

# SEARCHING FOR THE RED HUE<sup>1</sup>: PROBLEMS AND PROS- PECTS FOR GLOBAL NORMS

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## Abstract

This paper argue for the establishment of global norms and rejects relativism. This is accomplished, not through the usual avenues of explicit epistemic justification, but through an exploration of the more subtle and fundamental values of aesthetics. Klein illustrates this process through the example of red clay architecture of Fatehpur Sikri, and urges theorists to take seriously the search for transcultural objective truths.

*"You can't believe how they loved it," Geeta says. "So many people loving to bow down and say, Sir, Sir, we just love America."*

*"India and the U.S. as the two great democracies," Vivan adds. "India and America as partners and equals. That was the idea, and it was said without any sense of irony."*

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*"The India that remains in thrall to religious-communalist sectarians of the most extreme and medievalist type; the Indian that's fighting something like a civil war in Kashmir; the India that cannot feed or educate or give proper medical care to its people; the India that can't provide its citizens with drinkable water; the India in which the absence of simple toilet facilities obliges millions of women to control their natural functions so that they can relieve themselves under cover of darkness—these Indias were not paraded before the of the United States. Gung-ho nuclear India, fat-cat entrepreneurial India, glam-rock high-life India all pirouetted and twirled in the international media spotlight that accompanies the Leader of the Free World wherever he goes."*

Salman Rushdie<sup>3</sup>

## Introduction

Can anyone from the East or the "developing world" make positive claims about the United States—its commitment to autonomy<sup>4</sup>, individualism, freedom, and a capitalistic democracy<sup>5</sup>—without being viewed as having been brain-washed into selling out their own culture? Can anyone from the West make judgments about anything other

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<sup>3</sup> Salman Rushdie, "Letter from India: A Dream of Glorious Return," *New Yorker*, June 19 & 26, 2000, pp.94-112.



than their own personal subjective states without immediately being branded racist, sexist, elitist, orientalist, (or all of the above)? Are all attempts to find common ground between cultural groups, let alone establish normative standards cross-culturally or trans-culturally, inherently and hopelessly imperialistic and tyrannical? All of these questions need to be answered if contemporary education is to progress from its present harmful political agenda to a pedagogically sound commitment to educational and cultural diversity in our classrooms.

First, it is important to point out that with respect to Rushdie's lament, the "unwashed masses" from "developing nations," or even the "third world," are not

the only people who naively love everything foreign. Americans love the British accent—no matter where it's from—to the point where companies such as Victoria's Secret use such voices on their electronic answering machines to sell teddies. Nor is it the case that all "nationalism" is harmful. "Useful nationalism, in the sense of getting the best out of people, is not fostered by authoritarianism."<sup>6</sup> In addition, Americans are not the only racists.<sup>7</sup> But the point is not whose culture, nature or people is most naively in love with, or misguidedly in hate with whose, but whether the world population is making progress toward an idea of global citizenship via an appreciation of universal attitudes of human excellence.

By taking seriously the example set by the Third Mughal Emperor (Akbar) in his building of his new capital city Fatehpur Sikri, I believe philosophy (combined with other pedagogical disciplines) can create a universal norm for human excellence that will be fundamentally transcultural. By metaphori-

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<sup>4</sup>One commentator, for example, claims that "Ghandi was to provide Indians—and, by extension, other poor people in the world who were going naked and hungry—with food, clothing and useful occupation, so that they could live modestly but with dignity and decency. He wanted people, instead of being a burden on society, to become self-sufficient: spin their own cloth; raise their own cattle..." Ved Mehta "Progress Report: Technology has liberated us but materialism may enslave us," *The Spectator* 5 August, 2000, p.23.

<sup>5</sup>Interestingly the same person Rushdie cites above, the famous artist and social critic Geeta Kapur has argued elsewhere that artistic eclecticism "serves to emphasize the democratic right of politically subordinate cultures to invent new syncretic traditions of their own...and to participate in an international discourse of modernism." Geeta Kapur, "Dismantling the Form," *Traditions: Contemporary Art in Asia*, Asia Society Galleries, New York, 1996, pp.60-69.

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<sup>6</sup> Ian Buruma *The Missionary and the Libertine: Love and War in East and West*, New York: Random House, 2000, " pp.288-289.

<sup>7</sup> For example, "the glibly racist novels of Yamada Eimi and Ieda Shoko have made foreign male sexuality—in particular black male sexuality—a cause celebre in Japan today," Karen Kelsky, "Flirting with the Foreign: Interracial Sex in Japan's 'International' Age," in *Economic and Political Transculturalism Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (eds.), Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996, pp.173-192.p.181.



cally relating the cohering effects of the red clay used by this ancient architect—what I call the “red hue”—I will argue that we must reject all contemporary versions of rationalistic multiculturalism and substitute, instead, a more sophisticated and global account of aesthetic transculturalism. In so doing we can avoid both relativism and orientalism while leading our students toward global ideals of human excellence.

