

Living Together as an Intercultural Task

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**Abstract:** In his article, "Living Together as an Intercultural Task," Roland Hagenbüchle explores the multi-faceted challenges we face in a multicultural world. At the same time, he refers the reader to a survey of recent studies indispensable to an informed investigation of this topic. After analyzing the various options for coming to terms with life in multicultural societies and paying special attention to John Rawls' global model of justice as fairness and Martha C. Nussbaum's concept of a good life (based on the capability model), Hagenbüchle advances the transcultural concept of personhood as a non-hegemonic starting point for a dialogic intercultural exchange. Surprisingly enough, the correspondences of values among otherwise widely differing cultures tend to converge in the form of a common human ethos, thus strengthening our trust in a peaceful coexistence of peoples and (hopefully) laying to rest the ghosts of an inevitable and close-to-apocalyptic "clash of civilizations" (Huntington).

## Roland HAGENBÜCHLE

### Living Together as an Intercultural Task

Negotiating the coexistence of diverse cultures, ethnic groups, races, and religions has become one of the most urgent challenges at the beginning of this new century. Should this issue remain unresolved, smoldering and open conflicts in the political as well as the private sphere will be inevitable. While intraculturalism, demographically speaking, has already become a reality in many countries, a relatively large number of thinkers, politicians, etc., doubt the desirability of interculturalism. If, as is argued by cultural relativists, each culture maintains its own value system -- and that it cannot adequately be understood from an external perspective -- then all cultures, like religions, can equally claim the right to acknowledgement and to the inviolability of their respective identities. The right to be different is elevated to the status of principle. Equality becomes a matter of equal value, which renders any critique of cultural norms impossible, resulting in what Melford E. Spiro calls "moral cultural relativism," a concept which Richard Rorty has criticized from an epistemological point of view (159). Pure heterogeneity, which, according to Lyotard, constitutes the hallmark of postmodernism, would thus also characterize the relationship between cultures. Intercultural communication would consequently be detrimental (see Abou 1995, 93; Abou 1986, 47-82).

From a relativistic perspective, any form of acculturation is neo-colonial in nature, resulting in "ethnocide" or "deculturation." The loss of one's own culture and accepted value system must -- unless replaced by another -- lead to the dissolution of one's own traditional social order. As proven by military upheavals in different cultural regions, such apprehensions are not unfounded. Ethnologists such as Lévy-Strauss therefore advocate a careful negotiation of intercultural relations -- and this does not refer to "exotic" cultures alone (qtd. in Abou 1995, 27; see also Kuper 243). Paradoxically speaking, the attempt to understand the Other, as Barbara Whitmer has recently demonstrated, often has the opposite effect of creating mutual hostility. Bassam Tibi, for example, laconically states that people are more likely to wage war on neighboring countries than on distant ones. Gregory Bateson and Jürgen Ruesch point out that people who have different but complementary "universes" are able to cooperate successfully even without understanding the other's universe -- in fact, any efforts to this effect may even result in a failure of communication (Bateson and Ruesch 234-35). And Martin Buber views *Urdistanzierung* as a central prerequisite for any relationship since one can only enter into a relationship with a distant Other (i.e., an Other recognized as separate from oneself) (Buber 412-16). As a result, Tzvetan Todorov regards modes of communication without sufficient distance between dialogue partners as damaging since they tend to homogenize cultural diversity. According to Todorov, the homogenization of cultures, currently heightened by the developments of mass culture and global commerce, results in nothing less than a death sentence for humankind (qtd. in Abou 1995, 28). For the most part agreeing with this pessimistic conclusion, Ninian Smart cautions against "bulldozing" individual cultures in the midst of our current euphoria over globalization (372; see also Clifford 36-37, 45-46). In T.S. Eliot's words: "'a world culture ... would be no culture at all. We should have a humanity dehumanized'" (qtd. in Kuper 38-39).

