of skepticism, opposition and discontent.

It is a matter of common knowledge that over the past few years there have been demonstrations at the annual general meetings of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization (WTO), and the eight highly industrialized nations referred to as the 'G.8'. The demonstrations are against globalization. In this case, however, they are specifically against economic globalization—in particular the exploitative and selfish manner in which the wealthy, industrialized nations of the world carry on their economic and trade measures and practices, which are believed to have deleterious consequences on the economies of the developing nations of the world. Thus, the demonstrators are giving expression to the discontents of the economic features of globalization, such as the industrialized nations' closing their markets to products from the developing nations, while insisting that the latter open their markets for the manufactured products of the former.

I do not think that the demonstrations are against the idea of the inhabitants of the earth coming together in unity, sharing benefits (whatever these may be), sharing one another's fate, evincing spontaneous sympathy and compassion, providing support and assistance in the event of natural disasters that occasionally befall some of the inhabitants, and demonstrating other human attitudes toward one another. The protestors, I have reason to believe, would agree with King David that "it is good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity."<sup>19</sup> But dwelling together in unity, the protestors would say without hesitation, involves bearing each other up and doing what is necessary to reduce or eradicate suffering. This, they believe, is inflicted on some inhabitants of the earth through the exploitative economic policies and practices of the wealthy nations of the world. The stand of the protestors of economic globalization is thus patently a moral stand that is aimed at bringing to an end what they regard as unethical economic practices of the rich nations of the earth, with deleterious consequences on the poor. That moral stand ought to be defended, for it is intended to make economic globalization fair and humane.

Globalization appears on the surface as a descriptive term that merely says that ideas, values, and institutions evolved by specific cultures of the world spread to all other parts of the world, making it possible for these other cultures to appropriate them for their own purposes. But the term is essentially a normative term. It says that nations or cultures ought to come together, share ideas, values, and participate in the benefits made available to the inhabitants of the earth through the cultural, scientific, technological, and economic enterprises and achievements of the various peoples and cultures of the world. Such benefits are there for the taking by those who may consider it worthwhile to do so. True, discontents have been associated with economic globalization in particular resulting from the misinterpretation and misapplication of an otherwise good idea. Yet it can hardly be denied that the various peoples of the world, in the long

run, stand more to gain from globalization than not. Globalization offers great opportunities for global interactions not only in the fields of economics, but also of science, technology, and culture.

Economic discontents can be dealt with if those who generate them through their actions see themselves as bound by shared commitments and by a core of common values that we may call human values, if they allow such values to guide and influence their thought and action, and if they recognize that the basic desires and needs of human beings are common and so require certain common conditions to survive and flourish. The horizontalization of the benefits of globalization then is a function ultimately of the recognition and application of human values—values that are intrinsic to the fulfillment of human life. Fundamentally, globalization is the closer integration of nations and peoples of the world, yes; but it should be integrated also with fundamental values. For, after all, the impulse to globalization was basically moral, namely, to make life better for all.

## CONCLUSION

I have in this lecture attempted to understand globalization, a process that makes possible the appropriation and consequent spreading to many regions and places of the ideas, values, institutions, and techniques evolved or created by some particular culture (or, group of cultures). The appropriation was grounded in the acknowledged importance, interest, relevance, and functionality of these cultural products. Ripples of the process of globalization have for centuries been heard on the terrain of human history, making it an historical process not new to the human species, even though it can be said to have reached a crescendo in recent times. I have pointed out that the characteristics of the human species, which would include differences in talents and endowments and the human yearning for comfort, constitute the background of globalization. Given that globalization is tethered to humanity itself and to human desires and aspirations, it does not appear to be something that can ever be jettisoned, despite the genuine discontents—generally of economic nature—that have been associated with it. These will have to be dealt with satisfactorily if globalization is to be beneficial to all the inhabitants of the earth. If human values were globalized (i.e., recognized and respected globally) in tandem with economic globalization, then injustices and inequalities would be removed or at least reduced to the minimum, and anti-globalization protests would be neutralized.

