CONSCIOUS RECOGNITION OF THE LIMITATIONS OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE AS THE FOUNDATION OF EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

In the ever-smaller contemporary world, intercultural communication plays an increasingly important role. This paper discusses how to set the contents of a relevant package of university courses, which, while giving appropriate attention to practical solutions of intercultural communication problems, at the same time strongly emphasizes the final limitations of all human philosophical, religious, ideological, and even scientific comprehension. The paper proposes an educational strategy for dealing constructively with these limitations through raising the consciousness of their nature especially on the part of persons in positions of authority in different cultures. This should produce a greater sense of cultural modesty on the part of those persons, and therewith a reduction in intercultural conflicts. With this goal in mind, the paper proposes that such limitations be made the common platform of intercultural communication, thereby enriching this field of study.

Keywords: cultural history and scientific knowledge, university courses, educational strategies, religious and philosophical positions,cultural modesty.

The peoples of the world are now in a time of ever-increasing communication among themselves. Yet various cultures and nations within today's "global village" still exhibit serious imperfections in terms of mutual understanding and forbearance—that is to say, there are failures in their communication. Thus, efforts at improving intercultural communication play an important role in contemporary life, a fact that is reflected in the admirable work that many scholars from different parts of the world have done and are doing in this field. However, intercultural communication studies are so broad that much remains to be explored. For example, in America these studies often consciously or unconsciously still echo in some degree their early concern with the practical purposes of business and commerce. In China, intercultural communication studies are relatively new and not yet fully coordinated with global standards in these fields. Meanwhile, we submit that in intercultural communication studies it would be desirable to give greater attention to a still broader perspective.

There is no doubt in our minds that intercultural communication studies should focus both on the study of comparative cultures as such, as well as on communication studies as such. To use Chinese logic, this involves communication to let people learn about other cultures, and by learning about other cultures to let people improve their communication. We believe that problems in this regard are largely the result of shortcomings in global education, which shortcomings in turn result in deficiencies in intercultural communication. With reference first to educational curricula, many universities in recent decades have developed courses designed to overcome cultural and national provincialism. We have ourselves been involved for several years in the organization and teaching, in both China and the United States, of university-level courses on comparative world cultures and intercultural communication. These courses take a basically historical approach and include topics in the political and social evolution, religion, philosophy, and arts of Western, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Islamic, and African cultures. The courses are

thus wide-ranging and may afford students a basic cultural-historical and geographical literacy. But we have come to feel that the courses still involve too narrow an approach to the type of understanding called for in today's world, and we have become increasingly intrigued by the question of how the positive impact of these, and other similar courses, might be enlarged. We believe, for one thing, that courses in world cultural history, which are typically one academic year in length, need to be expanded into three-year long packages of courses that closely integrate cultural-historical material with material from the natural and social sciences.

While acknowledging that cultural history is indispensable for understanding how the human situation has come to be what it is, scientific knowledge is equally indispensable for coping with that situation today. The natural sciences segments of our envisaged set of courses, while giving attention to basic scientific principles and methodologies, would focus principally on those global problems that science has either itself been in part responsible for causing, or conversely might be helpful in solving: the population explosion, the international spread of diseases, pollution of the oceans, ozone depletion, destruction of the rain forests, and the degradation of croplands. Problems pertaining to our global ecological system reflect a stunning fact in the history of the world; namely that human civilization has now reached a point whereby it is capable of altering to a radically self-defeating extent the physical environment that supports it. Alleviation of these problems clearly calls for improvements in intercultural and international education and communication. Of equal importance, the social sciences segment of the package of courses would focus on international conflict resolution and arms control, world fiscal and trade policies, the maldistribution of wealth among the world's peoples, elimination of international crime cartels, and comparative cultural strategies of social and personal adjustment. In our present intensively interactive world it is only through the study of comparative world cultures in close concert with scientific topics that students can acquire the understanding needed to deal as effectively as possible with major human problems.