### The “Red Hue”

Between the years 1556 and 1605 the Third Mughal Emperor (Akbar) attempted to unite the diverse population of India. Aside from “inventing a uniform system of administration throughout his empire,”<sup>8</sup> creating the “universal” language of Urdu<sup>9</sup>, as well as initiating the eclectic creed Din-I-Ilahi<sup>10</sup>, Akbar was known throughout the East as a man of extreme tolerance. Akbar went to great lengths throughout his reign to receive, entertain and be impressed by all religious creeds and cultural artifacts.

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<sup>8</sup> Columbia Encyclopedia, Fifth Edition, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Urdu is viewed by many contemporary Hindus to be a classical language which needs preservation because of its uniqueness as well as its poetic qualities—it is often viewed as the language of love. Ironically, Urdu was first invented as the language of war by which Akbar could communicate with his multicultural mercenary troops.

<sup>10</sup> Which was a combination of Islam, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity.

Today the cosmopolitan spirit of this ruler is still exemplified near the rocky ridges outside Agra<sup>11</sup> where Akbar built his new capital city Fatehpur Sikri. While former rulers would import both the style (usually from their native land) and material (often marble) for their edifices, Akbar chose instead to build a city made of buildings that represented all cultures. Fatehpur Sikri “consists of a number of highly individual structures”<sup>12</sup> each of which is distinctly based on Roman, Islamic or Persian traditional architectural styles. In addition, and most interestingly, Akbar decided to unify all of these separate and unique buildings by constructing them out of the same material—the red sandstone indigenous to the area.

Akbar’s accomplishments are interesting for three interconnected reasons. The first is that they are an actual attempt to take what I will term aesthetic transculturalism, not rationalistic multiculturalism, seriously. Rationalistic Multiculturalism, and its commitment (at some level or other) to either orientalism or relativism, I will argue below, is, at best, epistemically impotent; at worst, pedagogically harmful. In the final analysis it has no saving virtues and the term (which is one of the ten most overused buzzwords of contemporary academic culture) ought to be dropped completely from academia.

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<sup>11</sup> Agra is about 100 miles south of Dehli.

<sup>12</sup> Samia Rab, “Architecture of the Mughal Emperors in India,” presented at the 2000 NEH Summer Institute, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawai’i.



What I am calling Aesthetic Transculturalism, on the other hand, does everything academics need to develop a sophisticated and globally educated student body while avoiding the pitfalls of Rationalistic Multiculturalism. I believe the difference between these two pedagogical constructs, as well as ones preferring the latter over the former, is best articulated by acknowledging—both conceptually and viscerally—the example set by Akbar. The Third Mughul Emperor, via his very clever use of architecture (a human endeavor which intimately combines art and science), not only aided in cultural unification, but has given us an actual example of why it is that the search for some kind of unifying and universal ideal is not the misguided pedagogical endeavor it is claimed to be by most academics.

This is for two interconnected reasons. On one level the metaphor is stark: There is nothing more obviously foundational than the very earth used in the construction of the varied buildings. At another level the metaphor is much more subtle, for it acts as a physical representation of a simultaneous commitment to uniqueness and universality. (That is, there seems to be an important lesson for those of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century who, following good academic fashion, have shied away from the need for any kind of unifying ground.)

Finally, and most importantly, one is immediately aesthetically moved by the symbol of the clay and its unusual color for it is what visually and spiritually unifies Fatehpur Sikri. I have noticed that it is in the world of art, and art criticism, that the intertwining of influences between East and West, for example, is

more often than not, viewed as something that not only goes “both ways” but is inherently positive. I am suggesting, therefore, that it may be that our most profound understanding comes, not merely from rational argumentation, but from such argumentation combined with (and focused on) an aesthetic sensibility.

Broadly, then, my point is that maybe philosophical theories are not so different from art in general and architectural structures in particular. I will suggest that some kind of theoretical foundation ought be sought which embraces the essence of the vast variety of philosophies that flourish worldwide. I will argue first that argument alone cannot make the case for global norms. I will then suggest that the search for an aesthetically pleasing philosophical “red hue” (which can help us develop criteria for determining what is and is not intellectually sound across cultures) is neither pedagogically misguided<sup>13</sup> nor inherently orientalist.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Some psychologists and counselors have argued that there is empirical evidence that a commitment to uncritical pluralism is actually psychologically harmful. Stated by Dr. Gene Usdin and Reverend John Stone Jenkins at their lecture “Love, Justice or Neither” lecture at Flagler College, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> By ‘orientalist’ I mean the non common phrase for critiquing most attempts to offer any kind of universal norms trans-culturally. Being a Westerner one is often accused of being either unjustly harsh, or even sickeningly patronizing toward the general culture, specific beliefs, religions or philosophical ideals of the East.