Despite our substantial efforts to safeguard the variety of species we are not doing enough to safeguard the variety of cultures. Christopher Bliss, for example, criticizes the World Bank for not sufficiently considering the destructive effects of their actions on existing lifestyles in developing countries (Bliss 431-32). The loss of this cultural variety would rob us of the opportunity to learn more about ourselves and to critically rethink our own cultural paradigms through intercultural comparisons (see Smart 371). Establishing an identity of their own no doubt still has priority for hitherto marginalized and developing countries. The movement of *Négritude* (criticized by Fanon and others as a product of Western thought) presents an instructive example. Curiously enough, the West itself rejects ethnocentrism while encouraging it in non-Western cultures -- probably owing to a sense of guilt -- without considering the long-term consequences (Abou 1995, 28).

Selim Abou and others have pointed out that productive intercultural relations can only be formed with the help of a universally valid normative order (Abou 1995, 29, 79-80, 83-85). Even "freedom" -- the basis and prerequisite of all other values -- loses its meaning without a normative horizon of values (Woody 301). Strict relativists, however, reject such an approach as essentialist -- yet this would also invalidate the basis for human rights. Furthermore, as James Clifford states, even anti-identity discourses cannot do without terms like "culture" and "identity." Yet there have been recent attempts to abandon the concept of culture altogether. Even though Clifford himself insists on preserving the idea of culture and its differentiating function, he, like Homi Bhabha, strives for a "hybrid collective identity" -- without, however, testing its viability (182).

Walter Benn Michaels's *Our America* has recently complicated this discussion by equating factually "culture" with "racism": "The modern concept of culture is not ... a critique of racism, it is a form of racism" and again: "Without racial identity, there is no cultural identity" (qtd. in Kuper 240-41; see also Hall 89-136). Within Michaels's "negative dialectic," even anti-racism becomes racism. Yet Michaels fails to consider the highly destructive cultural consequences of racist ideologies. The reason for such a reversal of values is obvious. For Michaels, there exists no normative horizon upon which values can be based. Without such a basis, however, dialectical thinking inevitably slides into an infinite regression. Yet it not only constitutes faulty dialectics, it is also politically irresponsible to operate with "inverse racism." Michaels could have learned from Lévy-Strauss that someone can only be criticized as a "barbarian" (or "racist") if he or she believes in "barbarianism" (or "racism") and behaves accordingly (qtd. in Kuper 243). Bassam Tibi rightly cautions against discrediting the advocacy of cultural norms as cultural imperialism or racism (Tibi 8). And Clifford agrees: "there is no reason to assume that crossover practices [or hybrid identities] are always liberatory or ... that an autonomous identity or national culture is always reactionary" (10).

#### **The Problematics of Multiculturalism**

In the wake of migrations owing to economic or political reasons, even European societies have turned multicultural during the past few decades. Today, most countries exhibit a multicultural demographic make-up. People of diverse cultural, national, ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds live -- more or less peacefully -- together (the Balkan states constitute an unfortunate exception on the old continent). Yet the number of immigrants admitted by different European countries varies widely. Except for Switzerland, Germany has accepted the highest number of immigrants in relation to its overall population whereas France, Great Britain, Ireland, and Italy (the last two are countries whose number of emigrants is one of the highest in the world) practice a restrictive immigration policy and allow only small numbers of immigrants into their countries. Holland and Finland have almost completely resisted these demographic shifts.

Multiculturalism in the sense of a multicultural lifestyle, currently propagated as a social model, is a construct of Western academic theory, akin to the postmodern "plurality of subjectivity" (and the "patchwork self"). Enthusiastic postmodernist claims to the contrary, a multicultural existence is by no means easy to realize (see Hollinger; Hagenbüchle, "From Common" 71-77). In fact, as Samuel P. Huntington observes, it is destructive. If one were to believe Félix Guattari, it results in a schizophrenic existence. Whatever position one may take, multiculturalism has already become a reality in many ways, a fact requiring a new mode of subjectivity. In "Das Subjekt als Grenzgänger" I argue that, under certain conditions, a multicultural existence may not only be possible but, as will be the case in the future, necessary. This, however, presupposes a new way of thinking and an attitude that we have not practiced enough so far, if at all. In short, multicultural societies are characterized by their valorization of a variety of lifestyles, concepts of the world and mankind, and their attempts to establish a social order based on "equality," "tolerance," and mutual "respect." Since Charles Taylor's particular blend of Canadian perspectives of multiculturalism, "respect" and "tolerance" have been elevated to form the ethical basis of multicultural societies. Yet whether a productive foundation has really been gained remains doubtful. We still have to determine, for example, to what extent "tolerance" is a justifiable response to intolerant and aggressive behavior, and in what way "respect" (in the sense of acceptance) can be demanded vis-à-vis a social system that fundamentally violates one's own values. In the context of intercultural conflicts of values, "tolerance" and "respect," evidently, fail as normative guidelines, both in the public as

