ARTICLE

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The concept of relativity

Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes offer a taxonomy of relativisms, several of which are relevant to cross-cultural differences and any prospect for cross-cultural understanding and solidarity. [1] Their list identifies five different types: moral relativism, conceptual relativism, perceptual relativism, relativism of truth, and relativism of reason. The list could no doubt be easily expanded. Steven Edwards adds linguistic relativism and ontological relativism [2]; Vernon Pratt includes the relativity of logic [3]; and relativity in many other areas, such as religion, political arrangements, aesethics, values, emotions, and customs, can be readily identified.

In short, any area of human experience that is cultural rather than biological can be seen as being subject to variation across cultures. Cultures simplify human experience: out of the total range of behavior that humans are capable of engaging in, cultures tend to direct behavior in certain directions and away from others. Certain cultures will thus be highly differentiated in certain areas of human experience and less differentiated, or perhaps not differentiated at all, in other areas.

A simplistic approach to dialogue across cultures is to say that if the two sides simply get together and talk things out in a free and rational manner there should be no significant barriers to reaching agreement. This approach rests on the untenable realist assumption that identical human thought-processes confronting an identical world should produce identical conceptions of the world. The field of intercultural communication has shown that this assumption is largely unfounded. Thought-processes are not identical across cultures, and while the world as perceived by different observers may in some ultimate sense be the same for all observers, differ-

ent cultures build into and read out of the objective world different meanings.

Learning to see the world in the way a different culture sees the world is an essential first step to cross-cultural dialogue. In this article attention is focused on some of the real difficulties that can arise in cross-cultural exchanges because of differences in conceptual orientations and reasoning strategies. Comparisons between the Japanese and American cultures are offered as examples.

That different cultures develop different attitudes towards truth, reason, beauty, values, ethics, and so forth can be taken as an empirical fact, but the mere fact of cultural relativity does not necessarily commit us to the norm of cultural relativism. Cultural relativity simply explores existing differences without evaluating their ultimate status; cultural relativism, however, insists that the differences must be normatively accepted, at least within the framework of their own cultural settings. The contention of this article is that an awareness of cultural relativity merely sets the stage for further cross-cultural dialogue on normative issues. This approach does not advocate simply accepting differences but rather using cross-cultural dialogue as a means of critiquing existing normative positions within given cultures and perhaps of integrating them dialectically into entirely new normative structures. [4]

The relativity of concepts

For the realist reality is what it is and what exists in fact can be unproblematically described in language. The world is divided into discreet objects which can be named. Concepts are general and can be applied to objects which share a sufficient number of characteristics. For the post-structuralist, on the other hand, reality is simply whatever it is described as being. Following Saussure there is only the interplay of signifiers (words) and the signified (thoughts); there is no need to relate words back to referents (real objects and events). Language, in this view, does not describe but constitutes experience. For the constructivist — a third position and the one defended here — reality is what it is and but there are an indefinite number of ways in which it can be described, none of which can be re-

garded as unproblematically true but some of which may be more viable than others. [5]

The difference is captured in the oft-repeated anecdote of the three umpires. [6] The realist claims, "Some are strikes and some are balls, and I call them as they are." The deconstructionist claims, "Some are strikes and some are balls but they aren't anything until I call them." The constructivist claims, "Some are strikes and some are balls, and I call them as I see them." The first two claims both seem arrogant, although in different ways. The first presumes a definitive knowledge of how things really are. The second simply imposes its own arbitrary pronouncements on reality without being bothered to look and see what is actually there. There is a certain humility in the constructivist position because it recognizes a reality outside of our own experience and yet acknowledges that our understanding of that reality is always limited.

It can be taken as an empirical fact that different cultures divide up the world linguistically in different ways. How the world is to be talked about, how objects are to be categorized is not pregiven in experience itself. In Hollis and Lukes' words, "Experience underdetermines what it is rational to believe about the world: schemes of concepts provide grids on which to base belief." [7] The well-known Whorf-Sapir hypothesis contends that

> We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds — and this means largely by the linguistic system in our minds. [8]

A strong interpretation of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis, which contends that the language we use *determines* what we are able to think and perceive, can be rejected on the grounds that it presents a thoroughly static view of language which is unable to account for how new forms of language develop. New experiences lead to new ways of thinking, which necessitate the creation of new forms of linguistic expression. Thought is thus able to structure language just as language is able to structure

thought, and the relation between the two is best seen as being reciprocal.

A weak interpretation of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis, which contends that the concepts available to us merely *predispose* us to register certain features of external reality rather than others, is still plausible, however. It is not that something does not exist unless it can be expressed linguistically but rather that we simply might not notice and conceptualize it. Our understanding of external reality moves in two directions, one away from language towards the phenomenon itself (similar to William James' and Kitaro Nishida's conception of "pure experience") and another towards the increasing differentiation of the schemas, linguistic and otherwise, which we employ to think and talk about that phenomenon (Piaget's constructivism; scientific, poetic, and philosophical writing in general). The first form of understanding is primarily intuitive, the latter discursive.