## Multiculturalism

'Multiculturalism'—the fundamentally political educational ideal that one should "celebrate"<sup>15</sup> diversity in the classroom due to the supposed empirical fact that there is a causal link between an increase in the real world of opportunity of previously marginalized students that is directly proportional to the increase of pedagogy in the classroom where ethnic, racial or "gendered" cultural, religious, or philosophical views are acknowledged—has been defended by scholars from all areas of academia.<sup>16</sup>

However, as pointed out by Harvey Siegel<sup>17</sup> there seems to be a logical paradox inherent in the multiculturalists' argument—a paradox springing from its foundational commitment to some form of epistemological and/or ethical relativism. Of course, the logical structure of the relativist claim—There are no absolute truths—suffers from immedi-

ately being either incoherent<sup>18</sup> or inconsistent,<sup>19</sup> but now Siegel argues that one can actually give this logical prestidigitation some teeth by applying it to the real time political agendas of multiculturalists.<sup>20</sup>

Siegel argues that multiculturalism is itself incoherent or inconsistent, for most multiculturalists are actually absolutists in politically correct clothing, i.e., that they believe in a fundamentally monocultural way in the supremacy of their own multicultural commitments. To support this, Siegel cites copiously from collections of essays by multiculturalists such as Charles Taylor<sup>21</sup> or J.Arthur and A. Shapiro<sup>22</sup> that are filled with not so subtle commitments to "moral requirements emphasized by 'liberal' social theory," the "most elementary moral injunction to respect the dignity of all human beings," "a solidarity that develops out of the imperatives of freedom, liberation, democracy, and critical citizenship"; as well

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<sup>15</sup> I use this term due to its ambiguous meaning in order to emphasize the fact that there is a multifarious range of notions of multiculturalism.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the anthologies by J. Arthur and A. Shapiro (eds.), *Campus Wars: Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1995; and C. Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (ed.) Princeton University Press, 1992.

<sup>17</sup> Harvey Siegel, "Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals," *Philosophy* 74, 1999, pp.387-409.

<sup>18</sup> How can we absolutely defend relativism?

<sup>19</sup> If relativism is only relatively true, then its antithesis must be only relatively true as well.

<sup>20</sup> A similar move against feminism was made earlier by E.R. Klein, *Feminism Under Fire*, Prometheus, 1996, pp. 74-77.

<sup>21</sup> C. Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (ed.) Princeton University Press, 1992.

<sup>22</sup> J. Arthur and A. Shapiro (eds.), *Campus Wars: Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1995.



as a blatantly obvious bias<sup>23</sup> toward a Western liberal democratic ideal of “justice”.<sup>24</sup>

Even Richard Rorty, the present day “Pope” of multiculturalism exposes his incoherent commitment to the possibility of inconsistency: “We pragmatists...should say that we must, in practice, privilege our own group, even though there can be no non-circular justification for doing so.”<sup>25</sup> In his “Response to Randall Peerenboom,” Rorty unapologetically claims that his own endorsement of liberal democracy is based solely on his “impression that wherever bourgeois freedoms and the culture of rights have gotten a grip, people have liked the results pretty well.”<sup>26</sup> Is Rorty offering an “unhealthy relativism,”<sup>27</sup> or is it simply that a “hard” multiculturalist is hard to find?

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<sup>23</sup> This point has been made by a number of scholars including, for example, Randall Peerenboom.

<sup>24</sup> Harvey Siegel, “Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals,” *Philosophy* 74, 1999, pp.387-409, p.390.

<sup>25</sup> Harvey Siegel, “Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals,” *Philosophy* 74, 1999, pp.387-409, p.402.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Rorty, “Response to Randall,” *Philosophy East & West*, Volume 50, Number 1, January 2000, pp.90-91, p.90.

<sup>27</sup> Chris Lorenz, “Comparative Historiography: Problems and Perspective,” *History and Theory*, 1999, Vol.38, No.1., pp.25-39, p.25.

Citing the work of Susan Khin Zaw (who interestingly “trenchantly articulates”<sup>28</sup> but does not endorse “hard” relativism), Siegel sets out to clean, stuff, and hang the other horn to this dilemma. Siegel claims that the “hard” multiculturalist is committed to the following argument:

1. Educational/philosophical ideals are meaningful, applicable or relevant only within the particular cultures which acknowledge and embrace them.