Perhaps most people would concur with the merits of the program we have just suggested. However, we are concerned to foster an educational emphasis less often explicitly recognized. Concerning the cultural history and social sciences segments of the sets of courses, one of their obvious goals would be to provide students with a greater knowledge of the values and practices of the diverse peoples and cultures of the world. Increased knowledge of other peoples may lead to increased appreciation of their beliefs and customs, and in practical terms such knowledge can be useful in cultivating successful diplomatic or commercial relations. But such knowledge can be two-edged. The knowledge of foreign cultures does not guarantee respect for those cultures; familiarity as often breeds contempt. We submit that to surmount the latter stumbling block, we need to go beyond the mere description of the beliefs and practices of diverse groups of people, and push the study to the level of conscious recognition of the fundamental limitations of all fields of human knowledge and understanding, limitations which from a nonsectarian, global perspective all peoples share. That is, explicit recognition of the finite character of human comprehension needs to serve as the foundation for practical improvements in intercultural and international relations. Accordingly, it will be pertinent here briefly to recall the basic nature of these limitations.

It seems fair to say that the quintessential aspect of being human is that people ask larger questions than they can answer; their curiosity outruns their ability fully to comprehend their own existence. Or, better said, various groups of people have been able, to their own satisfaction, adequately to understand existence, but only in ways that assert the truth of their own beliefs in contrast to the falsehoods of other equally sincere people. Concerning truth and falsehood, surely the totality of existence, whatever its unimaginable ultimate dimensions, is neither "true" nor "false"; it is simply "there"—as in the case of the classical Chinese concept of "Zi Ran" (自然, that is, "it is there itself"). The truths or falsehoods of aspects of existence, then, are only products of the human activity of making judgments, while the imperfections of that judging activity often lead to conflicting assertions, without there being any available criterion whereby to resolve the differences in a manner compellingly persuasive to all interested parties.

With regard to religious and philosophical issues, human history presents a long catalogue of such conflicting assertions. Humans have been unable to achieve universal accord concerning

either what sectors of "actuality" (or "reality," or "being") there are, or what are the available means for comprehending the same. Different persons have reached various conclusions in regard to the authenticity and efficacy of modes of judgment known as "empirical," "rational," "intuitive," and "mystical." Different persons have been variously persuaded that their judgments have corresponded with sectors of being known as the "material," the "mental," the "conscious," the "subconscious," the "collective unconscious," the "metaphysical," or the "divine." Some persons have asserted the co-reality of several kinds of being, while other persons have reduced all putative levels to one, the "material," the "ideal," or the "divine." The contradictions between some judgments have been complete, as in the case of the assertions "There is a god" and "There is no god." Other cases of contradiction have been only partial, yet significant; for example, if divine actuality be granted, some persons have asserted polytheism, others monotheism; or, granting the latter, some have asserted pantheism, others transcendence; or, granting the latter, some have asserted providentialism, others deism. As specific examples of the countless disparities among the spectrum of beliefs, the Islamic concept of one transcendent god is incongruous with the Mahayana Buddhist concept of a hierarchy of transcendent Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, while neither of these doctrines is compatible with the animistic beliefs of various African and other tribal peoples, and none of these beliefs can be valid in the view of the one modern Western philosophy of logical empiricism. The latter maintains that theological and metaphysical propositions, being neither logical tautologies nor empirically verifiable, can be neither true nor false, nor even genuinely hypothetical, but only nonsensical—although in a global perspective this philosophy is simply one more judgment incorporating the non-universally persuasive assertion of its own truth in contradiction to various non-universally persuasive assertions of the validity of metaphysical truths.

Persons who believe in a transcendent god may consider that all contradictory human judgments are overcome by the omniscience of their god, such persons thus regarding ultimate non-contradictory comprehension as extant in the cosmic scheme of things, only moved back a step, as it were, from the mundane to the divine level. Such omniscient understanding is presumably not "true" in mundane terms, but a supreme species of understanding beyond the realm of human differential judgments of true or false. Such persons may anticipate that after their death in this world, they will join their god and thereby achieve a supernatural understanding of their own. The Christian doctrine of the "beatific vision" approaches this anticipation by supposing that persons saved and in heaven will directly see and know god, become themselves supernaturally enlightened, and thus be better able to comprehend what were during their sojourns on earth the mysteries of existence (although such persons will never become *identical with God*, and never *exhaustively* comprehend the final ineluctable nature of God). One of the doctrines of Hinduism in a sense carries the anticipation of human post-mortem comprehension even further. Those individuals who finally escape the cycles of reincarnation and attain *moksha* (liberation) fuse totally with *brahman*, the latter constituting the eternal, impersonal, all-pervading ground of being for nature, humans, and gods alike. Such persons cease to exist as individuals, not in the sense of becoming nothing, but in the sense of becoming at one with everything; being indistinguishable from the ultimate unity of *brahman* they subsist in a state beyond the polarities, contradictions, and incompleteness of human comprehension. However, from the detached, nonsectarian viewpoint of comparative cultures, the beatific vision and *moksha* are

merely two among many non-universally convincing beliefs entertained by persons of merely finite understanding.

