OVERCOMING INCOMMENSURABILITY THROUGH INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

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ABSTRACT: Is universalism necessarily ethnocentric? Are there inevitably incommensurable differences between diverse cultures and traditions? While these questions may appear highly theoretical at first sight, they inevitably have significant practical consequences as witnessed by the prominent contemporary discourse about a "clash of civilizations", on the one hand, and by the challenges confronting multiculturalism, on the other. As these debates attest, the foregoing questions are truly significant because, if there is no genuine possibility of overcoming incommensurability by finding and building on common ground, the future looks bleak for intercultural relations, both internally and externally.

In revisiting pivotal issues at the heart of the Winchean rationality debates, and in drawing some selective comparisons with the Kuhnian incommensurability debates which came to the fore at a similar time, this paper draws on core hermeneutic insights to vindicate the tenability of a dialogical approach to the problem of intercultural communication and understanding. This approach, it is contended, can give difference its due to the extent of stimulating a genuine and productive process of intercultural learning, in a manner that truly navigates between the Scylla of an ethnocentric universalism and the Charybdis of a self-sealing relativism, and thereby not only averts a destructive cultural stand-off or clash, but facilitates the emergence of a well-grounded "fusion of horizons".

KEYWORDS: Incommensurability; culture; Winch; hermeneutics; dialogue

INTRODUCTION

Is universalism necessarily ethnocentric? Are there inevitably incommensurable differences between diverse cultures and traditions? While these questions may appear highly theoretical at first sight, they inevitably have significant practical consequences as witnessed by the prominent contemporary discourse about a "clash of civilizations" (e.g., Huntington 1996), on the one hand, and by the challenges confronting multiculturalism (see, e.g., Parekh 2006, especially Introduction, ch. 9), on

the other.   As these debates attest, the foregoing questions are truly significant because, if there is no genuine possibility of overcoming incommensurability by finding and building on common ground, the future looks bleak for intercultural relations, both internally and externally.

Furthermore, although it may seem at an even further remove in theoretical terms, the cultural rationality debate, which received its contemporary formulation by Peter Winch a few decades back, has significant implications for the ability of seemingly incommensurable cultures to interact productively and harmoniously in the contemporary world.   At issue here, fundamentally, is the possibility not just of meaningful communication between cultures, but also of mutual recognition and respect among cultures. The importance of the latter has been underscored by Charles Taylor, who perceptively notes that, "Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (Taylor 1994, 26).

At the same time, it is also vital that intercultural recognition be grounded not just in mere tolerance, but also in genuine appreciation of what a particular culture truly has to offer. And as Winch and Taylor are acutely aware, this in turn brings to fore questions regarding the rationality of unfamiliar, or "alien"--as they have formerly been pejoratively termed--cultures, and in particular that of so called "primitive" cultures. For if other cultures, including aboriginal or indigenous cultures, cannot judiciously be deemed rational, then, problems arise with according them comparable recognition. But how, then, are we to make sense of, let alone do justice to, the seemingly strange beliefs and practices exhibited by other cultures? And more specifically, how are to do this without falling prey to an ethnocentric universalism? And indeed, it is possible to do so at all given the seeming incommensurability of pre-industrialised and industrialised cultures in particular? Further, we may wonder whether unfamiliar cultures can legitimately claim immunity from external scrutiny or accountability as an antidote to an ethnocentric universalism, even if this embroils them in a self-sealing relativism?

In revisiting these pivotal issues at the heart of the Winchean rationality debates, and in drawing some selective comparisons with the Kuhnian incommensurability debates which came to the fore at a similar time, the aim in what follows is to draw on core hermeneutic insights to vindicate the tenability of a hermeneutico-dialogical[1] approach to the problem of intercultural communication and understanding. This

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[1] Briefly stated, the term "hermeneutico-dialogical" is intended to designate an approach which, underpinned by Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, aspires to do justice to both the dialogical character of human understanding and its historico-cultural situatedness. As envisaged by Palmer (1997), this expanded conception is also intended to embrace the work of related contemporary theorists such as Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault along with that of established hermeneutic thinkers like Gadamer. It thereby aspires to encapsulate cultural critique alongside more traditional hermeneutic endeavours. Kögler (1996) provides a prototype; see too Healy (2005).

approach, it is contended, can give difference its due to the extent of stimulating a genuine and productive process of intercultural learning, in a manner that truly navigates between the Scylla of an ethnocentric universalism and the Charybdis of a self-sealing relativism, and thereby not only averts a destructive cultural stand-off, or clash but facilitates the emergence of a well-grounded "fusion of horizons".[2]

BEYOND ETHNOCENTRIC UNIVERSALISM AND RADICAL RELATIVISM

At the heart of the original debate[3] were questions about the putative rationality of other cultures and the availability of transcultural standards with reference to which their rationality could be adjudicated. Notwithstanding the subtlety and diversity of the early contributions, the debate soon crystallised around the polarized alternatives of universalism and relativism.