well as the private sphere. To practice tolerance and respect in a meaningful way requires reciprocity as well as the development of a shared horizon of values that allows for a precise definition and critical assessment of the boundaries of these concepts. In this regard, Taylor still owes us a convincing answer (see also Kuper 236-37).

Tolerance proves to be useless -- in fact highly detrimental -- if merely employed as a political catchword, a catchword similar to solidarity, which is often conveniently used by politicians eager to promote their own agenda by attempting to portray their opponents as "intolerant" and "lacking in solidarity." In my opinion, this kind of rhetoric is repulsive in its abuse of elementary ethical terms. It is morally altruistic in language, but politically egotistical in action. It is this kind of rhetoric that turns into mere slogans the very value systems that should form the ethical basis for a peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, the "mediatization" of political culture has reduced politics to a public spectacle. There remains little room for a critical discussion that might open up the possibility for self-criticism.

For postmodernists, the concept of culture is an exclusively pluralist one (see Kuper 23-46; 59-63). Yet the valorization of cultural diversity -- in the sense of a radical equality of all cultures -- prevents any form of critical engagement, thus contradicting the notions of a universally valid reason or a binding ethical norm. Even though acknowledging the existence of multicultural societies, Mark R. Amstutz therefore strongly rejects "cultural relativism" as an inappropriate and ethically unacceptable theory "because it is impossible to live with the doctrine's severe consequences." For Amstutz, as for other critics, relativism is "intellectually indefensible" (Amstutz 1-12). Attempts to overcome, at least in part, the contradictions inherent in multiculturalism are usually based on the principle of human rights, which is deemed indispensable for guaranteeing the dignity and self-respect of humankind. At this point, however, the problems start, as there is no agreement on these rights' range of validity. They are questioned whenever they are in conflict with one's own ethical, religious, or sociocultural value system, or whenever they run counter to a government's national self-interests. In such cases, a person's dignity and self-respect is annulled without further explanation -- as if the Human Rights Declaration of the UNO never existed. Drawing on numerous examples, Amstutz demonstrates the extent to which the political pursuit of power and economic egotism have repeatedly undermined ethical principles. The USA is counted among the biggest global sinners of this kind, as suggested, for example, by Ahmed Rashid's analysis of their involvement in the rise of the Taliban.

Following Marx and Lyotard, Ralf Dahrendorf has identified the agonistic element as the determining quality of postmodern society. As numerous warlike disputes demonstrate, this largely also applies to the relationship between cultures. Unfortunately, however, this conflict model does not take into account a culture's quality -- thus preventing a necessary and fruitful competition between diverse cultural forms (Sen 1999, 54-86). Anthony Giddens has highlighted the postmodern tension between tradition and cultural value: "A post-traditional order is not one in which tradition disappears -- far from it ... Traditions have to ... become open to interrogation" (qtd. in Smart 372). Seen from a comparative perspective, two criteria are of special importance: 1) Which culture provides better protection for the basic existential needs of human beings (this includes John Rawls's "primary goods," such as one's livelihood and security as well as social self-esteem [348-52])? and 2) Which culture provides better opportunities to realize the "good life" (Sen's "capability set" 1999 74-110; see also Nussbaum's discussion of basic necessities and capabilities in *Gerechtigkeit* 187-226)?

In the West, there exists a strong interest in non-Western -- especially Eastern -- notions of spirituality (e.g., Buddhism or Islam). Yet as soon as social interaction interferes with one's individual private space, the other culture can no longer be accepted as equal. The differences in religious and social norms, especially in the context of family structures, seem impossible to overcome quickly. Even without assuming an explicitly feminist stance, one has to note that the role of women inevitably proves to be an interculturally contentious issue, as is the method of child rearing and education. In concrete situations, abstract theories of living together, including the principles of tolerance and respect, lose their seemingly incontestable validity. To deal with such value

conflicts in a peaceful manner requires a transcultural standard for decision making. John Kekes has offered some highly relevant suggestions in this context.