2. Therefore, there can be no absolute, universal, or transcultural ideals.

3. There can be no culture-neutral standpoint—none is ‘philosophically available’—from which to evaluate alternative, culturally-relative ideals fairly and impartially.

4. Therefore, the imposition of hegemony of culturally specific ideals upon other cultures which do not recognize the legitimacy<sup>29</sup> of those ideals cannot be morally justified.

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<sup>28</sup> Harvey Siegel, “Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals,” *Philosophy* 74, 1999, pp.387-409, p.392.

<sup>29</sup> Siegel notes an equivocation with respect to the term ‘legitimacy’ and argues that the “hard” multiculturalist must be, at heart, a “hard” relativist believing that “all cultures must accept the legitimacy of all other cultures living in accordance with their own, culturally-specific ideals,” p.393. It is implied that this would be true even if the ideals were inconsistent with the ideal of multiculturalism itself. In other words, they must embrace, at the very least, the possibility of having to embrace contradiction.



5. Reason, therefore, requires that cultures tolerate, and recognize the culture-specific legitimacy of, the ideals of other cultures and accept the legitimacy of all other cultures living in accordance with their own, culturally-specific ideals.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, if “hard” multiculturalists actually ever existed, or are not already extinct, they need to be hunted down and made so for such people would have to take seriously, at least the possibility of embracing, contradiction. After all if we are really “hard” multiculturalists, then we may actually be forced to recognize the legitimacy of a monocultural commitment against multiculturalism itself; a commitment which could, in principle, lead to the intolerance and tyranny of anyone supporting a “hard” multiculturalism.

Unfortunately, this is where Siegel himself becomes inconsistent to his own position. That is, instead of standing firm against both “soft” and “hard” multiculturalism (which, due to their ultimate commitment to epistemological and/or moral relativism, fall prey to incoherence or inconsistency respectively), he instead couches his absolutist commitment to what he calls a “transcultural ideal”—specifically that of embracing multiculturalism in the now trendy language of multiculturalism itself. Is Siegel just trying to “have his cake and eat it too,” or is it that even the most staunch anti-relativists can be made to fit the Procrustean bed of our politically correct academic climate?

Probably both. For there can be no other explanation for his not seeing that he too has become, like the theorists whom he

criticizes, fundamentally circular. It’s not merely that Siegel thinks that multiculturalism allows for the possibility of transcultural ideals (ideals to which anyone from any culture could be committed), but rather that multiculturalism is essentially transcultural. “Multiculturalism does not entail that educational and philosophical ideals are relative to culture”<sup>31</sup> because there is one “universalistic” or “culture-transcendent view of genuine educational and philosophical ideals,”<sup>32</sup> namely one’s commitment to multiculturalism itself. Multiculturalism is simply entailed by Siegel’s account of transculturalism and so his thesis becomes not only true but necessarily, and trivially, so.

Siegel’s “modest”<sup>33</sup> middle-ground multiculturalism runs as follows:

They [multiculturalists] hold—rightly, in my view—that the evils visited upon marginalized cultures and their members

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<sup>30</sup> Harvey Siegel, “Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals,” *Philosophy* 74, 1999, pp.387-409, pp.392-395.

<sup>31</sup> Harvey Siegel, “Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals,” *Philosophy* 74, 1999, pp.387-409, p.387.

<sup>32</sup> Harvey Siegel, “Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals,” *Philosophy* 74, 1999, pp.387-409.

<sup>33</sup> Harvey Siegel, “Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals,” *Philosophy* 74, 1999, pp.387-409, p.397.



by a hegemonic dominant culture which marginalizes, silences, and devalues them, are genuine evils in which dominant cultures can engage only in violation of their moral obligations. As multiculturalists claim, all persons and cultures are morally obliged to treat cultures other than their own, and the members of those cultures, justly, with respect, in ways which do not silence, marginalize, or oppress...It is significant, though, that this moral obligation is not itself limited to cultures which recognize it; it applies even to those cultures which do not acknowledge that it does. That is why advocates of multiculturalism can coherently urge monoculturalists to embrace it. After all, if members of dominant, majority cultures were not erring in neglecting the views and interests of members of other cultures, there would be no reason for them to change their views, or their educational or social/political agendas, in order to respect and incorporate the views and interests of those other cultures. It is because those persons and cultures which fail to treat other cultures and their members properly are mistaken in their treatment—because, that is, there is something morally wrong with such treatment—that multiculturalists can compellingly make their case.

