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Asian-Arab Philosophical Dialogues on Culture of Peace and Human Dignity



**Asian-Arab
Philosophical Dialogues on
Culture of Peace and Human Dignity**

Editor: Darryl R. J. Macer

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PREFACE

This is the third volume of papers coming from the Asian-Arab Philosophical Dialogues that have been organized by UNESCO to stimulate philosophical reflection on contemporary themes. As we emerged from the Decade of the Culture of Peace in 2011 we have seen a rise in the culture of violence in North Africa and the Arab world, counter to the culture of peace. Most of the papers in this volume stem from a dialogue of philosophers from the Asian and Arab region convened in Thistle Resort, Port Dickson, Malaysia from 14-17 May 2010.

Dialogue is essential for developing a better understanding of not only others, but also ourselves. Dialogue is an exchange between different people, communities, and entities. The papers in this volume are written by individuals expressing their own opinions in the context of dialogues between philosophers in the Asia-Pacific and Arab regions. In many cases a paper is followed by a commentary by another philosopher. The general discussion that ensued after each paper is not recorded in this volume. The publication of the papers and commentaries is aimed to broaden intercultural communication, to strengthen the role of philosophy in public policy, and to promote the teaching of non-Western philosophies around the world.

These dialogues have been held over the past seven years in Seoul, Rabat, Hiroshima, Paris, Bangkok and Port Dickson. These dialogues occurred with the coordination of the Regional Unit in Social and Human Sciences in Asia and the Pacific (RUSHSAP) at UNESCO Bangkok, UNESCO Rabat, and UNESCO Paris, and the efforts of academics throughout the world. As people in many countries of the world express dismay at the directions that society is pursuing some are reminded of the former important roles of philosophers as navigators of the courses that societies should take.

This volume was edited by Darryl Macer, and we especially thank Professor Azizan Baharuddin, Director, Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Ms. Souria Saad-Zoy, UNESCO Rabat; Mrs. Moufida Goucha, UNESCO Paris; Dr. Pierre Sane, Imagine Africa; and Ms. Anniken Celina Grinvoll, Thailand. For assistance with the editing of the text we thank Leonard LeBlanc III, Laura Brodie-Ballantyne, and Marco Antonio Zamboni Zalamena. For interest in further dialogues please contact Ms. Souria Saad-Zoy, UNESCO Rabat (Email: s.saad-zoy@unesco.org) and Dr. Darryl Macer, Regional Unit in Social and Human Sciences in Asia and the Pacific (RUSHSAP), UNESCO Bangkok (email: rushsap.bgk@unesco.org).



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Three Ways of Conceptualizing the Global: The Universal, the Holistic and the Macrocosmic

Philip Cam, Australia

Introduction

Globalization is often seen as a contemporary economic development, involving such things as the growth of multinational companies, the increasing interdependence of the world's financial systems, and the unprecedented dependence of countries upon one another when it comes to the supply of resources, manufacturing and trade. As is generally acknowledged, however, it is not an entirely recent phenomenon. Ancient as well as modern empires have involved far-flung economies, and extensive trade routes have existed for centuries. Nor is globalization confined to the economic sphere. Mass communications have added a cultural dimension to globalization, global industrial relocation is beginning to shift the world's political axis, and globalization has seen the advent of both political institutions such as the United Nations and legal institutions such as the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

In this paper I will attempt to conceptualize globalization in the broadest possible terms by turning to some notions that are cognate with the global—the universal, the holistic, and the macrocosmic. Each of these notions occupies a significant place in the history of philosophy,⁶⁵ and each implies one or more contrasts: the universal contrasting with the particular and the relative; the holistic with the individualistic and reductive; and the macrocosmic with the microcosmic. These notions will enable me to depict globalization on a broad canvas so as to enlarge our view of it. Such a brief review as I am able to offer here can be little more than a gesture in the direction of the contribution that philosophy can make to thinking about globalization. Even so, it can stand as a reminder that philosophy still has a significant role to play in thinking about world affairs. Having said this, even in such a short exploration, I have also felt the need to warn against philosophy's tendency to fall prey to one or another kind of intellectual folly.

The Universal

The term “universal” has many meanings. In metaphysics, the universal is commonly conceived of as that which contrasts with its instances—liberty, for example, as distinct from the concrete particulars of which it might be predicated. In logic, a universal proposition asserts something of all members of a class, as opposed to a particular proposition, which predicates something of an individual or individuals. As I will be using the term “universal”, however, the universal is opposed to the relative. To go to examples: this is a distinction underlying the claim that there are universal moral laws or values that transcend particular times and places—as opposed to the view that morality is inevitably relative to context—to history and culture. Immanuel Kant provided us with a famous instance of this kind of claim when he laid down his categorical imperative in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. There he argued that the only morally acceptable maxims are those that could be rationally willed to be universal law.⁶⁶ In other words, Kant implied that all genuinely moral decisions and judgments must be able to be universalized. A second example is furnished by the concept of natural rights. When John Locke argued that humans by nature have the right to preserve their “life, liberty, and estate,”⁶⁷ he was appealing to a concept of natural rights that makes such rights universal and inalienable. That is to say, they could not be relinquished through the social contract and were meant to apply to all people in all circumstances—applying not in virtue of a body of law, and hence relative to it, and not just to those upon whom social and historical circumstances had conferred such blessings.