Precisely because concepts and conceptual schemes simplify reality and our ways of interacting with it they are subject to a considerable degree of variability across cultures. Here is how Glen Fisher, working out of the field of intercultural communication, puts it:

> . . . [T]he ability to develop an efficient and coherent mental cross-referencing system is not only constructive, it is phenomenally productive when viewed from the perspective of human evolution. It would be a limited psyche indeed that would have to process each new stimulus as it came along without reference to past experience. The human mind simply cannot encompass the full complexity of all the events and stimuli which press upon it from even its own immediate, everyday environment, much less a radically expanded international environment. It must therefore have a means of efficiently screening, sorting, coding and storing sensory data. This need is met by structuring experience, for example, by establishing categories within which we can pigeon-hole given ranges of phenomena which concern us. [9]

Because we interact with both a physical environment (including natural and built environments) and a social environment, the meanings we arrive at must, to a large extent, be shared with others. Thus, we arrive at

intersubjective agreements which designate certain shared experiences with similar terms.

Within cultures there is usually widespread agreement about the meanings of various words and phrases, but even among two people who share the same language and the same culture there can be disagreements. Disagreements arise most frequently at more abstract and general levels (what is love?), but there can also be discrepancies based on differences in experience. Technical vocabularies provide a good example because they depend upon wider familiarity with certain areas of experience. Auto mechanics have a more highly differentiated vocabulary for talking about the parts of cars, doctors for talking about medicine, philosophers for talking about metaphysics, and so on. With Wittgenstein we can say that words come to be used in a similar way and to have similar meanings when the individuals who use them share a similar form of life. [10] The more that experiences are shared and the more that individuals have been trained to use the appropriate terms, the more likely it will be for them to agree with each other about how those experiences should be talked about.

The same insight holds across cultures. To the extent that two cultures share similar forms of life, they will tend to develop similar ways of thinking and talking about those experiences; to the extent that their forms of life differ their conceptual systems will also differ. Words that designate objects which are common to two cultures are relatively unproblematic: the Japanese word "*neko*" and the English word "cat" stand in more or less a one-to-one relationship with each other and there are no difficulties in saying that the two words refer to same sorts of objects.

Other familiar objects may nonetheless be more problematic. For example, the Japanese word "*ashi*" can mean either "leg" or "foot" in English, and the Japanese expression "*ashi o kiru*" could mean either "I cut my leg" or "I cut my foot" in English. [11] Color words also show how the same perceptual experience can be differently categorized. School children in Japan paint tigers yellow and black rather than orange and black, the sun red rather than yellow, traffic lights blue rather than green, and so on. [12]

It becomes more difficult to communicate across cultures about objects

and experiences which are not shared. Food words are an easy example to start with since the kinds of food found in one culture may not be found in another. Until KFC restaurants opened in Japan it was impossible for most Japanese to really understand what American-style biscults (scones) were. Most Westerners have equal difficulty arriving at more than a hazy idea of what Japanese *umeboshi* (pickled plums) are really like before actually eating one themselves.

Grammatical patterns complicate matters further. In English we clearly distinguish between objective and subjective points of view by insisting that each well-formed sentence have a subject and an predicate. Thus we say either "It's hot" (the objective point of view) or "I'm hot" (the subjective point of view). In Japanese such distinctions can but need not be made because well-formed sentences may omit the subject. Thus when we want to say either "It's hot" or "I'm hot" in Japanese we usually say simply "*atsui desu,*" which literally translated means "hot is." The Japanese language equally makes no distinction between singular and plural nouns, countable and uncountable nouns, or definite and indefinite articles.

Linguistic differences of this sort are familiar to anyone who has studied a foreign language but they can also have philosophical significance. Hajime Nakamura devotes several pages of his chapter on "non-rationalistic tendencies" in Japanese thought to showing how logical and abstract thinking simply could not have arisen in pre-modern Japan, given the state of its language at the time.

> The original Japanese language, as clearly revealed in its classical literature, has a rich vocabulary of words denoting aesthetic or emotional states of mind. On the other hand, words denoting intellectual, inferential processes of active thought are notably lacking. In the original Japanese language, where words were for the most part concrete and intuitive, the construction of abstract nouns was lacking. Hence it is extremely difficult to express abstract concepts solely in words of the original Japanese. [13]

The Japanese emphasis on the concrete can be explained in part by its adoption of the Chinese writing system which is based on pictograms rich

in associative meanings. Japanese poetry could never conceive a line such as "To be or not to be; that is the question" but it could come up with a poem such as Basho's: "An old pond / a frog jumps in / the sound of water." (The poem also illustrates the Japanese love of ambiguity: is the frog jumping into the pond or into the sound of water or into both?)

