An Intercultural Dialogue between Confucianism and Liberalism
Towards a Universal Foundation for Human Rights

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Abstract

This paper builds on the debate between Confucianism and human rights first sparked by the Bangkok Declaration of 1993. I show that there is indeed a conflict between Confucianism and human rights, which on the broader level, can be characterized as the conflict between communitarianism and liberalism. These are two particular traditions and in spite of the conflict between them, I show that they can come to complement each other through an intercultural dialogue. The idea of an intercultural dialogue is a response to the inadequate responses of liberals to the fact of multiculturalism, which is a broader implication of the liberalism vs. communitarianism debate. In this regard, I argue that an intercultural dialogue can ensure fairness. In addition, the intercultural dialogue also sustains traditions, and ultimately, is able to produce a truly universal foundation for human rights through a shared understanding of “human universals”.

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The Bangkok Declaration of 1993 was the culminated expression of Asian political leaders which declared the particularity of “Asian values” that prevented them from adopting human rights doctrine in its entirety. It was, in effect, a charge against liberal values of the West and their claim of universalism. “Asian values” were strongly championed, in particular, by Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew who linked it with Confucianism (de Bary 1998, 3). While the “Asian values” rhetoric has largely disappeared from the international political scene, the scholarly debate of the compatibility of other particular traditions, such as Confucianism, with human rights is still alive and strong.

This paper takes as a starting point the debate between Confucianism and human rights. In Part I Section 1, I first introduce our conception of culture, tradition, civilization before I clarify which human rights and Confucianism
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we are referring to in this paper. In Section 2, I then show what the ethical cores of human rights and Confucianism are and argue that the conflict that we see between them is, in fact, a specific characterization of the conflict between liberalism and communitarianism. Given that the wider implication of this conflict is the fact of multiculturalism, I then critique the responses of liberals to multiculturalism as being inadequate and unfair in Section 3. I also introduce the idea of an intercultural dialogue in that section and claim that it can ensure fairness.

In Part II, I develop more fully the idea of an intercultural dialogue. To begin, I consider three motivations for an intercultural dialogue. I show that an intercultural dialogue ought to be motivated by a desire for fairness, a desire to understand and embrace our common humanity, and a desire to sustain traditions. I focus on fairness as I develop the conditions of an intercultural dialogue in Section 5, and show that fairness is achieved when those conditions are met in the dialogue. This shows the contribution of such a dialogue to the liberalism vs. communitarianism debate. In Section 6, I show that the desire to embrace our common humanity is manifested as a search for “human universals” which can become a truly universal foundation for human rights. This constitutes our long-term vision of what the intercultural dialogue can produce, and brings us back to address the specific conflict between Confucianism and human rights. In Section 7, I consider objections to the idea of an intercultural dialogue in the various forms that other scholars have imagined them in. In Section 8, I conclude with the assertion that there is a need for an intercultural dialogue that fairly accounts for the fact of multiculturalism and produces a shared understanding of “human universals” which can become the foundation for a human rights doctrine that is truly universal.

1. Confucianism and Human Rights

1. Introduction

A. Our Conception of Culture, Tradition and Civilization

Among philosophers, there is little distinction between the use of the words “culture” and “tradition.” In this paper, I will use these two terms interchangeably. Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out how these two terms might differ and what they refer to when we use them interchangeably.

Ram Adhar Mall points out that Alfred L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn have worked out as many as 150 definitions of culture (4). Broadly, he thinks that culture “stands for all sorts of performances, achievements,
and products of the human mind, starting from the simplest agricultural equipment and extending to sciences, arts, religion, and philosophy” (4). We can see how such a notion of culture is not far from the idea of a tradition. Tradition is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation.” Given that cultures take time to develop and are typically sustained across generations, it is not surprising that philosophers tend to use these terms interchangeably.

Yet, I think that there often is a preference for the term “culture” among Western scholars because the liberalism that Western liberal democracies are founded upon cast notions of “tradition” in a negative light. Alasdair MacIntyre points out that it was the project of liberals to found “a form of social order in which individuals could emancipate themselves from the contingency and particularity of tradition by appealing to genuinely universal, tradition-independent norms” (335). Yet, they do not realize that they too are working within a tradition – the liberal one – that has constructed a new concept of an individual as one who reasons as an “individual qua individual” (339). I will elaborate on liberalism as a tradition in 2A of the paper.

So far, I have attempted to explain why Western scholars might prefer using “culture” over “tradition,” and that ultimately, we shall use both interchangeably to refer to products of the human mind that have formed a distinct identity for itself. I will now clarify another aspect of cultures that is often taken for granted – its dynamism.

David Wong and Nicole Hassoun argue that an essentialist conception of culture as a static entity with an essence is a problematic one. Essentialists think that cultures have a fixed set of customs, norms and beliefs that are connected to form an integrated whole. Such a conception, however, is not reflective of the actual dynamism within cultures, and lends itself to further misunderstandings. Their proposed alternative conception sees “culture as conversation,” which acknowledges the plurality of voices that brings about internal diversity, dissent and the possibility of change (10).

Such an understanding of culture is not entirely new, though Wong and Hassoun have certainly given it one of the most thorough expositions. Wm Theodore de Bary argues that a major tradition must be “self-defining and self-confirming,” which means that there needs to be substantial dialogue that has taken place within the tradition itself, with disagreements and “constant, repeated cross- and back-referencing” (2013, 49). On the weight of such dialogue, the tradition takes shape and substance. MacIntyre similarly argues that “a tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of [internal and
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external] conflict” (12).

In this paper, I will adopt this dynamic conception of culture as a
conversation. However, I think it is wrong to be too carried away with this
conception and to fail to recognize that cultures have a core of beliefs and
principles that, while mutable, is also stable. Wong and Hassoun seem to
deny this when they reject the “essences” of cultures. This core is important
because it is the foundation upon which the disagreements arise from and go
against. Without a core that we can say is distinctive of each culture, cultures
lose their identities. If all we have for cultures are conversations alone, then
each “culture” is really the same thing, merely differing in content and
location. Since this is clearly not the case, I argue that cultures have a stable
but mutable core that we can identify it with. However, this core is constantly
facing objections and dissent from voices just beyond the core that brings
about changes to the core. These voices of dissent can come from both within
and without the culture. Internal dissent begin from the core of the culture
while external dissent begin from other cores, both bringing into question the
core of that culture and sustaining the culture itself. It is the core of cultures or
traditions that we will work with for the rest of the paper.