To be sure, if any one comprehensive religious or philosophical version of existence is valid, it is *ipso facto* valid for all persons, whether they realize it or not, as all persons share one and the same universe. However, from a panhuman vantage point there is no way to establish which if any particular comprehensive doctrine is indeed valid, notwithstanding the circumstance that some doctrines have been, or are, more widely accepted or discredited than others. And persons who, through their comparisons of different cultural beliefs and concepts grasp this common aspect of the human condition would thereby, it may be supposed, incline to a philosophical modesty conducive to forbearance toward people of differing persuasions. Beyond all matters of attraction or repulsion that given persons may experience in reference to various doctrines, there prevails, from a global standpoint, the inclusive human condition of inconclusive understanding, and the study of world cultures should expressly elucidate this condition. Such study would also thereby establish a common platform for intercultural communication; only on the basis of such a platform can different cultures cease "talking past" one another.

But if acknowledgement of the final inconclusiveness of human religious, philosophical, or ideological comprehension reaches beyond the attractions or repulsions of culturally diverse epistemologies and ontologies, would not the moral corollaries which these doctrines typically entail also appear inconclusive? And if persons were to order their behavior in line with that inconclusiveness, would this not be conducive to a disastrous moral permissiveness? We think not, for the inability to know with assurance if any religious, philosophical, or ideological system is valid or not has a corollary morality of its own, namely that all people have the right to embrace and morally act in accordance with any religious, philosophical, or ideological creed or doctrine, *but only to the point of infringing the same right of other persons to embrace and act in line with other doctrines*. To vitiate the latter principle would be to allow the possibility that some particular doctrine, destructive in its principles toward other doctrines, is assuredly valid, therefore the destructive actions of adherents of that doctrine toward nonbelievers should be morally acceptable to all people; this allowance would render the posture of ultimate moral uncertainty self-contradictory and self-stultifying. Ultimate moral uncertainty involves tolerance for doctrinal diversity, but not, aside from self-defense, for violence toward persons who hold beliefs different from one's own. But is uncertainty, then, merely one more creed among others, a paradoxical dogma of non-dogmatism? If so, it remains the one dogma that maximally accommodates all others, and thereby the one dogma having optimum relevance to cross-cultural tolerance—and thus the one dogma that could form the basis for the most effective intercultural communication.

Scientific understanding is problematical in a different sense. On the one hand, science is a component common to the intellectual enterprise of all but the most "primitive" cultures, and scientific judgments stand a better chance than do religious, philosophical, and ideological judgments of being globally embraced. For example, all physical scientists—whether they be, say, American democrats or Chinese communists, Nigerian Christians or Saudi Muslims, Thai Buddhists or Indian Sikhs—accept the validity of the Periodic Table of the chemical elements, indicating the atomic number, atomic mass, and other data concerning the known elements. The persuasiveness of this and a great fund of other scientific findings is virtually universal for the good reason that palpable transformations in nature observed or induced in

accordance with these findings provide repeatable public confirmation of their validity—evidence that individuals often can ignore only at their physical peril. Non-scientists, to whom scientific formulae may be unintelligible, are equally persuaded by the force of this evidence.

However, notwithstanding the fact that scientific findings in certain areas and at certain levels of complexity are coercively persuasive and globally accepted, various aspects of scientific knowledge strongly reinforce the condition of incompleteness that characterizes humanistic understanding. The cultivation of global education and communication, while recognizing the store of well-established scientific findings as indispensable for dealing as effectively as possible with today's problems, would at the same time emphasize that science patently fails to provide a definitive understanding of existence. For one thing, scientific knowledge evolves; repeatedly in the history of science what has been known with assurance at certain times, has later been abandoned, altered, or expanded. In some cases, more comprehensive new findings have modified older views through reducing their general validity to validity for special cases. At other times entirely new knowledge is brought forth; humans did not discover bacteria until the nineteenth century or viruses until the twentieth century—and so on in a vast number of equivalent cases. Such expansion of knowledge inspires of itself no anticipation that it will cease, and suggests that scientific understanding has always remained limited to an indeterminate degree, in that humans have not been able at any point in their history to realize with what portion of the total arc of actuality, from microcosm to macrocosm, their accumulated judgments have at that point corresponded. That is, at all successive points in the past, scientific judgments have been, and remain today, collectively incomplete.