65 My references will be to the history of Western philosophy because that is what I know. I must leave it to those with a better knowledge of other traditions to trace whatever parallels exist elsewhere.

66 Kant, I. 1964. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. by H. J. Paton. New York, Harper Torchbooks, p. 71.

67 Locke, J. 1960. *Two Treatises of Government*, Peter Laslett, ed. Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, p. 368.

The influence of Locke's account of natural rights upon subsequent political thought is well known.⁶⁸ Briefly, however, it is the conception taken up by Thomas Jefferson in drafting the United States Declaration of Independence of 1776 and immortalized in the words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." It is the conception that reappears in Article I of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen in 1789: "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights." These were to include "natural and imprescriptible rights" to "liberty, property, safety and resistance against oppression" (Article II), spelled out in terms of such things as equality before the law (Article VI), freedom from arbitrary arrest (Article VII), free communication of thought and opinion (Article XI), and rights to enjoyment of property (Article XVII). Since the general populace actually enjoyed few if any rights under the *ancien régime*, the declaration heralded momentous changes for those living in France. As with the declaration on the other side of the Atlantic, however, it is important to note that the document is universal in conception rather than relative to a specific social and historical context.

These documents are, of course, forerunners of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. As its Preamble states, this declaration was put forward in "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family".⁶⁹ Here "members of the human family" has replaced the word "man", making it clearly audible to modern ears that the declaration is to include women and children, and thus to be manifestly universal.⁷⁰

The point of reciting these momentous historical applications of the concept of natural rights is to remind us of how this philosophical idea gained currency, so that what was universal in conception in the Enlightenment has become all but universal in practice today. What began as a philosophical conception, brought to life and nurtured in conditions now remote, eventually grew and blossomed. Its transformation from a guiding ideal of social and political life in the New World and in France into something approaching a living reality across large parts of the globe is a sign of globalization no less significant than that of the transformations which have been taking place in the economic order. Let us not forget that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is itself a product of a global organization. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine such a declaration gaining almost worldwide assent without the formation of some such organization. Both the declaration itself and the organization from which it sprang are an expression of the moral will of a globalizing world.

In saying this, I do not mean to sweep aside the fact that the concept of natural rights has been the subject of significant philosophical criticism. In the history of philosophy, one has only to think of Jeremy Bentham. When Bentham wrote that talk of "natural rights is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense, —nonsense upon stilts"⁷¹ he was directly attacking Article II of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. This is not because, according to Bentham, there are no such things as rights. Rather, he is arguing that "there are no such things as natural rights—no such things as rights anterior to the establishment of government—no such things as natural rights opposed to, in contradistinction to, legal (rights)".⁷² Bentham's claim is that talk of natural rights is "merely figurative" and that such rights as exist have their existence only within and relative to a social

68 Less well known, however, is the suggestion that Locke's account of natural rights may have been influenced by the conception of inalienable rights in Islamic thought through his acquaintance with English oriental scholar Edward Pococke. See Christopher Gregory Weeramantry. 1997. *Justice Without Frontiers, Vol I: Furthering Human Rights*. The Netherlands, Kluwer Law International.

69 From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on the 10th of December 1948.

70 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, together with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, formed the basis of the International Bill of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly in 1966, and took on the force of international law in 1976, after ratification of the Covenants.

71 Bentham, J. *Anarchical Fallacies: Being an examination of the Declaration of Rights Issued during the French Revolution*, www.law.georgetown.edu/faculty/lpw/documents/Bentham_Anarchical_Fallacies.pdf . To call rights "imprescriptible" is simply to say that they cannot be taken away by means of the law.