I wish to end this lecture with two verses of an Indian religious poem:

We are the birds of the same nest  
We may wear different feathers  
We may speak different tongues  
We may believe in different religions  
We may belong to different cultures  
Yet, we share the same home, Earth.  
Born on the same planet  
Covered by the same skies  
Gazing at the same stars  
Breathing the same air  
we must learn to live together  
Or, miserably perish together

For, a person can live individually  
But, can only survive collectively. 20

If globalization is pursued humanely—with due consideration for the interests and needs of all the inhabitants of the earth—and if it uses human values as its compass as it journeys through human history, this process will make for collective human good and survival on this planet.

## EPILOGUE

### ‘THE TIES THAT BIND’

The theme of these lectures is “Beyond Cultures: Perceiving a Common Humanity.” I have been concerned to argue that our humanity, not our cultural particularities, constitutes our fundamental identity. The idea of humanity expresses the characteristics, attributes, values and disvalues, problems, possibilities, and dispositions that human beings essentially have in common. Given our common humanity and our basic human interests, needs, purposes and aspirations, we can talk sensibly about human values that, as human values, can be said to be universal and distinguishable from cultural values, notwithstanding the fact that, allowing for respective differences of detail, human values have been integrated into the value systems of most cultures. While the fact of the diversity of human cultures cannot, of course, be denied, the diversity merely reflects the human creative spirit, different aesthetic endowments and capacities, different perceptions of the external world, and different ways of dealing with the metaphysical as well as the various existential problems of humankind.

Yet the diversities of human cultures have been employed by some philosophers, though wrongly, to my mind, as a basis for maintaining that cultures are incommensurable, that is, that there is no common measure or standard by which we can judge or evaluate two different cultures or ways of life, a position I have controverted by arguing that there is, indeed, a common measure in the notion of human well-being, which, in ultimate terms, is the *raison d’être*—the telos—of the creation of human culture.

The British writer, Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907, is famous known to have made the following observation: “The East is East and the West is West and never shall the twain meet.” The implication of the statement is that Western and Eastern cultures are so radically different that they are irreducibly incommensurable. Kipling’s statement is thus clearly a blithe celebration of difference; but the celebration has no real basis and is thus unjustifiable. In light of the cultural borrowing or exchange that followed (and still follows) the encounters between the two cultures, which can hardly be denied, the statement is extreme and is not true. The West cannot seriously deny that in the course of its cultural development over the centuries it has adopted (and adapted) certain cultural values and practices from the Orient; and vice-versa. At the level of human values, the statement is straightforwardly false.

Thus, to Kipling’s statement, the late Indian poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), who was also awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, gave an appropriate and telling response when he said: “The twain shall meet in amity, peace, and mutual understanding, and this will lead to a holy wedlock before the common alter of humanity.”<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s response means that before the common alter of humanity, cultural differences atrophy or diminish, breaching, if not collapsing, the cultural wall. And, through the breach, what we would perceive is a humanity that we all share and (some) cultural ideas, values, or practices that a shared humanity leads us, mutually, to borrow or adopt for the fulfillment of our own lives in the various human societies.

The significance of the Akan proverb, “Humanity has no boundary” (*honam mu nni nhanao*), for the unity or brotherhood of all human beings that was pointed out in the third lecture resonates Tagore’s perception of our common humanity. The Akan perception recognizes all human beings, irrespective of their racial, cultural, or ethnic background, as brothers, a

perception that is unambiguously expressed also in the assertion of the traditional Akan sage: “Man’s brother is man (onipa nua ne ‘nipa), meaning that a human being can be related only to another human being, not to a beast. The word “brother” is generally used in African cultures and languages in a comprehensive sense that goes beyond the kinship or blood-relation level. The comprehensive use of the word is intended, indeed, to lift people up from the purely biologically determined blood-relation level onto the human level, the level where the essence of humanity is held as transcending the contingencies of human biology, race, ethnicity, or culture. It is at this human level, that it would be easier for people of all cultures and for citizens of all nations to engage in the cultivation of their humanity.