In response to Winch's perceived relativism,[4] universalists were united in defending the existence of a set of non-negotiable standards held to apply, universally, across cultures as the definitive measure of cultural rationality.[5] Internal variations notwithstanding, the universalists converged on principles of logico-scientific reasoning (non-contradiction, identity, deduction, etc.) as the universal standards needed to provide a common measure with reference to which comparative evaluations could be made across cultures about the rationality of beliefs, practices, and indeed of whole "forms of life". Some universalists sought to allow for local variations in cultural beliefs and practices, while continuing to defend the primacy of

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[2] This paper was originally presented at the "Incommensurability 50" Conference, Department of Philosophy, National Taiwan University, Taipei, June 1-3, 2012. It draws on and develops themes broached in my "Beyond Ethnocentrism and Relativism: Rationality, Dialogue and Culture" (Healy 2005, ch. 5) . The paper has been further refined in light of helpful suggestions from the Editor, *Cosmos and History*.

[3] For convenience, I use this phrase to designate the debate initiated by Peter Winch's "Understanding a Primitive Society" (Winch 1970; originally 1964), and the responses thereto collected in Wilson (1970). As is well known, the original debate focused on the rationality of so-called "primitive" cultures, and in particular on the rationality of the beliefs and practices of the Azande people. For a succinct overview of the issues in this debate, see Simon (1990); for an extended analysis and appraisal, see too Ulin (1984).

[4] While the extent of his putative relativism will no doubt always remain a contested matter, Winch appears to give clear indications that his position is not relativistic in any strong, exclusive sense. Thus, while emphasising the need to understand other cultures in their own terms (e.g., Winch 1970, 95, 97), he also vindicates the existence of points of commonality between cultures and advocates a process of "learning from" other cultures, oriented toward extending both our own self-understanding and our conception of rationality (e.g., 1970, 99, 100). Winch likewise alludes to "an earlier paper" in which "I have tried to show some of the limitations of relativism" (p. 107).

[5] Prominent universalist contributors to the original debate included Lukes, Jarvie, Horton, and MacIntyre, each defending a variation on the universalist theme (see further Wilson 1970).

standards of rationality derived from logic and scientific reasoning.[6] But despite such concessions at the margins, this strong universalism was beset by the problem of "invidious comparison" (Dascal 1991). In designating logico-scientific reasoning as the definitive measure of cultural rationality, other cultures—and in particular the so-called "primitive cultures" around which this debate revolved—could not fail to emerge as deficient in point of rationality since, by definition, these cultures do not construe rationality in such terms. Hence as Winch aptly put it, in judging an atheoretical culture by the standards of a theoretical one, universalism falls prey to a "category mistake" (1970, 93)—with damaging consequences for the perceived rationality of non-Western cultures.

At first sight, relativism may have seemed to have merit as a potential corrective for this universalistic ethnocentrism. As defined by Jarvie, relativism stipulates that: "what is true, what is rational, even what is logical vary from culture to culture and no extra-cultural court of appeal exists to adjudicate differences" (Jarvie 1984, 105). In ruling out an appeal to culture-transcendent standards, it precludes the possibility that another culture could be characterized as inferior to our own, as happens when indigenous cultures are assessed using our standards. But this putative strength is bought at a considerable cost. For in characterizing cultures as self-sealing monads impervious to context-transcendent standards that could serve as common measures between them, it rules out the possibility of principled comparative evaluation; and without such, there is no reliable basis for coming to appreciate the distinctive strengths of these cultures in all their differences from our own. In short, then, relativism's deficiency is that it "solves" (or rather dissolves) the problem of invidious comparison only by precluding the possibility of making any comparisons at all. And in thus blocking the possibility of comparative evaluation it likewise precludes the possibility of mutual recognition and respect arrived at through a developed awareness that other cultures have merits from which we could profitably stand to learn. Ironically, then, in endeavouring to promote appreciation and respect for other cultures by valorising their allegedly incommensurable differences from our own, relativists ultimately undermine the very basis on which we might judiciously arrive at such an assessment.