72 *Ibid.*

and political setting. Indeed, showing his utilitarian colours, Bentham goes so far as to say that just as “there is no right, which ought not to be maintained so long as it is upon the whole advantageous to the society that it should be maintained, so there is no right which, when the abolition of it is advantageous to society, should not be abolished.”⁷³

I say that I do not overlook the controversy over the concept of natural rights because when we are thinking about globalization we are not in fact concerned with the metaphysical status of rights. It is sufficient that rights once acknowledged in particular social and historical circumstances should begin to spread to other societies or peoples over succeeding generations. Talk of rights as natural and hence universal in concept may be “merely figurative” rather than literal as Bentham maintained—or an expression of moral will rather than the assertion of a metaphysical truth, as I am suggesting. All that really matters in the broad sweep of history is the progressive acknowledgement of human rights, so that what began as universal in theory becomes increasingly universal in practice. Given that the modern world has witnessed something of a global shift in that direction, we can say that the spread of human rights is in the process of becoming universal. Their universalizing tendency is all we require in order to point to their globalization.⁷⁴

Let me now return to Kant and his first formulation of the categorical imperative in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*: act only according to those maxims that you would will to become universal laws. The categorical imperative is a universal prescription. Such maxims as it endorses are in turn universal in at least two senses. First, they are universal in that they are supposed to apply simply in virtue of reason and irrespective of one’s role in or relationship to the particulars of the case. We might say that they are in that sense impartial or not relative to the situation of those making the judgment, so that anyone who followed the dictates of reason would make the same judgment. Secondly, a morally acceptable maxim must be universalizable in the sense that it could be prescribed as a rule of conduct without fear of contradiction. To take one of Kant’s examples, suppose we proposed as a maxim that it is permissible to try to secure a loan without any intention of paying it back. To be a morally acceptable maxim, we must be able to universalize the prescription and thereby make it permissible for anyone and everyone to attempt to secure a loan in that way. This faces the obvious problem that the very institution of money lending could not survive if people were generally to act like that. The maxim makes it impossible to engage in the kinds of practice that it is supposed to make permissible. It involves what Kant called a contradiction in conception. Hence it is not a morally acceptable maxim.

These brief statements remind us of the centrality of the universal in Kant’s ethics. It may be far less clear how any claim to a universal ethics can be relevant today, when we are accustomed to live with differences in ethical outlook and when part of the problem in this globalizing world lies with those who still fiercely maintain the tenets of an absolutist ethical vision. In response, let me make the same point that I made above about human rights. For progress towards a universal ethics, it matters not at all whether Kant was right in thinking that such an ethic could be established from first principles by reason alone. Progress towards a universal ethics depends upon the world as whole—or large parts of it—becoming collectively engaged in the moral evaluation of human conduct. In other words, the globalization of ethics depends upon global ethical dialogue and decision-making, and not on preparing the ground for the metaphysics of morals. What Kant saw as a purely rational project is thus supplanted by a dialogical one, in which the expression of different points of view, and even open disagreement, are a vital part of an inclusive ethical practice through which we learn to be reasonable with one another. To take one example, debate about whaling practices before the International Whaling Commission often takes a moral tone. That is as it should be. It is all too often forgotten, however, that dialogue and thoughtful decision-making rather than abuse and attack is the moral route to the resolution of such issues. Dialogue is a form of moral praxis that can help to resolve what we should and should not do; and the establishment of global dialogue to resolve moral issues is a step in the direction of a universal ethics, even if all metaphysical claims to moral universality are forlorn.

73 *Ibid.* Nor do we want for contemporary critics; see W. Walker. 2003. “Historical Perspectives on Human Rights.” In Philip Cam, ed. *Philosophy, Democracy and Education*. Seoul: Korean National Commission for UNESCO. Also available at <http://hist-phil.arts.unsw.edu.au/append/publications/>

74 It may muddy the waters to talk about animal rights as a further extension of the globalization of rights. Still, the argument can be made. For the classic attempt to extend rights to animals, see P. Singer. 1975. *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals*. New York, Random House.

Let me now sum up this part of the discussion. The great philosophical constructs of the past are in ruins. While we can admire them, they are no longer habitable. Locke's idea that human rights should be universally acknowledged in practice because they are universal in theory may have provided an intellectual warrant for the historical movement through which human rights gained ground. Yet the historical development of human rights does not depend upon the validity or otherwise of Locke's argument.⁷⁵ Universalizing human rights is a pragmatic project, which takes succor where it can, and it matters not whether we side with Locke or Bentham on their metaphysical status. Kant's notion that any rational individual can readily determine to what moral commands all should adhere appears to be naïve in face of the fact that on-going debate and disagreement is almost the *sine qua non* of the moral domain.⁷⁶ Rather than having recourse to a simple rational test, an individual's moral pronouncements are subject to the experience and perspectives of others. That is the key. It is through social intelligence rather than the Kantian applications of abstract reason that we can best determine how we should deal with our moral differences and disagreements. And it is the application of social intelligence on a global scale that will pave the way for a universal or global ethics, irrespective of any intellectual proof that an acceptable ethic must be universal.⁷⁷