Further, the growing edge of scientific understanding is frequently marked by less than definitive interpretations. To consider an example from scientific cosmology, in place of an older conception of the universe as static and having existed forever, astronomers currently favor the view that the universe and time itself began some fifteen billion years ago, when an infinitely dense point of matter exploded (the "big bang") with an incomparable force, thereby setting in motion the evolutionary developments that have produced our known universe. However, some current research in theoretical physics is directed to ascertaining if there may have been some earlier factor that gave rise to that point of matter [1]. If the search for that unknown factor were to be successful, it would lead in turn to an infinite regress of generative or causal questions. That kind of search is endless, as Lao Zi (老子) calmly told us centuries ago. Moreover, even if the generative origin of the point of matter that produced the big bang could be identified, there is no reason to expect that it would afford of itself any help in making known the ultimate purpose, or lack thereof, of the universe as a whole, or the ultimate meaning of human life.

In any event, advances in natural science made on many fronts are of course remarkable, although for some people those advances, far from resolving the uttermost riddles of existence, merely accentuate its mystery by exposing in ever greater depth the astonishing complexity of terrestrial nature, together with the mind-boggling extent of extraterrestrial nature in space and in time—or, in modern scientific terms, in the integrated continuum of "space-time."

The social sciences, while comparable in certain ways to the natural sciences, have their own problems and limitations. To consider the behavioral sciences (psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology) as an exemplar, these disciplines deal with human personalities, alone and in groups, and must grapple, thus, with the copious idiosyncrasies and inconstancies that personalities display. Yet, personalities are not entirely erratic in their functions, they exhibit certain regularities and patterns, and behavioral scientists employ a variety of methods, including controlled experiments, case studies, sample surveys, and statistical analyses, by way of identifying those patterns. However, as they develop, the behavioral sciences are often characterized by contradictory interpretations. For instance, the doctrine of "behaviorism," maintaining that human habits are the reflection exclusively of conditioned physical (glandular and motor) reactions, stands in contrast to the "depth psychologies," which explain human actions in terms both of conscious and unconscious divisions or levels of "mind." In any case, and in a manner reminiscent of the natural sciences, when behavioral findings are viewed from a wider philosophical angle none of their interpretations explain human beings in any definitive sense. What the behavioral sciences—or the social sciences generally—can accomplish, starting simply with the fact that humans do exist, is to identify aspects of their personal and group dynamics and their institutional practices, and to develop strategies, when thought needful, for modifying the same.

While both the sciences and humanities have their limitations with respect to providing a definitive understanding of existence, the abstract domain of logic is in this regard also lacking. In the context of the present discussion it is relevant to recall that even this field of knowledge, with its characteristically decisive conclusions, rests on controversial foundations. Formal logic involves the establishment on an abstract level of the inferences of truth or falsehood that certain kinds of judgments have for others; thus premises of the type "All a is b" and Some a is c," when taken together, infer unavoidably the truth of the conclusion "Some c is b." Or, as another example, the principle of contradiction, which is the foundation of all judgments of truth or falsehood, is expressed in the terse fashion of formal logic as "No sentence of the form ‘p and not p’ can be true." But while the specific findings of logic (an extensive and intricate array of findings far in excess of the simple examples given here) have been widely agreed upon by interested parties, if one presses for an answer as to what the deeper grounds of logical understanding are, one encounters a range of disagreement reminiscent of other sectors of knowledge. Some philosophers have judged that logical understanding is empirically derived, that it reflects our experience in the world, that it echoes our consistent past observations of how the world actually works. Other logicians have judged that logical understanding, while indeed accurately reflecting the operation of the empirical world, is nonetheless derived on an *a priori* basis; it is an understanding purely rational or introspective in origin, which yet informs us about the nature of the external world. As a variation of the latter view, still other logicians have maintained that logical understanding is a reflection of how the human mind itself compulsively functions; humans make the logical distinctions they do simply as a result of their minds being so constituted that they can make no other kinds of distinctions (this interpretation tends to transform philosophical logic into a branch of scientific psychology). Yet other persons have concluded that logical understanding, rather than being informative about further reaches of actuality, is based simply on verbal custom; logical insights are arbitrary conventions arising from the growth of language, and reflect the habitual meanings which humans have for convenience attached to words such as "and," "or," "all," "some," and "not," together with their syntactical

relations [2]. Thus, whatever the actual ground of logical understanding may be, the exercise of that understanding discloses that the several judgments concerning it are themselves contradictory.