In response to the impasses thus generated by the polarised alternatives of ethnocentric universalism and radical cultural relativism, a dialogical approach aspires to forge a viable "middle way" capable of transcending the limitations of the original debate, while building on its strengths. Central to this approach is a

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[6] A notable example is Lukes (1970), who, while allowing for "context-dependent" criteria of rationality, continues to insist on the importance of evaluating the beliefs and practices of indigenous cultures by such universal standards of rationality which, he maintains, "simply *are* criteria of rationality, as opposed to criteria of rationality in context" (see especially pp. 208-13).

commitment to rehabilitating Winch's, often overlooked, valorisation of the need to learn from other cultures about what it means to live a worthwhile human life as the true focus of intercultural communication and inquiry. To this end, I now go on to explore the dialogical conditions under which mutual understanding and learning may be possible, starting with the potential for transcending incommensurability.

BEYOND INCOMMENSURABILITY

As holistic repositories of meaning and significance cultures share many attributes in common with scientific paradigms, to the extent that, as Fay puts it, "an entire culture might be considered a paradigm" (1996, p. 81). Could it be, then, that what Kuhn termed "the most fundamental aspect of the incommensurability of competing paradigms", namely that "the proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds" (Kuhn 1970, 150) also applies to cultures, with the implication that an insurmountable divide separates cultures as much as scientific paradigms? This is the conclusion to which radical relativism would seem to lead, to a picture of isolated cultures separated into "enclaves of mutual incomprehension"; such that despite its desire to valorise difference, it ironically ends up making it impossible to appreciate it on a principled basis (cf. Fay 1996, 81-82). Since the strong incommensurability thesis thus has the drastic consequence of precluding the possibility of meaningful and productive intercultural communication, not to say learning, we need to consider why it might not be compelling. This is all the more the case since cultural incommensurability also has deleterious social and political consequences. For example, in giving credence to "the dubious idea of mutually incomprehensible cultures and societies", it can serve as a "justification for resurgent tribalism" (Zhang 2010, 342), and thence potentially for a so-called "clash of civilizations". Further, in precluding the existence of commonalities between cultures, it renders them self-validating as well as self-sealing and hence beyond accountability, no matter how deleterious their beliefs or practices. Accordingly, it is important to recognise that the cultural incommensurability diagnosis may be premature and correspondingly unwarranted.

Thus, firstly, the contention that there could be no commonalities that can serve as a bridge among different conceptual schemes would seem to be inherently flawed, since even to qualify as alternate worldviews they must share enough in common to be regarded as offering divergent conceptualisations of similar cultural phenomena. Hence, just as it has been contended that the very idea of competing paradigms inevitably entails the existence of commonalities, the very concept of different cultures constituting alternate worldviews would seem to entail the existence of overlaps or commonalities between them (cf. Fay 1996, 80-84). Otherwise, they would simply be totally unrelated. Similarly, Davidson's (1973) well known reflections on "the very

idea of a conceptual scheme" reinforce the case against cultural incommensurability. Thus, as Davidson has it, we cannot coherently attribute the capacity to speak, think, and make sense of their world to denizens of other cultures without necessarily presupposing that their conceptual schemes and cultural worldviews overlap with ours in significant respects. Hence the very perception of other cultures as representing intelligible conceptual schemes also presupposes that they share core attributes and capabilities with us. Reinforcing the cogency of this assessment, Winch famously points out that the "limiting notions" of "birth, death, sexual relations" "are inescapably involved in the life of all known societies" and "give shape to what we understand by "human life"" (1970, 107). Clearly too, the list could be extended to include not only basic survival needs but also such concepts as self and communal identity, and the like. In a similar vein, G.E.R. Lloyd notes that:

> Empirically, there is no human society with which communication has proved to be totally impossible, however hard mutual understanding--always imperfect, to be sure--may sometimes be to attain. Logically, if indeed we are confronted with a conceptual scheme that is incomprehensible in our terms, then we cannot, by definition, make any sense of it. (Lloyd 2004, 40, cited in Zhang 2010, 347)