Seneca (c.A.D. 1-65), a Roman Stoic philosopher, admonishes us that “...while we live, while we are among human beings, let us cultivate our humanity.”<sup>2</sup> Seneca means, among other things, that people should see themselves as human beings ultimately bound to all other human beings by ties of common sensibilities, needs, aims, and concerns, and think of humanity in broader terms that transcend their narrow, local sympathies and concerns. The Latin word “colo” (cultum), translated in the above quotation as “cultivate,” is the root also of the word “culture.” What is thus implied in Seneca’s statement is that it behooves human beings to create:

- cultures that appreciate and place a high premium on, our common humanity;
- cultures that recognize that human beings of whatever background in race, ethnicity, language, religion, geography, are bound—while we are among human beings (dum inter homines sumus)—to all other human beings by ties of common basic values, concerns, hopes, and aspirations;
- cultures that encourage their participants to appreciate the possibilities of other cultures and to understand the various ways in which common human problems are negotiated, as well as the attempts made in different situations to fulfill common human needs and purposes;
- cultures whose participants would—in fact should—recognize that, as the altruist rescuer said in the interviews quoted in my third lecture, “You should always be aware that every other person is basically you.”

A variant, or perhaps the consequence, of this altruist rescuer’s view appears in a maxim created by a traditional Akan sage:

Your neighbor’s situation is [potentially] your situation (Wo yonko da ne wo da).

Two important things about this maxim need to be pointed out. One is that the maxim is uttered in reference only to the pitiable, miserable or unfortunate situations of another person (referred to in the maxim as your “neighbor”—wo yonko) or other people (your “neighbors”). These unfortunate situations or circumstances noticeably call for the demonstration of sympathy, compassion, and willingness to help. The other is that the word “neighbor” in the maxim refers to any other person irrespective of that person’s nationality or culture, not necessarily the person next door or in one’s community<sup>2</sup>, even though the person next door or a member of your community<sup>2</sup> is, of course, not to be discounted in the dispensation of our compassion and sympathy.

Thus understood, a member of the most extensive community, i.e., community<sup>3</sup>, is also to be considered a neighbor. (The Akan word may in fact be rendered by “fellow,” a fellow human being.) The maxim morally requires that human beings give empathetic response to the

miserable situations of another human being or other human beings, for you could be that particular suffering person. Our sense of human limitations and vulnerability to misfortune and suffering can—and—should lead us to imagine what it would be like to be in the miserable situation of the other person, a situation which you would certainly not like to be in and would do everything possible to avoid. The morality of a shared humanity thus demands mutual reciprocity as a moral mandate in a world in which human beings can easily be overcome—even overwhelmed—by the contingencies of their existence. In this world human beings, weak and limited in many ways, are subject to vulnerable situations.

The morality of a shared humanity therefore sets its face against an attitude or conduct that betrays insensitivity to the needs, interests, and plight of others: a conduct that represents a moral shrug. Insensitivity to the needs and hardships or suffering situations of others is repudiated in Akan morality, as it is, indeed, repudiated in the moralities of all human cultures. In Akan moral thought and practice, one such statement that rebukes the lack of feeling for others is put thus:

When it sticks into your neighbor's flesh, it is as if it stuck into a piece of wood (etua wo yonko ho a, etua dua mu.)<sup>3</sup>

“Sticking into another's flesh (or, body)” is another way of referring to the suffering, misfortune, hardship, or pain of another person. When something, such as a needle, sticks into your flesh or body, you feel the pain. If it is stuck into another person's—your neighbor's—flesh you would not directly feel the pain; even so, you should not feel insensitive to the pain or suffering of that person and shrug your moral shoulders, for the other person's flesh is certainly not a piece of wood that cannot feel pain.

Globalization speaks to, and is predicated upon our common humanity, that is, upon a set of common values that may be considered human values. It reminds us that our one world is a capacious, extended family that imposes on its various inhabitants the moral obligations of bearing up one another and helping to eradicate the sufferings of other inhabitants: your neighbors. The importance of the moral imperatives of globalization should not be lost on human beings that inhabit a single place: the one world.

My aim in these lectures has been to argue the need to look at the various cultures fashioned by humankind in basic terms—in terms of fundamental human values, in terms of the basic needs and desires and goals and purposes of human life, in terms, to wit, of human well-being. Various cultures are trying to deal with such matters in different ways. It behooves us to try and look beyond our cultural particularities in pursuit of “the ties that bind”—our common humanity, which, after all, constitutes our fundamental identity and lies at the base of all serious talk about globalization.