Clearly this does not at all mean that Japanese are *incapable* of logical and abstract thought, any more than that Westerners are incapable of poetic ambiguity. But for the Japanese to be able to engage in these types of thinking it was necessary for them to first create the vocabulary in which these new concepts could be expressed. Nakamura notes that unfamiliar Western philosophical concepts are most often assimilated into the Japanese language by coining new words which combine original Japanese characters in novel ways. The correspondence between the new coinages and the original Western ideas are often purely conventional; the English word "concept," for example, is expressed by two Japanese characters, *gainen*, which might be literally translated as "overall certification." Beginning philosophy students in Japan, incidently, complain that many of these coinages are "unintelligible" (they are unaware of what the conventions are intended to convey) and some find it easier to read philosophical works in their original languages (or English translation) than in Japanese; they learn the concept by learning the language.

Many of the same types of problems come up when we try to translate certain Japanese concepts into English, particularly aesthetic terms, which the Japanese language is much richer in than English. The Japanese word *sabi*, for example, has no exact equivalent in English but denotes, in R.H. Blyth's gloss, "beauty associated with loneliness." [14] One may be able to find specific poems, or lines of poems, in English which convey a similar aesthetic sensibility but the best way to understand what the term *sabi* is intended to convey is probably to read a number of Japanese poems which have that quality. Our aesthetic sense, of course, will be expanded in the process.

Scientific concepts can also be be difficult to grasp across cultures. Consider Yasuo Yuasa's claim that Western medicine could benefit by re-examining the Japanese concept of *ki* ("energy"). [15] Oriental medicine

sees mind and body not as separate but as a single energy field which embraces both. This concept is, of course, utterly alien to traditional Western medicine, but given the West's more recent interest in holistic, psychosomatic approaches to medicine, Yuasa believes that the West could profitably incorporate concepts and techniques from Oriental medicine into its own practice, just as Oriental medicine has incorporated Western concepts and techniques into its practice.

Describing psychological states also poses particular problems. For example, the Japanese psychologist Takeo Doi has identified *amae* as being a central concept in explaining the psychological makeup of the Japanese. [16] The concept can be roughly translated as the feeling of dependency that individuals feel towards others, particularly towards those who are in superior or more powerful positions relative to themselves. The concept includes the idea of an inferior being able to indulge the goodwill of a superior. Children, for example, enter into *amae* relationships with their parents, students with their teachers, new employees with their supervisors, and lovers with each other.

In Doi's view *amae* is a universal aspect of human experience, yet there is no exact translation for this concept in English. Doi's explanation is that *amae* relationships are at the root of Japan's group-oriented culture, with its emphasis on dependency on others rather than dependence on self. Dependency is encouraged in Japan but suppressed in the West. Westerners tend to regard feelings of dependency as infantile or immature, something to be transcended in pursuit of what is for Westerners the higher goal of self-reliance. Japanese, for their part, are equally suspicious of the Western notion of self-reliance which they tend to associate with the idea of self-indulgence and egoism. Prior to its encounter with the West, the Japanese had no word for individualism, and the word which is presently used to translate this concept, *kojinshugi*, still carries with it the connotation of selfishness rather than the Emersonian connotation of self-reliance.

Doi notes that Japanese *amae* has its pathological manifestations and the same might be said for Western individualism. Self-indulgence and "other-indulgence" may be equally obnoxious. But in its more positive aspects the Japanese experience of dependence indicates an ability to bond

with others and form warm, interdependent, "human" relationships. The Western experience of independence, on the other hand, indicates the ability to stand on one's own two feet and take care of oneself; it also implies, however, a certain coldness towards others. The issue here is not so much that there are two competing responses to a single area of human experience but rather two completely different areas of human experience with two completely different cultural categories for explaining them and evaluating their worth.

Rather than take the Aristotelian approach of Martha Nussbaum, who argues in favor of a single standard of human flourishing and certain "non-relative virtues" which are universal across cultures, [17] we would argue that there is no fixed human nature and no teleological "end" which all humans, by virtue of the fact that they are humans, are moving towards. Human beings as they are biologically constituted are capable of identifying any number of areas of potential experience which, given their personal and cultural priorities, may be felt to be worthy of development. At the same time, however, our biological constitution does not prevent us from learning how to act in accordance with concepts offered by different cultures. The Westerner in Japan can learn how to effectively bond with others just as the Japanese can learn to be self-reliant. This point challenges the *nihonjinron* ("theory of Japanese uniqueness") idea that some traits are culture-specific and in principle unlearnable by people from different cultures.

Indeed, successful adaptation to life in another culture presupposes that such a learning process is possible. As we learn the concepts of another culture and the experiences which they relate to, our sense of what it means to be human can be enriched, in that we are able to explore more of what it is possible for us to achieve. But this enrichment is an emergent process, not something that is given to humans *qua* humans as part of a fixed human nature. Integrating seemingly "opposite" perspectives — Japanese dependence and Western independence, for example — is the real challenge. While the concepts may seem "incommensurable" on the surface, at a deeper level they may not be. The choice need not be one of "either-or," but can in fact be "both-and." One can learn how to be depen-

dent on others and at the same time preserve a sense of self-reliance. The perspective which emerges will be richer than either of the two original positions taken in isolation, but in any event cannot be regarded as a foreordained conclusion built into our "nature" as human beings.

