Cultural Relativism, Human Rights and Globalization: Towards a New Ethics of Solidarity

WILMER TRIA, Ph.D *

> We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages.
> – *Whorf*

> If a tree has many firm roots, there is no need to fear the storm.
> – *Asma Abdullah*

Philosophy, in spite of Heidegger's bickering, will survive. It will continue to serve as a living force for peoples' struggles against the thrall of ignorance and as a backbone to face the jitters of this new millennium. Philosophers, however, must not allow it to grow stale by mere indulgence to futile philosophical justifications. The world is not a 'given' and world events are not predetermined moments waiting for explanations and conceptualizations. Such philosophizing is devoid of *imagination, of inspiration, of courage. Philosophy must articulate the* inarticulable to refashion, redefine and reinvent the world.

The third millenium is a refashionable universe. It does not yet exist; it is still a possibility. But its not-yet-existence is already in the hands of the present and the concrete. Philosophy has the gift to see beyond the seeable, to sense beyond the sensible. The fate of the third millenium depends on the success of a new world order known as globalization. What philosophical framework could best mould a future of imperial globalization?

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* The author holds a Ph.D in Philosophy from the *Università di San Tommaso* (*Angelicum*), Rome, in 1995. He is professor and presently the Dean of Philosophy at the Holy Rosary Minor Seminary of Naga City, Philippines.

The article comes in three parts. In the first part, I justify at length a philosophical framework called relativism. There are several forms of relativism and linguo-cultural relativism sounds to be the most moderate and acceptable form. The second part is an attempt to fit linguo-cultural relativism within the same category. To avoid solipsism and arbitrariness which makes relativism self-defeating, I have proposed the need to postulate a common world, the *phusis*, and a common rationality shared by all men. The final part is a brief description of globalization and a review of some postmodern philosophies to demonstrate the dangers of this new world order. It concludes with a proposal for a new ethics of solidarity, a solidarity of reverence and responsibility, to attenuate the negative consequences and to enhance the benefits of globalization.

I

Relativism comes in different forms. Maurice Mandelbaum distinguishes three basic forms, namely: subjective relativism, objective relativism, and conceptual relativism.[1] Subjective relativism fondles a Protagorean world of solipsism and voluntary arbitrariness. Any assertion must be viewed with respect to the beliefs and attitudes of the particular individual making the assertion. Thus, one cannot speak of truth and falsity of an assertion *simpliciter*. It is her or his world. Objective relativism believes that for every assertion, there is an accompanying reason. This reason is his point of view grounded on some aspects of the object concerned. If the first type is relative to the particular individual, the second is relative to the total context. Other individuals, therefore, may have similar assertions. The third type is dubbed by Mandelbaum as conceptual relativism. Similar to objective relativism, it holds that assertions are interpreted in reference to the context in which they are made, not with reference to the individual who makes them. Unlike the two, however, a conceptual relativist gives weight not to the individual interests, whether as individual or as having some reasons for them, but to the conceptual background which the individual carries with him in his problem-solving activity.

In his book, *Philosophy of Social Science*, Martin Hollis mentions four, namely: moral relativism, conceptual relativism, perceptual rela-

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[1] See M. Mandelbaum, "Three Forms of Relativism" in *The Monist* 62, 403-428.

tivism and relativity of truth.[2] Moral relativism explains the saying: in Rome do as the Romans do and in Athens do as the Athenians do. No matter how vague this type is, it is enough to have recourse to the fact that moral behavior varies enormously among peoples, periods, and cultures. The second type is conceptual relativism. The difficulties encountered in mechanical translation are due to this second form. Societies have their respective schemes that serve as main factors in the taxonomy, conceptualization and ordering of experiences. One society speaks of spirits to explain diseases; another speaks of HIV/AIDS. Perceptual relativism maintains that even if two persons are looking at the same object, they may actually see things differently. Lastly, relativity of truth eschews the very idea that there is anything necessarily universal even about logic. All four actually fall under the category already discussed by Mandelbaum, that is, conceptual relativism. Later in this article, we shall refer to this particular form as linguistic-cultural relativism, emphasizing the symbiotic interrelationship between language and culture in defining peoples of different geographical and epochal situations.

Objections to conceptual relativism goes back to ancient debate on reality and universals. Socrates, for instance, was interested in the definition of moral concepts. He asked questions like: What is temperance?; What is justice? Although he does not use the term universals, the correct answer to those questions specify the forms or universals. In some respects, Plato follows Socrates. Like Socrates, Plato argued that there must be definitions of concepts which are forms to explain the possibility of knowledge. These forms are real and universal.[3] Aristotle further reinforced this contention simply by denying the reality of Platonic forms and considering the actual world as real and concepts thereof as universals.

The discussion of the problem of universals continued through medieval period. In fact, it was one of the central issues addressed in

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[2] See Martin Hollis, *The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp. 236-240.

[3] See Gail Fine, *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 44. Socrates rejects answers that suffer narrow compresence of opposites. Opposed to broad compresence, narrow compresence requires something to be a form and not form in virtue of some one and the same aspect of itself. 'Standing firm in battle', for instance, has some courageous and non-courageous tokens.

those times. To the medievals, the word is the mind.[4] There is but one language for one reality. One word would have one meaning, one concept, one thought, applicable to all instances. However, with the advent of the renaissance, the national languages became important. Situations then began to change.[5]

Many twentieth century philosophers firmly believe that concepts are historical and they change from one period of history to another. One of the most significant theorists of empirical concepts is a philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn. He is credited with setting the stage and providing the conceptual tools for conceptual relativism. He may even be considered as one of the important contemporary epistemologists.[6] He was influential in the revolution of the historiography of science when he developed themes like paradigm shifts, scientific revolutions and incommensurability thesis in his celebrated book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*[7] (1962). Kuhn's theory of concepts is derived mainly from his philosophy of science. Contrary to orthodox philosophy of science, Kuhn held that science is colored by historical,

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[4] This was the issue of the realists against the nominalists, particularly of William of Champeaux against Peter Abelard. Because of the prevalence of the realists, writing and rewriting became the primary preoccupation of the medievals, especially of the monks. Paleographical research reveals that there was only one language important for the medievals, that is, Latin. See J. John, "Latin Paleography " *Medieval Studies* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992) p. 4.