Concurring, Bernstein (2010) is emphatic that we should not allow ourselves to be held captive to an inherently flawed and restrictive picture of intercultural relations, when more tenable and productive alternatives are available, in particular the hermeneutic. Specifically, the hermeneutic template has the advantage that in valorising their linguistic constitution, it conceptualises cultural horizons and boundaries as mobile, fluid, and inherently open, thereby vindicating their mutual permeability.[7] Indeed, as Gadamer himself puts it, "as verbally constituted, every such world is of itself always open to every possible insight and hence every expansion of its own world picture, and is accordingly available to others" (1989, 447). Hence, as Bernstein contends, its distinctive ontological and epistemic presuppositions position the hermeneutic template well to underwrite the mutual intelligibility of diverse cultural traditions, and thereby provide a defensible and worthwhile alternative to the reified, static and mutually impermeable picture presented by the strong incommensurability thesis. It thus has the advantage of affording a theoretically well-grounded alternative that is more complex, less reified, and correspondingly truer to our experience of engagement with other cultures. Moreover, the hermeneutic template has the further advantage that in embodying an inherently dialogical conception of human relations, it not only has the capacity to transcend the

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[7] This emphasis on their linguistic constitution has direct affinities with a conception of cultures as ongoing, open, processual and evolving "conversations" (cf. Fay 1996, ch. 3.3), which likewise challenges their "different worlds" conceptualisation as reified, closed, static, and mutually impermeable.

limitations of a reified "different worlds" conception of cultural relations; it also embodies the potential to underwrite productive possibilities for mutual understanding and learning between different cultures and traditions, without however, minimising the challenges inherent in so doing. In addition, longstanding familiarity with the challenge of "unlocking" the intelligibility of complex and unfamiliar texts gives additional weight to the hermeneutic confidence in the possibility of identifying pertinent "bridgeheads" capable of providing access to other cultural worldviews, notwithstanding strong initial impressions of strangeness or even unintelligibility. Indeed, provided the requisite dialogical conditions are met, far from constituting as an impregnable barrier, the hermeneutic approach views the encounter with difference as providing an indispensable stimulus to intercultural understanding and learning.

As we shall now consider, however, the possibility of such productive dialogical interaction between traditions and cultures is conditional on endorsement of "comparable validity" and "dialogical equality" as regulative commitments.

TOWARD COMPARABLE VALIDITY AND DIALOGICAL EQUALITY

If incommensurability does not pose an intractable barrier to communication and contact between cultures, the challenge becomes that of avoiding the kind of invidious comparisons that beset the original debate and of embarking instead on a process of interactive engagement conducive to mutual understanding and learning. As the next step, we need briefly to reassess the principles of "charity" and "humanity" which have heretofore dominated the debate in favour of others more conducive to doing justice to the integrity of other cultures in all their richness and diversity, to the extent that they can be seen to pose a challenge to our own entrenched ways of thinking. For in presupposing mere intelligibility and in postulating sameness as conditions of understanding, the existing principles fall significantly short of what is required to underwrite genuine intercultural understanding and learning.

Thus, firstly, in postulating mere intelligibility as a condition for understanding, the so-called "principle of humanity" is an altogether inadequate basis for intercultural communication and inquiry since, on this minimalist principle, no account is taken of the potential richness of the other culture such that it could constitute an integrated conceptual framework with the ability to inform, and confer significance on, the whole way of life of a people over an extended period of time and which, as such, has the potential to challenge our own entrenched values, standards, and presuppositions. In thus failing to do justice to the richness and integrity of the other culture as a complex repository of meaning, potentially comparable in

significance to our own, [8] the presupposition of intelligibility does little to alleviate the problem of invidious comparison. Rather, in settling for mere intelligibility, it effectively reinforces the prevailing ethnocentrism. Moreover, in enjoining us to "count them like us", "the principle of charity" simply exacerbates the problem. This is because in stipulating similarity as a condition for understanding, this principle enjoins us to minimise, if not negate, difference in our efforts to comprehend another way of life. Consequently, it fails to take account of the possibility that other cultures could legitimately ground their way of life in standards, values, and even styles of reasoning very different from our own. Correlatively, it renders it all the more likely that we will misconstrue the other culture's beliefs and practices as less-than-adequate functional equivalents of our own, as typified in the responses of Winch's early universalist critics (see further Lukes 1970, sec. I; cf. Simon 1990, secs III-V). But it only when we begin to appreciate that the other culture's beliefs and practices have no direct counterpart in our own—that they are in this sense incommensurable—that we can really begin to come to terms with what it has to offer in contradistinction to our own (cf. Taylor 1982, 98-99). A fortiori, in inadvertently suppressing its distinctive richness and integrity, this principle likewise fails to accommodate the possibility that the other culture could pose a real challenge to our entrenched ways of thinking and doing, and hence falls correspondingly short of what is needed to stimulate a genuine process of intercultural learning. In effect, then, by placing "everyone in the same hermeneutic circle" (Bohman and Kelly 1996, 87), the existing heuristic principles undermine the prospects for genuine intercultural learning from, as envisaged by Winch. Hence truly to transcend the limitations of the original debate, these principles need to be replaced by others that can better respect difference. On a hermeneutico-dialogical analysis, *comparable validity* and *dialogical equality* have particular merits in this regard.