## NOTES

### Lecture I: Our Human Nature, Our Human Values: Looking over the Cultural Wall

1. Melville J. Herskovits, *Man and His Works* (New York: Knopf Publishers, 1947), p. 76.
2. Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p. 55.
3. Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, pp. 37-38; further references to Herder's views on the incommensurability of cultures and related issues can be found also in Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), pp. 153, 188, 191, 194, 209-211; and in F.M. Barnard, *J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 23.
4. The Akan people constitute the largest single ethno-cultural group in Ghana.
5. Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 242-258.
6. James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its meaning, Measurement and Moral Importance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 40-55.
7. James Griffin, *Well-Being*, p. 53.
8. John Finns, "Commensuration and Public Reason" in *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason*, edited with Introduction by Ruth Chang (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 224; integral human fulfillment is taken to mean "all human persons and their communities being fulfilled in *all the basic goods*"; italics mine; also p. 233.
9. T.M. Scanlon rejects the idea of well-being as a "master value," even though he says much that indicates that well-being is a fundamental value and that there is "an element of truth in the idea that other things are valuable only insofar as they contribute to individual well-being." He does assert that "In some cases, what makes an activity worthwhile is its contribution to the well-being of others, so in these cases well-being in general (one's own and that of others) is what is fundamental." T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 142-143; also p. 389 Note 33. Scanlon's denial of the status of well-being as a mater value is based on his conviction that "the values that properly guide us remain plural, and are not exclusively teleological" (p. 143). Even though he says that "the value of other things does not always derive from the fact that they make individuals' lives better," nevertheless, he immediately adds: "But if these things are valuable, then recognizing them does contribute to the quality of people's lives" (p. 395, Note 23). It can hardly be denied that contributing to the quality of people's lives has a definite goal (or consequence) of contributing to their well-being. The logic of Scanlon's statements here, then, as I see it, is that well-being is not only a fundamental value but (can be considered) a master value as well; the statements seem to imply also that the status of well-being is exclusively teleological.
10. Several of these value and disvalue experiences are mentioned in Robert Kane, *Through the Moral Maze: Searching for Absolute Values in a Pluralistic World* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), pp. 51-56.
11. Pamela Foot, "Moral Relativism," in Jack W. Meiland and Michael Krausz, eds., *Relativism: Cognitive and Moral* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), p. 164.
12. Sir Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p. 14.
14. A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Vintage, 1963), p. 349.

15. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, Translation and Introduction by Philip Mairet (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1973), p. 28.
16. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 34.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 45-46; emphasis in the original.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 46; emphasis in the original.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 56; emphasis mine.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 47; emphasis mine.
24. Robert Kane, *Through the Moral Maze*, p. 52.
25. Immanuel Kant, *A Critique of Judgement*, sections 20, 21, and 40.
26. Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p. 11; also Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), chps. 2 and 3.
27. Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," in Jack W. Meiland and Michael Krausz, eds., *Relativism: Cognitive and Moral* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1982), p. 67; emphasis mine. I take Davidson's use of incomparability here to be interchangeable roughly with incommensurability.
28. Michele M. Moody-Adams, *Fieldwork in Familiar Places: Morality, Culture and Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 55.
29. Michele M. Moody-Adams, *Fieldwork in Familiar Places: Morality, Culture and Philosophy*, p. 119.
30. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 164.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-163.
32. The nineteenth century British liberal thinkers, Jeremy Bentham, identifies the common good with "the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it" [the community]. See his *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1823; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948), p. 126; a contemporary liberal thinker, Will Kymlicka, remarks that "in a liberal society, the common good is the result of the process of combining preferences, all of which are counted equally (if consistent with the principles of justice." See his *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 206.
33. See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), pp. 9-10.

## **Lecture II: The Emptiness of Ethnocentrism**

1. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 480.
2. Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 96-97.
3. Richard Barrett, *Culture and Conduct: An Excursion in Anthropology* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1984), p. 8.
4. R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 407.