[5] The greatest setback to human rationality was its experience with Copernicus (1473-1543) and Galileo (1564-1642). These scientists discovered that, for almost seventeen centuries, humanity had been deceived by the geocentric theory proposed by Ptolemy (90-168 AD). It is the sun, rather, which is at the center of the universe. The Ptolemaic system, modern philosophers realized, was actually based on the works of Aristotle. If Aristotle could err, and Scholastic philosophy and the Catholic teachings were heavily indebted to him, what was the guarantee that scholasticism and Catholic theology would not commit mistakes? The Pope himself, indeed, made a mistake when he condemned Galileo. Such experience led philosophers to pay more attention to epistemology instead of God and authority. From Descartes to Kant, investigations have been more liberal, free from church scrutiny, and more analytical in its approach

[6] See W. Tria, *The Epistemology of Thomas Kuhn* (Rome: Tipografica Leberit, 1995). Hereafter cited as ETK. In this work, I have pointed out that Kuhn's epistemology is a modification of that of Kant. Kant's approach is non-genetic, whereas Kuhn's is genetic. Kuhn's epistemology, therefore, welcomes growth of knowledge and gives merit to bodies of knowledge found in scientific communities and cultures. See ETK, pp. 139-144.

[7] Hereafter cited as *SSR*.

sociological and psychological elements. In the 1920s, the logical positivists thought that observations are pure, data are neat facts and, therefore, empirical concepts are ahistorical, unchangeable and can be represented by logical symbols. Logical empiricists, for instance, believed in "raw," "untainted," "ahistorical," "pure" facts. Kuhn, however, like P. Feyerabend (1958) and N. Hanson (1958), believed that observations are theory-laden.[8] Empirical concepts, therefore, are laden with historical, sociological and psychological elements and, therefore, change from one scientific episode to another.

That empirical concepts change is one of the topics discussed in detail by Kuhn in the succeeding articles after the *SSR*. In his writings in the early seventies, empirical concepts are immediate products of perception. As products of perception, however, they cannot be universals. They have particular attributes. First, he distinguishes stimulus from sensation. 'Much neural processing takes place between the recipient of the stimulus and the awareness of sensation.'[9] This sensation or perception is schematized by the learned similarity relations in the perceptual space to produce the sense datum language, also called 'bits of language'.[10] A series of differentiation takes place between perception and the learned similarity relations to produce the basic vocabulary or the empirical concept. The relation between perception and language, therefore, is not linear, but involves a process of differentiation. This differentiation or dialectical process takes place in the perceptual space. Concepts, therefore, do not respond *simpliciter* to nature. Two individuals may use the same word, yet have two different concepts on the same thing!

From 1979 onwards, Kuhnian epistemology became linguistically oriented. Conceptual change is no longer a regrouping in the perceptual space, but in the lexicon.[11] Such organization is called lexical

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[8] See P. Feyerabend, "An Attempt at a Realistic Interpretation of Experience" in *Proceeding of the Aristotelian Society*, 58:143-170 and N. Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

[9] *SSR*, pp. 192-193.

[10] P. Hoyningen-Huene, *Reconstructing Scientific Revolutions: Thomas S. Kuhn's Philosophy of Science.* Trans. A. Levine (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 95.

[11] Kuhn, "Possible Worlds in History of Science" in *Possible Worlds in Humanities, Arts and Sciences,* ed. S. Allen. pp. 49-51.

taxonomy. First, the student learns empirical concepts by analogy or metaphor-like process. Learning by metaphors has a double role, namely: the ostension of examples and the ostension of words. Through repetition, one can have an adequate knowledge of concepts. Learning by exemplars, however, is open-ended and inexplicit. Since one learns concepts not by definitions but by analogy, learned concepts are not universals and immutable. Further, this also implies that the knowledge of nature becomes dependent on language. The way of seeing the world is importantly contingent on language. Until it has been acquired, one does not see the world at all.

Meanwhile in 1966, Alasdair MacIntyre published *A Short History of Ethics.* He is one of those contemporary thinkers who have been greatly influenced by the New Philosophy of Science, especially by Kuhn himself. MacIntyre applied the new historiography to Ethics, four years after the publication of the *SSR.*

According to MacIntyre, ethics has been taught as if it were ahistorical, as if out of the blue, there came a set of moral principles.[12] Rather, ethical concepts are developed and are best understood by going back to their history.[13]

Moral concepts have the following characteristics. First, "moral concepts change as social life changes."[14] The Greek *dikaiosune,* for instance, has greatly changed from one social context to another.[15] They

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[12] MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1966) p. 1.

[13] Attempts to present ideas from the historical perspective did not principally start with Kuhn and MacIntyre, but from authors of the first half of the century like W.D. Ross, A.J. Ayer, R.T. Gunther and so on. For a comprehensive study of concepts from the historical perspective, see *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Selected Studies of Pivotal Ideas,* ed. P. Wiener, vols. I-IV (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968).

[14] MacIntyre, p. 1.