### **Suggestions for Solutions**

Contrary to Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), a study insistently cautioning against the dangers of intercultural conflict, Bassam Tibi, in *Der Krieg der Zivilisationen: Zwischen Vernunft und Fundamentalismus* (1995), proposes ways to bridge cultural gaps without downplaying the differences inherent in different value systems. Huntington's study is based on a political realist's estimate of global spheres of conflict. Tibi, on the other hand, employs Kant's principle of reason while at the same time calling for institutional protection against practices that violate human rights (134-41). His cogently argued book proves to be the most balanced discussion of these problems to date. In contrast to Huntington, whose analysis needs to be understood as provocative warning, Tibi offers concrete suggestions for solving intercultural conflicts. His, in the best sense of the word, enlightening and emancipating stance is courageous and forward-looking (35-44). Jan and Aleida Assmann's brilliant and original essay in *Kultur und Konflikt* goes in a similar direction. Instead of a "theory of mutual understanding," Assmann and Assmann develop a "praxeology of understanding" in the sense of a "mutual arrangement." The Assmanns' studies are indispensable -- as are Tibi's works -- for a deeper understanding of cultural processes. Further, Jürgen Habermas's proposal of a non-hegemonic discourse as a means to avoid or solve conflicts could very well be a worthwhile basis for intercultural communication. At the same time, it would require a willingness on the part of all participants to accept the best argument. Yet there are very few examples of solutions accomplished on the basis of dialogic argumentation alone, without external institutional pressure. Apart from the fact that the achievements of the European Enlightenment have long been lost, as the terrible events of the past century have shown, we are far removed from a global Enlightenment. In this context, the Habermasian model -- while remaining a respectable outline -- proves impractical in its utopian goal. Recently, Otfried Höffe's "Eine föderale Weltrepublik" (1999) presented a detailed proposal for a supra-national institution, which deserves attention beyond the discipline of philosophy. The fact that, under current political circumstances, this proposal has little chance of being realized, in no way diminishes Höffe's contribution.

In his "Oxford Amnesty Lecture" (1993), entitled "The Law of Peoples," John Rawls sketches a globally acceptable legal basis apt to guarantee a minimum of individual freedom and safety. He believes that his project "Justice as Fairness" may be acceptable for non-Western and even non-liberal (e.g., theocratically governed) states. In his analysis and evaluation of this suggestion, Patrick Hayden comes to the conclusion that, ultimately, Rawls's model is not universally applicable and, even more problematically, that Rawls's treatment of human rights borders on cultural relativism (for another critique see also Hoffmann). It is true that Rawls's terms of "freedom" and "equality" allow for different meanings in the context of different forms of government and that he leaves sociocultural and religious norms untouched even if they violate the "Declaration of Human Rights" of 1948. At the same time he insists on a few (in his view) generally acceptable fundamental rights, so-called "primary" rights or negative freedoms (the right to be free of enslavement, of torture, etc.). He excludes, for the most part, the positive freedoms at the core of Human Rights (especially Article 1) in order to avoid potential conflicts with non-Western cultural norms or the charge of neo-colonialism.

If measured against practical utility and applied to the current discussion between radical proponents of Islam and political reformers intent on improving the position of women in Morocco, for example (see Huntington 2000, 5), the weaknesses of this model become apparent. Rawls's "The Law of Peoples" fails to offer help in two areas: first, with respect to men's infinite possibilities to turn a woman out of their house; and second, with respect to women's financial compensations for agreeing to a polygamous family life. In fact, the model does not even indicate which direction the position of women in this country (90% of whom are illiterate) might take -- a position in dire need of reform from a human rights perspective. Rawls could have heeded Rousseau's suggestion of adapting national laws to common principles of humanity (qtd. in Abou 1995, 43). Yet for Rawls, it is the different cultural and political value systems that maintain primary validity.

Since human rights have to be adapted to those systems, individual freedoms -- depending on the respective culture and type of state -- are substantially restricted. The question then remains whether Rawls's pragmatically prompted concession of tolerance toward other cultures is not too high a price to pay.