The Holistic

Whether we think of Parmenides' claim that nothing is created or destroyed and that all is one, of Spinoza's view that all the modes in which the world presents itself are but aspects of an imminent God, or of Hegel's account of the inexorable unification of oppositions, holistic conceptions have been recurrent in the history of philosophy.⁷⁸ The classical conception of holism is that an entity or system is more than the sum of its parts, as when Aristotle speaks of "all those things which have several parts and in which the totality is not, as it were, a mere heap, but the whole is something besides the parts."⁷⁹ On a more radical interpretation, holism involves the claim that the parts of whatever is in question are ultimately only aspects of the whole and have no independent reality. In Spinoza, for example, all the finite modes of existence—that is, particular entities or events—are transient forms of the one necessary, indivisible, eternal, underlying substance, which is God or Nature as an active principle (*natura naturans*).⁸⁰ In the end, this implies: a double-aspect theory of mind and body in which

75 In any case, Locke's account of human rights depends upon Christian premises that cannot ground the assertion of natural rights in a global context or in a secular state.

76 In case it should have escaped, notice how readily unaided reason is supposed to be able to determine such maxims, it is worth quoting Kant's statement of the matter: "Thus I need no far-reaching ingenuity to find out what I have to do in order to possess a good will. Inexperienced in the course of world affairs and incapable of being prepared for all the chances that happen in it, I ask myself only 'Can you also will that your maxim should become a universal law?'" *Groundwork*, p. 71.

77 We could have looked at further ways in which philosophy's concern with the universal is relevant to the topic of globalization, had space permitted. Of particular note is its long standing interest in universal propositions, systematic treatment of which goes back at least to Aristotle. Aristotle's interest in universal propositions was not just for logical purposes, of course, but also for the purposes of science—at least, for the demonstrative paradigm of science that we find in the *Posterior Analytics*. The treatment of universal propositions within the Aristotelian paradigm may have been long overturned, demonstrative knowledge having been replaced by what Karl Popper called "essentially conjectural knowledge" (in *Objective Knowledge*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1972, p. vii.). Yet the search for the universal has been preserved, science being interested in relations between events that remain constant and in methods that can help to reveal such relations. Particularly in its experimental mode, it is essential that its methods are replicable and that its results are communicated. Progress in experimental science depends upon procedures that can be repeated and the results obtained by anyone with the appropriate training and apparatus. This includes those who entertain rival conjectures. It is therefore no surprise that, with the growth of science in recent centuries, it has come to provide us with a significant example of a worldwide community. The idea of the world's scientific community seems to have been recognized first by Charles Sanders Peirce in the 19th Century, and while Peirce did not employ the concept of globalization, he furnished us with an example of it. See Struan Jacobs. 2006. "Models of scientific community: Charles Sander Peirce to Thomas Kuhn." *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*. Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 163-173.

78 Forms of holism under discussion today include semantic holism in the philosophy of language, epistemic holism in confirmation theory, holism about mental contents in the philosophy of mind, and metaphysical holism in the philosophy of physics. For a recent account, see Michael Esfela. 2001. *Holism in Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Physics*, *Synthese Library*, Vol. 298. Dordrecht, Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers.

79 Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Book H 1045a, 8-10.

80 Spinoza, B. de. 2000. *Ethics*. Trans. and ed. by G. H. R. Parkinson. Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press.

mind and body are one; an epistemology in which reason reveals knowledge of the world not as a succession of particulars, but as an eternal whole (*sub specie aeternitatis*); a thoroughgoing determinism in which the individual is completely entangled in the universal web of necessity; and a politics in which individual power, which obtains in a state of nature, is transformed into the legal and moral power of society as a whole. Spinoza's holism, in short, pervades his philosophy. To take another example, the logic of Hegel takes our notions of Being to involve internal contradictions or relations of opposition, in which one notion inevitably leads to its opposite, only to end up united with it in a higher or more complex whole. This applies to things as well as to thought, making logic the mirror of metaphysics. In Hegel's metaphysics, all oppositions ultimately find their resolution in the Absolute—the one true unity in which all things move and have their being. It means that history involves a dialectical movement inevitably leading through the “strife of opposites” to ever-greater unity. Everything from individuals to whole civilizations is an instrument of the Absolute, with each successive age—the ancient Orient, Greece and Rome, Hegel's Germany—progressing to a more complex unity. This applies, in particular, to successive intellectual achievements down the ages, which turn out to be but phases through which the Absolute expresses itself as Absolute Idea. For Hegel, the inexorable march of history also represents a progression from slavery to freedom, which is progressively achieved as the desires of the individual are integrated into the unified system of the state, in which the will of each is replaced by the will of all.