Moreover, that cultural domination is indeed a moral mistake is not something that can be claimed only from the perspective of some particular culture; it cannot be regarded as a culturally-relative truth that cultural domination, marginalization and oppression are wrong. If it were to be regarded in this way, the monoculturalist would have an obvious reply: 'perhaps this domination

and marginalization is wrong from the perspective of your culture, but it is fine from the perspective of mine.' The multiculturalist has no response to this, if she sees the multiculturalist imperative as a legitimate imperative, a moral truth, only from the perspective of her own culture. Consequently, the advocate of multiculturalism must see the requirements of avoiding cultural domination and hegemony, and of treating cultures and their members justly and respectfully, as themselves culturally-transcendent or transcultural moral requirements. She must in fact see them as universal in the strong sense that they are applicable to all cultures, including those which do not recognize them as moral truths or imperatives...My claim, then is that multiculturalism is itself a culturally transcendent or universal moral, educational and social ideal in the sense that it is applicable to all cultures, even those which do not recognize or embrace it; and that it rests upon other, equally transcendent, moral imperatives and values. It is important that this claim not be misunderstood, and so I close this section with the following clarification. By 'culturally transcendent' I do not mean 'can exist or be recognized apart from all culture.' I happily grant that, prior to culture and language, it would not be possible to conceive or articulate educational or philosophical ideals; nor can there in fact exist actual, flesh-and-blood people, capable of formulating and affirming such ideals, who are not in significant ways shaped by the culture(s) in which they are embedded. I mean rather to argue that such ideals can 'transcend culture' in the more modest sense that they can be legitimately applied to (the members of) cultures other than those



which explicitly recognize them, and even to those which explicitly reject them—and that multiculturalism is itself one such ideal.

Siegel, at this point, could easily be hoisted by his own petard. The most obvious response from the “hard” multiculturalist would be simply: According to you! No matter how many times he repeats himself, at best Siegel seems to be caught chasing his tail in much the same way for which he chides Rorty.

Actually, however, Siegel’s circle is much more vicious and deceitful. For ultimately Rorty simply admits to the personal and subjective flavor of his political, ethical and epistemological commitments. Siegel does not.

Via the concept of “transcultural normative reach”<sup>34</sup> Siegel attempts to show that one’s advocacy of multiculturalism is “not only non-arbitrary, but rational—warranted by the reasons offered in its support.”<sup>35</sup> But despite Siegel’s attempts to rationally defend rationality, in the final analysis he will have to admit that any “hard” multiculturalist could retort that Siegel is trying simply to impose his own brand of academic rationalistic hegemony on everyone else, “including those who do not recognize” such rationalistic ideals as truths or imperatives.

At such a problematic juncture, it seems that Siegel could either join the relativist (by biting the subjective bullet which waits at her center), or, if he was a real anti-relativist, he would give up his multiculturalist rhetoric completely. A true believer in universal norms, such as myself, favors a straight-talking

commitment to doing the hard work—actually searching for specific universal ideals that are foundational to humanity and therefore would prove, empirically, to be accepted as standards for human excellence across the globe.

### **Aesthetic Transculturalism: From Red Hue to Philosophical Ideals**

I recommend, therefore, that we give up our academic commitment to multiculturalism altogether. As a theory, its embracing or entailing of epistemological and moral relativism is simply too theoretically problematic. Not only is it inherently circular, it is viciously so—allowing anyone and everyone to offer accounts and critiques they either will not or cannot justify. As practice, it enables, at best, a scenario such as the one seen in contemporary feminism where there is no unified movement, no substantive policies to sustain its political existence for the next generation, no *raison d’être*.<sup>36</sup> At worst, it allows just as easily for war as it does for peace; tyranny as easily as freedom; poverty as easily as economic health; happiness as well as misery.

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<sup>34</sup> Harvey Siegel, “Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals,” *Philosophy* 74, 1999, pp.387-409, p.401-407.

<sup>35</sup> Harvey Siegel, “Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals,” *Philosophy* 74, 1999, pp.387-409, p.401.

<sup>36</sup> For more detail on this see E.R. Klein, *Contemporary Feminism*. Forthcoming, Paragon House, 2002.



I also do not recommend we give up our classical and continual desire for global norms. However, having learned the hard lesson that rationality itself can always be seen as yet another hegemony (albeit at a very problematic level<sup>37</sup>), I have decided to try to beat the problems above, not by arguing for certain ideals, but by instead arguing that argument alone will not suffice. I will call this the search for an aesthetic transculturalism.

This idea of “doing” philosophy viscerally is certainly widely accepted in the East where, for example, the sayings of Confucius, Buddha, or Arjun are intermingled with poetry and visual works of art, not analytic philosophy, to suggest grand universal claims about humanity. But, it is not so unusual to find this approach in the West as well. From Plato’s cave<sup>38</sup> through Kepler’s music<sup>39</sup> and Heidegger’s use of VanGogh’s Peasant Shoes,<sup>40</sup> to Martha Nussbaum’s recent account of Andrea Dworkin’s Mercy,<sup>41</sup> appealing to works of art in order to present global norms is not unusual.