[15] For his thorough description of the changing conceptions of justice, see MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) pp. 244-455. Regarding ancient conceptions of justice, see also G. Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy,* vols. I-II, ed by D.W. Graham (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1995). In vol. II, pages 69-103, he discusses the differences between Plato's and Aristotle's conception of justice. According to Aristotle, it both meant comprehensiveness and as a name for social virtue, "the virtue of which each has his own," a view from the standpoint of the recipient (pp. 71-73) while for

are different because there are two different forms of social life to which those terms belong. Second, though they belong to different social milieu, two different moral concepts still have relations. They overlap. Thus, *dikaiosune* and *justice* are not totally irrelevant to each other. Third, a concept involves behavior. To alter concepts is to alter behavior.[16] He cites the following cases. Socrates was condemned by the Athenians. Hobbes' *Leviathan* was condemned in 1666 by the English Parliament. Philosophical books were burned by the Nazis. These condemnations have only one reason: the refusal to change the accepted behavior. Therefore, two concepts of two sociological milieu mean two kinds of behavior. The sophists loved rhetorics and pretension. Socrates loved silence and the acceptance of ignorance.

Moral concepts, like empirical concepts, are learned not by definition but by ostension of examples. A person being initiated into a community receives instructions from a teacher of morals who already belongs to a linguistic group, with his own set of standards of recognized list of values. Learned concepts, therefore, are learned ends, rules and virtues which may differ from the other linguistic groups.[17] Therefore, moral concepts, like empirical concepts, are historical and they change as social environment changes.

Conceptual relativism does not only warrant conceptual changes, but insists on the incommensurability of two different conceptual schemes. Using political revolutions as metaphor,[18] Kuhn illustrates in the *SSR* the behavior of two competing paradigms. If one is accepted, the other one must be rejected. No two competing theories can exist at the same time. Competing paradigms employ different methods, prob-

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Plato, it is "doing one's own", a view from the standpoint of the agent (p. 77). The different standpoints are significant. Plato sees it as a duty, while Aristotle sees it as a right.

[16] MacIntyre, pp. 2-3.

[17] See MacIntyre, p. 266. He writes: "Within each of these moralities (Aristotelianism, primitive Christian simplicity, the puritan ethic, the aristocratic ethic of consumption and the traditions of democracy and socialism) there is a proposed end or ends, a set of rules, a list of virtues. But the ends, the rules, the virtues, differ... Between the adherents of rival moralities and between the adherents of one morality and the adherents of none, there exists no court of appeal, no impersonal neutral standard."

[18] See *SSR*, pp. 92-94.

lem-fields, and standard of solutions accepted by a mature scientific community.

Incommensurability or lack of common language in the *SSR* forced Kuhn to deny the correspondence between the stimulus and sensation in the *Postscript*. In his later writings, Kuhn developed the undefinability and untranslatability of empirical concepts. He writes: "different translators may differ, and the same translator may make different choices in different places even though the terms involved are in neither language ambiguous."[19] Here Kuhn denies Quine's concept of radical translator, that a "quasi-mechanical activity governed in full by a manual which specifies a function of context, which string in one language may, *salva veritate*, be substituted for a given string in the other."[20] If two theories are incommensurable, they must be stated on mutually untranslatable languages.[21] Since concepts are learned not by definitions but through metaphors, the price they have to pay is untranslatability. However, incommensurability does not mean incomparability and untranslatability does not mean unlearnability. Kuhn admits universal learnability of languages while denies the universal translatability of languages. To possess a lexicon is to have access to the linguistic community. Learning and translating are two different activities. Learning other languages produces bilinguals and multilinguals, but not translators.

One final point. According to Kuhn, there is a fine difference between the way adult members of a speaking community embody the relation between language and the world and the way children do so in the language acquisition process. The child is instructor-dependent ready to undergo initiation. He is initiated to the world and language that are already bound together by the speaking community.[22] In his

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[19] Kuhn, "Possible Worlds in History of Science", p. 12; Kuhn, "Dubbing and Redubbing" in *Scientific Theories. Minnesota Studies in Philosophy of Science 14* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) p. 300.

[20] Kuhn, "Possible Worlds in History of Science", p. 11.

[21] Kuhn, "Commensurability, Comparability, Communicability" in *PSA 1982*, pp. 669-670; see also *Possible Worlds*; and, *Dubbing and Redubbing*.

[22] Ostension, a manifest demonstration, is an activity that consists of both linguistic and behavioral moments. The instructor ostends different members of a similarity class he has already established. It is an initiation into a phenomenal world. See *SSR*, pp. 46-47; 191-194.

article, "Ethnography of Speaking," Dell Hymes, further pushed the issue. To be affiliated to the speaking community is equal to becoming a human being, to receiving the world and language together as one reality.[23] He presents the case of feral, autistic or aphasic children. These children are incapable of human language. Their behavior, therefore, are less human – similar to highly domesticated animals. They may be able to adapt to their surroundings, perform minimal tasks, and interact with others in a simplified manner. But these children never really enter 'the human world of reciprocal interaction, promises, common understanding, and creative expression.' A man is therefore less human if he has no access to the human language and human world.

II

Why call this linguistic-cultural relativism? Culture is embodied in the language of the community. One may even say that when a special language system begins to exist, a community has come into being. The form of the language expresses the conscious manner of thinking of the people using the language. There is a parallelism between the operation of thinking and the operation of the language. In the same article, Hymes claims that speech is a form of human behavior which constitutes and influences our experience of the world around us, both physical and social.[24] Language embodies important cultural features.