On hermeneutic principles, genuine understanding is possible only on condition that we begin by acknowledging the holistic integrity of the thing to be understood, be it a text, a person, or a culture.[9] Hence, comparable validity enjoins that we begin by acknowledging the holistic integrity of the other way of life such that, as grounded in a

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[8] Cf. Dascal (1991, 284), who notes that recent ethnography attests that so-called "primitive" cultures are far richer than what is assumed on a mere presupposition of intelligibility, in that they have "a language which is no less complex and rich than [ours]", "elaborate kinship systems", "a systematic way of categorising their environment"; they also have "a religion, a morality, a literature, a collective memory, art, rules of etiquette, rules of communication and argumentation—in short, a complete set of interlocked socially shared systems comparable in scope to ours"; cf. also Fay (1996), ch. 5.5.

[9] For an extended elucidation, and vindication, of this theme in its application to the domain of cross-cultural communication and inquiry, see Kögler (1996), especially ch. 3.

distinctive "symbolic order", it can function as a rich repository of meaning capable of informing, and conferring significance on, the whole way of life of a people over an extended period of time (see further Healy 2005, 119-22; cf. Kögler 1996, chs 3, 5, and "Conclusion").[10] Accordingly, instead of presupposing similarity, we need to allow the other culture to challenge our existing presuppositions, recognising that it is likely to embody ways of viewing the world and of thinking and reasoning about it previously unfamiliar to us but from which we could profitably stand to learn.[11] Correlatively, endorsement of dialogical equality as regulative commitment enjoins that we desist from presupposing that we are well positioned to stand in for the other culture and represent their views better than they can themselves. Instead, aware that our familiar ways of viewing the world may not be adequate to the challenge of comprehending the other cultural worldview, we accord it the right to articulate its self-understanding in its own terms and, attending carefully to fundamental differences in ontological, epistemological, and valuational presuppositions, stand ready to modify our existing preconceptions in the light of what we thus come to learn (see further Healy 2005, 124-26; cf. McCarthy 1992). In thereby correcting for the homogeneity and ethnocentrism of the established heuristic principles, these postulates move us correspondingly closer to fulfilling Winch's injunction that we not only seek to understand other cultures in terms commensurate with their own self-understanding but also to learn from them about "different possibilities of making sense of human life" (Winch 1970, 106). Nonetheless, we should also be clear that comparable validity is not tantamount to equal validity and hence, as considered further below, it does not preclude principled comparative evaluation of the other culture's beliefs, values and practices with regard to their actual significance for living.

In thus attuning us to the need to respect difference to the point of being prepared to learn from it, these postulates constitute a promising basis for embarking on a situated process of dialogical interaction conducive to the advancement of intercultural understanding and learning.

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[10] While the present analysis owes much to Kögler (1996), in keeping with the concerns of the original Winchian debate, it remains sharply focussed on the dimensions of meaning and rationality and desists from engaging with the analysis of "power relations", important though these are in their own right (for more on the latter, see Kogler, especially Ch. 6 and "Conclusion").

[11] While Bohman and Kelly's injunction to embrace the other culture's beliefs as credible "truth candidates" even though they may "represent entirely different categories of belief or types of actions than may be available "by our lights"' (1996, 91) constitutes a real advance on the principles of charity and humanity, it still falls considerably short of what comparable validity entails in terms of posing a challenge to our established worldview.

TOWARD ADVANCEMENT OF INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND LEARNING

As we have seen, a striking, if regrettable, feature of the original debate is that in fostering polarised choices between Western science and Zande magic, it invited invidious comparison and judgments of relative superiority. In this context, the Winchean ideal of learning from other cultures about "different possibilities of making sense of human life" could gain little traction. A dialogical approach endeavours to correct for this by placing the ideal of learning from centre stage. As noted throughout, this calls for significant modifications in the regulative commitments with which we approach the other culture. We now focus more sharply on the character of the dialogical interaction needed to fuel genuine advances in intercultural understanding and learning.