This may be because such norms, when analyzed and deconstructed philosophically, through language alone, will always show a certain inherent incommensurability.<sup>42</sup> One’s personal, cultural, ethnic, etc. paradigm will always create some kind of “gap” between ways of seeing and ways of knowing. One’s language, even when trying to bridge the gap between paradigms, may necessarily create a certain amount of “slack”.<sup>43</sup> Although I believe that there are ways around this theoretical conundrum<sup>44</sup>, none of these ways have yet been convincing to anyone who has not already accepted the need for, or value of, such norms and the Archimedian point of universal adjudication it creates.<sup>45</sup>

More positively, the field of aesthetics has a certain philosophical elasticity that no other field of study can lay claim to. That is, art, art criticism, and aesthetics

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<sup>40</sup> Heidegger,

<sup>41</sup> Martha Nussbaum, “Equity and Mercy,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 22:2, 1993, pp.83-125.

<sup>42</sup> Thoman Kuhn, *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, W.V. Quine’s vast amount of work on the indeterminacy of translation.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, E.R. Klein, *Feminism Under Fire*. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1996.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Jane Flax, “On Encountering Incommensurability: Martha Nussbaum’s Aristotelian Practice,” in James P. Sterba (ed.) *Controversies in Feminism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, pp.2-45.

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<sup>37</sup> Problematic for at least at first blush it seems that rationality is in some sense self-justifying. After all, if one asks ‘Why be rational?’ it does seem to be that the question itself—given that it implicitly asks for reasons—buys into the valuing of rationality. At another level, however, this seems to be just another analytic trick and does not do the real classical work of defeating relativism.

<sup>38</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, Book VII.

<sup>39</sup> Johannes Kepler, “The Harmonies of the World,” in *Great Books of the Western World*, 16, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, et al., New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952, pp.252-659.



are all simultaneously committed to both ends of the epistemological spectrum. At one end, these fields infuse, and are infused by, the classical criteria of objectivity via their intimate connection to physics. Galileo, Kepler, Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg and Hawkings seem just as comfortable appealing to the language of art, and art criticism (citing such desiderata as simplicity, elegance, balance and unity) as DaVinci, Picasso, Escher, and Kandinsky are with the language of chemistry, optics and geometry. In addition, artists often appeal to what is most irrational, or at least arational to the human experience—our emotional needs and our spiritual desires. Despite Plato's stated bias against art and its distance from truth,<sup>46</sup> it seems that 'art' (in the broadest sense of that term) is capable of reaching and broadening the core of our humanity.

Furthermore, and this is no minor political reality, there are a great many negative presuppositions being made when one attempts to do any cross-cultural work. For example, one standard bias is that all "global" influence comes from the West (viewed as the Borg<sup>47</sup> of Earth) and that such influence always has deleterious effects (stated especially from the postmodern sector of

academia<sup>48</sup>). This, however, seems truly unfair. For example, the idea that rights-based, American-style democracy is a purely Western bias that has no positive normative import is nonsense.

Open and free societies are also, on the whole, the richest. Japan [for instance] is indeed in many ways a less liberal society than the U.S. or Britain, but it is much freer than ever before. And its economic success probably has as much, if not more, to do with freedom of information, mobility of labor and freedom to travel as with nationalist propaganda...Although laissez-faire economics is not favored by most East Asian governments, this is still not to say that an Asian system exists, except in the minds of Southeast Asian demagogues and Western commentators who think that they are on to something.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Book X of the *Republic*.

<sup>47</sup> The Borg are a fictitious race of human/computer cyborgs invented by Gene Roddenberry and the Star Trek group. They are a terrible and powerful species that overpowers all life forms in their path while reciting the following mantra "resistance is futile...you will be assimilated."

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<sup>48</sup> "Postmodernists often argue that even the Romantic idea of the artist following his or her own idiosyncratic bent, opposing society, rejecting crass middle-class capitalist values—even this, strange as it may seem, is really just a way of supporting the middle-class capitalist market economy. Many people living in Third World, underdeveloped countries today regard the ideal of liberal democracy—the rights of the individual to be free to pursue his or her own interests so long as he or she does not interfere with the equal rights of others—as something typically American or Western...we are culturally conditioned to demand freedom!" H.Gene Blocker and Jennifer M. Jeffers, *Contextualizing Aesthetics*. New York: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1999, ppxi-xxi.