Some scholars like Samuel Huntington and Onuma Yasuaki use
the term “civilization” as when they refer to a “clash of civilizations” or an
“intercivilizational dialogue.” Since we will be considering their arguments
later, it is important to note Huntington’s definition of “a civilization [as] the
highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity
people have short of that which distinguished humans from other species”
(43). Civilizations, then, are cultural entities. For Huntington, civilizations also
have a geographical dimension to them. Thus, even though he concedes that
the boundaries that divide them are not sharp, he asserts that they are real
(43). I will not be using the term “civilization” since it implies that there are
geographical locations for cultures to be situated. While we can trace cultures
to specific geographical locations, it is the case in our globalized world today
that foreign immigrants in a different country could still identify strongly
with aspects of their own culture even if they are citizens of a place that is
geographically distant from where their original culture originated. Therefore,
using “culture” allows us to accommodate the reality of multiculturalism that
is not simply a global fact, but sometimes a local or national one. I will revisit
this issue when we consider objections to the idea of an intercultural dialogue
in Section 7.

B. Which Human Rights?

Philosophers debate widely about the form and function of rights as
well as the history of the language of rights (Wenar *Introduction*). Human rights as we know them today found expression first in the language of natural rights used by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Hugo Grotius (Nickel *Introduction*). Institutionally, they found expression in bills of rights such as the Magna Carta (1215), the English Bill of Rights (1689), the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789), and the Bill of Rights in the United States Constitution (1791).

In this paper, human rights refer to those explicitly stated in the International Bill of Rights, which comprises Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The International Bill of Rights is recognized today as the source of the our contemporary conception of human rights, which can be distinguished from earlier expressions of human rights as stated above. Since the International Bill of Rights carries our most accepted expression of human rights and has been signed and ratified by most of the countries in our world today, it is this bill of rights which the biggest debates center on and which we will be the point of contention here.

C. Which Confucianism?

Philp J. Ivanhoe in *Moral Self-Cultivation* gives a survey of key Confucian thinkers and their interpretation of the task of moral self-cultivation. His work highlights the difficulty for my project of comparing Confucianism and human rights – which Confucian theory, in its two thousand years of history and evolution, are we to look at? Joseph Chan’s piece is instructive for this problem. I choose to adopt his method of limiting myself to the theories of early Confucianism, reading closely *The Analects and Mencius*. *The Analects* is a compilation of sayings directly attributed to Confucius and *Mencius* is the development of Confucianism that came about two-hundred years after *The Analects*. That is short enough a timeframe for us to place these two works within early Confucianism.

Critics might argue that appealing to early Confucianism only is insufficient for the project of comparing Confucianism and human rights. If the purpose of the project is to provide insight on how Confucianism can navigate and place itself within dominant human rights discourse today, then of what use is it to turn to early Confucianism? It would be more sensible to consider Confucianism as it is now, rather than as it was then.

There are two considerations for my approach; the first is practical and the second is political. The practical consideration is that we are unable
to look at the entire two-thousand years of Confucianism within a paper like this. Indeed, that would be a book-length project. Out of the works and thought that span the history of Confucianism, selecting *The Analects* and *Mencius* makes sense because they are both considered classics within the tradition, upon which the newer theories were built upon. Even though both were written from 6th century B.C.E to 4th century B.C.E., they were assigned as foundational texts for the civil service examinations during the Ming (1368 – 1644) and Qing (1644 – 1912) dynasties. As part of the classical canon, Confucian thinkers returned to them time and again as the base from which their theories arose from and challenged. By doing the same, we hope to approach what is the core of Confucianism which can then provide the basis for future discussions on later Confucian interpretations.

The political consideration relates to our desire of getting to the core of Confucianism. Confucianism, as did all other ideologies, came under attack during the Cultural Revolution. It ceased to develop as an intellectual endeavor during the late 20th century except in the Chinese diasporas of Hong Kong and Taiwan. Arguably, it continued to influence the Chinese informally in their lifestyle and thought. With Marxism discredited after the fall of the Soviet Union, “China is in an ideological crisis, and Confucianism as cultural perspective seems most natural to fill the vacuum” (Chan 213). Given this scenario, there is the potential for Chinese politicians to manipulate it for their own ends, as was done by other Asian political leaders during the “Asian values” debate. Getting to the core of Confucianism by focusing on the Confucian classics clarifies what is most important to it and prevents politicians from distorting it wildly. In the next section, I consider what the ethical cores of human rights and Confucianism are and explain the conflict between them. I show that Confucianism is a communitarian tradition, human rights are a liberal tradition, and the wider implication of the conflict between communitarianism and liberalism is the fact of multiculturalism.

2. The Conflict between Confucianism and Human Rights

A. The Ethical Core of Human Rights

Human rights doctrine emphasizes the equality of all individuals and the primacy of their personal autonomy. This is evident from Article 1 of the UDHR, which states that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Articles on the rule of law (Article 7), liberty and security of person (Article 3), freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Article 18), freedom of opinion, expression and the press (Article 19), freedom of assembly and

1. I refer only to Confucianism in the Chinese context, omitting references to Korean Confucianism or Japanese Confucianism, which have developed distinct characteristics of their own.

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association (Article 21) are further testaments of the emphasis on the equality of all individuals and the primacy of their personal autonomy.

Certainly, human rights doctrine also refer to the rights of individuals in relation to their status as members of groups and even to the rights of groups themselves, as seen in Article 1.1 of the ICESCR which states that “All peoples have the rights of self-determination”. Nonetheless, the roots and grounding of human rights are still found mainly in the ideas of human agency and autonomy (Nickel 2.2; Booth 65), which is as much the result of the history of the language of rights (Donnelly 80, 82; Brown 105) as it is of the dominant position of the United States in global affairs today and her emphasis on civil and political rights over other kinds of human rights (Onuma 113; Taylor 1992, 54). We will consider the historical rise and contemporary identification of human rights with the liberal tradition in the following section.

B. Human Rights as a Liberal Tradition

What is liberalism? In its Lockean formulation, the individual stands “at the center of liberalism, alone, as the best rational judge of one’s self-interests and must be permitted to act freely to achieve them” (Chua 185). Contemporary scholars have not drifted far from this Lockean formulation in their understanding of liberalism. Will Kymlicka shows that the barest outline of liberalism states that “since our most essential interest is in getting [our personal and internal] beliefs right and acting on them, government treats people as equals, with equal concern and respect, by providing for each individual the liberties and resources needed to examine and act on these beliefs” (Kymlicka 1989, 13). The role of the state, then, is to be a neutral umpire in the interactions among individuals; it does not intervene in the private lives of individuals unless there is a threat to public interest that arises because of disputes among private parties (Chua 186). In the absence of such threats, any intervention is an infringement of the rights of the individual.