Firstly, the assumption that we already know how to conceptualise what is going on in the other culture needs to give way to an open-minded, questioning attitude oriented toward uncovering the ontological, epistemological, and valuational basis of its own self-understanding with a view to learning from its strengths. Hence, there is a need to eschew the traditional universalist expectation that the categories we already possess are adequate to encapsulating the beliefs and practices of the other culture. As already intimated, early attempts to understand Zande beliefs and practices using familiar labels such as "intellectualist", "functionalist" and "symbolist" effectively undermined the possibility of understanding them in a way that would imbue an appreciation of that culture's distinctive strengths. At the same time, it is important to recognise that we cannot simply wipe the slate clean and "go native", as has sometimes been recommended. In this regard, it is helpful to differentiate between a '"transcendentally" necessary ethnocentrism' on the one hand and an "invidious ethnocentrism" on the other. The comparative advantage of the former being that while it recognises that we cannot meaningfully engage with another culture without bringing our prejudgments into play—since as Fay perceptively puts it (1996, p. 216), "far from opening [our] eyes", "such an elimination would in fact render [us] blind"—it simultaneously emphasises the need to put our preconceptions at risk, and allow them to be called into question in face of our growing awareness of what is distinctive about the other culture's beliefs and practices in all their differences from our own. This is turn foregrounds the need for tacking between perceptions of sameness and difference in our dialogical interactions with others.

Since incommensurability has been seen not to pose an intractable barrier, the potential to identify pertinent commonalities always exists notwithstanding initial perceptions of unfamiliarity and strangeness. In addition to the Winchean limiting concepts already highlighted, the concept of selfhood provides another ready example. But while these common reference points, or "bridgeheads", are

indispensable for enabling us to gain a conceptual foothold in the other culture's belief system, this is just the starting point; the further challenge being to engage with them in a way that does justice to their distinctive connotations in the context of the symbolic order in which they are embedded and achieve their significance. Importantly then, rather than beguiled by the impression of sameness and lulled into assuming the adequacy of our own conceptual framework for encapsulating that of the other, the challenge is to navigate these bridgeheads' in ways that will allow their different connotations in the unfamiliar context to begin to emerge into clear view, so as to enable us to begin to gain an appreciation of what is distinctive about the other culture in all its differences from our own. Since there is no algorithm that can determine how we should proceed to unravel the different assumptions and "epistemic orientations" (Kögler 1996, p. 165) in the unfamiliar context, as Bernstein has it, this process is "always precarious and fragile" and depends on "the cultivation of hermeneutical sensitivity and imagination" (1991, pp. 92-93).

Unlike the invidious comparisons that dogged the original debate, progress with uncovering the constitutive assumptions of the other culture paves the way for what may be termed a dialogical process of "contrastive foil" learning (cf. Kögler 1996, 262-63), with the ability both to make us aware of heretofore unrecognized limitations of our own worldview and to alert us to new possibilities for thinking, doing, and being. It does so by enabling us both to see why, given its constitutive symbolic order and concomitant "regional rationality" (Kögler), it makes sense, from the standpoint of that culture, to endorse the specific beliefs and practices that it does and to recognize these beliefs and practices as potentially valid responses to the problems of living to the extent that they can pose a challenge to our own preconceived ways of thinking and doing, thereby causing us to re-evaluate what we ourselves take to be worthwhile and important. Accordingly, as Lorenzo Simpson puts it, a genuine process of intercultural learning presupposes a moment both of "familiarization" and "defamiliarization", such that "not only might "they" become more familiar to "us", but we may well become more "strange" to ourselves" (2001, 89; cf. Kögler 1996, e.g., 199, 213, 245). Moreover, as Simpson further contends, provided we are genuinely open to learning from otherness, "[s]uch an encounter may well provide answers to our questions that are different from those with which we have become comfortable (p. 92). Careful attention to the constitutive features of a different symbolic order can thus make us profoundly aware of the relative contingency, fragility, and hence mutability of our own, as well as concretely appraising us of the need for change in aspects of our own conceptual worldview in virtue of coming face-to-face with its limitations. Moreover, as is discussed further below, the prospect for intercultural learning is reinforced by a process of comparative evaluation along selected dimensions whereby we come to reappraise the validity of our way of doing things in

the light of a growing awareness of the viability, and indeed potential merits, of other ways of thinking, doing, and being. Moreover, on a hermeneutico-dialogical analysis, in addition to—and indeed largely as a result of—the comparative evaluations thus engaged in, a more holistic learning experience can occur through this process of attuned and interactive engagement with difference, culminating in a potentially transformative "fusion of horizons", whereby, as Taylor puts it, we learn "to move in a broader horizon, within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to valuation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background of the formerly unfamiliar culture" (1994, p. 67).