Although "The Law of Peoples" deserves respect as a first step toward a global legal order, the answer must needs be in the affirmative. Rawls's list of negative freedoms would admittedly constitute significant progress if implemented, yet depriving human rights in favor of traditionally established cultural and political norms would render the latter unamenable to external criticism, thus rendering possible changes unlikely for generations to come. To posit an adaptable, changeable legal basis seems to be highly problematic since other cultures are initially excluded from contributing to formulate this basis -- despite the possibility of later adjustments. Irrespective of its ultimate form, a universal legal order should be envisioned as a goal rather than posited as a point of departure; that is, we should concentrate on first working out a transcultural understanding of legal actions and values in mutual dialogic exchanges (see also Nussbaum 1999, 196, 240). The idea of a united humanity needs to grow with time; it cannot be decreed (Schleißheimer in a personal letter to the author, 22 March 2000; Smart 371-72). Only in the course of a joint effort to realize such a project can a feeling of partnership develop.

Contrary to all objections, human rights still remain an ethically and politically promising attempt to acknowledge cultural diversity without simultaneously slipping into a radical relativity of norms that would inevitably lead to totalitarianism. The experiences of the last decades vividly demonstrate the difficulties involved in practicing human rights; numerous studies on this issue have been published. Yet this must not prevent us from promoting fundamental values stemming from a developed notion of the human being. This is not a primarily theoretical postulate but an eminently practical concern, increasingly shared by developing countries due to their painful experiences whose implications for their own existence, contrary to Lee Kuan Yew's thesis (qtd. in Sen 1999, 151-52), they certainly understand. Amartya Sen thus strongly contradicts Lee's claims that the poor of developing countries show no concern for democracy and human rights (Sen 1999, 151-52).

Together with other second nations and developing countries, it is China, in particular, that has repeatedly criticized the universal claim to human rights as Eurocentric or Euro-American neo-imperialist (the issue was raised in the "Bangkok Declaration" and during the succeeding UNO human-rights conference in Vienna, 1993, in this form [see Davis, "Chinese" 3-24; Loh 145-87]). If analyzed closely, especially in the context of the changing policies of various Western governments, it becomes evident that human rights often constitute an arbitrarily applied instrument of political power. It is sad, in fact even tragic, that Europe and the USA are incapable of a political action in accordance with their high moral traditions. On the other hand, the second nations' and developing countries' reservations indicate that a -- for them -- eminently important issue is being thwarted by dictatorial regimes and national self-interests. Wolfgang Schmale has presented a detailed study of these issues in *Human Rights and Cultural Diversity* (1993).

These and similar objections raised against human rights do indeed highlight the necessity to find a different solution without, however, questioning the principle itself. In *Menschenrechte und Kulturen* (1995), Selim Abou put this very poignantly: "Human beings are not just legal subjects but also beings who demand recognition, acceptance, and love"; in other words, they are also "persons" (Abou 1995, 29-34). As shown by my historic-systematic introduction to the two-volume *Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der modernen Subjektivität* (1998), it is hardly an exaggeration to state that the entire Western history of ideas -- from classical antiquity to the present times -- amounts to a definition and redefinition of the concept of "personhood"; even postmodernism is no exception (Hagenbüchle *Geschichte*, 1-80, especially 76-77; see also Hagenbüchle "We are All," 1-36). The principle of human rights likewise finds its ultimate justification in the notion of "personhood."

Agreeing with Amartya K. Sen, and echoing Aristotle, Martha C. Nussbaum proposes a "conception of person" grounded in "central human capabilities" (*Cultivating* 190). While accepting the validity of some of Rawls's "primary goods," Nussbaum considers the opportunity to make full

individual use of these primary goods -- rather than human rights (as guaranteed by the constitution) -- as a prerequisite for a "good human life" defined as the opportunity to develop into "full personhood." To prevent someone from utilizing these primary goods is tantamount to preventing him/her from fully achieving "personhood" and thus disregards human "autonomy, dignity, and emotional well being" (*Cultivating* 204). Nussbaum (following Aristotle) argues empirically, basing the validity of her concept of "personhood" on the self-interpretations of different cultures as they manifest themselves in "myths and tales." While she tries to initiate a debate on primary experiences and primary capabilities, no decision has yet been reached as to "how [such a debate] will use and criticize traditional convictions" and "how it will deal with oppositional convictions" (*Cultivating* 247).