To summarize the foregoing discussion, humans have held, and do hold conflicting religious, philosophical, and ideological beliefs, the validity of none of which can be established on a basis compelling persuasive to all people. And even scientific knowledge, many of the findings of which are universally convincing, evolves, remains ever incomplete to an indeterminate degree, is characterized by competing interpretations on its frontiers, and is in any event incapable of resolving religious and philosophical issues. Moreover, understanding the foundations of human logical reasoning, in line with which all human differential judgments of truth or falsehood are rendered, is also subject to controversy and uncertainty. Thus, again, from a global or cross-cultural standpoint the fundamental incompleteness of human comprehension overarches all particular, parochial cultural beliefs, and those individuals who consciously grasp this commonality of the human condition should, one may suppose, be in a favored position to think and act simply as earthlings, rather than as ethnically distinct, and religiously, or philosophically, or ideologically, or even scientifically arrogant enthusiasts. The final thrust of globally oriented education should be to foster a disinclination to such arrogance, thereby to provide a more effective platform for intercultural communication, and thus a more profitable approach to the solution of global problems.

In line with the foregoing discussion, we would like to propose, more specifically now, an educational strategy, which, despite what may appear to be its utopian character, could have such extensive benefits that the difficulty of its implementation will not, we hope, dissuade the reader from giving it serious consideration. We maintain that an effort should be made by world universities to provide, on a coordinated basis, common globally-oriented sets of courses, providing not only positive and useful information supplied by the various cultural, and scientific disciplines, but also explicitly emphasizing on a broader and overarching level the final limitations of all human comprehension. Such courses should be required of all students, regardless of their major fields of study. Colleges and universities having the foresight to offer such integrated sets of courses might conceive of them as "core" or "general educational" requirements. Consensus on the contents of such courses could most readily be achieved and such courses first be offered, by a few cooperative universities—then eventually be spread, helped by modern communication technologies, to major universities around the world. Imagine, finally, in the best-case scenario, major world universities offering identical or similar sets of courses accenting the final limitations of human understanding, thereby establishing a common platform for intercultural communication. Cooperative programs of technical and esoteric scholarship are already in place among world universities. Would it not be desirable, at this point in history, to establish a global consortium of institutions devoted to fostering a common global understanding of the type here suggested? Students having experienced such education could be expected eventually to seed the echelons of authority in their respective cultures and nations with individuals possessed of that understanding. Perhaps the *Journal of Intercultural Communication* could serve as one catalyst for such a development.

It may be supposed that a global community of such intercultural and international leaders would be disinclined in significant measure to the kinds of religious, philosophical, or ideological conceit and doctrinal gridlock so often productive of hostile and destructive

activity. Differences of religious, philosophical, or ideological conviction, as well as differences in the techniques and habits of communicating those differences, while by no means always or necessarily negative in their effect, have nonetheless all too often been a major factor in the instigation of military aggression or the protraction of conflicts among peoples. To be sure, in such conflicts it is often difficult to know in what degree the leaders and their supporters on either side are truly motivated by their professed religious/philosophical/ideological principles, as distinct from consciously or unconsciously appealing to such principles merely to legitimize greed for power and dominance, or conversely to justify the alleviation of political, social, or economic grievances. Such ambiguity has characterized, among countless examples, the medieval struggles between Christendom and Islam, or the sixteenth and seventeenth century wars between Catholics and Protestants, or the missionary activity of the centuries of colonialism, or in more recent times the hot and cold wars between communists and their foes, or the Japanese Shintoist principle of divine emperorship as a supportive sanction for territorial expansion, or today the disputes between Jews and Muslims in the Near East, or between Muslims and Hindus in India, or between America and Iraq. But whatever the degree of purely self-aggrandizing motives involved, surely the admixtures of religious or ideological justification sensed by the participants in such conflicts have contributed significantly to their intensity. Today the United Nations through its forum of negotiation strives to preclude or quell open conflicts. However, in view of the proclivity for ideological self-righteousness that continues to be exhibited by major sectors of humanity, there appears to be limited hope for the establishment through those measures alone of a stable world peace. Perhaps, then, the chance for peace would be enhanced through the embrace by international heads of state, together with some significant number of their deputies, of religious, philosophical, and ideological uncertainty, as nurtured through their common involvement in the kind of studies here being proposed. Such rulers might be expected more readily to perceive that human beings in this stage of their evolution need to be governed by leaders who function, not as culturally divisive fanatics, but simply as fellow passengers on "spaceship earth." We borrow the these phrases from Barbara Ward, who enters an eloquent plea in favor of "patriotism for the world itself." [3]