<sup>49</sup> Ian Buruma *The Missionary and the Libertine: Love and War in East and West*, New York: Random House, 2000, "pp.288-289.



Whether such cultural critics are correct or not, my point here is simple: there are venues in which honest attempts are made to see the beauty without the bias. The one I am most interested in is aesthetics.

For example, on one of the walls of the Museum of Art in Honolulu, Hawai'i (a place, oddly, where the East is to one's west and the West is to one's east<sup>50</sup>), an educational kiosk located below an exhibit which displays a variety of pieces of furniture, paintings and wardrobes completely unselfconsciously states the following:

The Asia trade had a significant impact on almost all aspects of Western taste, as Asian art influenced architectural, interior and garden design, painting, textiles, furniture, ceramics, and other decorative art forms. Even social customs such as Chinese masques became a fashionable means of Western entertainment.<sup>51</sup>

In addition, the whole nature of the construct of "influence" is challenged in the art world. In the words of the art historian Michael Baxandall:

'Influence' is a curse of art criticism primarily because of its wrongheaded grammatical prejudice about who is the agent and who the patient: it seems to reverse the active/passive relation which the historical actor experiences and the inferential beholder will wish to take into account... To say that X influenced Y in some matter is to beg the question of cause without quite appearing to do so... Y makes an intentional selection [to be influenced] from an array of resources in the history of his craft... to

say that Cezanne influenced Picasso would be false<sup>52</sup>: it would blur the differences in type of reference, and it would take the actively purposeful element out of Picasso's behavior to Cezanne. Picasso acted on Cezanne quite sharply.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, the art world has been more open-minded about the possibility of positive interplay between East and West.

It has been said that "architecture has grave ends; capable of the sublime; it impresses the most brutal instincts by its objectivity; it calls into play the highest faculties by its very abstraction."<sup>54</sup> Fatehpur Sikri (even if only via a photographic form) excites one to see precisely that.

<sup>50</sup> And a place where "ouwli" (white European) culture is always looked upon with suspicion.

<sup>51</sup> Museum of Art, Honolulu Hawaii, 2000. Chinoiserie.

<sup>52</sup> Interesting since in 1906, Cezanne died and Picasso started working towards *Les Femmes d'Alger*.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Baxandall, "Intentional Visual Interest," in (ed) David Goldblatt and Lee B. Brown, *Aesthetics: A Reader in Philosophy of the Arts*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1997, pp.29-35.

<sup>54</sup> Charles-Edouard Jeanneret Le Corbusier, "Towards an Architecture," in (ed) David Goldblatt and Lee B. Brown, *Aesthetics: A Reader in Philosophy of the Arts*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1997, pp.166-169.



So what can this particular metaphor do? For one thing, Fatehpur Sikri offers us a physical representation of what Ram Adhar Mall offers as a fundamental intercultural ideal—the commitment to “unity without uniformity.”<sup>55</sup> Akbar respected the diversity of the different cultures and peoples under his reign, but nonetheless believed that his people needed unity—something to bring them together as many different people of one city, something to make them an organic whole. The Third Mogul’s commitment to diversity was great, but his commitment to unity was even greater. The structures of each building at Fatehpur Sikri are fundamentally different and culturally diverse, yet the red clay essence of each brings them together into a unified whole.

Mall, having studied philosophy East and West, believes that the unity “does not try to constitute the other but starts with the conviction and commitment that our very perception of the other obliges us to live and let live.” However, and this is what sets Mall apart from others preaching tolerance, he does not believe that one ought to accept tolerance at all costs. “Even the best type of tolerance has its limits where its own fate is at stake.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, unity, for Mall, stands boldly as an ultimate goal for humanity. An ultimate goal for Ireland, the Middle East, or wherever. Hailing from India with its ongoing struggle with Pakistan, it is not hard to see why Mall may believe the world needs more unity, not more separateness, “not as a fact but an ideal.”<sup>57</sup>

Unfortunately, it seems that the only people taking advantage of the desire for

global unity are those multinational corporations attempting to create, not a series of different cultural styles unified beautifully by the clay of the surrounding area (as represented in Fatehpur Sikri), but a conglomerate of cheesy consumerism brought together simply to attract a mass market. “Cable TV and MTV dominate the world absolutely. Entertainment and tourism are huge transnational industries by themselves. The return to ‘authenticity’ is a closed route. There is nothing of the sort extant any longer in much of the world.”<sup>58</sup> One can only hope that this is not the extent of our commitment to global norms.

I believe such hope is not in vain. Several theorists have suggested reasons for believing that the search for global norms is not only not inherently problematic, but actually worthwhile. For

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<sup>55</sup> Ram Adhar Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, pp.45-58.