Much the same approach can be taken with regard to aesthetic experience and scientific investigation. It is not that Japanese and Western poets simply use different language to describe the same aesthetic experiences but rather that the experiences themselves differ. It is not just that practitioners of Oriental medicine and Western physicians treat their patients differently but that they focus attention on different aspects of their illnesses. In all of these examples, the range of experience as well as the concepts used to describe that range are different.

If this is the case, then it no longer makes sense to ask which aesthetic, scientific, or psychological descriptions are "right." The West, by regarding its own forms of experience as "universal" simply omits other forms of experience and thus deprives itself of the opportunity to increase its range. The most progress made by the West in overcoming its earlier condescension towards non-Western traditions has probably been with regard to aesthetic experiences. In the past non-Western musical traditions could be denigrated, for example, for lacking the complex harmonic structures of Western music; non-Western artistic traditions could be denigrated for lacking the richly representational qualities of Western art; and so on, ad nauseum. "Universal" standards could be appealed to in order to distinguish "good" from "bad" in aesthetic judgements.

Of course, what has been discovered over the past hundred years or so is that non-Western traditions have complexities of their own — in rhythmic patterns or symbolic expressiveness, for example — which had been largely lacking in the West. This discovery led to a greater appreciation for non-Western aesthetic traditions and various attempts on the part of Western composers and artists to integrate elements of those traditions into their own work. The result was a fertile interplay between various aesthetic traditions which enriched the possibilities of what Western artists themselves were able to achieve.

An appreciation for non-Western art forms is now relatively

uncontroversial, but can the same kind of interplay be endorsed with respect to values and knowledge? In times past, much as with art, it was possible for Western ethics, equipped with the idea that it had arrived at certain "universal" norms for behavior, to look at the ethical systems of non-Western cultures as "barbarian" and "uncivilized." Thus arose the fairly noxious attempt on the part of Westerners to impose their values and ethical norms on every non-Westerner they encountered. In the past these values and norms were mainly concerned with religion and personal morality; at present they are wrapped up with promoting the "virtues" of capitalist economics and *laissez faire* politics. It has only recently begun to dawn on some Westerners that non-Western values and ethics may have a measure of legitimacy in their own right. In time it may even be possible for some Westerners to reach the radical conclusion that "we" have something to learn from "them."

Even if it does not make sense to ask which way of looking at or doing things is "right" it still makes sense, however, to ask whether or not they "work." Does a poem, whether Japanese or Western, increase our range of aesthetic experience? Does the patient, being treated by either Oriental or Western medicine, become well? Do the psychological experiences we cultivate both as individuals and as cultures contribute to our ability to flourish as human beings? Questions such as these point to what may in fact be an underlying pragmatic criterion for deciding whether a particular cultural manifestation can be described as "true," "good," or "beautiful."

Cross-cultural understanding involves much more than simply understanding the concepts of another culture; it also involves coming to share its form of life, as has been argued. In the absence of shared experiences dialogue is meaningless. Conceptual systems are unavoidably incommensurable when they are not even focused on the same areas of experience and no progress can be made in reconciling differences if the differences are not fully acknowledged in the first place. Anthropologists sometimes distinguish between etic and emic approaches to the study of other cultures. The etic approach attempts to translate the concepts of the other culture into our own (presumably more scientific) terms; the emic approach attempts to understand the culture on its own terms. Anthropology

is in something of a state of crisis right now because it fully recognizes that any attempt to translate the concepts of another culture into our own vocabulary results in distortion. [18] On the other hand, a purely emic approach fails to make the other culture intelligible to those in one's own culture who have no first-hand experience with the other culture. Some researchers have suggested combining the two approaches. [19]

In our view the etic approach can be useful as a starting point, but if our goal is to really *understand* another culture, an emic approach will be superior. If our goal is to also *interact* with another culture, however, then something beyond even the emic will be needed. We would argue that a mere conceptual understanding of another culture, even on its own terms, is insufficient; conceptual understanding must be backed by direct experience with a culture's form of life. Effective judgements cannot be made by simply comparing concepts across cultures but only by comparing those concepts in relation to experience. Of course, not everyone will want (or be able) to acquire an experiential understanding of a foreign culture in this way — not all of us may be prepared to go to the lengths that Carlos Castenada did in his efforts to understand the peyote religion of the Yaquis of Mexico, for example. [20]

But to the degree that such direct experience has been obtained, the whole issue of conceptual relativism across cultures begins to dissolve. Even though foreign concepts initially may seem strange to us, incommensurable with our own conceptual schemes, and so forth, they can nonetheless in principle be learned. To deny that the ways of alien cultures can be learned is to commit ourselves to an essentially racist view which holds that people from one culture are biologically incapable of thinking, acting, or feeling in the ways of another culture. It is true that we may never become as adept with alien concepts as people who are native to the culture, just as we may never be able to overcome having a foreign accent when speaking another language. But precisely because human nature is not immutable we always have the *capacity* to learn new ways of thinking, acting, and feeling.