Liberalism as a tradition grew out of Western political theory and the experiences of the French Revolution and American Revolution and came to heavily influence the UDHR because of the dominant roles of the U.S. and Europe in the drafting process (Donnelly 80, 82; Brown 105; Beitz 5). The UDHR and subsequent human rights doctrine became an expression of liberalism in its emphasis on the equality of all individuals and the primacy of their personal autonomy. Thus, human rights belong to the liberal tradition in its growth and maturation. What is the ethical core of Confucianism and why would we consider it a part of the communitarian tradition?
C. The Ethical Core of Confucianism

There are two major themes that run through The Analects. The first is the emphasis on the righteousness (yi) and virtue (de) of the ruler. People listen and follow when he commands properly (4.26; 12.7; 12.12; 14.12; 20.1). He commands properly when he cultivates trust (12.7) and practices the rites (li) which teach him righteousness (3.19; 4.13; 15.18) and give him virtue, a kind of moral superiority and power (2.1; 2.3; 13.6). In that sense, the ruler has duties to carry out – by ensuring his righteousness and virtue, he gains the trust of his people and keeps the peace.

The second is the emphasis on harmony within society. Everyone ought to take his place in society and do what is expected of him, while in the public sphere and especially within the family (2.21; 4.14; 12.11; 14.26). This takes the form of being deferent to elders, being righteous to juniors, and doing what is expected of one’s role to contribute to the functioning of family and society. Such conduct exemplifies humaneness (ren) in that one expresses the love and compassion that one has for others by taking into account their interests in one’s actions. In this way, a strong sense of fraternity is promoted which places the needs of the collective over those of the individual. Again, we see that a culture of dissent and of claiming one’s rights is not emphasized. Instead, duties to maintain harmony and build up society are emphasized at the level of the individual.

The themes that run through Mencius are not too different. This is not surprising as Mencius is often seen as the primary defender of Confucianism against the rise of competing philosophical movements in the years after the death of Confucius. Again, it is the virtuous ruler who is guided by humaneness and righteousness who will be able to earn the command and respect of his people (1A1; 1A5; 1A7; 1B7; 1B8; 1B12; 1B13; 2A3; 2B2). Mencius is also committed to the ideal of a harmonious society in which individuals cultivate humaneness, righteousness, wisdom, and propriety (2A6).

However, he does not merely reiterate Confucius in a different form; he further builds on various aspects of The Analects. A key development is the idea of human nature being innately inclined to goodness (2A6; 6A1; 6A15). He thinks that we possess humaneness, righteousness, wisdom, and propriety as moral sprouts that we need to cultivate individually in order for us to be good. We learn to develop these sprouts by engaging our heart-mind (xin). It is important to note that he thinks we are all inclined to goodness to the same extent (6A15). This emphasizes a “natural equality among human beings” which some scholars appropriate to show that some conception of human rights exists in the core of Confucianism (Munro qtd. in Ivanhoe 2009.
Introduction xiv). I will show why such an interpretation is problematic in Section 7. How is Confucianism a part of the communitarian tradition?

D. Confucianism as a Communitarian Tradition

Communitarianism is a Western tradition that arose as a critique of liberalism in the wake of its resurgence brought about by John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*. Communitarians like Michael Sandal, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer criticized liberals for their overly individualistic conception of the self which undermines the value of communal associations for human well-being (Bell 2004, 33; Kymlicka 1989, 181). Bell argues that there are three central claims to communitarianism. The first is a “methodological claim about the importance of tradition and social context for moral and political reasoning”; the second is a “metaphysical claim about the social nature of the self”; and the third is a “normative claim about the value of community” (Bell 2013).

From our understanding of the core of Confucianism, it should not be difficult to see how Confucianism is a type of communitarianism. Confucianism is a tradition foreign to liberalism that envisions a society in which the individual is embedded within wider social networks that he sees as being as important as, and sometimes even more important than, himself. In making such a claim, it emphasizes the social nature of the self and the value of community which are the second and third points above. By being a tradition that is situated outside of the West, where liberalism took root and flourished, it proves the first point above that tradition and social context does play an important part in developing our outlooks in life and the way we reason morally and politically. Thus, Confucianism belongs to the communitarian tradition2 since it intersects with Western concerns about liberalism (Fox 563).

E. Wider Implications of the Liberalism versus Communitarianism debate - Multiculturalism

It is clear now that pitting Confucianism against human rights doctrine is but the liberalism vs. communitarianism debate in a more specific form. Scholars have also identified other cultures that similarly intersect with communitarianism and oppose liberalism in their conception of the individual such as the Islamic and Buddhist traditions (An Na’Im 147; Satha-

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2. To see how Confucianism as a type of communitarianism is different from the communitarianism that was a response to liberalism, see Hu’s “On Confucian Communitarianism” (full citation in “Works Cited”). Hu argues that Confucian communitarianism was built on a different social structure. Nonetheless, his argument does not undermine the claim that Confucianism belongs to the communitarian tradition.
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Anand 193; Taylor 1999, 124). In the face of a plurality of visions in which each characterizes the individual, state and society differently, it becomes clear that we have a plurality of cultures or traditions in our world today, with liberalism and Confucianism being but two of the many. Multiculturalism is a fact that all of us, whichever tradition we identify with, need to acknowledge and accommodate.

In the past few decades, liberals have been seeking to account for the fact of multiculturalism within a state (Kymlicka 1995) and in the world (Okin; Rawls 1999; Beitz; Taylor 1999). In the next section, I want to address some problems with the responses of liberals to multiculturalism. In the process, I also consider what we can learn from these problems and how they might help us to address the fact of multiculturalism better.

3. The Problem with Responses of Liberals to Multiculturalism

The problem with responses of liberals to multiculturalism lies in their inability to remove themselves from their liberal stance to properly accommodate and respect other cultures in their responses. They make multicultural claims on their liberal terms and this is insufficiently sensitive to other cultures. In examining the positions of Will Kymlicka and Susan Okin, it will become clear that both are comprehensive liberals, as opposed to being political liberals. Okin takes a much stricter stance on comprehensive liberalism than Kymlicka does, but ultimately, they both argue for their positions from their liberal standpoint and fail to properly respect other cultures in their implicit assumption that liberalism is the superior and true tradition. Martha Nussbaum makes the distinction between comprehensive and political liberalisms clear in her reply to Okin and I discuss this in 3B. While she does lay out the directions for a political liberal treatment of multiculturalism and the human rights of women, she does not give us any details of it. I then consider Beitz’s practical conception of human rights to fill that gap but finally show that such a conception is insufficient as well in its treatment of multiculturalism.

A. Kymlicka on Multiculturalism

In Multicultural Citizenship, Kymlicka argues that liberalism requires for group-differentiated rights within states that allows minority groups to actively maintain membership in their own societal culture (Kymlicka 1995, 105). He argues that individuals are closely tied to their own particular societal culture and that since minority cultures are vulnerable to decisions of the majority culture, group-differentiated rights are necessary to address this “disadvantage” that is just as “profound and morally arbitrary as the
inequalities of race and class that liberals worry about” (Kymlicka 1995, 126).