<sup>56</sup> Ram Adhar Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, p.46.

<sup>57</sup> Ram Adhar Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, p. 47.

<sup>58</sup> Masao Miyoshi “A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State,” *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (eds.), Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996, pp.78-106, 395.



example, African philosopher Kwasi Wiredu claims that “philosophical insights can be shared across cultures,” that they are accessible, in principle, to anyone. “Philosophical dialogue is possible among the inhabitants of all cultures,” it can be “understood and assessed,” and such dialogue can be “fruitful both intellectually and practically.”<sup>59</sup>

One suggestion toward operationalizing this construct is to first view the ability to develop such norms in the same way one views any other kind of expertise—as something that is acquired through training and experience—i.e., the development of someone who is not merely a global citizen, but a *cosmopolitan*.

Expertise suggests that the hybrid intellectual can acquire something like a ‘cosmopolitan’ as opposed to a global persona and function; the ‘cosmopolitan’ can take up the perspectives and knowledge needed to acquire a point of view on the global whether imaged as total or seen in struggle with the local.

The cosmopolitan has expertise and also, if you will, critical consciousness. This critical consciousness is not meant to be an idealist, free-floating detachment but rather both a process and its result: it acquires education, knowledge, critical judgment, and, above all, the ability to take notice. This means to see not only what appears within the apparently empirical evidence of the day—which is, after all, merely the results of established systems’ efforts to represent experience. It means rather to see those places where, as it were, the new knowledges produce anomalous effects upon ruling institutions and systems; to identify the misprision between the political adaptations of those new knowledges and the social forces they intend to direct.”<sup>60</sup>

The development of such a consciousness would allow one to come up with global, universal norms for human excellence, or at least, maximal “human functioning.”<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusions

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Third Mogul Emperor needed to coalesce numerous cultures into one people. He did this without adopting either a tyrannical position of parochial universalism—forcing everything to fit his own culture, nor by giving into multiculturalism—where there were no unifying standards at all. Instead, he combined the myriad of architectures of the time with the unifying red clay of the surrounding area. He physically created a scenario in which the many became one. Fatehpur Sikri, I believe, stands as an architectural representation of the possibility of bring-

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<sup>59</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, “Can Philosophy Be Intercultural?,” *Diogenes*, Winter 1998, p. 147.

<sup>60</sup> Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake “Afterward: ‘Global/Local’ Memory and Thought,” in Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (eds.) *Economic and Political Transculturalism Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996 pp.372-385, p.378.

<sup>61</sup> Martah Nussbaum offers an Aristotelian account of “human functioning” in “In Defense of Universal Values,” in James P. Sterba, *Controversies in Feminism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001, pp.3-23.



ing the unity of global norms to a world filled with many and divers cultures.

Of course it may be that such norms already exist at a much deeper, spiritual level. For though not a Christian myself, I recently attended a mass and heard a Catholic priest (of Indian decent) offer a series of quotations from the classical religious texts of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and, lastly, Christianity. The quotations were variations on the same theme—what is colloquially known in the West as the “golden rule”—one ought to treat one’s neighbor as oneself.<sup>62</sup> The purpose of his sermon that day was, in a nutshell: We all share the same world; we all share the same ideals of justice. To find the proverbial common ground to make his point of universal brotherhood, the contemporary Priest utilized the sacred texts already adopted by much of the world’s populations. To unify the different cultures converging on Fatehpur Sikri into one Mogul Empire, Akbar literally used common ground—the red sandstone that was right under his feet.

Though probably for fundamentally different reasons, both men wanted the same goal: unity. Is it possible that this desire, represented in architecture, art

and literature around the world is itself enough to both motivate and justify the search for global norms in a more theoretical and philosophical sense? I believe so. It is my hope that academics will quit the metaepistemological infighting over the good or evil of multiculturalism and, instead, adopt actual steps toward developing global norms. Just what universal norms would compete for acceptance in the global marketplace of ideas is, of course, an empirical point. However, if we piece together the best of all cultures I am confident that a vein of some specific hue will show itself. We can then use the hue, wherever it falls on the spectrum of our ethical and epistemological values, as a standard of adjudication. Such a global norm will allow humanity not merely the theoretical luxury of claiming some “absolute,” but a practical tool for filtering out and preventing the spread of bias, hatred, and war—the consequences of global moral and epistemological blindness.

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<sup>62</sup> I would like to note that the Kantian principle of “universalizability” especially in its initial “negative” formulation—“one ought never act except in such a way that they could will the maxim of that action be universal law” is probably a better way to state the essence of the sentiment. Such a formulation puts the onus of “universalizability” on a rational, rather than any personal qua emotional, decision.