Another name for conceptual relativism is cultural relativism. Cultural relativism, originally a key concept in anthropology, asserts that each culture has its own core values and practices. In this light, anthropologists stressed that the study of customs and norms should be value-free and the role of an 'outsider' is that of an observer and recorder. This type of relativism maintains that cultures are determinants of the mental schemes of different societies for perception, conceptualization and even for making moral judgments.

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[23] See D. Hymes. "The Ethnography of Speaking," in *Anthropology and Human Behavior*, 1962. See also J. Gill. "Language and Reality: One More Time" in *Philosophy Today* 41:2 (1997), p. 260.

[24] Hymes, *ibid.*

Cultural relativism became a part of epistemological lexicon when Putnam accused Rorty of supporting such position.[25] As a staunch respecter of objectivism, Putnam considers cultural relativism as "perhaps the most influential, and definitely the most dangerous, form of naturalized epistemology extant."[26] Such relativism reduces rationality to whatever a given culture takes it to be. Thus, the name.

Linguistic-cultural relativism, whether anthropological or epistemological, could yield a lot of problems to many issues. One of those issues that could greatly be affected by this relativism is the Human Rights issue. Anthropologists who are committed to safeguarding the rights of people will have, at certain points, to abandon even this seemingly moderate form of relativism. In 1947, the executive board of the American Anthropological Association did not participate in a discussion that led to the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights"[27] in the belief that no such declaration would be applicable to all human beings. Yet in the past, anthropologists did not hesitate to condemn Nazi genocide and South African apartheid.

Is "All Human Rights for All"[28] possible even within the framework of linguistic-cultural relativism? Or must we abandon one in favor of the other?

There are rights that are easily discernible as inherent in man and therefore classified as 'universal'. But others are seen more as culturally determined. To draw the line, however, is not an easy task. First, the understanding of humanity varies. From an outsider's view, Nazi genocide was deplorable. At that given time, however, the Nazis

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[25] See R. L. Jackson, "Cultural Imperialism or Benign Relativism? A Putnam-Rorty Debate" in *International Philosophical Quarterly* XXVIII, 4:112 (1988) pp. 387, 388, 392. Culture as a philosophical foundation has also be treated thoroughly by Rorty in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 390.

[27] Adapted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. See M. Carlos Vilian Duran, "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: a landmark history – a vision for the future" (Speech delivered on behalf of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Official conference on the 29th Study Session, Institut International des Droits de L'Homme, Strasbourg, France, 6 July 1998.)

[28] Theme of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

failed to realize that genocide was a such violation of human rights for, in the first place, they did not see the Jews as fellow human beings! Second, some acts are seen to have rich cultural values rather than as violations of rights, such as female circumcision in Sudan and honor killings in Japan and the Middle East; or seen to have pragmatic results, like domestic violence – for emample the spanking of children is considered as an effective form of discipline. Third, the lack of education excuses or even excludes certain peoples from the so-called human rights culture, like the clashes and communal killings in Rwanda between the Tutsis and the Hutus.

In the cases mentioned above, can we say that linguistic-cultural relativism is a barrier to the integral development of the human person and therefore must be rejected?

Rorty is in defense of this form of relativism. In his article, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality," Rorty denied the role of Platonic-Kantian foundationalism as basis of "human rights culture."[29] To him, whether all human beings have those rights enumerated in the Helsinki Declaration is not the right question. Attempts to answer such a question will certainly conflict with cultural relativism. The human rights culture, if it were founded on the Platonic ideal or the Kantian moral obligation, would present itself as a superior culture over other cultures in the world. Rorty refuses to recommend such mentality.

According to Rorty, the human rights culture is not based on the universal nature of man or shared rationality. He writes: "We seek our task as a matter of making our culture – the human rights culture – more self-conscious and more powerful, rather than of demonstrating its superiority to other cultures by an appeal to something transcultural."[30] No one has the right to make such an assertion, for no one is a cultural arbiter! Instead, Rorty appeals to the irrational, that is, sentimentalism. He recommends sentimental education to youngsters so that they will be less tempted to consider those different from themselves as only quasi-human. The goal of this irrationalist

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[29] Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" in *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993* ed. Shute, S. & Susan Hurley (New York: Basic Books, 1993) p. 115.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

sentimentalism is the growing expansion of the concept of humanity, from 'our tribe' or 'our nation' to 'our world.' Within this content, the intolerant should not be considered as irrational or lacking human understanding, but as deprived of 'good upbringing', 'security' and 'sympathy.'[31] Not the force of reason or the weight of argument, but the art of listening – 'the softening of his self-satisfied heart of a leisure class,' is that which enables man to see others unlike himself as fellow human beings.

Rorty's failure, however, lies in his admission of sentimentalism as irrational. The sentimentalism that he suggests, the education of the sentiment that he recommends, are still rational. The ability to understand and feel are both elements of rationality! To be fully human is to have both intelligence and compassion.[32] Furthermore, two forms of rationality must also be distinguished. The first is value-rationality which is definitely culture-bound. It is the rationality couched in a scheme of a particular culture and language. It is the 'voice', often dominating, that engages in discourse. The other one is the non-schematized, inexpressible rationality. Though inarticulable, this second type of rationality must be postulated, similar to the Platonic ideas, as the foundation of all shared predicaments. Dialogue, conversation, discourse, or listening, are activities that facilitate the agreement between two incommensurable worlds. Value-rationality helps us understand why, for instance, certain human rights issues remain debatable, such as gender issues, gay rights, pro-choice, death penalty, etc. Yet some of these issues can easily reach agreement. The reason for this agreement is basic or shared rationality. Other cultures and languages are learnable because of a hypothetically postulated common world. Third, the aim of the dialogue is not exactly to reach a Habermasian consensus, that is, to get the opinion of the majority in achieving the universal. The unequal encounter of two speakers or two cultures may not vouch for a healthy consensus. The superior al-