In this connection, it is notable that the emergence of a hermeneutic fusion of horizons is by no means a purely numinous occurrence, but results rather from what Georgia Warnke has termed a principled process of "integration and appropriation" (1987, 101), whereby we stand ready to have our existing preconceptions about what it means to live a worthwhile human life systematically challenged and corrected in light of the distinctive strengths that come to the fore in our encounter with other ways of life. Notably too, because a hermeneutic fusion of horizons results from the expansion of our existing worldview to progressively embrace other possibilities, it does not fall prey to the limitations of an incommensurable "different worlds" scenario which would entail an irrational Gestalt switch to select between alternatives. On the contrary, as we shall now consider, the dialogical approach also embodies the potential to underwrite a non-invidious process of comparative evaluation grounded in a multidimensional conception of cultural rationality, which secures its capacity to adjudicate the possibilities inherent in other ways of life on a principled basis.

TOWARD NON-INVIDIOUS COMPARATIVE EVALUATION

Recall that the problem of invidious comparison arises not in virtue of the activity of comparison itself but rather because appeal is made to a standard, such as logico-scientific reasoning, which when used as a yardstick for cross-cultural assessments cannot but fail to show the other culture in an inferior light in point of rationality. Accordingly, the needed corrective is not relativistically to eschew such evaluations, but rather to ensure that the selected standards are appropriate for underwriting a non-invidious process of intercultural learning. Moreover, provided the appropriate standards can be identified, a commitment to comparable validity is no barrier to engaging in a principles process of comparative evaluation since, as already noted, this is needed to judiciously establish what is worth learning from, and what is not. But how, then, are the appropriate standards to be identified in a way that transcends the pitfalls of the original debate?

In response, a dialogical approach valorises a multidimensional conception of cultural rationality capable of doing justice to the distinctive strengths of diverse

cultures in a way that an exclusive focus on logico-scientific reasoning could not. More specifically, taking its cue from Winch, it embraces the idea that the concept of a worthwhile human life has the potential to ground a more appropriate measure of cultural rationality (1970, 105-106). While further work is needed to consolidate this proposal and specify the range of operative standards, some suggestive insights can be derived from post-Winchean contributions to the debate, and in particular from that of David Wong.

Thus Wong recognises, firstly, that given legitimate variations in the styles of reasoning constitutive of different cultures, a multiplicity of evaluative standards is likely to be needed. Furthermore, like Winch, he persuasively contends that notwithstanding the original preoccupation with logico-scientific reasoning, cultural rationality is ultimately more closely related to the values associated with living a worthwhile human life. On this basis, Wong defends the possibility of deriving a multidimensional conception of cultural rationality from the values deemed highly prized in a diversity of cultures (1989, 154). Elaborating, he expands on how "attunement" (to one's natural and social worlds as well as to the perceived order of thing) has traditionally been highly valued in Chinese culture, and goes on to valorise its contemporary potential to provide an indispensable counterbalance to a preoccupation with logico-scientific reasoning as the appropriate measure of cultural rationality (1989, 148ff.). More broadly this theme resonates with the insight, echoed by other contributors, that certain cultural values, still evident in more traditional cultures but largely lost to modern industrialised societies, may have an indispensable role to play in the constitution of a rich and complete human life Thus for example, although a committed universalist and critic of Winch, Robin Horton nonetheless vaunts his discovery in traditional African culture of "things lost" in the scientifically-oriented West, in particular an "intensely poetic quality in everyday life and thought, and a vivid enjoyment of the passing moment" (1970, 170) . A similar point could be made regarding the importance of rediscovering a sense of wonder, a virtue advocated by most major philosophical traditions, but largely deadened by the mind numbing routines of daily life in the industrialised world. Extrapolating, Wong vindicates the merits of the ideal of an integrated and balanced way of life in which values like "attunement and greater control over nature are combined and reconciled" as a judicious measure of cultural rationality (1989, p. 154), which in virtue of its multidimensionality can genuinely lay claim to transcultural applicability. Independently, Charles Taylor likewise valorises the benefits of incorporating a broader range of transcultural standards, including attunement, which could do justice to the diverse possible ways of living a worthwhile human life. Correlatively, Taylor too is emphatic that when it comes to cultural rationality, "there is no such thing as a single argument proving *global* superiority" (1970, 103; italics in original);