Fundamental problems associated with the above strategy recall certain issues raised in the enduringly provocative *Republic* of Plato. The crucial supposition in support of the program we are proposing is that it would eventually produce an intercultural and international corps of leaders, whose members, while being influential in the world of practical affairs, would at the same time be keenly aware of their limited human understanding and thus be disinclined toward cultural or national vainglory, bigotry, or belligerence. Meanwhile, however, it seems unlikely that the majority of "average" persons in whatever sectors of the world will abandon their cherished and dogmatic parochial beliefs—understandably, since holding such beliefs are important sources of their identity and self-esteem. Moreover, religious beliefs will evidently continue to provide multitudes of people with needed assurance that in the final scheme of things the adversities they experience in this world are more than a random absurdity, and that through appropriate faith and works those adversities will be justified and compensated for by the attainment of eternal bliss in some next and better existence. Most people world-wide will in all probability continue to need the emotional equilibrium acquired by coming to rest in one or another set of beliefs, typically of the sort which leaders trained in the type of program here being suggested would find of dubious or only tentative validity. These leaders would constitute a corps of persons possessing the temperamental capacity to

abide in philosophical uncertainty, while having the benign-Machiavellian skill to override the intercultural and international animosities of their various constituencies. In other words, these rulers would constitute, in Plato's sense, a class of "philosopher-kings"—though with certain differences. Plato's rulers are a small minority of persons who, through selective breeding and prolonged education, are alone capable of apprehending ultimate truths as these reside in eternal and unchanging "Forms." The latter are supra-empirical realities perceived by the mind alone and constituting archetypes for classes of tangible objects and qualities of objects, as well as of moral actions. By contrast, leaders acutely aware of the limitations of human comprehension would be those individuals who recognize best the uncertain nature of all metaphysical schemes, including the one of Plato.

Nonetheless, rulers of the sort envisaged in this paper, while being skilled in intercultural and international communication, would need, as did Plato's rulers, to claim some moral advantage as the sanction for their paternalistic rule. Plato's rulers are those few individuals who, crucially, achieve an immediate knowledge of the "Good," the supreme eternal Form. Such individuals are thus in the best position to apply justice through their rule, justice being realized by maintaining a contented equilibrium between three distinct classes of persons (rulers, soldiers, and workers), with members of each group performing their appointed tasks within a philosophically united society. By contrast, modern rulers of the sort here anticipated, while being imbued with religious, philosophical, and ideological humility, and being skilled in intercultural communication, would at the same time be directing a radically more complex world than that of ancient Greece, and would need to recognize that ideological diversity is an ineradicable aspect of human experience. However, these rulers would attempt to maintain amity between diverse factions and cults, both within and between their countries. Actually, for Plato, the Form of the Good has an exalted status beyond that of an extrasensory prototype for morally good behavior, for it is also the generative source of the very capacity whereby humans can have any valid knowledge at all; the Form of the Good is "the cause of knowledge and truth."sup>4 Thus, whereas Plato's kings attain their mandate to rule through their exclusive knowledge of the Good, which includes knowledge of the ultimate source of knowledge, modern leaders skilled in intercultural and international communication would deserve to rule, in crucial part, because of their mutual admission of final philosophical ignorance. Plato's imagined rulers, like various modern despots in reality, claim the mandate of absolute knowledge; our envisaged rulers would have the opposite mandate, that of consciously acknowledged ultimate ignorance.