Still, this capability model remains the most promising approach to a universally ethical norm to date. Nussbaum herself has compiled a (provisional) list of fundamental capabilities which -- from her point of view -- define "good human life." To guarantee their development is, according to Nussbaum, a political duty. It is crucial to note, however, that Nussbaum's normative focus on (historically and culturally situated) concrete human experiences -- like Rawls's -- is based on abstract (Kantian) principles. In contrast, Amartya K. Sen's use of the capability concept in the field of development aid policy (with a special focus on women's quality of life) induced the *Human Development Reports* of the UNO to analyze and categorize nations according to this approach -- a rare but well-earned success of theoretical effort.

Without a doubt, the concept of personhood has been developed most continuously and most complexly in Western cultures (see "Person"). Although, as Bernhard Schleißeheimer explains, this has not resulted in a unified concept of the "person," some significant characteristics were and still are fairly generally accepted, including identity, individuality, reason, and freedom and autonomy (see Schleißeheimer 1987, 482f., and 1989 4f.; Müller and Vossenkuhl 1060). The dual traditions of classical antiquity and Judeo-Christianity have reached their climax in Kant, according to whom a person should never be regarded merely as a means but as an end in itself. Kant challenges us to acknowledge all people in their individual personal dignity (see also Schleißeheimer 1989, 4f.). The value of objects is determined by their price; yet whatever is priceless and cannot be measured in exchange value [e.g., money] has dignity (see Burkhard). Tibi, himself a traveler between cultures, insists uncompromisingly on the accomplishments of the European Enlightenment (specifically on the Kantian reason and its universal ethics (64, 304-5).

With respect to a realization of Kant's postulate, two main concerns arise, both calling for political support and appropriate political willingness: 1) How can the idea of "human dignity" be brought to life in the consciousness of humanity as a whole? and 2) How is it possible to mobilize institutional protection for this "birthright" (if it is one; for contrary positions see Sen *Development*, 227-48) against various attempts to functionalize a person for diverse purposes? The first is mainly a question of upbringing and education and requires a democratic sociopolitical environment. The second point requires legal protection guaranteed by national and international institutions.

### **The Concept of Personhood as a Common Project**

Disillusioned by Foucault and Lyotard, we can no longer look toward a collective history or "metanarrative" for providing a basis for our identities. Yet instead of turning toward the past, we can design a future identity engaged in the realization of a common social project -- a proposal I first introduced in "From Common Ground to Common Project" (1-36). Instead of concentrating on the idea of the individual or the universal citizen (which, translated into practice, has repeatedly lead to the exclusion of certain groups), this project could find its focal point in the transcultural notion of human beings as persons (for an account of the historical exclusion of women under certain conditions, see Nussbaum *Cultivating*; Sen *Development*). As Elise Boulding has so stated: "It takes time to become a person. The civic culture, and the public interest, only develop where there are human beings with a fully developed sense of individual personhood. ... Reflection is a key to the development of personhood. ... We can join the company of persons-in-becoming who are working to give civic culture shape, or we can stand on the sidelines. ... The choice is ours" (162-64).



Lately, the concept of personhood has received much critical and literary attention again -- in both Western and non-Western cultures (see Bloom 4-6; as well as the contributions by Joseph Elder, Robert Thurman, and Paul Valliere in Bloom's volume for a discussion of the significance of the individual in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and the Russian Orthodox Church). The current Western emphasis on the concept of 'personhood' is related to the fact that philosophers (e.g., Nussbaum) as well as cultural critics and historians (e.g., Himmelfarb) have moved center stage the notion of "virtue" in their discussions of values (e.g., Zagebski; McKinnon). At the same time, the term "character," neglected since Modernism, has gained importance in literary criticism, psychology, and ethics, especially in connection with an "ethical attitude" and (especially since Sartre) the existential personal decision. In a recently published study on the relation between "freedom" and "justice," J. Melvin Woody comes to the conclusion that "freedom" is meaningless without "integrity of character": "Freedom of choice" and "character" are two sides of the same coin (305).