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[31] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

[32] See H. Skolimowski, *The Participatory Mind: A New Theory of Knowledge and of the Universe* (Arkana: Penguin Books, 1994) pp. 18-26. The author provides a beautiful analysis of the Western misconception of Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal. Rationality was equated to intelligence and to score low in IQ tests was an indication of a 'low status on the ladder of humanity.' Yet 'anyone who is completely void of compassion ... hardly deserves the name of human being.' Skolimowski, *ibid.*, p. 18.

ways becomes the majority. Who will defend, for instance, fetal rights? What consensus can be reached with the encounter between humans who can speak and humans who cannot? Or who will defend the rights of indigenous peoples? Rather, the goal must be the discovery of a common duty or responsibility toward the other, the discovery of new forms of human solidarity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not only a list of those agreed rights of man. It is a rough sketch of a long lost brotherhood or sisterhood that perhaps is found in the landscape of the Platonic world of ideas.

Linguistic-cultural relativism, therefore, must admit and postulate the existence of an absolute truth as the ultimate point of reference. It must admit that there are supracultural elements in value-rationality. What this type denies is the monopoly of a single type of human expression to represent the absolute. To postulate common humanity is necessary to account for the relative success in communication. One culture can communicate to another culture. Certain agreements seem to be transcultural or 'universal' because of the postulated existence of a common universe. However, they are only provisionary. They may be stable relatively speaking, but never static; they may have universal appeal, but they are not universals. Value-rationality is cultural, and therefore, finds its validity only in a definite historical period and cultural context.

At this point, I wish to bring back the Kuhnian model to illustrate cultural relativism in understanding pluralism and identify the principles underlying it. In his earlier writings, Kuhn speaks of two worlds. He follows the Kantian distinction between the *Ding an sich* and the *Erscheinungswelt*.[33] The *Ding an sich* or, in Kuhn's term, the *Welt an sich* is the indeterminate and the indescribable world. He cites three of its characteristics, namely: unchangeability, unknowability, and inaccessibility.[34] The *Welt an sich* is the world outside the epistemic subject, uninfluenced by observation and theory. Kuhn also calls this the postulated immutable world in the *Postscript*.[35] This world is only assumed for epistemological reasons, that is, to avoid individual and social solipsism.

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[33] See *ETK*, pp. 93-105.

[34] *ETK*, p. 94.

[35] *SSR*, p. 193.

The *Erscheinungswelt* changes during scientific revolutions or paradigm shifts. It is paradigm-dependent so that when the paradigm changes, the world itself changes with it.[36] Kuhn, however, departs from Kant when he said that there is a multitude of phenomenal worlds. During crisis, when candidate paradigms proliferate, phenomenal worlds also proliferate. Two competing paradigms are two incommensurable phenomenal worlds. This plurality is consistent with Kuhn's denial of neutral-observation language which he substitutes with theory-laden observations. The *Welt an sich* is inaccessible and there can be no single phenomenal world, but a multiple possible reconstruction of the unknown world. Moreover, this phenomenal world is both natural and conceptual.[37] He insists that this world is still the actual world of the scientists and the world where the actual spoken language applies. These two aspects can be distinguished, but they are inseparable. When the phenomenal world changes, conceptual change also occurs.

In the particular cultural community, the core value is the *nomos*,[38] that which is shared by all the members of a cultural community. It is the factor that facilitates communication. To achieve relative unity, therefore, one community must have its own *nomos*. Yet the same community can still communicate with other cultures with relative success because of the *phusis*.[39] It is to be postulated as the *Welt an sich*. It is the rationality found in all contemplative creatures. A single and uniform expression of it is impossible. The *nomos* is the 'voice' of reason, *phusis* the reason behind the 'voice.'

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[36] *SSR*, p. 111.

[37] *ETK*, pp. 105-107. Kuhn published three important articles on the theme that the phenomenal world also refers to the shared language. See "Metaphor in Science" in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. A. Ortony (Cambridge University Press, 1979) pp. 409-419; "Rationality and Theory Choice" in *Journal of Philosophy* 1983/80:563-570; and "Possible Worlds in History of Science" in *Possible Worlds in Humanities, Arts and Sciences*, ed. A. Allen (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989) pp. 9-32.

[38] The Greek term means 'convention' or 'law'. It is, therefore, similar to Kuhn's concept of paradigm, i.e. that which is shared by a community. The *nomos* ensures social and political order, a way of singing the world to communicate the harmony of justice. See D. M. Levin, "Singing the World: Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Language" in *Philosophy Today* 42:3 (1998) p. 320. See also M. McCarthy, "Pluralism, Invariance and Conflict" in *The Review of Metaphysics* LI:1.201 (1997) p. 7.

[39] The Greek term means 'nature'. In Kuhn's epistemology, it is the *Welt an sich*, the unchangeable and inarticulable world. See M. McCarthy, *ibid*.

A radical full-blooded linguistic-cultural relativism betrays the very purpose of contention, discourse or debate. Such theory is futile, aimless, and unphilosophical. To refuse to postulate a common humanity, a common rationality, or even a common world is altogether absurd. Agreement through discourse is possible. The unifying principle is the postulated rationality shared by all humans.

No one may even, in the absolute sense, be committed to a 'soft' version of relativism. One should realize that it is but one of those frameworks of understanding. Imposing on such a framework tends to be imperialistic, if not totalitarian.