Spinoza's method in his *Ethics* is a curious thing for modern readers whose conception of argument in regard to such things as cosmology and mind-body relations is conditioned by the model of testing hypotheses against empirical evidence. Proceeding as in geometry, Spinoza begins with definitions and axioms from which propositions are deduced, supposing that the most startling and fundamental truths about the universe can be derived from what is allegedly self-evident. This appears far less surprising in his system because thought or ideas and extended nature are but two aspects of the one thing, through which the human mind is directly furnished with all manner of appropriate cognitions through the application of reason. On Spinoza's account, we can produce a satisfactory theology, a true foundation for physics, and a comprehensive morality by merely thinking about it. As we all know, however, an adequate theoretical basis for physics cannot be constructed by deduction from tautologies and synthetic apriori claims, and it is high time we realized that neither can an adequate morality. That unaided reason can deliver such things from axiomatic truths is a mistake of truly historical proportions.

Things are no better when we come to Hegel. Given the paucity of evidence for thinking that human history is ruled by the dynamic he proposed, it is astonishing to gaze upon the extent of Hegel's influence on the history of thought and action. This is especially true of political thought and action, where two great roads lead from the Hegelians of the Left and the Right to communism and fascism. Hegel's metaphysics is frankly anthropomorphic, with reason writ large and made the moving force of ultimate reality. While Hegel's insistence upon the history of things has continued to gain momentum, from Darwin's account of the evolution of species to the “big bang” theory of physical cosmology, the knowledge that they supply shows reason and consciousness to supervene upon a world of mechanism in which mindedness is a local and recent excrescence rather than the essence of things. For us still to cling to a philosophical system that is inconsistent with what we know on the basis of our most powerful forms of inquiry and adjudication of evidence (viz. on the basis of scientific inquiry) would be to forfeit any claim to intellectual seriousness.

These critical remarks on method and metaphysics are not meant to show that we have nothing to learn from their proponents. When stripped of its metaphysical pretensions, the holistic vision of Spinoza and Hegel is in many ways suggestive. For example, the basic idea in both thinkers of increasing the power of the whole through the integration of conflicting forces is of general significance. When it comes to globalization, it suggests, for instance, that the integration of our national economies could bring a more powerful order to human productive effort and strengthen the world's economy. This will not happen of necessity and it would not involve the growth of a world spirit in any deep metaphysical sense. In the face of integration, we might quite properly come to speak about the growth of such a spirit, but only after the manner in which we talk about the development of team spirit. Such a development would lead people to more deeply identify with a world community and may see the withering away of the nation-state. Even so, such a phenomenon is not evidence of the truth of a radical holism. Whether or not it is viewed as such depends upon which aspect of an ambiguous figure strikes the eye. From one perspective, all the elements are subsumed in the whole, whereas from another the whole can be analyzed into its parts without remainder. As is typical in traditional metaphysics, *a priori* arguments for

either view of such matters are always inconclusive—and more importantly, they are beside the point when it comes to what is real in any sense that is worth worrying about. The development of a global spirit of collaboration that breaks down national and other barriers between peoples may promote the kind of synthesis that paves the way to a peaceful world future; and if it does, we should do what we can to foster it irrespective of whether radical metaphysical holism is true or not.

There are many humdrum ways of expressing something of the notion behind Hegel's dialectic without entering into his metaphysics. We may think of the old adage that, in matters of opinion, the truth lies somewhere in the middle, or the idea of unity in diversity, to which recourse is often made in cultivating a sense of identity amongst diverse populations.⁸¹ To take the first of these, as globalization has gained momentum in a world of diverse populations and cultures, it has become increasingly common for people to come into contact with foreign values and ways of life. This confrontation with difference shines a light back upon our otherwise unreflective ways, making us more conscious of them and ourselves. Such encounters can nurture prejudice and hostility, but they can also lead to a genuine engagement that ultimately produces a degree of fusion or blending, as that which was once foreign becomes familiar and congenial. While this has an air of the Hegelian operation of Reason about it, no weighty metaphysic is needed to comprehend it. For all the heavy lifting, the metaphysics does no effective work in enlarging our notions and modifying our practices.

'Unity in diversity' is a holistic notion in at least the sense in which it recognizes that a whole can have a property distinct from those of its parts. To take just one example of its application, consider the Javanese phrase "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" (literally "in pieces, yet one") that is usually translated as "Unity in Diversity", which is the official motto of Indonesia. The phrase comes from a 14th century Kakawin poem, employing poetic devices that derive from Sanskrit literature. The stanza in which the phrase occurs (in the last line) is worth quoting. Here it is in translation:

"It is said that the well-known Buddha and Shiva are two different substances. They are indeed different, yet how is it possible to recognize their difference in a glance, since the truth of Jina (Buddha) and the truth of Shiva is one. They are indeed different, but they are of the same kind, as there is no duality in Truth."