I do think that Kymlicka’s proposal for liberals to give minorities recognition as separate and self-governing societies alongside the main society is a compelling argument for how liberal states ought to handle the fact of multiculturalism within their borders (1995, 129). His proposal also includes the idea of recognition for other cultures, which I consider important to my own project.

However, I disagree with Kymlicka’s idea of liberal toleration that is dependent on a commitment to personal autonomy. On this account, illiberal groups or states must be tolerated because imposing liberalism on them is illiberal and illegitimate. Instead, liberalism and its key principle of autonomy need to be promoted in illiberal societies through “education, persuasion and financial incentives” (1995, 166). I disagree with this since it assumes from the start that the principle of personal autonomy is foremost in the conception of a good life.

Indeed, liberalism is not an abstract individualism that features an individual far removed from community or culture. On the contrary, community and culture provide the context and capability for individuals to exercise their freedom of choice (Kymlicka 1995, 92-93). What liberalism does, however, is to place the individual at the center of the picture – community serves a purpose for him/her, rather than being “constitutive” of the person’s identity. Kymlicka does not provide a substantive argument for why the community could not be central in the conception of a good life. He claims that a common national identity cannot be a basis for communitarian politics simply because while sharing “a language and history, they often disagree fundamentally about the ultimate ends in life” (1995, 92).

Yet, he does not explain what some of these fundamental disagreements might be, and why they might be enough to render communitarianism untenable. Perhaps he means to say that people will desire different outcomes for their lives based on their own individual desires. But surely a communitarian society allows for this, and to think otherwise stretches the communitarian argument too far. Just as liberals are not abstract individuals, communitarians are not fully embedded parts of a whole – we ought to grant them degrees of autonomy and individuality. A communitarian nation, then, need not be unable to accommodate differing ultimate ends in life, even though we might expect that the set of possible ultimate ends in life might be smaller. (This would be the case since the number of possibilities of ends is limited by the desire of the people for personal autonomy. Given that we are assuming a composition of communitarians at the outset, this desire would
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be smaller and reached more quickly.) Therefore, the set of possibilities are smaller not because of a complete imposition of group values and goals on the individual, but because of the communitarian individual’s personal decision to have the group prioritized. This different understanding of human nature cannot be dismissed from the start and it allows us to imagine other societies where the ideal of community is foremost and individualism takes a backseat, though still existent.

Therefore, we can imagine why what we need is not toleration, but a form of dialogue. Since we cannot dismiss either liberalism, communitarianism, or any other major tradition at the outset, I argue that we need to allow for some kind of meaningful intercultural dialogue that works out the similarities and differences among major traditions. Before I consider the feasibility of such an idea, I want to consider another response to multiculturalism from a liberal. I argue that Okin makes the same mistake as Kymlicka does in accepting as true the underlying premise that personal autonomy of the individual and equality among individuals – values that are fundamental to liberalism – should be the most fundamental values for all societies. We will consider her argument and the implications it has for us next.

B. Okin on Multiculturalism and Human Rights of Women

In “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” Okin argues against multiculturalism from within a stricter form of comprehensive liberalism. Multiculturalism is understood as the claims made by other liberals that, beyond promoting tolerance of other ways of life and encouraging cultural diversity, liberal democracies ought to grant group rights that protect minority cultures or ways of life (Kymlicka 1995, 105). Comprehensive liberals see a problem with this because one of its core tenets, egalitarianism, is threatened. If group rights allow for minority cultures to sustain their own ways of life, then practices which encourage the control and dominance of men over women will continue and be indirectly endorsed by liberalism (Okin 23). Okin thinks that liberals should not allow such practices to continue since they offend a core tenet of liberalism. In fact, the principle of egalitarianism ought to be spread to all cultures and individuals since it is of such fundamental importance (16).

I take issue with both her methodology and position. I will specifically address the problems with her methodology in Section 5 when I show how she violates the conditions of an intercultural dialogue. Here, I will focus on the problems with her position of comprehensive liberalism. Martha Nussbaum, in a reply to Okin, lays out the distinction between comprehensive liberalism and political liberalism, as first advanced by Rawls (Nussbaum 1999, 108-109). Comprehensive liberals fight for egalitarianism because they
think that personal autonomy, if rightly prized, ought to exclude any kind of oppression. Cultures with practices of oppression, then, ought to be oppressed so that personal autonomy can flourish. Already we can see the irony in the previous statement. Political liberals, on the other hand, acknowledge the fact of multiculturalism in our world and attempt to accommodate it by allowing for the existence of reasonable and comprehensive conceptions of the good. Given basic liberties and opportunities, individuals should be free to pursue a non-autonomous life in a decent, hierarchical society or culture (Rawls 1999, 71). In this way, there is respect and tolerance for alternative comprehensive conceptions of the good. Given such respect and tolerance of other cultures, traditions and religions, Nussbaum suggests that reasons for state action against patriarchal practices (that do not go against basic liberties and opportunities as understood in the Rawlsian sense) can only be found from within a political conception that all citizens agree to because it respects their differing comprehensive conceptions of the good. She does not state what those reasons might be, only that our pursuit of it will be a difficult one because of the fact of multiculturalism. I think that Charles Beitz picks off nicely where Nussbaum ends in his argument for human rights of women. I want to consider next his argument for human rights of women, and the implications it has for my search for universal foundations of human rights.

Beitz argues, like Okin does, that an appeal to culture for the continuation of oppressive acts against women cannot be condoned (191). However, his argument differs from Okin in that he does not thereby condemn multiculturalism; he thinks that a practical conception of human rights which appeals to the underlying basic interests of every individual is sufficient to dispose of the appeal to culture. In his words, “the liberty interests involved in marriage and divorce law and the security and subsistence interests involved in laws governing property-holding and inheritance do not differ in nature or urgency by gender” (191). Since such basic interests of liberty, security and subsistence apply to all humans, regardless of culture or gender, they ought to be protected by a practical conception of human rights that allows for both state and international action.

While Beitz identifies such basic human interests through his practical conception of human rights that recognizes “certain predictable dangers to which [such interests] are vulnerable under typical circumstances of life in a modern world order composed of states” (109), my argument calls for the identification of such basic human interests through an intercultural dialogue among major cultures. The benefit of this approach is that it is not culturally neutral, thereby bearing in mind the fact and implications of multiculturalism in our world. Given that we all have cultures which are constitutive of our identity and which serve as a framework through which we view the rest of
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the world, it is important that we recognize the merits and demerits of our own culture in light of others. The dialogue is not a search for an overlapping consensus as suggested by Taylor (1999); instead, it hopes to explore the possibility of forging new common grounds among cultures based on mutual respect and understanding of the core of each culture. In this way, the foundation for agreeing upon what constitutes basic human interests differs from Beitz, even though we might expect some overlaps in content. I will provide a more elaborate response to Taylor’s argument in Section 6. In Part II, I will take up the idea of an intercultural dialogue fully.