In contrast to the (arguably Western) notion of human rights, the concept of personhood seems less contestable. The accusation of "Eurocentrism" does not apply for the very reason that the concept of "personhood" is not an exclusively Western achievement but also manifests itself (in similar forms) in other cultures -- although less in the sense of a fully developed metaphysics of the person or a theoretically coherent construct than in perpetually recurring efforts to find answers to questions such as: What constitutes a fully developed human being? and How does such a person relate toward his/her fellow human beings? From this inter-subjective and interactional perspective, the notion of personhood constitutes a highly suitable inter-cultural project for the following reasons: 1) Owing to its inherent performative quality, the concept of personhood defines a person's relationship to herself and her fellow human beings, thus regulating her daily social interactions. In the Middle Ages it was already generally accepted that "one person is not a person," which recalls the Confucian *jen*, according to which the human being as a person is always represented together with another person. Confucius declares: "By recognizing yourself in the Other, you are on your way to humanity" (qtd. in Bloom 122, 128). Peter Frederick Strawson similarly insists on an intersubjective aspect inherent in the concept of personhood, defining a person as someone who acknowledges other people as persons and vice versa. The concept of personhood is thus a reciprocally relational term. Apart from its rich philosophical, teleological, and political tradition throughout the European history of ideas, the notion of personhood has remained a radically open concept with the potential for further development. In contrast to the codified concept of human rights, the notion of personhood -- like the notion of the human being as a cultural being in general -- is an idea-in-progress, a processual and future-oriented concept, incomplete and incompletable in its cultural contingencies as well as its constantly changing historical definitions. It is this element of incompleteness, in particular, that should enable members of different cultures to make their specific contributions (determined by their respective culture and history) to the self-conception of human beings.

The definition of personhood and its political realization thus becomes a genuinely trans-cultural task, inviting and equally valorizing the contributions of everybody. Without a wide range of diverse participants, any understanding of human beingness would have to remain insufficient and unbalanced. Moreover, a common project is the crucial prerequisite for ensuring that people from various cultures can engage with each other productively and acknowledge each other as partners. An intercultural dialogic exchange along these lines may indeed offer numerous opportunities to build bridges across cultural borders, as Bassam Tibi has suggested in his study quoted above. Such a dialogue -- less in the sense of a discourse à la Habermas (which aims at promoting the better argument) than in the sense of an open conversation -- will call on every participant to answer the following questions from his/her special point of view: "What constitutes a human being?," or, more appropriately, "Who are we?" Instead of demanding a traditional definition of the human being, this approach places the practice of social interaction (i.e., the appropriateness of interpersonal relationships) at the center of interest. Thus "Who are we?" ultimately becomes even less important than the question: "How do we interact with each other?" No doubt the two questions are closely interrelated. In spite of the great variety of cultural value systems and

worldviews, one can still observe considerable correspondences in the negotiation of intersubjective relations. Such correspondences mainly refer to central values such as "truth telling, beneficence, promise keeping, courage, self-control, and justice" (see Harbour 155-170). According to Harbour, "primary moral values" are -- in contrast to culturally specific "secondary" and "tertiary" values -- transcultural in nature and are based less on reflection (or reason) than on deeper emotional patterns of reaction: "Morality involves evaluations that bear on the essence of being human" (Harbour 159; see also Schleißeheimer "Der Mensch").

Not only do interculturally corresponding values turn out to be "primary" values as such; they also become "a touchstone for individual and sociocultural behavior" (Harbour 170). A.J.M. Milne refers to the following as transcultural moral norms: "respect for human life, pursuit of justice, fellowship, social responsibility, freedom from arbitrary interference, honorable treatment, and civility" (21). In this context Michael Walzer talks of a kind of "minimal morality," which is shared by all cultures (Walzer *Thick and Thin*, 1-19). According to Walzer, people with completely different cultural backgrounds can accept each other, help each other and have the opportunity to learn from each other on this moral basis (Walzer *Objectivity*, 8). In the context of such correspondences, a general human feeling, thinking, and judging manifests itself. At least as far as "core values" are concerned, something like a universal ethos emerges. Whereas cultural relativism still applies to "secondary and tertiary values," "core values," according to Harbour, are "objective principles" (qtd. in Amstutz 10). The acceptance of the highest moral principles as universally valid norms (as Harbour proposes) almost assumes the quality of a natural law. In view of the debates on relativism, this is a highly unconventional form of explanation. Yet the crucial question whether the shared features observed by Harbour and others (see Harbour 162-64; for a discussion of the positions of Milne, Walzer, Klukhohn, Brandt, Lewis, Rokeach, Schwarz, and Bilsky) only manifest themselves on such a highly abstract level and disappear in more concrete and reality-based situations remains at present still unanswered.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