It may be that acceptance of the holistic metaphysical claim made in this passage would have been necessary for it to have the practical effect of promoting tolerance between Hindus and Buddhists, which was no doubt the poet's intent. Yet to set out with this intent to persuade people that the truth of the two religions is the one Truth only serves to remind us what a barrier to toleration metaphysical religious beliefs can be. And while trying to convince people of different faiths of the truth of certain metaphysical claims is one way of promoting toleration, it is unlikely to be as effective as, for example, finding practical ways for members of the two faiths to live together on an equitable basis. That would surely be a more robust measure.

The processes by which we might achieve a greater unity in diversity in a globalizing world may follow a dialectical logic, regardless of whether it is the work of the *Weltgeist*. For example, vast populations within China and India that until recently were living in the poverty of largely pre-industrial economies have begun to experience a belated industrial and post-industrial revolution, with rapid increases in their material standard of living. While the large-scale relocation of manufacturing and associated industries from the developed world have overtaken old ways of life, the new way of life also carries the seeds of its own destruction. In a world that finally has to face the threat of climate change, it is clear that the vast increase in greenhouse gas emissions is unsustainable. This does not mean returning to an agrarian past, but rather the creation of a new technological age on a global scale. Such a move forward does not imply uniformity across the planet, but as with a global system of carbon credits, it will demand unity of purpose to be achieved through cooperative mechanisms that allow for the different conditions in which local economies find themselves. To take another example, the more robust forms of individualism that have developed in the social and historical conditions of the West are increasingly being brought into contact with traditions of greater social conformity in other parts of the world. While this can have dislocating effects, in the longer run the encounter may prove to have a moderating

81 For example, "Unity in Diversity" is the motto of Indonesia, the Republic of South Africa, and the European Union. A similar conception occurs in the Latin motto *e pluribus unum* that is inscribed on the seal of the United States of America and appears on all its coins.

influence all-round and lead to beneficial social transformations. Finally, in a lighter vein, the essentially British food that was all we knew when I was growing up in Australia was largely overtaken by an array of foreign cuisines brought into the country through successive waves of migration in the 1970s and 1980s. Then a kind of blending began to occur and for the past decade or more various kinds of fusion food have become popular. In its own modest way, the blending of cuisines demonstrates that the “dialogical movement” between oppositions can indeed be a creative force and a source of richness. Many examples of this kind of synthesis can no doubt be found in all manner of things, from farming or business practice to the visual arts and music, and such syntheses are among the fruits of globalization.

The Macrocosmic

The macrocosm contrasts with the microcosm.⁸² In the history of philosophy this pair has been employed not merely to mark a distinction between the large and the small order of things, but to imply that there is a parallel between the nature of human beings and the world in which they live. We find two examples of it in Plato. In the *Philebus*, Plato has Socrates suggest that not only are our bodies composed of the same elements as we find in the universe at large, but that just as we have a soul, so the universe must have a soul, albeit one superior in all respects to our own.⁸³ To see the human soul as a pale reflection of this “wondrous regulating intelligence” is to see it as a microcosm of that which resides in the macrocosm. A second example is to be found in *The Republic*.⁸⁴ There Plato reasons that there must be a parallel between the state and the individual in regard to justice because things called by the same name must be alike, regardless of whether they are big or little. So the just man and the just state must be alike in that respect. According to Plato, there is a threefold division in the human soul, with analogous division to be found in the state. In the soul, one part is rational, another appetitive, and the third spirited. In the state, we have the counselors representing its rationality, artisans and merchants its appetite and the military its spiritedness. In a just state, each of these classes performs the function for which it is suited and does not attempt to usurp the powers of the others, and so it is with the just individual. A just individual is ruled by his reason rather than by his appetite, and his high spirits do not conspire with his desires to thwart reason.

The tendency to see the world in which we live as a macrocosmic parallel to ourselves is all the more readily illustrated outside of philosophy. The constellations of the zodiac provide a well-known example. As George Boas remarks:

“However absurd these correlations may be, men cast horoscopes, saw psychic traits in the spatial relations of the planets and constellations, and . . . saw their destiny written in the stars. The projection of the human body in the heavens, the endowment of the planets with emotions, all made the solar system . . . a great man in contrast to us little men.”⁸⁵

Even though the idea of a parallel between the macrocosm and microcosm may have largely faded from view, and we recognize what John Ruskin called the ‘pathetic fallacy’ in our tendency to assign human traits to nature, we still apply the categories of folk psychology as freely to institutions and groups as we do to individuals. We speak of what the company or the market believes, of the aspirations of nations and political parties, of the wishes of the meeting or the electorate, and of what NGOs or governments are trying to do. Nor is it clear that we are speaking merely figuratively when we apply such terms to supra-personal entities. These ways of speaking are equally explanatory and predictive of the behaviour of such entities as they are of human individuals, and it is by no means obvious that we can reduce these accounts to statements about what individual members of such bodies believe, aspire to, wish for, or are trying to do.⁸⁶ This suggests that when it comes to the social domain, we still recognize a parallel between the microcosm and the macrocosm, allowing that mindedness is in some sense social as well as individual.