II. Intercultural Dialogue and its Implications for Human Rights

4. Motivations for an Intercultural Dialogue

A. Fairness

As shown in Part I, since we do not have a priori reasons to prefer one tradition over another, we need to engage in meaningful dialogue to experience and understand other traditions if we want to even start thinking about which tradition is “preferable to another.” This reason, as shown above, demonstrates the value of intercultural dialogue to the liberal. It is this motivation which I will focus on in fully developing the conditions of an intercultural dialogue in Section 5 since this paper situates itself as a response to the liberal vs. communitarianism debate. Even so, there are two other important motivations which we should be aware of.

B. Embracing our Common Humanity

Through dialogue, traditions ought to work through differences in traditions by appealing to similarities in human nature. This does not seem like an impossible task; advocates of a liberal education advance this vision that has the potential to unite different peoples and traditions (de Bary 2013, 37; Nussbaum 1997, 10, 63). We see evidence of this common humanity in both liberalism and Confucianism since at the core of both traditions, it is the well-being of the individual which is desired. What the two traditions differ on is how the individual is to achieve such well-being. Therefore, what is left is for us to see how knowledge of this common humanity can help introduce external but beneficial concepts into internal dialogues of traditions. For example, if liberals perceive the need for greater emphasis on community in liberalism and Confucians perceive the need for great emphasis on rights of individuals in Confucianism, then they can learn from the external tradition to advocate change within its core. In this manner, cultures evolve and incorporate more of other traditions (or begin to emphasize parts of their
tradition that were previously neglected) based on terms that are internal to their tradition, thereby reducing differences and moving closer to a common point. This common point is not fixed, but we can imagine that traditions will keep redefining it and moving towards it together through the dialogue that continues to reveal more about a common humanity.

Bhikhu Parekh further suggests that such other similarities in our human nature, which he calls “human universals,” are human dignity, human unity, human worth, and equality (149). He argues that we will realize that these values are the most important to us since they are “grounded in an interculturally shared human identity and are capable of being defended by interculturally shareable good reason” (150). With such human universals as a foundation, we can start to construct human rights with the right form and function to achieve these universals. I shall demonstrate the importance of this motivation in Section 6 when we consider the vision of an intercultural dialogue.

C. Sustaining Traditions

Wong and Hassboun argue that we should aim not for preservation of a culture, which assumes an essentialist conception of culture, but for sustaining of a culture, which allows for participants to have full control over practices, norms and beliefs within the culture as they change over time (15). An intercultural dialogue is non-coercive, allowing for traditions to take content from the dialogue back to be placed within their own internal dialogue and worked out at their own time. In this way, the tradition is sustained since it evolves at its own pace, yet, the fact of multiculturalism is allowed to properly affect the way it evolves. As long as there is an intercultural dialogue in motion and a particular tradition participates in it, we can consider that tradition being sustained.

5. Conditions of an Intercultural Dialogue

What are the conditions for a fair intercultural dialogue? In this section, I will propose three conditions. After each condition is briefly explained, I will draw on the work of various scholars to show when the conditions are violated or abided by. I will show that abiding by these conditions allows us to give other cultures a fair hearing that properly respects them. In the process, we properly account for the fact of multiculturalism in our world today.

1. An attitude of fallibilism (that is accompanied by a presumption of worth): participants must enter the dialogue without assuming that that their tradition is already superior and the final answer. They must be ready to
learn from other traditions, admitting where aspects of other traditions can fill gaps in one’s tradition or be complementary (Nussbaum 1997, 9). This must necessarily be accompanied by a presumption of worth, which requires the participant to accord due respect to a tradition on the basis of the tradition being accepted, practiced and lived out by a substantial group of people for an extended period of time. The presumption of worth can also motivate one to develop an understanding of the core of other traditions (see condition 3).

Violation of Condition 1: Okin

As shown in Section 3b, Okin enters the debate on multiculturalism as a comprehensive liberal who already assumes the superiority of the liberal tradition. This translates to an attitude of infallibilism which leaves her with the only option of condemning all other traditions. This is evident when she makes sweeping states such as “while virtually all of the world’s cultures have distinctly patriarchal pasts, some – mostly, though by no means exclusively, Western liberal cultures – have departed far further from them than others” without substantial support or good reasons (16). This is clearly unfair and it further leads her to make the normative claim that liberalism should be universal and enforced in all other societies which are still stuck in their “patriarchal pasts” (19).

Abidance of Condition 1: Taylor and Walzer

Taylor in “The Politics of Recognition” steps out of the both the comprehensive and political liberal positions to consider “a liberal society that singles itself out by the way it treats it minorities, including those who do not share public definitions of the good, and above all by the rights it accords to all of its members” (1992, 59). This form of liberalism he proposes allows for strong collective goals to be prioritized if basic and fundamental rights are protected and those who do not share the common goals are respected. In this way, a society which prizies the survival and flourishing of a particular culture may do so. To define it by the terms we have been using in Part I, this is a communitarian society with liberal characteristics that prioritizes the collective good over the individual good while still allowing for minimal notions of personal autonomy.

Why is Taylor’s view preferable to Okin’s? Taylor enters the debate on multiculturalism without assuming the infallibility of any one tradition. He acknowledges that there can exist liberal societies which view the individual as central and “primarily a subject of self-determining or self-expressive choice” alongside communitarian societies which prioritize collective goals over individual goals (1992, 57-58). He argues that, in the face of multiculturalism,
liberals ought to be open to the existence of communitarian societies because that is what equality and fairness demands of them (1992, 43).

Nonetheless, he allows for such communitarians societies to be limited by minimal notions of liberalism, thereby acknowledging that liberalism can still be of value in such societies. By entering with an attitude of fallibilism, he recognizes that liberalism is not the only way and that there can exist different types of society that assign different weights to collective and individual goals, even though the presence of both are equally important. Such an approach asks for reason in showing why one particular society should prioritize one type of goal over the other, and allows for diverse weighting of goals to exist. It also presumes that other ways of lives are worthy of respect given that a significant number of people have lived by it for a long time and continue to ask for the survival of those ways of lives (1992, 62).

Given such an understanding, Walzer further suggests in a reply to Taylor that America would choose a liberal position as a collective goal from within the communitarian position (103). By showing that Taylor’s approach allows for liberalism to flourish in particular societies which are suited to it, he demonstrates the superiority of Taylor’s attitude of fallibilism which allows for diverse types of comprehensive societies, liberal or communitarian, to exist alongside each other. Lacking in Taylor’s account is what the basic or fundamental rights are. I will take up this matter in Section 6 when I suggest how we might find truly universal foundations for such a set of human rights.