and hence, there is "no question of judging one [culture] to be an inferior version of the other" (1970, 99). Concurring, Dascal also valorises the need to adopt a *holistic* measure of cultural rationality, such as "quality of life", as "a necessary ingredient of unprejudiced cultural comparison" and he, too, is emphatic that such a holistic measure would "have to be defined over a set of transcultural parameters" (1991, 284-85).

Hence, while further work is needed to expand the range of candidate standards and to more fully elucidate the structure, dynamics and logic of the situated dialogical processes at issue, the clear advantage of such a multidimensional conception of cultural rationality incorporating a variety of standards related to the ideal of human flourishing is that it can underwrite a principled process of intercultural learning, without falling prey to invidious comparison. Moreover, since it does not provide grounds for identifying one way of life as constituting *the* overall "proper form of human life", it does not licence a univocal judgment of superior rationality (Taylor 1982, 103-4). Instead, it enjoins each culture to endeavour to achieve the best internal balance it can among the relevant desiderata (or "primary values"), such that, for example, "attunement and greater control over nature are combined and reconciled" (cf. Wong, 154).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As prefigured at the outset, the present paper has sought to delineate a well-grounded dialogical response to the impasses generated by the original Winchean debate about cultural rationality in the process seeking to disperse the spectre of incommensurability. Although necessarily circumscribed, it is hoped that enough has been said at this juncture to convey the flavour of what a hermeneutico-dialogical approach can offer in response to the limitations of the original debate about cultural rationality and of its implications for promoting meaningful and productive intercultural communication and learning. In this regard, the following additional comments are noteworthy in conclusion.

Firstly, in response to a potential objection that such a dialogical approach to intercultural communication and inquiry in unduly utopian, I contend that while numerous barriers can impede its implementation, these are not insurmountable. Rather, the point to be emphasised is that, as a worthwhile and theoretically cogent response to the alleged incommensurability of cultures, it is always amenable to implementation in some measure to the extent that the will to do so exists. Notably too, given that, as hermeneutic theorists have it, we are inherently dialogical beings, we are always already in some measure dialogically connected with others, and hence although always imperfectly realised, the envisaged dialogical process is nonetheless already underway, and hence simply needs to be reinforced rather than initiated from

nothing, as it were. Accordingly, it is contended that while the proffered dialogical approach represents a fragile and elusive possibility, it is not an impossible ideal.

More controversially perhaps, it is also contended that in a tightly interconnected globalised world a commitment to implementing the dialogical ideal is not entirely discretionary. Instead, I envisage it as entailing an accountability requirement such that, far from constituting a self-validating monad, each culture remains accountable to others in the global community of cultures, in which all cultures in principle participate, for the beliefs, values and practices it sees fit to endorse as acceptable responses to the problems of living with which it is confronted.[12] On dialogical premises, this entails a correlative willingness on the part of each culture to engage in a non-invidious, dialogically grounded, process of intercultural learning with a view to assessing the cogency of its responses and to improving upon them when they are found wanting.[13] In effect, then, a dialogical analysis radically recasts the construal of self-other relations that originally gave rise to the problem of invidious comparison, in that while it accords each culture the right to structure itself in a manner commensurate with its constitutive ontological, epistemic, and valuational presuppositions, it simultaneously holds each accountable on a non-invidious basis for living up to its inherent potential for sustaining the cultural conditions conducive to living a worthwhile human life.

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[12] Cf. McCarthy on "multicultural cosmopolitanism" in Hoy and McCarthy (1994, ch. 3.4).

[13] It is noteworthy that on a critical hermeneutic analysis, far from being regarded as self-validating, cultural beliefs and practices are construed as criticisable validity claims, which are inherently open to critical scrutiny from other perspectives. As elaborated by Georgia Warnke (1995, 139): "this would seem to entail its capacity to show its worth in relation to the worth of other cultures, to be able to enrich itself with what it takes to be valuable in other cultures, to show its own members how its values stack up against those of others, where it fits in the panoply of cultures and so on".

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