82 For an extended discussion of the history of the idea, see G. Boas. 1969. *The History of Ideas: An Introduction*. New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, pp. 212-238.

83 *Philebus*, 28e-30a.

84 *The Republic*, Book IV, pp. 435-441.

85 Boas, p. 227.

76 For an argument to that effect, see A. Clark. 1994. Beliefs and desires incorporated. *Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 91, No. 8, pp. 404-425.

The idea that the individual is in many ways a microcosm of the larger social terrain is relevant to thinking about globalization. For globalization is a process marked by large-scale social transformations. Whole populations that formerly had relatively little acquaintance with one another, or that could effectively treat each other's differences as distant curiosities, are being confronted by exotic political, cultural and religious practices that increasingly impinge upon their world. Whether it is an issue about religious attire in France and Belgium, the uneasy imposition of democratic government in Afghanistan, teenagers dying their hair and listening to heavy metal music in Tokyo, or political concerns in China over the free expression of ideas through the Internet, the social terrain all around the world is undergoing transformation as a result of such things as mass migration, global conflict, and social and cultural diffusion in an electronic age. While this is a source of all kinds of issues and problems, my present purpose is merely to point to the parallel between the upheaval and transformation of the social and political landscape and that of the mental landscape of its inhabitants. In a distant echo of the ancient idea of the macrocosm and the microcosm, globalization involves not only large-scale adaptations but also the small-scale adaptation of the individuals who are subject to them.

Conclusion

We have glanced at three concepts—the universal, the holistic and the macrocosmic—that bear a relation to the global. These concepts have been central to theories and arguments that helped to shape the history of philosophy. In the cases we touched upon, I suggested that the work of the philosophers was a more or less mistaken attempt to provide a basis for political or moral life or to see the universe as rational and to model it in our image. In this respect, if I may say so, the history of philosophy is by and large a litany of mistakes—as with the history of ideas more generally. My particular concern, however, has been with two related presumptions that continually reappear. They involve the assumption that what are properly matters for social determination must have their blueprint in the natural order of things, and the supposition that matters of such moment can be ascertained through pure intellection. The history of philosophy to which I refer is therefore not just a chronology of particular mistakes, but of systematic error. We need to dispense with these presumptions. First, we need to acknowledge that such things as human rights, moral conduct, the relation of the individual to society, and indeed the whole course of human history, is not foretold in the nature of things or written in the stars. It is up to us to resolve and determine such things. Second, we need to turn away from the idea that *a priori* philosophical arguments and theories contain the solutions to social, moral and political problems. The resolution of these problems must be worked out by reflecting upon our experience and engaging in dialogue rather than by the construction of castles in the air.

In the history of philosophy, so many towering intellectual edifices have been built upon unsound foundations. Even so, we can return to these ruins in the hope of finding something useful. Reworking the intellectual materials of the past can help us to gain our bearings when we try to think about contemporary issues and problems. Today I have tried to show that we can renovate the notions of the universal, the holistic and the macrocosmic to help us think about globalization within a more pragmatic philosophy.



Isham B. Pawan Ahmad, Malaysia

Philip Cam's reexamination on the ways of conceptualizing the global from a philosophical perspective through analyzing three cognates with the global: the universal, the holistic and the macrocosmic is extremely thought provoking. Cam's attempt to evaluate what most see as a contemporary economic development, globalization through the lenses of philosophy not only reconnects the global experiment to the development in human thought but also raises again the questions of the very foundations that form the basis of human concepts of right and wrong and the role the acceptance of Western concepts of human rights that has restricted other possible interpretations of human rights from even entering the debate. Is the Western metaphysical status of rights the only way to establish rights issues? Hadn't this Western metaphysical status of rights undergone a progression of development before they became widely accepted and therefore should have been affected and bound by time and place limitations? Cam raises these questions not in order to undermine the importance of rights but rather to explore if we can expand this basis of rights to include multicultural perspectives rather than to impose and be dogmatic about it in insisting that all must conform to these principles and no other basis. Cam proposes global dialogue and thoughtful decision making as an alternative and his solution to the dogmatic insistence on universal moral overtone. Cam says, "To take one example, debate about whaling practices before the International Whaling Commission often takes a moral tone. That is as it should be. It is all too often forgotten, however, that dialogue and thoughtful decision-making rather than abuse and attack is the moral route to the resolution of such issues. Dialogue is a form of moral praxis that can help to resolve what we should and should not do; and the establishment of global dialogue to resolve moral issues is a step in the direction of a universal ethics, even if all metaphysical claims to moral universality are forlorn."⁸⁷

Cam points out that in today's multicultural world, we need to be more open to other perspectives and other historical experiences that color and shape different peoples outlook and perceptions instead of assuming our perspectives and our experiences are the only valid experience and therefore must be universalize making it form the universal basis for universal ethics. He says it may be far less clear how any claim to a universal ethics can be relevant today, when we are accustomed to live with differences in ethical outlook and when part of the problem in this globalizing world lies with those who still fiercely maintain the tenets of an absolutist ethical vision.