5. Dugald Campbell, *In the Heartland of Bantuland: A Record of Twenty-nine Years' Pioneering in Central Africa among the Bantu Peoples* (London: Seeley Service, 1922), p. 44.
6. R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, pp. 406-407.
7. R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti Proverbs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1916), pp. 11-12.
8. I am indebted to Martha Nussbaum for both of these examples. See her *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 132. She adds (p. 140) that if Europeans were to "relentlessly purify our tradition of all Asian elements, we will be left with some exiguous scraps of information about the indigenous peoples of Europe and their cultures before the advent of the Indo-Europeans."
9. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Book 2, chp. 13, sec. 19.
10. Bimal Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 4. emphasis mine.
11. Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, p. 132.
12. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 36.
13. Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, p. 132.
14. Here I am drawing freely on my *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 227.
15. Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, p. 309 Note 5.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
17. Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 119.
18. Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" in Michael Krausz, ed., *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1989), p. 39.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
20. *Ibid.*, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" p. 50.
21. Michael Krausz, *Rightness and Reason: Interpretation in Cultural Practices* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 114-115.
22. Jon M. Shepard, *Sociology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co., 1984), p. 92.
23. Alain Locke, "Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy" in Leonard Harris, ed., *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), p. 59.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 60; see also Tommy Lee Lott, "Nationalism and Pluralism in Alain Locke's Social Philosophy" in *Defending Diversity: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives on Pluralism and Multiculturalism* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 113.
25. Alain Locke, "Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy," p. 59.
26. Alain Locke, "Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace" in Leonard Harris, *The Philosophy of Alain Locke*, p. 70.
27. John Searl, "The Storm over the University," *New York Review of Books*, December 6, 1990, p. 39.
28. Bernard Williams, "The Truth in Relativism" in his *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 138.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
36. Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" p. 49, Note 13.
37. Bimal Matilal, "Ethical Relativism and Confrontation of Cultures" in Michael Krausz, ed., *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation*, p. 343.
38. See my analysis of the notion of tradition in my *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 219-232.
39. I pointed out in my first lecture that, despite my use of the expression "cultural wall," I do not consider culture as a sealed unit or a windowless monad.
40. Bernard Williams, "The Truth in Relativism," p. 132.
41. Robin Horton, "African Thought and Western Science" in Bryan R. Wilson, ed., *Rationality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), p. 170.
42. Bernard Williams, "The Truth in Relativism," p. 140.
43. Edward Shils, *Tradition* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), p. 260.
44. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *A Short History of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 299.
45. The title of E.E. Evans-Pritchard's book is *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936).
46. Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society" in Bryan R. Wilson, ed., *Rationality*, p. 89.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*, p. 186; emphasis mine.
50. Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), p. 27.
51. Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," p. 102.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
53. David Bidney, "Cultural Relativism," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 3, 1968, p. 546.
54. Charles Taylor, "Comparison, History, Truth" in his *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 150.
55. Charles Taylor, "Comparison, History, Truth," p. 152.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

### **Lecture III: The Morality of a Shared Humanity**

1. A number of philosophers have expressed sympathy with the conception of morality as linked with human well-being or interests. As examples: Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1984). John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987). Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, Mass.:

Harvard University Press, 1981). Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy*, vol. 3, 1958. James Griffin writes: "Well, interests are certainly central to our seeing an issue as a moral one. There are all sorts of possible links between morality and interests," *Value Judgement: Improving Our Ethical Beliefs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 126-127. He asserts that "Morality, on our current conception, does not answer the general question, how should I live? But the more specific one, how much I accommodate the interests of others? P. 167, Note 9.

African ethics has a relentless preoccupation with human welfare. See, for instance, Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1980), p. 6; also his "The Moral Foundations of an African Culture," in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, eds., *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies I* (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), chapter 9. Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987; rev. ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), chapter 8.

2. Bernard Williams is perhaps the flag-bearer of the philosophers—not many, I think—who have attacked the traditionally acknowledged universality and impartiality of morality on the grounds that morality is too demanding, while its pursuit detracts from the pursuit of projects that give meaning to one's life. In his view, "the Kantian, who can do rather better than (the utilitarian), still cannot do well enough. For impartial morality, if the conflict really does arise, must be required to win; and that cannot necessarily be a reasonable demand on the agent. There can come a point at which it is quite unreasonable for a man to give up, in the name of the impartial good ordering of the world of moral agents, something which is a condition of his having any interest in being around in that world at all" (in his "Persons, Character and Morality" in *Moral Luck*, p. 14). The Kantian is a universalist and an impartialist.