To the extent that the experiences of another culture become *our own* experiences, we are able to critically reflect on them and to make plausible

judgements as to their worth. In the process our view of the world is enlarged and our sense of what it is humanly possible to experience is enriched. The same process can work in the reverse, of course. People from other cultures may be able to learn from our experiences as well and in the process dialogue between traditions based on an empathetic cross-cultural understanding of those traditions becomes possible.

What lies beyond this is a generative process in which entirely new forms of culture can be created. Philosophers such as Kitaro Nishida and Hajime Tanabe can combine Western philosophical concepts with a Japanese understanding of experience; poets such as Kenneth Rexroth and Gary Snyder can incorporate a Japanese aesthetic sensibility into Western poetic forms; and so on. What is being advocated is not the abandonment of our own cultural traditions and values, but rather a willingness to learn from other cultures. In the process we will inevitably be led to a penetrating reexamination of our own culture and values and perhaps to the creation of entirely new cultural forms.

The relativity of rationality

Assuming we are able to get our linguistic and conceptual difficulties sorted out the next problem we confront in cross-cultural exchanges concerns how language is actually used in interpersonal communication. There are cultural differences with regard not only to what is expressed but also with regard to how it is expressed. Researchers in the field of intercultural communication have identified several important areas where differences in reasoning strategies are apparent. We shall discuss three of these: communication styles, epistemic structures, and argumentation.

The best way to explain the idea of communication styles is to offer some examples. In a study of the communicative styles of Japanese and Americans Dean C. Barnlund [21] found that Americans tend to describe their communication style as self-assertive, frank, informal, spontaneous, and talkative. Japanese, on the other hand, tend to describe their communication style as reserved, formal, silent, cautious, evasive, and serious. Americans tend to disclose more of themselves in conversation, talking with a larger number of people on a wider variety of subjects and in more

depth than Japanese. Japanese prefer to maintain a higher degree of personal privacy, to restrict communication to trusted members of one's own group, to limit topics to non-controversial matters (so as to avoid open conflicts with members of the group), and to discuss those topics at a fairly superficial level. The American communication style tends to favor directness, clarity, and spontaneity, among other things, whereas the Japanese communication style tends to favor indirectness, ambiguity, and ritualized expressions.

Nobuhiro Nagashima, who offers a similar comparision of the Western and Japanese communication styles, [22] suggests that Westerners typically engage in what he refers to as "maximum message communication" whereas Japanese engage in "minimum message communication." Examples of the latter can be found in ancient Japanese poetry (*waka, renga,* and *haiku*), where the goal is to compress as much meaning as possible into the strict space limits prescribed by the particular poetic form. Japanese-style communication, we might add, relies heavily on the connotative meanings of words rather than on their denotative meanings. Moreover, much of the meaning must be inferred from the context and is rarely stated in unambiguous, literal terms.

The influence of Buddhism on Japanese-style communication is pervasive. Nagashima writes,

> An extreme form of the minimum message communication is expressed by the words *ishin-denshin* (first used in *Zen* Buddhism) which means a "direct communication from mind to mind" without using words — communication without message. This can be achieved only, so it is said, between those who understand each other perfectly. [23]

Zen Buddhism, moreover, regards the world as being in a constant state of flux, which leads it to reject fixed linguistic categories. Hence, there is relatively little interest either in describing and classifying phenomena or in defining logical relationships.

One can easily see that the Japanese and Western communication styles are virtual opposites; it should also be apparent why communication be-

tween Japanese and Americans can be not only fascinating but difficult. Americans sometimes take the lack of depth in Japanese conversations as indicating a lack of intelligence; ambiguity is regarded as deceit; and ritualized politeness is taken as a sign of insincerity. Japanese, for their part, sometimes think of Americans as intrusive, domineering, and rude. Americans tend to say what they think regardless of how others feel about it. Japanese tend to keep controversial opinions to themselves, empathize with the views of others (whether they really agree with them or not), and strive to maintain good social relations at all costs. The differences in communication styles alone can explain much of the friction in U.S.-Japan relations in the post-war period. The self-assertive Americans are good at explaining their positions but weak at listening to others. The reticent Japanese are generally good at listening to others but weak at expressing their own opinions. Putting the two sides together in the diplomatic arena without recognizing and trying to overcome these differences usually leads to less than fortuitous results.