It is enough for a relativist or its disciple to realize that s/he has no monopoly of the truth. One must therefore adopt an open-minded attitude towards the culture of another, if s/he is to learn from it. Careful listening is the immediate effect of such an attitude. All doors must be closed to ethnocentrism. There are no superior cultures, not the Western culture, not even the human rights culture. Universal appeal does not warrant a healthy consensus. Take, for instance, the human universal that women are in some degree inferior to men.[40] In one of his least studied lectures, "On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy," Kant castigates those who assume an arrogant, elevated tone, implying in effect, their privileged access to a realm of knowledge denied to all other people.[41]

To maintain a workable framework, relativism should not overstress the cultural variety through anthropological evidences, but the need for a certain degree of toleration and respect for another's culture. After all, each culture has its own right to be "stubborn" and to be committed to its own *nomos* or core values. In fact, it is her duty. A missionary must carefully listen to its own peculiar rationality and learn from its own internal logic.

Furthermore, relativism must not dwell on skepticism. Hume himself, in all his skepticism, admits common humanity. Unlike Kuhn and Rorty, Platonic foundation must not be altogether dismissed. There

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[40] For a thorough treatment of this human universal, see R. Ty. "Men's Rights and Women's Rights: The Politics of Cultural Constructions About Gender Roles in Society," in *Journal of Reproductive Health, Rights and Ethics*, vol. 3 (1997) pp. 43-52.

[41] See P. Fenves, *Raising the Tone of Philosophy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

is a shared humanity and a shared rationality. Rather, relativism must push for the possibility of a 'more or less' stable, but not static, agreement through discourse. A cosmopolitan attitude must be promoted. Certain principles with 'more or less' universal appeal and acceptability are discernible. A universal declaration of human rights, therefore, is possible.

Lastly, relativism must stress the need to adopt a more integral methodological discourse of reason and feelings, of rights and duties, of seeing and listening, of enlightenment and compassion, for the discernment of more comprehensive and lasting principles.

III

With the fall of the Berlin Wall marking the collapse of communism and the reunification of the states, reforms in both political and economic policies became necessary. Some nations felt the need to find new markets, raw materials, sources of cheap labor and open their once closed economies. These movements developed into a phenomenon called globalization, a new paradigm for world order. It is also known as international trade. This phenomenon is at the same time a by-product of technological advancement making the flow of products and capital across the globe faster and more extensive.

Globalization is primarily an economic issue. There is an expansion of transborder financial flows with impact upon the monetary and exchange policies of national economies, the globalization of production and the ensuing expansion of world trade flows, the growing uniformity in the institutional and regulatory framework in all countries such as the World Trade Organization. It is also connected to a revolution on production patterns leading to a significant shift in the comparative advantages of nations. Abundant labor is no longer perceived as an advantage, but the quality of human resources, of knowledge, of science and technology applied to production methods.

The effects of this new world order could be enormous. This brings about the need to study closely its framework. What could be the implications of globalization to culture and the different sectors of the society? With its movement towards a borderless world, what could be the local as well as the global effects? The interconnection of economics and politics and culture cannot be underestimated.

As of the present, there has been progress in some areas of social and economic development. The global wealth of nations has multiplied sevenfold in the past fifty years and international trade has grown even more dramatically; life expectancy, literacy and primary education, and access to basic health care, including family planning have increased in the majority of countries; democratic pluralism, democratic institutions and fundamental civil liberties have expanded. Decolonization efforts have achieved progress among which is the eradication of apartheid.[42]

Still too many people, mainly women and children, are vulnerable to stress and deprivation. Poverty and unemployment result in isolation, marginalization and violence. The gap between rich and poor has widened. Policies prioritizing capital regions and cities exist in Asian and African continents leaving many regions abounding in natural resources exploited and underdeveloped. More than one billion people live in subhuman conditions; a large proportion of whom are women. The unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, are major factors of the continued deterioration of the global environment. The disabled are among the world's largest minorities who are more often forced to poverty and social isolation. How about the millions of refugees who are at the mercy of their host countries? [43]

In the Philippines, the negative effects of globalization have been unparalleled. Oil deregulation and trade liberalization, the selling of some public utilities, the continuous land conversion in the suburban areas from agricultural to commercial and industrial, the contractualization of labor, the exodus of less competitive industries from the market, export oriented commerce, have all caused fears among small businessmen and consumers and poor sectors of the society.[44]

Globalization, which has increased human mobility, enhanced global communication and promoted cross-fertilization of ideals and cultural values, also threatens the integrity of home-grown cultures.

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[42] See *The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action: World Summit for Social Development* (New York: United Nations, 1995) p. 6.

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

[44] See J. Raquedan. "Globalization and Human Rights" in *The Human Rights Agenda* 3:1 (1998) pp. 1, 3. See also *The National Situationer* (ICSI, December 1999).

In the first place, global capitalism is Westernization. It is effectively the export of Western commodities, values, priorities, ways of life. National governments are slowly giving in to a new leadership, the leadership of Western corporations. At the outset, an unequal cultural encounter is evident. What are, for instance, the intentions of Western leadership?