For Williams, morality is not about happiness, but what gives meaning to one's life and a reason to take interest in the world. But a lot of the pursuits or projects that give meaning to one's life may have nothing to do with morality at all, such as philosophical contemplation, enjoyment of novels, playing football, and watching films. However, Susan Wolf, in a very clear, analytic interpretation and defense of Williams' position says that "meaning, unlike happiness and satisfaction, can only come from involvement with projects of value." Thus, on this showing, "Child-molesting, since it is lacking in values, is not the sort of thing that can give meaning to one's life" (Susan Wolf, "Meaning and Morality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series*, vol. 97, Part 3, 1997, p. 306). It appears prima facie that what gives meaning to one's life is a highly subjective matter. But Wolf, in her interpretation, says that "the activities, interests, and commitments that give meaning to people's lives are those that people are disposed to see as objectively worthwhile" (p. 304). This leads her to the conclusion that "many of the most common sources of meaning in people's lives are highly commendable from a moral point of view, fostering, as they do, community, well-being, and virtue" (p. 314). It may be added that at least some projects of value, qua projects of value, cannot by any stretch of the imagination totally exclude pursuits that conduce to the well-being and interests of others and give meaning, directly or indirectly, to their lives also.

If Wolf interprets Williams correctly, then, Williams' position would not be fundamentally or radically at odds with the traditional conception of morality as having links with well-being; nor can it off-handedly be reduced to egoism.

In this connection, we may turn to what Williams says in an earlier paper of his titled "Egoism and Altruism" in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

1973). In this paper, Williams takes altruism “to be a necessary feature of a morality. It follows that a principle to the effect that everyone ought exclusively to pursue his own interests... would not constitute a morality or be a moral principle” (p. 250). Morality, he says, “implies altruism... [which] refers to a general disposition to *regard the interests of others, merely as such*, as making some claim on one, and, in particular, *as limiting one’s own projects* (*Ibid.*; emphasis mine). Thus, he sees a justification “why any society has to bring it about that most of its members have to some degree altruistic dispositions” (p. 252). The reason is that, and I entirely agree with him, “society implies a degree of minimal altruism *in order to operate*” (*ibid.*; emphasis mine). All this leads him appropriately to cast serious doubt on the rationality of ethical egoism, for, after all “[the egoist] and his activities are variously parasitic on other people and in particular on their altruism... He operates in society, fulfilling his desires and projects involves society, and we can add that the very existence of his desires and projects is the product of society” (*ibid.*).

Even though Williams gives due recognition to the importance of the moral notions of altruism and “the interests of other,” nevertheless, given his partialist perspective on morality, he probably means by “other” not all human beings irrespective of their cultures and societies, as I would mean, but relatives, friends, neighbors, however, he might well mean all the members of a particular society—which still fits into the partialist mold, but which is at variance with my impartialist and universalist perspective spelled out in their lectures.

My reading of Williams as a whole suggests the conviction that he seeks to steer between the Scylla of extreme impartialist (universalist) moralities and the Charybdis of an extreme type of altruism. The reason is that he cannot reject impartiality totally while at the same time giving due recognition to the importance of society as the only framework for the realization of the desires and projects of the individual. To function in a human society requires recognizing some degree of impartiality to make it possible for society to operate in a way that will benefit *all* of its members. In fact, when Williams asserts that “*any society* has to bring it about that most of its members have to some degree altruistic dispositions,” he is resorting to a universalist language. He means that in *all* human societies it is morally appropriate—perhaps imperative—for people to demonstrate some degree of altruism. I would not—most people would not—objective to such a view.

What Williams position amounts to, as I understand it, is that the individual has a life to live, has duties to him or her-self, and projects to care about and should have the opportunity to pursue them, without the unnecessary demands of an overriding morality, so as to be able to fashion a life that is worthwhile for oneself. But Williams also recognizes (in “Egoism and Altruism”) that having duties to ourselves does not in any way obliterate duties to others. If this interpretation of mine is correct, then his position does not seriously threaten the ordinary morality that is required to give due consideration to the interests of others.

I do not think that even those moral philosophers who hold the conception of an impartialist and universalist morality that links it with, or involves it in, accommodating the interests of all others simply intend to jettison the idea of duties to oneself, or the pursuit of one’s own projects that makes him have a fulfilling life. No, not at all. In the final analysis, then, it is all a matter of right balancing between one’s personal interests and those of others, appropriately adjusting to the interests of others. What these “others” are is differently interpreted by the partialist and the universalist. But, even so, this is enough for the conception of the morality that I am working with in this lecture: the morality of well-being.