One way to explain these differences is to draw on the distinction made by Edward T. Hall between "high context" and "low context" cultures. [24] Japanese culture, which is relatively homogenous, can be described as "high context." Certain fundamental cultural traditions have remained unchanged for long periods of time and are highly shared. The degree of intersubjective agreement is so high that principles do not need to be openly stated and verbal communication can be minimized. People know what to do in any given situation not by talking about it but by simply "reading the context." American culture, on the other hand, which is highly heterogenous, can be described as "low context." A great deal of communication needs to take place between individuals because it cannot simply be assumed from the outset that people will know what to do in any given situation. Firm principles need to be established which everyone is then expected to follow and a lot of attention is paid to the negotiating processes which establish these principles.

This difference explains in part why contracts are so little valued in Japan and so highly valued in the U.S. In Japan the emphasis from the outset is on creating feelings of mutual trust. It is simply assumed that

once trust has been established the two sides will seek to work together in a cooperative and harmonious spirit. Little needs to be specifically spelled out and both sides can be flexible in responding to changing circumstances. In America each of the parties is seen as acting in their own self-interests and as having certain rights to protect those interests. Contracts are necessary to spell out exactly what responsibilities each of the parties will undertake and what benefits each will receive.

The American negotiating style is to lay everything out on the table, get to the point, debate ferociously, and reach firm and unambiguous agreements which bind the two parties to specific actions. The Japanese style on the other hand is to first establish good relations between the two parties, avoid confrontation, strive for consensus, and solve future problems as they arise. In cross-cultural negotiations between Americans and Japanese, the Japanese side often sees the Americans as being obsessed with details and inflexible. Americans, for their part, see the Japanese reluctance to come to clear and specific terms as creating an opportunity for deviousness. The differences in negotiating styles reflects deeper and more fundamental differences in the two culture's ethical and political philosophies, which we have already given some indication of.

These considerations would call into question, for example, any attempt to apply Jürgen Habermas's concept of an "ideal speech situation" to cross-cultural dialogue and international negotiations. They also point out the Western bias in Paul Grice's attempt to delineate a set of nonconventional "conversational implicatures," or normative guidelines for the conduct of discourses. [25] The four maxims he lists under the category of "Manner," for example — (1) avoid obscurity of expression; (2) avoid ambiguity; (3) be brief; and (4) be orderly — would all be violated in some situations by Japanese communicators. (Obscurity allows for indirectness and ambiguity for flexibility. Brevity is usually good but would be considered impolite at certain formal occasions such as weddings where exceptionally long speeches are the norm. Japanese can be extremely orderly when the situation calls for it, but at some public events audiences will freely talk among themselves if what the speaker has to say is deemed unimportant or a mere formality.)

The difficulty in reaching agreement across cultures is further complicated when we realize that different cultures employ different argumentative strategies. John Condon and Fathi Yousef, suggest that both "epistemic structures" (the way arguments are built) and "rhetorical patterns" (the way arguments are presented) vary from culture to culture. [26] The notion of epistemic structures is derived from Pribram's identification of four distinct "patterns of thinking": (1) the universalistic; (2) the nominalistic or hypothetical; (3) the intuitional or organismic; and (4) the dialectical. [27] These patterns will be familiar, of course, to anyone acquainted with the history of Western philosophy. Pribram's unique contribution was the idea that in every culture one of these patterns will be dominant. Thus he saw French and Latin cultures as being predominantly universalistic; Anglo-American cultures as predominantly nominalistic; Germanic and Slavic cultures as predominantly intuitional; and the communist countries as predominantly dialectical (or trying to be — Pribram was writing in 1949).

It would be possible no doubt to plot Asian cultures on the same map. A reading of Nakamura's *Ways of Thinking of Eastern People* [28] would suggest that India has a universalistic culture, China a nominalistic culture, and Japan an organismic culture. It is also interesting to note in this connection that most of the essential positions developed in the history of Western thought — realism, idealism, intuitionism, and even phenomenology and nihilism — have counterparts in the history of Asian thought. [29] This does not quite prove the claim of perennial philosophers, such as Aldous Huxley, [30] that at some point all intellectual traditions converge, but it does corroborate the contention of transpersonal psychologists that there are probably a limited number of ways in which it is possible for people to think about the world (which they call "deep structures") and that these ways of thinking can be independently arrived at. [31] It also suggests that people holding to roughly the same philosophical orientation across cultures would have more in common with each other than they might with individuals in their own cultures who hold to different philosophical orientations.

This is essentially the conclusion Magoroh Maruyama has reached in

his recent work on mindscapes. [32] Maruyama's contention is that what Condon and Youself have referred to as "epistemic structures" (and what he calls "mindscapes") are an individual rather than a cultural variable. While mindscapes can be empirically identified their cause is still unknown (Maruyama hypothesizes that they may be genetic). Maruyama has delineated four major types (there are others): "H" (homogenous), "I" (individualistic), "S" (systemic), and "G" (generative). These are roughly equivalent to the four types earlier identified by Pribram (universalistic, nominalistic, intuitional, and dialectical respectively). Maruyama's empirical work indicates that these four types exist in varying proportions in all the cultures he has studied, even though in any given culture one type may dominate the others. A corollary of the dominant-mindscape thesis is that individuals who possess non-dominant mindscapes in a given culture may not get a fair hearing (a "G"-type Galileo facing the "H"-type hierarchy of the medieval church, for example). Maruyama sees America, incidently, as being dominated by H-type personalities and Japan by S-types.