Cam argues that by reexamining the Western metaphysical status of right, he revealed that this idea had gone through a progression of development within the context of Western history and experience and thus should be seen contextual and not made adamant on its universal application. It is this insistent on its universal application that has stumbling block for open dialogue and moral praxis. Thus we should not begin our dialogue with others from a moral high ground of universal ethics but instead open and free dialogue. Cam calls on the figuring tower of Jeremy Bentham for support that rights are contextual. When Bentham wrote that talk of natural rights is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense, nonsense upon stilts,⁸⁸ he was directly attacking Article II of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. This is not because, according to Bentham, there are no such things as rights. Rather, Cam is arguing that there are no such things

87 Philip Cam. 2011. Three ways of conceptualizing the global: The Universal, the Holistic and the Macrocosmic, in this volume, pp. 83-92.

88 Bentham, J. 1998. *Anarchical Fallacies: Being an Examination of the Declaration of Rights Issued during the French Revolution*. www.law.georgetown.edu/faculty/lpw/documents/Bentham_Anarchical_Fallacies.pdf

as natural rights—no such things as rights anterior to the establishment of government—no such things as natural rights opposed to, or in contra-distinction to, legal rights. Cam writes: “Utilizing the ever growing acceptance of utilitarianism in today’s ethical arguments, Bentham’s argument that human rights should not be base upon natural rights which he condemns as rhetorical nonsense, merely figurative and thus removes any need to refer the argument to God. Instead the body of men is sufficient to grant and maintain these rights within the context of the society. . . . that such rights as exist have their existence only within, and relative to, a social and political setting. Indeed, showing his utilitarian colours, Bentham goes so far as to say that just as there is no right, which ought not to be maintained so long as it is upon the whole advantageous to the society that it should be maintained, so there is no right which, when the abolition of it is advantageous to society, should not be abolished.”

Cam concludes what we need in order to progress towards a universally acceptable ethics matters not on what basis we establish rights, metaphysical or otherwise, but rather in the human collective engagement. For progress towards a universal ethics, it matters not at all whether Kant was right in thinking that such an ethic could be established from first principles by reason alone. Progress towards a universal ethics depends upon the world as whole—or large parts of it—becoming collectively engaged in the moral evaluation of human conduct. In other words, the globalization of ethics depends upon global ethical dialogue and decision-making, and not on preparing the ground for the metaphysics of morals.

I must admit I find Cam’s argument for collective dialogue to be the means for progress towards universal ethics extremely inviting and tempting. It is inviting because it seeks to involve and engage all and also therefore, for these very same reasons, it is tempting for it is inclusive and can cater, respect and gain from the diverse multicultural world we all find ourselves in everywhere and anywhere today. However, the devil is always in the details, or in this case, in the lack thereof.

If we decide to boldly cast off the shackles that metaphysics has imposed on making human rights basis as the sole basis for universal ethics, and instead replace it with collective engagement, collective dialogue among men, what would form the new basis of this collective engagement of men with diverse experiences and perspectives? Could men of such diverse experiences and perspectives come to accept and agree to one set of universal ethics or is it acceptable to all that we reach some sort of range of acceptable behavior, instead of a universal ethics, a toleration of ethical views. It cannot be live and let live or a free for all, which would result in moral relativism, another impracticality given that we now live next to the others, and thus are affected by each other’s actions.

Would metaphysical dogmatism be replaced by utilitarian expediency and thus the new basis becomes mutual advantage? As the allure of utility as the measure of ethical judgment and action gains wide spread acceptance in contemporary times, could this form the new basis of ethical universalism, the basis for collective dialogue? If this becomes more acceptable, then we are face with the same ethical dilemmas that all utilitarians face, the majority may oppress the minority. Since there are no absolute rules to refer to and use as a means of protection (i.e. certain rights as incontrovertible), the majority could decide anything that is to its advantage. For example history has taught us that more than once the majority is neither always right nor kind to minorities. In fact more than not, human history is flooded with examples of the strong oppressing the weak. Western history itself is replete with history of discrimination even to extend of making the other, the minority, sub-human and enslaving them. It was not that long ago that the American laws enforced discriminations against Blacks, or European laws against Jews. One can hope that mankind has outgrown this oppressive tendency but without an absolute principle to refer to and constraint them, can we be sure the ugly head of expediency will not rise again? It is such fears that make us cling to the consolation of natural law, which makes us all equal.

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