With the advent of the neoliberal world order, cultural identity of nations is under increasing attack by new means of international communication and information flow. The dominance of Western cultures in the media is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. With the appearance of global concepts of movies, shows and series, as well as the growing of a global audience of a concentrated media ownership are phenomena that lead towards the homogenization of cultures."[45]

Media is the most powerful instrument to promote social, structural and cultural changes. However, knowing its power potential – whose reality is presented? There is a growing decline of public broadcasting in favor of commercial broadcasting, like game and talk shows. The cinema industry also shows the signs of globalization or Americanization. US produced films shown in cinemas across the world continue to grow in popularity. Take for instance the *Titanic* and *Silence of the Lambs*. Meanwhile local cinemas have experienced enormous decline. Even if there is the localization focus in TV, it still carries a large amount of American-style, popular culture programming. This falls in line with general programming offered through the globalized media firms. Media is responsible for the emergence of a world culture.[46]

TV and cinema are only passive forms of communication. An active, and therefore more powerful, one is the Internet. The user chooses what s/he is prepared to see. Feedback is direct through interactive

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[45] "Communications and Culture Transformation: Cultural Diversity, Globalization and Cultural Convergence." Project Presented to the European University, Barcelona, June 1998. Downloaded on March 17, 1999 from http://www.stephweb.com/capstone/3.htm. See also Lourdes Quisumbing, "The Use and Misuse of the New Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in *A Reader on Information and Communication Technology Planning for Development*, ed. F. Rosario-Braid and R. Tuason (Manila: Katha Publication Co., Inc, 1998) pp. 60-64. Quisumbing speaks about the dangers of cultural homogenization which is a one way flow of information from the dominant culture to the subjected culture.

[46] "Communications and Culture Transformation," *ibid.*

games and chatting. One can easily go around the world. Countries and cultures are only 'a single mouse click away.' According to recent studies, users are projected to be 250 million by the year 2000 and 300 million by 2005.[47] The internet, therefore, has become a medium of a developing 'universal' language. It is a superhighway of information on the globe. However, it can both be a pathway of good and bad values. Among the bad is cyberspace pornography.[48] It makes conservative cultures practically defenseless. And since no genuine consent is present when women become its objects, human dignity is destroyed. The United States has condemned sexual harassment in the workplace, but it has not said anything against feminine pornography!

Cultural homogenization is the inevitable effect of globalization. With the massive flow of concepts and values from the dominant cultures to the subjected, weak and endangered cultures, cultural genocide will without fail be the catastrophic consequence.

Given this new paradigm, the traditional division of East-West and North-South is reduced to inclusion and exclusion, those that can "participate in and share the benefits of globalization and those which do not. The former are generally associated with the idea of progress, improvement and wealth; the latter, with exclusion, margin-alization and misery."[49] Globalization opens wide many doors of opportunities, but the price it has to pay is exclusion, violence and injustice.

Whether we need it or not, economic globalization is the new international order. We must accept it with the sense of realism. It has multiplied wealth and productivity on an unprecedented scale. However, the rapid changes in the economic order has also been accompanied by social disintegration and isolation. If we want philosophy to be responsive to the social context in which it occurs, we must look for some answers to the problem. What can philosophy offer to our times? Globalization certainly has social, political and cultural implications.

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[47] See http://www.monitor.com. See also http://www.cyberatlas.com/big_picture/demographics/data.html. The survey was conducted on 31 March 1999.

[48] See Anne Wells Branscomb, "Internet Babylon? Does the Carnegie Mellon Study of Pornography in the Information Superhighway Reveal a Threat to the Stability of the Society?" In *The Georgetown Law Journal* 83:5 (1995) pp. 1935-1957.

[49] F. H. Cardoso. "Social Consequences of Globalization: Marginalization or Improvement" at the Indian Intercultural Centre (New Delhi, 1996).

Thinkers must offer proposals to mitigate its negative consequences and to fully enjoy its benefits.

The third millenium is characterized by a tendency to seek a universal or global culture. This tendency is being fashioned by a mentality we have identified above as value-rationality that seeks power, order, progress, development, scientific and technological advance, increase of efficiency and productivity. It is geared towards the establishment of an imperial world of one law, one citizenship, one currency, one language, and one culture. This mentality is evident with the growing acceptability of the human rights culture, in the increasing power and recognition of the United Nations and International laws, as well as the continued optimism toward globalization.

Philosophy, however, must be quick to identify the dangers of such mentality. Globalization is a new form of totalitarianism. Although its main agenda is to expand economic opportunities to other countries, this new international program is monopolistic, assimilative, and consequently leads to exclusion, violence and injustice. It has created poor countries that cannot share the fruits of the program. It has marginalized the developing countries and many small unrepresented sectors of the society. It has deleted the small business from the folders of powerful companies. Two contemporary philosophers may be of help, namely: Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-François Lyotard. From their philosophies we may find a new ethics of solidarity.[50]

According to Levinas, ontology is the reduction of the other to the self.[51] He sensed the totalizing mentality of that self. The self is monopolistic. It enjoys a panoramic vision of the other, placing the other from its selfish perspective. Totalitarianism is a philosophy of power and injustice.[52] The monopolistic self enjoys the value of order, harmony and system. Knowing the flaw of the self, naturally there will be categories that cannot be accommodated by the self. It cuts out any-

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[50] Some writers have found a close similarity between the thought of Levinas and Lyotard. See Hent de Vries, "On Obligation: Lyotard and Levinas" in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 20:2-21:1 (1998) pp. 83-112; and, A.T. Nuyen. "The Trouble with Tolerance" *in American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXXI:1 (1997) pp. 1-12.

[51] Levinas. *Totality and Infinity*. Trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Dusquesne University Press, 1969) p. 34.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

thing that eludes it.[53] Similar to Rorty's position, those that cannot be accommodated are then classified as 'different from us.'[54] The Nazis saw the Jews as different. The Whites saw the Blacks as different. Men see women and children as different. Currently, ethnic Albanians are driven out from Kosovo for Serbs see them as different. The 'different' is that which is outside of one's conceptual scheme. The project of modernity is to enlarge the conceptual scheme, to totalize humanity. The natural consequence is exclusion, violence and marginalization. Levinas ethical project is to resolve the problem of how to enter the world of another without violating its alterity. The aim is to break the wall of totalitarianism. He introduces the concept of infinity. The other is infinitely irreducible to the self. With the 'other', the self has an infinite responsibility.[55] The new ethic of solidarity, therefore, is characterized by sensitivity to the other as 'other.' Levinas calls for a special listening attitude to the 'alterity' of the other.