One practical application of Maruyama's research is that communication tends to be easier across cultures when conducted by individuals who have the same mindscape. This presents a dilemma in cross-cultural negotiations, however. A Japanese negotiator with an S mindscape would be readily understood by the Japanese public but misunderstood by an American counterpart with an H mindscape. A Japanese negotiator with an H mindscape would be readily understood by an American counterpart with an H mindscape but not by the Japanese public. American negotiators will find themselves in a similar dilemma. Maruyama does not resolve the dilemma but he does suggest that negotiators and foreign representatives be chosen with these considerations in mind.

We turn finally to the problem of argumentative structures. Consistent with Pribram's theory, Glen Fisher has observed that in international negotiations the French, whom Pribram had identified as universalist, tend to employ deductive patterns of reasoning, starting with general principles and working from there towards specific conclusions. By contrast, Americans, whom Pribram had defined as nominalist, tend to employ inductive arguments, starting with the "facts" and working from there towards gen-

eral principles. [33] The Japanese, who might be identified as intuitivist or organic, basically see everything as being connected to everything else. For the Japanese, therefore, argumentation can basically start from any point, move on from there to any other point, and end at whatever point happens to come last. Westerners, as might be expected, often find the Japanese argumentation style totally "illogical." [34]

In fact, logic as such is not highly emphasized in the cultures of East Asia, as we have already noted. Thinking in both China and Japan has tended to emphasize the concrete over the abstract and the particular over the general. Nakamura's chapter, mentioned above, on what he calls the "non-rationalistic tendencies" of Japan has subchapters on such topics as Japan's "indifference to logical rules," "lack of interest in formal consistency," "tendency to avoid complex ideas," and "lack of knowledge concerning the objective order." Obviously being logical in the Western sense is not a precondition for being able to get on well in the world. [35]

Ch'an and Zen Buddhism both emphasize detaching the mind from concepts about the world in order to have a clearer and more direct experience of the world as it is. This detachment is brought about either through silent contemplation (*zazen*) or by meditating on logical paradoxes (*koan*), such as "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" [36] At the highest stages of Zen Buddhism the law of noncontradiction is simply inoperative, as it is in Plotinus and also in the highest stages of the Christian contemplative tradition, such as in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. The intention is to break down our ordinary ways of thinking so that we will not mistake our thoughts for reality (expressed in the Buddhist proverb, "Do not mistake the pointing finger for the moon it points to"). The "law of contradiction" may serve useful purposes in a culture, just as the law of non-contradiction does. [37]

What this section has attempted to show is that rationality is also variable across cultures. Rather than look for a "common core" of rationality which can serve as a "bridgehead" across cultures [38], our suggestion is that we will probably have better success if we simply begin to build bridges rather than look for preexisting ones. We cannot simply assume that people will reason the same across cultures, nor that Western reason-

ing strategies and communication patterns are universal. Rational discussion may still be possible in cross-cultural contexts but it is something that must be achieved by working through existing differences. Rationality arises out of specific cultural contexts and the goal of rational thought is not so much to free ourselves from all cultural contexts (to achieve a contextless God's-eye-view) as it is to reflect back on those contexts, subject them to critical review, and if need be transform them. We are setting forth here a dialectical view of rationality that is capable of integrating into wider frameworks the more limited forms of rationality that may be found in existing cultures.

Notes

[1] Introduction to Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes, eds., *Rationality and Relativism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp. 5–12.

[2] Steven D. Edwards, *Relativism, Conceptual Schemes and Categorical Frameworks* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1990), pp. 18–20.

[3] Vernon Pratt, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (London: Methuen, 1978), pp. 60–61.

[4] For a fuller statement of this view see Richard Evanoff, "Intercultural Ethics: New Ways of Learning to Get Along with Each Other" in *Kokusai Komyunikeeshon ni okeru gengo to bunka* (*Language and Culture in International Communication*) (Tokyo: Aoyama Gakuin Daigaku Sougou Kenkyu Jyo and Kokusai Seiji Kezai Kenkyu Sentaa, 1996).

[5] *Cf.* Richard A. Shweder and Joan G. Miller, "The Social Construction of the Person: How is it Possible?" in Kenneth J. Gergen and Keith E. Davis, eds., *The Social Construction of the Person* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985), p. 41:

> ...[T]heories of category formation can be divided into three general kinds: (a) realist theories, which argue that "people categorize the world the way they do because that's the way the world is"; (b) innatist theories, which argue that "people categorize the world the way they do because that's the way people are"' and (c) social construction theories, which argue that people categorize the world the way they do because they have participated in social practices, institutions, and other forms of symbolic action (e.g., language) that presuppose or in some way make salient those categorizations.