2. Argument by reason: good reasons must be given for why a tradition should adopt aspects of other traditions or drop aspects of its own.

Violation of Condition 2: Okin

Okin shows the lack of good reasons in arguing for her position of comprehensive liberalism in “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?”. Okin describes the oppression that women face in other cultures through the use of anecdotes and interview statements (14, 15). One has to question if the oppressive attitudes expressed by those few individuals are indeed representative of their entire culture. Furthermore, even if there is a trend or history of oppression in a society, I do not think that such descriptive statements alone are sufficient to condemn their entire culture or society. One has to question what the normative core principles of the society are – if practices merely present a deviation from those core principles are do not represent the core principles themselves, then one is arguing against the wrong set of principles. I also do not see how Okin’s blanket dismissal of oppressive practices in Asian, African and Islamic cultures (12-16) ought not
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to be applied to her own society in America, which has its history of slavery and oppression which many argue still exists today, albeit in the form of the system of mass incarceration (Alexander, Gottschalk). Given her reasoning, since liberal democracy in America is descriptively oppressive, the culture of liberalism ought to be denied the group rights to sustain itself. Liberalism would then have to be open to an overhaul of its principles and tenets, and the very foundation of Okin’s arguments needs to be questioned first. Therefore, Okin does not give us good reasons to accept her position of comprehensive liberalism and what it demands of other cultures.

Abidance of Condition 2: Joseph Chan

In “A Confucian Perspective of Human Rights for Contemporary China,” Chan argues for the compatibility of human rights and Confucianism based on the concept of humaneness (ren) which entails care and compassion for others through one’s action (217). While humaneness is often tied to roles within one’s particular social relations, Chan further argues that there are also “nonrelational occasions when moral actions are also required by [humaneness]” (218). To provide good reasons for such an interpretation of humaneness, he draws from key passages in Mencius and The Analects. From Mencius 2A6, a humane person is moved to save a child from a drowning in a well not because of any particular relationship he has with the child or his family, but because he cares for human life and does not want to see the child suffer. From Mencius 4B28 and 7A46, a humane person is expected to love “other people” and everyone, without specifics. Finally, from The Analects 1.6, 12.2, 12.22, Confucius makes it clear that the humane person is to “love the multitude,” “love others,” and “not impose on others what you would not like yourself.” These passages provide us good reasons to accept Chan’s claim because he draws from the same widely-accepted authoritative sources within the tradition to refute the claims of those who argue that humaneness is only applicable within the specific roles we take on in society.

Having proven his claim through sound analyses of authoritative texts, he then argues that the concept of humaneness would “endorse human rights as an instrument to protect humanity and important human interests” since care for the needs of other human beings is of central importance to it (237). At this point, one might wonder why I agree with Chan’s reasons that lead to the conclusion that human rights is compatible with Confucianism, when in Part I, I had argued for that the two traditions are in conflict with each other. I should point out that though I do stand by the notion that the two traditions are opposed in their recognized key tenets and the practice of them, I do not think that they will always be opposed to each other. In fact, it is the possibility that traditions can come to complement each other in the way that
Chan proposes which also motivates the idea of an intercultural dialogue (see Section 4B of this paper). I will return to this point in Section 6. It is enough to note here that while I think that the two traditions are opposed to each other, I do not think that they are incompatible with each other. Chan argues with good reasons for his claim and contributes to the intercultural dialogue.

3. **Expertise of one’s tradition and knowledge of other traditions:** participants need not belong to the culture they represent by birth, ethnicity, or geography, but they must be recognized within the tradition itself as an active participant who is capable of representing the tradition. As important is an understanding of the other traditions that are participating in the intercultural dialogue. While we should expect them to be experts in the details of their traditions, we will only expect them to know the core of the traditions they are in dialogue with.

**Violation of Condition 3: Kymlicka and Okin**

Neither Kymlicka nor Okin demonstrate an understanding of the core of any other traditions in the world today. In *Multicultural Citizenship*, Kymlicka acknowledges that other traditions exist and that liberalism is but on among many (1995, 18). Even so, nowhere in his book does he make an attempt to seriously engage with the core of any one of those other traditions that he acknowledges exists. By remaining comfortably within the liberal tradition, he fails to properly respect what other cultures could bring to the discussion about the fact of multiculturalism. He falls back mainly on the liberal notion of tolerance in his treatment of multiculturalism, which accounts for the difference but not the possibility of mutual learning and compatibility among traditions (1995, 152).

Okin shows an attempt to engage with Islamic, Asian and African culture but her attempts are marred with bad arguments and a superficial treatment of these traditions (see Violation of Condition 1 in this section). Instead of drawing on authoritative texts or figures from within the respective traditions, she cites interviews with strangers as evidence for her claims about these traditions (12-16). She makes no attempt to seriously engage with the traditions as a whole or to at least acknowledge and understand the key debates within the cores of each tradition.

**Abidance of Condition 3: Daniel Bell and Joseph Chan**

In *Beyond Liberal Democracy*, Daniel Bell not only acknowledges multiculturalism but makes an effort to seriously engage with the tradition of Confucianism, taking him beyond the liberal tradition which he grew up in. He draws on Mencius in his discussion of just and unjust wars in the Confucian
context (2006, 35) and engages in dialogue with contemporary scholars on liberalism and Confucianism throughout his entire book. In the same way, Chan also engages directly with the Confucian classics and with contemporary scholars in building up his argument, demonstrating knowledge of both the liberal and Confucian traditions.


In this section, I will consider what the participants in an intercultural dialogue should aim towards. Given that fairness and the sustaining of traditions are both ensured if traditions participate in a fair intercultural dialogue with above conditions in place, what substantive outcome should participants hope to reach at the end of the dialogue? In other words, what should their vision of the intercultural dialogue be?

Certainly, we expect the dialogue to produce some form of agreement about human rights that will give parties reasons to accept and act on them. But of what nature is this agreement? This needs to be answered before we can proceed to consider the vision of the intercultural dialogue. Beitz distinguishes three different kinds of agreement theories: common core, overlapping consensus, and progressive convergence (74). Each of these has their own problems, which I will further develop here. I will also show how my theory of agreement is different from those three, and why it is preferable.

First, we consider the common core agreement theory. This theory is the simplest of all three and aims to find human rights that are common across the major cultures of our world to produce a list of human rights that we would all agree to. This theory, in its simplicity, is quickly invalidated. As we have noted already, human rights themselves are culturally specific, so if we are searching for specific rights language in the various cultures, the major ones associated with communitarianism such as Confucianism and Islam are immediately excluded as a whole. Even if one argues that what one wants to find is a common core which reflects the substance of human rights, this common core would produce too thin a list and exclude many of the human rights which we think are of importance to us today such as human rights of women (Beitz 74).