Similarly, Lyotard bewails totalitarianism. In his radical pluralism, Lyotard advocates cultural relativism without universal rules. Two cultures (phrases) are incommensurable because of the different rules of discourse. What is expressible in one is not expressible in the other. The other that cannot speak is the differend.[56] To resolve a conflict in terms of the one is an injustice to the other. If the voice of one rationality dominates the discourse, that is totalitarianism. The unity of all voices, therefore, is dangerous. There is no metanarrative, no single rule applicable to all humans, less it will inflict violence and terror on the voice of those that are unpresentable. In his ethics, Lyotard challenges to present the unpresentable, to allow the differend to emerge from silence. Following the Levinasian ethics, Lyotard insists on the primacy of the other. Obligation emanates not from the self but from

[53] This position is similar to T. Adorno's 'identity thinking.' Reason is in search of identities. To think is to identify. For his critique, see T. Adorno. *Negative Dialectics.* Trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973).

[54] See Rorty, *ibid.* pp. 112-113. Earlier in this paper, mention was also made regarding Rorty's call to enlarge the concept of humanity.

[55] The Ethics of Responsibility is developed in Levinas' philosophy of the Face. The face summons, claims, recalls the self to responsibility. See *Outside the Subject.* Trans. M. Smith (Standford: Stanford University Press, 1994) pp. 93-94. See also *Totality and Infinity*, p. 50.

[56] See Lyotard. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute.* Trans. G. Ven den Abeele (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1986).

the world of the other. Hence, the otherness of the other is the basis of human rights. Following the thoughts of Hannah Arendt, Lyotard writes: "What makes human beings alike is the fact that every human being carries within him the figure of the other. The likeness that they have in common follows from the difference of each from each."[57]

Obviously, the new ethics of solidarity is that of responsibility. The 'other' are those beyond our comprehension, those that we cannot fathom, those that 'do not belong to us.' They are the unwanted fetuses, the unproductive elderly and disabled, the ignoramus of the mountains and undeveloped provinces, those who do not belong to our gender, our race, our faith, our culture, or our institution, and so on. In globalization, the 'other' are the countries which cannot learn the language of global economy, those which undergo fundamental political, economic and social transformation, those in the process of consolidating peace and democracy, those undergoing economic transition, and those states making efforts towards self-determination, like East Timor and West Papua of Indonesia. These peoples excluded from the totalitarian scheme of globalization become less human. With the given situation, we must hold on to an ethics that gives primacy to the 'other,' not the traditional ethics of conformity and totalitarianism. The 'other' who cannot speak our language invite us to listen to their language, to the voiceless reason that we also share with them as fellow humans. Careful listening allows us to enter their world without violating their alterity. Following the challenge of the encyclical, we must remove the mentality that "equates personal dignity with the capacity for verbal and explicit, or at least perceptible, communication." (EV 19) Every 'other' has a silent language that elicits our special care and attention. Coordination and cooperation, the commitment of the United Nations and other international agencies, can only be achieved with relative success under this new solidarity of responsibility.

Another new ethics is the solidarity of reverence. Though one must be cautious with the dangers of globalization, it should not lead to pessimism. In spite of the price globalization has to pay, we must not altogether close our minds to this new paradigm. We must welcome the idea of a 'cosmopolitan culture.' There should be no room for

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[57] Lyotard. "The Other's Rights" in *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures,* ed. S. Shute & Susan Hurley (New York: Basic Books, 1993) p. 136.

xenophobic attitudes, intolerance, racial and religious discrimination, and other forms of hatred. There is no reason for us to be insecure. After all, imperial languages die, not the native ones. 'Universal' languages may be learnable and may facilitate inter-communication, but they are only superficial. They are only special artifacts. True, cultures converge, but only artificially. According to Kuhn, there is actually no world to which this 'enlarged' lexicon applies.[58] Meanwhile, local languages and cultures will not be completely abraded. There is always a home environment, the internal meaning structure that determines local languages and cultures. The home environment remains a base. The language's adaptation to it is necessary. It may incorporate some cosmopolitan or universal cultures, but it maintains a strong link to the home culture. While we open our minds to learn and listen to other cultures, we must also continue to appreciate our own and promote a homegrown philosophy. In our country, the growing popularity of teaching philosophy in Filipino is a proof of the naturalness of the native language. There are also efforts to come up with a Philippine Human Rights Declaration.[59] The fact of being rooted in one's culture warrants a healthy, open-minded and cosmopolitan attitude. Given this attitude, there is much to learn from other cultures.

The traditional form of solidarity, the totalitarian motto of "one for all – all for one," must now be replaced with the new ethics of solidarity, that of responsibility and reverence. With responsibility and reverence, we can successfully refashion a world of peace in the third millenium. The present Pope clearly expressed the positive contribution of this new ethics in his 1998 New Year's message: "This is the path for building a world community based on mutual trust, mutual support and sincere respect. The challenge, in short, is to ensure a globalization in solidarity, a globalization without marginalization."[60] ❑

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[58] Kuhn, "Possible Worlds in History of Science", pp. 22-23. Kuhn admits the possibility of enriching a lexicon by adding new vocabularies from possible worlds other than the one possessed. Yet even if they are combined, they become two sorts of knowledge which cannot coherently describe the same world.

[59] Project proposed by the Philippine Working Group Toward the Establishment of an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism (PG-AHRM).

[60] John Paul II, "From the Justice of Each Comes Peace for All" (Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1998.)