[6] Social constructionists Theodore R. Sarbin and John I. Kitsuse cite this anecdote in a "A Prologue to *Constructing the Social*" in Theodore R. Sarbin and John I. Kitsuse, eds., *Constructing the Social* (London: Sage 1994). Unlike us they side with what we have labeled here the "deconstructionist" position.

[7] Hollis and Lukes, p. 7.

[8] Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality*, ed. J.B. Carroll (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1956), p. 213. See also p. 215: "All observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar,

or can in some way be calibrated."

[9] Glen Fisher, *Mindsets: The Role of Culture and Perception in International Relations* (Yarmouth: Intercultural Press, 1988), pp. 22–23.

[10] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1958), §241.

[11] Another frequently discussed example is R. Bulmer's observation in "Why is the cassowary not a bird?," *Man*, 2: 5–25 (1967) that while the Karam of New Guinea use the word "*yakt*" in much the same way that English-speakers use the word "bird," they include bats under the concept *yakt*, but not cassowaries.

[12] B. Berlin and P. Kay, in *Basic Color Terms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), determined, however, that there are eleven "focal" colors which all languages draw on in formulating color terms.

[13] Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1964), p. 532.

[14] R.H. Blyth, *A History of Haiku*, Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1964), p. vii.

[15] Yuasa's ideas have been presented in English in three books: *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, ed. T.P. Kasulis, trans. Shigenori Nagatomo and T.P. Kasulis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); David Edward Shaner, Shigenori Nagatomo, and Yasuo Yuasa, *Science and Comparative Philosophy: Introducing Yuasa Yasuo* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989); and *The Body, Self-cultivation, and Ki-energy*, trans. Shigenori Nagatomo and Monte S. Hull (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

[16] Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1973). The book defines a number of relatively unique Japanese terms related to the psychological experience of Japanese.

[17] Martha Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach" in Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, eds., *The Quality of Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

[18] See Ton Lemaire, "Anthropological Doubt" in Lorraine Nencel, ed., *Constructing Knowledge: Authority and Critique in Social Science* (London: Sage, 1991).

[19] See, for example, John W. Berry, Ype H. Poortinga, Marshall H. Segall, and Pierre Dasen, *Cross-Cultural Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 232–236.

[20] See, for example, Carlos Castaneda, *Tales of Power* (New York: Touchstone, 1974).

[21] Dean C. Barnlund, *Public and Private Self in Japan and the United States* (Tokyo: Simul Press, 1975).

[22] See Nobuhiro Nagashima, "A Reversed World: Or Is It? The Japanese Way of Communication and Their Attitudes towards Alien Cultures" in Robin Horton and Ruth Finnegan, eds., *Modes of Thought: Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 94, which provides a similar, though more impressionistic, comparison. Nagashima describes the Western communication style with such adjectives as objective, analytical, logical, consistent, definite, impersonal, intellectual, and argumentative. The respective opposites for the Japanese communication style are subjective, synthetic, non-logical, inconsistent, vague, personal, emotional, and harmonious.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

[24] See Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (New York: Doubleday, 1959); *Beyond Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1981); *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Anchor Books, 1982); and *The Dance of Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

[25] Paul Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 26–40.

[26] John C. Condon and Fathi Yousef, *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 227–231.

[27] Karl Pribram, *Conflicting Patterns of Thought* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1949).

[28] See Nakamura, chaps. 2, 17, and 35.

[29] Junjiro Takakusu, *The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987).

[30] See Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1945).

[31] For an overview of recent research see Roger Walsh, "The Transpersonal Movement: A History and State of the Art," *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology,* 25: 123–139 (1993).

[32] Magoroh Maruyama, "Mindscapes and Science Theories," *Current Anthropology* 21: 589–600 (1980).

[33] Glen Fisher, *International Negotiations: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Yarmouth: Intercultural Press, 1980).

[34] See also the section in Condon and Yousef on rhetorical styles and organization, especially p. 243.

[35] Nakamura, chap. 36.

[36] Two classic collections of *koan* are the *Mumonkan* and *Hekiganroku*; see Katsuki Sekida's translation in *Two Zen Classics* (New York: Weatherhill, 1977).

[37] Lukes admits that ordinary logical laws may be violated "in ritual contexts," but the positive uses of contradiction may be much wider, especially in any form of dialectical thinking. See Steven Lukes, "Relativism: Cognitive and Moral," *The Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume XLVIII* (London: Methuen, 1974), p. 170.

[38] See, in addition to the references above, Steven Lukes, "Some Problems about Rationality" and Martin Hollis, "The Limits of Irrationality" and "Reason and Ritual," in Bryan R. Wilson, ed., *Rationality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), as well as Lukes' "Relativism in its Place" and Hollis's "The Social Destruction of Reality" in Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes, eds., *Rationality and Relativism, op. cit.* Another relevant paper is Lukes' "On the Social Determination of Truth" in Robin Horton and Ruth Finnegan, eds., *Modes of Thought: Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973).