3. V.A. De Benoist, *Europe, tiers Monde, meme combat* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1986), quoted in Souleymane Bachir Diagne and Henri Ossebi, *The Cultural Question in Africa: Issues, Politics, and Research Prospects* (Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA, Working Paper No. 3, 1996), p. 14.
4. Kofi A. Busia, *The Challenge of Africa* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), p. 103.
5. Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 170.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
7. Joseph Raz, *Ethics in the Public Domain: Essays in the Morality of Law and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 31.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 43.
12. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 7.
13. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 8.
14. Much of what I say here on supererogation draws heavily and freely on my discussion of it in my *Tradition and Modernity*.
15. James Griffin, "Incommensurability: What is the Problem?" in Ruth Change, ed., *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 46. The statement was made earlier in his *Value Judgement: Improving Our Ethical Beliefs*, p. 97.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
17. J.O. Urmson, "Saints and Heros" in A.I. Melden, ed., *Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), pp. 214-215.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 205, 211, 213, and 215.
19. David Heyd, *Supererogation: Its Status in Ethical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 166.
20. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 117.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 117; emphasis mine.
22. David Heyd, *Supererogation*, p. 119; emphasis in the original.
23. Albert Schweitzer, *My Life and Thought: An Autobiography* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1933), pp. 102-103, 114.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
25. J.O. Urmson, "Saints and Heros," p. 213.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 210; emphasis mine.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 209, 211, and 215.
28. David Heyd, *Supererogation*, p. 181.
29. Kristen R. Monroe, *The Heart of Altruism: Perceptions of a Common Humanity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).
30. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 104; emphasis mine.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 51; emphasis mine.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 1150.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 118; emphasis mine.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

#### **Lecture IV: Our One World: Some Thoughts on Globalization**

1. Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Co. 2002), p. ix.

2. Horst Kohler, "Working for a Better Globalization" in *Amannee* (Public Affairs Section, United States Embassy, Accra, Ghana, March 2002), p. 9.

3. Deepak Nayyar, "Globalization Once More" in *Biblio, A Review of Books* (The Hague: Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, March-April 2002, "Cosmopolitanism and the Nation-State"), p. 18a.

4. Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree, Understanding Globalization* (New York: Anchor Books, Random House, 2000), p. 9.

5. Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Citizens of the World? Cosmopolitanism in the Dialogue across and through Differences" in *Biblio, A Review of Books*, op.cit., p. 6c.

6. Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, pp. 3ff.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. xii, xvii, et. al.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

9. [www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com) September 2001.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Kwame Kyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought, The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995), p. xiii.

12. Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, p. 380.

13. Philippe Legrain, *Open World, the Truth about Globalization* (London: Abacus, 2002), p. 304.

14. Philippe Legrain, *Open World*, loc. Cit.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 315-316.

16. J.H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1986).

17. Bernth Lindfors, *Approaches to Teaching Achebe's "Things Fall Apart,"* edited by Bernth Lindfors (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1991), p. ix.

18. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 243.

19. *The Bible*: Psalm 133:1.

20. R. Sampatkumar, in a Keynote Address delivered at the Opening of an International Conference on Youth and Human Values, July 8-11, 2002, Accra, Ghana, p. 10.

#### **Epilogue**

1. Quoted in Kofi A. Busia, *The Challenge of Africa* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), p. 105.

2. Seneca words are: "Iam istum spiritum expuemus. Interim, dum trahimus, dum inter homines sumus, colamus humanitatem" (*De Ira*, 3, 43.4): "Soon we shall breathe our last. Meanwhile, while we live, while we are among human beings, let us cultivate our humanity." The English translation of these words of Seneca can be found on the frontispiece as well as the last page, page 201 of Martha Nussbaum's *Cultivating Humanity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

University Press, 1997). I am grateful to Professor Nussbaum for sending me the Latin version of Seneca's statement.

3. Kwasi Wiredu translates this maxim as "sticking into your neighbor's flesh, it might just as well be sticking into a piece of wood." See his "Moral Foundations of an African Culture" in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, eds., *Person and Community, Ghanaian Philosophical Studies I* (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), p. 198.

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