Second, we consider the overlapping consensus agreement theory. This theory is more nuanced, recognizing a distinction between the norms and the justifications of human rights (Beitz 75). In “Conditions of an Unenforced Consensus on Human Rights,” Taylor elaborates on this theory by drawing first on the original Rawlsian idea of an overlapping consensus which aims to accommodate a plurality of cultures within a democratic regime. Rawls
argues that it is possible for various cultures and philosophies to have an overlapping consensus on a “regulative political conception of justice” that would “provide a shared public basis for the justification of political and social institutions” within a democratic society (1987, 1). Taylor builds on this idea and suggests that it can be applied in the global arena among different cultures and philosophies as well, so that human rights norms can be agreed upon in their practice, even as they are supported by different legal forms and have different background justifications within different cultures and societies (1999, 143).

The problem with this theory is that searching for the norms of human rights that are common across the major cultures in the world is likely to produce too thin a list of human rights as well. Furthermore, if we work from the assumption, as Taylor does, that it is the current set of human rights norms found in the Bill of Rights that we ought to agree on and work our way towards from each tradition, then we would have the “relationship between agreement and justification backwards” (Beitz 78). It is precisely because human rights norms were based on liberal foundations in its conception that we want to have a justificatory theory that helps us to distinguish the specifically liberal human rights from the human rights that we can all accept. Accepting all the current human rights norms as they are now and then working to justify them within the respective traditions is to defeat the purpose of searching for an agreement theory.

Third, we consider the progressive convergence agreement theory. This theory claims that we can come to agree on current human rights if we have each tradition “develop or evolve under pressures for adaptive reinterpretation” so that we soon find human rights norms within each of them (Beitz 88). As previously mentioned at the end of Section 2C, scholars have attempted to justify the “natural equality” of all human beings and, hence, human rights from the Mencian idea of the innate inclination to goodness. In this way, they hope to readapt Confucian conceptions to directly support human rights norms and justifications. If all other traditions could also develop such a revisionist understanding of their own tradition to support current human rights norms, then we have a convergence which gives us reasons to act on current human rights doctrine (Beitz 90).

The problem with this theory is that we reverse the relationship between agreement and justification once again. If what is in question is the universality of current human rights, then the kind of agreement theory which we seek needs to give us good reasons to accept or reject them. If it assumes the universality of current human rights already, then the charge of unfairness remains.
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Having considered the three kinds of agreement theories, I want to propose an agreement theory that drives the idea of an intercultural dialogue, sets a vision for its participants, and also gets by the weaknesses of the theories above. This theory also works on the idea of convergence. However, instead of converging on an existing viewpoint such as liberal human rights, it aims to converge on a new viewpoint which is a hybrid produced by the intercultural dialogue. What could we imagine this hybrid viewpoint to look like? Returning back to Section 4B, the intercultural dialogue will strive for a shared understanding of “human universals” among traditions which serves as the basis of the human rights norms which we agree on from the process. Indeed, it is important to not be too prescriptive about what the exact content of the hybrid viewpoint might be, but one can imagine that traditions would benefit from each other in the way that Chan (see Section 5: Abidance of Condition 2) and Taylor (see Section 5: Abidance of Condition 1) have proposed.

Ultimately, a shared understanding of “human universals” will provide a truly universal foundation for human rights. This gives us a justificatory theory that comes before agreement, thus avoiding the problem we had seen with the progressive convergence and overlapping consensus theories. It also does not limit the scope of human rights since the dialogue itself allows for the scope of human rights to be debated on in a fair environment. Thus, it avoids the problem of having too small a scope which we had seen in the common core and overlapping consensus theories. In embracing our common humanity through an intercultural dialogue, we arrive at shared understandings that become a truly universal foundation for human rights.

In the next section, I will consider objections that might be raised against the idea of an intercultural dialogue itself, in the various forms envisioned by different scholars. I will show that in spite of these objections, an intercultural dialogue is still possible in the form which I have proposed.

7. Objections to an Intercultural Dialogue

In *The Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington argues that, as a result of increasing civilization consciousness in the post-Cold War world, differences among civilizations will become the major source of conflict, replacing the preceding ideological conflict between liberalism and communism. While he rightly shows that differences among cultures do exist, he does not show why there is no hope for an intercultural dialogue that could bring cultures closer together. He lists evidence for the relevance of his civilizational paradigm (38, 39); yet, he chooses to only emphasize instances of conflict among civilizations, and clearly ignores instances of cooperation. In our modern world, instances of conflict do abound, but so do instances of cooperation. Internationally, one can look at economic cooperation among states and civilizations

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demonstrated by the signing of Free Trade Agreements and the increasing prevalence of multinational corporations that transcend borders. Nationally, one can look at the proliferation of multicultural societies which bring cultures to co-exist together. Such multicultural societies are not without conflict, but that they still exist and that participants in such societies make an effort to work towards greater cohesion is evidence that a clash of civilizations, globally or within societies, is not wholly inevitable. Since it is in defending the idea of an intercultural dialogue that its form and value becomes more apparent, I will now address possible objections to the idea of an intercultural dialogue in this section. In the process, I also hope to fill in a gap in Huntington’s work.

In *Beyond Liberal Democracy*, Bell considers three authors and their conceptions of an intercultural dialogue. I will consider here his four objections against the work of Onuma Yasuaki, Amitai Etzioni, and Charles Taylor.

*A. Against Onuma Yasuaki*

In “Towards an Intercivilizational Approach to Human Rights,” Onuma argues for the need for an intercivilizational dialogue. He thinks that such a dialogue will help move us away from “West-centrism” (122) and also legitimize human rights theoretically (120) but he does not attempt to sketch out the conditions of the intercivilizational dialogue. Bell’s first objection comes in the form of questioning what the boundaries between civilizations are and how we ought to delineate them even before we begin such a dialogue (2006, 80). As Bell does not explicitly say what type of boundaries he is referring to, I will respond to interpretations of boundaries as either physical or cultural.

If Bell is questioning the physical boundaries of civilizations, then I think his objection arises from Onuma’s problematic use of the civilizational paradigm, which is concerned with searching for the largest fixed cultural grouping of peoples to be participants in the dialogue. As I stated in the Section 1A, I think that the use of “civilization” is problematic because it is really culture that we are concerned about. Onuma defends his use of “civilization” by arguing that it is the more comprehensive analytical concept, especially since “culture” is often narrowly defined within human rights discourse to not include “economic, social, civil and political fields” (119). While this is indeed a problem, I think that it is a minor one that can be quickly overcome by properly defining the wider scope of culture to one’s audience or readers. This task is also aided by the fact that definitions of culture outside human rights discourse are often much wider to begin with as shown in Section 1A. Even though our explicit project is to have the intercultural dialogue provide a legitimate theoretical foundation for the idea of human rights, we can imagine that the dialogue will also be of benefit to humanity in other
realms of policy-making or comparative work. Therefore, there is no need to restrict our understanding of “culture” to how it is often understood in human rights discourse; rather, in realizing that the intercultural dialogue will be of wider relevance to all disciplines and fields of work, we can choose to adopt a definition of culture that is wider and also more widely accepted.