To reflect on basic ethical and political concepts from an intercultural perspective, and thus to suggest a transcultural horizon of values for joint political action is a challenge that can only be met through interdisciplinary and intercultural cooperations. It is undoubtedly necessary, as Dieter Senghaas warns, to transcend one's own limited point of view (215). What would be equally necessary, but cannot be attempted here, is to look back at oneself from a radically external perspective. Such a bifocal understanding or "compound vision" (Hagenbüchle "Das Subjekt"; Hagenbüchle and Raab, xii-xv) constitutes an indispensable prerequisite for a productive intercultural dialogue. Yet the difficulties remain considerable. Dialogue in the sense mentioned above constitutes a form of cultural analysis, which in turn implies criticism of both one's own and the foreign culture. Finally, it is not easy to alleviate the tensions between divergent modes of observation and the desire for an all-encompassing frame of reference (Bal 7, 12-14). A look at James Clifford's *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* may highlight these problems. Central ethico-political concepts inevitably reflect a culture's specific history -- however defined. The extent to which non-Western cultures may thus privilege completely different terms requires further investigation. "Understanding" a culture, according to Clifford Geertz, is tantamount to reading an alien, faded, incomplete manuscript full of contradictions, questionable amendments, and tendentious commentaries (15). This also means, however, that any intercultural dialogue will need consist of different languages and modes of discourse, and that its primary goal will have to be the development of a common mode of conversation (see Senghaas 195-221). The inherent heterogeneity of the subject positions involved will not permit any facile solutions. Uma Narayan has recently attacked Euro-American critics for their tendency to misuse developing countries as a mere mirror for critiquing their own culture, thus denying them a voice of their own. At the same time, a struggle for dominance would not accomplish anything either.

Intercultural negotiations demand no less than a new kind of thinking and acting, namely, bifocal thinking as social practice (see also Geertz's "bifocal understanding" and "cross-traveling" and Hall's "bifocal perspective"). Only by employing a dialectical discourse -- that is, by adopting each other's perspectives -- can culturally specific and hence differently perspectivized modes of

subjectivity and discourses be reintegrated into an interdiscourse without subjecting the culturally competing elements to a new master discourse. Our objective must be "translation" (see Hall's notion of the translator as builder of bridges, 6) and certainly not homogenization. Translation, however, is apt to produce misunderstandings as the old dictum goes, *traduttore, traditore*. This is all the more true of intercultural translations, in which difficulties in understanding semantic and cultural codes add up and multiply (Clifford 6, 36-38, 41-42, 182-85). Moreover, translation is always interpretation (see Assmann and Assmann 11-28); not without reason is Hermes the god of traders and translators; as a go-between, he is also a trickster figure. In other words, mediators build bridges while at the same time also creating new obstacles. At best, they help us to familiarize ourselves with and adopt the foreign, without, however, removing its foreign quality; at the same time, they also throw into relief our own irreducibly foreign quality in encountering the Other. Without drawing on Foucault's archeological method, and without a large-scale intercultural cooperation such a dialogue cannot be realized.

The task outlined here is by no means an easy one, but it constitutes an indispensable basis for living together productively in an intercultural environment -- and it becomes more and more urgent every day (see Hahn 247-48). All participants will no doubt encounter surprising and productive insights. Yet despite all optimism, Uma Narayan's warning in *Dislocating Cultures* cannot be overlooked: "'Figuring out' what isn't 'getting across' seems inevitably a messy, provisional, and uncertain business ... I am fairly pessimistic about any quick fixes for these sorts of problems of informal 'border-crossings'" (105). And she quotes Himani Bannerji approvingly: "Our struggle is for a fundamental change in social relationships ... We are not going shopping in the market of cultural differences" (qtd. in Narayan 157).

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