But if the educational strategy of intercultural communication espoused above were to become determinative in global relations, would the resulting peace and intercultural equilibrium prove too stolid or dull an arrangement to satisfy some inherent human need for the exhilaration of messianic zeal, frequently carried over into the excitement of murderous conflict? We think not, at least not for the great majority of people, who, it seems safe to say, would prefer to avoid the possibilities of displacement, impoverishment, mutilation, or death typically attendant upon violent conflict, but also considering how much would be left under conditions of global amity for the stimulation of individuals. Intercultural and international peace, as here conceived, would not require a colorless ethnic homogeneity, nor would it preclude the continued experience on the personal, family, or community level of the spectrum of successes and failures, delectations and tragedies, which characterize human life under the best of conditions and provide its fascination. The program here being suggested would not be a panacea, and would not provide utopia. What it would provide—having at the

intercultural and international levels gone beyond debilitating religious/philosophical/ideological conflicts—is the optimum opportunity for the nations of the world jointly to concentrate on scientifically feasible efforts to solve economic, ecological, and epidemiological problems, which should in turn lead to the optimum chance for the greatest possible number of persons to achieve such satisfactions, both material and spiritual, as the contingencies of a still imperfect world might allow.

Those satisfactions would stand to be increased through cultivation of the distinctive literature, drama, music, and arts of various cultures, and attention to these media would need to be included in our package of world-oriented courses. Works of art are reflections of human aspirations, anxieties, and gratifications, which at some rudimentary level are surely common to all peoples, and through contemplating the expression of such feelings in the aesthetically concentrated forms of world art, persons may have their lives enhanced and intensified at the same time as they cultivate a more cosmopolitan orientation. Indeed, the arts are kinds of communication that may for many persons be more immediately accessible and meaningful than are formal statements of doctrinal or ideological principles. For example, while a great portion of the world's visual art and architecture has been executed in the service of particular religious beliefs, these works often exceed in their appeal the verbal doctrines with which they are associated, and may function as avenues of intercultural appreciation and positive communication. One does not need necessarily to be a Christian to stand in awe of the structural skills, and sculptural and stained glass artistry employed in the service of religious faith, as evidenced in the Gothic cathedrals of Western Europe; one need not be a Muslim to relish the intricate and stunningly beautiful colored-tile adornments, incorporating *Koranic* calligraphy, found on the mosques, madrasahs, and mausoleums of Turkey, Iran, and Uzbekistan; one need not be a Buddhist to marvel at the beauty or form and iconographical ingenuity of the great stupas of Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, and Indonesia. From the vantage point of nonsectarian intercultural awareness, these monuments alike represent victories of the human spirit in the teeth of merely finite human existential comprehension.

To recapitulate, if all world cultures and nations were to pursue intercultural communication based on the conscious and explicit acknowledgement that no one culture or nation, large or small, is necessarily in possession of the only valid human belief-system, then surely an atmosphere of mutual respect and forbearance would be more likely to prevail. That forbearance would have its best chance of succeeding if at least those persons in positions of authority and prominence within all world cultures would divest themselves of ethnocentric conceit, and base their intercultural communication on the recognition that all philosophical, religious, and ideological preferences are subject to the same conditions of conceptual imperfection and incompleteness. Within a multicultural atmosphere of such recognition the peoples of small or developing countries, as well as cultural minorities within larger countries, would not need to harbor mistrust and fear that larger and more powerful cultural or political groups would absorb or eliminate them. The more powerful or advanced cultures, in turn, would not regard themselves as in exclusive possession of the truth, and would not force their own preferences on minorities within their own jurisdictions, or on smaller countries through dominance or conquest. Only under conditions of explicit, serious, and mutual recognition of the limitations of human understanding will persons in international policy-making positions be able to engage in intercultural communication in the most constructive and fruitful way.

Notes 1) For a technical discussion of these possibilities see Gabriele Veneziano, "Was the big bang really the beginning of time?" Scientific American, vol. 290, no. 5, May, 2004, pp, 55-65. 2) For a comparative critique of these views, see Stephen F. Barker, The Elements of Logic (New York, McGraw Hill, 1965), pp. 295-304. 3) We borrow these phrases from Barbara Ward, Spaceship Earth (New York, 1966, Columbia University Press), which presents an eloquent plea in favor of a "patriotism for the world itself," 15, 148. 4) The Republic of Plato, translated with introduction and notes by Francis MacDonald Cornford (New York & London, 1967, Oxford University Press), p.220.

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