Moreover, “civilization” also implies a specific geographical location. Onuma thinks that such groupings of people transcend the boundaries of nations and are rightly termed “civilizations.” While it is true that cultures originated in “spheres of people [that have] both a geographical and historical dimension,” it is not the case today that cultures continue to remain within a specific geographical space (119). In our increasingly globalized world, the high speed and volume of people moving around the world means that diasporas are forming in multicultural states and societies. Immigrants in such diasporas might be citizens of a new country, but they often still bear allegiance to their cultures in the way they behave and think. As a result, there is also the possibility of a clash of cultures at the national level that is removed from specific geographical locations that each culture originated from respectively. This means that even though the term “civilization” is the broadest cultural grouping of people, it is not conceptually broad enough to capture the reality of multiculturalism that occurs at various levels of societal groupings. While it might be true in the past that cultures did remain in specific geographical locations, that claim is not true today. The use of “civilization” distracts us from our main concern of analyzing cultures and their interactions at all levels of society.

Therefore, we can understand this interpretation of the first objection to be against the idea of “civilizations,” and not explicitly against the idea of the intercultural dialogue itself. Bell is right that physical boundaries between civilizations are hard to delineate. But this is only important if we choose to limit ourselves to the civilizational paradigm in our analysis of culture. Once we acknowledge that identification with a culture can transcend specific geographical boundaries and thus remove ourselves from the civilizational paradigm, this objection fades.

What if Bell was referring to the difficulty in delineating the cultural boundaries between civilizations? Again, I think that he is right. However, it is unnecessary for us to delineate firm cultural boundaries for the dialogue. As I have argued earlier in Section 1A, our definition of culture is such that it has a stable but mutable core. It is these cores which are distinguishable from each other, and which makes the idea of an intercultural dialogue and his own project of the “mutual learning and enrichment of political theories” possible to begin (2006, 9). Therefore, firm boundaries among traditions are
unnecessary and this interpretation of his objection is also unfounded.

In response to Onuma, Bell’s second objection to the idea of an intercultural dialogue is that it will exclude minority cultures and marginalized groups in society such as “sex workers, refugees, and people who are mentally ill” (2006, 80). How such marginalized groups are to be incorporated into human rights doctrine is indeed an important issue in thinking about the idea of human rights, but to incorporate it into the idea of an intercultural dialogue now is premature. That endeavor has not been properly accomplished even within the current human rights doctrine which draws mainly on just one particular tradition – liberalism. To expect the intercultural dialogue to accommodate these complicated issues right from the start is to overcomplicate the task. Nonetheless, we can imagine that the intercultural dialogue will mature and develop to be able to accommodate such issues. As each tradition draws on its own resources and learns to address how we should treat marginalized groups in society, the dialogue becomes a platform to share principles and philosophies behind our treatment of such groups.

In a similar vein, the intercultural dialogue should start off with a dialogue among only the major cultures so that we can learn to work through the finer details of the process. As the dialogue matures, minority cultures should then be included. They will be expected to participate on the same terms as the major cultures. At that point, it would be necessary to come up with requirements that will help us to distinguish legitimate minority cultures from illegitimate ones. That will be problematic since the politics among cultures will complicate matters. Nonetheless, if we aim for complete universality, we would want to include legitimate minority cultures at some point. That, however, is a project which should be shelved till we learn to properly manage the intercultural dialogue among the major cultures.

B. Against Amitai Etzioni

Bell’s third objection goes against Etzioni’s conception of a worldwide moral dialogue. Etzioni thinks that a worldwide moral dialogue is needed to produce “global mores that have the compelling power of those of various societies” (236). Since Etzioni also does not explicitly state the design of such a worldwide dialogue, Bell questions if the dialogue is to include every individual in the world today. This is a practical impossibility and will not allow us to reach any meaningful conclusions. Thus, we need to find representatives of each culture. Even so, that is also a problematic issue (2006, 80).

I respond to how we are to choose the right representatives from each culture in Section 5 where I proposed conditions to be placed on participants
in the intercultural dialogue. If participants can meet those conditions, then they are worthy of representing a culture. The dialogue need not be a physical encounter; it could be accomplished through an exchange of letters or articles that are published periodically for access to all. In this way, everyone is invited to participate in the process but only those who meet the conditions will eventually be published to have their voices amplified. Such back-and-forth will eventually come to constitute the dialogue.

B. Against Charles Taylor

Bell’s fourth objection is against Taylor’s idea of an unenforced consensus on human rights. While Taylor (1999) does not explicitly refer to the idea of an intercultural dialogue, his method suggests how we could accommodate a plurality of cultures within human rights doctrine through some form of agreement as shown in Section 6. Thus, it is useful for us to consider his ideas within this context since a particular aim of the intercultural dialogue is to achieve that very same aim.

Bell objects to Taylor’s consensus-forming process because he thinks that it will be difficult for people to remove themselves from their deep-seated cultural values and beliefs during the course of such dialogue. Furthermore, even if participants remove themselves from their specific cultures, it is likely that the agreement will take place on general levels that do not actually reach the heart of the arguments that surround contested rights (2006, 80). I agree with Bell’s objections, and think that they are aiming at a broader objection against Taylor’s position. This broader objection I have explained clearly in Section 6 as well. In brief, it is that the consensus-forming process ultimately assumes the validity of all current human rights which is based on a position that liberalism is true and superior. However, I have shown that it is possible to conceive of an idea of an intercultural dialogue that is based on a different kind of agreement theory which gets us out of this worry.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that there is indeed a conflict between Confucianism and human rights, which on the broader level, can be characterized as the conflict between communitarianism and liberalism. These are two particular traditions and in spite of the conflict between them, they can come to complement each other through an intercultural dialogue. The idea of an intercultural dialogue is a response to the inadequate responses of liberals to the fact of multiculturalism, which is a broader implication of the liberalism vs. communitarianism debate. In this regard, an intercultural dialogue can ensure fairness. In addition, the intercultural dialogue also sustains traditions,
and ultimately, is able to produce a truly universal foundation for human rights through a shared understanding of “human universals”. The objections raised against the idea of an intercultural dialogue highlight some difficulties of the intercultural dialogue, but do not deter us from pursuing it in the specific form that I have proposed. This paper is but a starting point for the intercultural dialogue which takes place on a much grander scale, involving all the major cultures of the world. To work towards deeper understandings of each other’s cultures that culminate in a shared vision for humankind is the hope of an intercultural dialogue. That hope might very well be the hope of humankind in our world today.
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