

# SELECTED PAPERS FROM THE XXII WORLD CONGRESS OF PHILOSOPHY

## MODERNIZATION, COUNTER-MODERNIZATION, AND PHILOSOPHY

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**ABSTRACT:** The ennobling vision of modernity asserts that the benefits of identifying individual citizens as subjectivity are realized only when each subject is aware of the self as free in decisions and actions. Modernization through industrialization and urbanization has been seen as a means by which society can, through market contractual relationships, allow each citizen to become a self-determining subject. In Korean society this self-awakening has already set in and ought to deepen through dynamic economic growth. However, the authoritarian political power combined by technocracy obstructs the emergence of mature subjectivity. This is what can be called a phenomenon of counter-modernization. Citizenship training through philosophical dialogue may find ways to resolve this impasse by reconceptualizing modernity's goals and means in terms of enabling the potentiality inherent in subjectivity.

### BEYOND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The philosophical dialogues which frame today's multicultural world usually revolve around comparisons of the varied traditions of world views which are said to characterize the regions concerned. Comparative approaches examine various philosophical traditions in terms of both commensurability and incommensurability. In these approaches there seem to be two opposing views. One view argues that no meaningful comparison of differences can be made because there is no basis for comparison to begin with. The other argues that the core content of any cultural tradition can be identified and it is essentially the same, no matter what the culture. In this paper, it is assumed that in spite of their seeming differences, diverse traditional thoughts invariably deal with the nature of reality, modes of knowledge and how people ought to live together and there can be found a great deal of commonality as well as elective affinity in many respects among them. Furthermore, it

is here suggested that both new and advanced industrial societies today appear to be shedding or transforming certain aspects of their respective traditional cultural perspectives that are purportedly responsible for their worldviews. The result is a convergence of world views among different peoples especially with regard to how people sharing the same global environment ought to live together.

A comprehensive socio-historical, and I might add, hermeneutic, explanation for this convergence has been articulated in the United Nations' recent *Alliance of Civilizations* document which asserts that "civilizations and cultures reflect the great wealth and heritage of humankind; their nature is to overlap, interact and evolve in relation to one another.<sup>1</sup> All civilizations share a history of mutual borrowing as well as accommodation and assimilation of one another's ideas and customs. Because cultures and civilizations evolve through interaction with others, local customs, knowledge, and ideas are transformed in the processes of their transfer from one culture to another, around the globe. The narratives played out by the individual and collective lives in each culture are shaped by complex social, experiential interactions within the dynamics of histories, cultures, cultural identities, globalizations, self and selves. No one of these alone can claim to be the primary sculpting force of humankind's destiny. Neither can any one of them exist without the others. Indeed, the complexity of the interactions involved in the dynamic and ever constant developing of selves and cultures over time and space can only be hinted at, never charted precisely. All that can be said with a fair degree of certainty is that societal change, whether subtle or stark, recognized or unrecognized, is constant and multiple by its nature. Even Hegel, who gave us our present notion of historicism, and maintained that the meanings of change can only be understood or constructed at the end of an era, insisted that the complexities of change never ceased.

What better example of the complexity of change can there be than the newly industrializing societies in East Asia, long considered the region of timeless, changeless traditions and now, hailed as "emerging markets" in the global economy. They have been rapidly progressing in achieving greater scientific-technological renovations in production, thus creating material abundance and enhancing the quality of life for larger and larger numbers in their respective societies. As their economic structures become increasingly modernized, the daily lifeworlds of the metropolitan areas of Beijing, Seoul, Bangkok, Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Djakarta are becoming more and more immersed in the techno-scientific culture so that it is now impossible for citizens of such metropolitan areas to think of perceiving and negotiating daily life in this world without technology.

Indeed, for emerging markets, development, economic growth, science and technology have become vital appendages to each other. As science and technology move forward and encompass the globe, East and West, North and South are operating more and more in the same sphere of rationality, and thus the concepts of reality, objectivity and rationality can no longer be claimed as characteristic of only Western civilization. Both empiricism and rationalism, once considered to constitute the main developmental phase of Anglo-European intellectual history,

are now merging seamlessly into the history of world philosophy. There is no doubt whatsoever that the legacies of these two schools of modern philosophy resonate deeply in the *Zeitgeist* of East Asia's new industrial societies, just as they resonate deeply in today's Anglo-European societies. Indeed, sometimes when I speak of *Zeitgeist*, or spirit of a grand, dominating idea in the context of today's modernity, I find myself thinking of the term much as it was used by Hegel, as something enduring and powerful, almost supernatural, guiding the human race. For Hegel, a *Zeitgeist* was conceived and then manifested itself, took hold, as it were, in the material life of a people but it did so in such a way that its purity was lost. Purity was lost because every idea has an oppositional idea and conflict ensues in some form or other until the conflict is resolved, the resolve is always soon challenged and the dialectical cycle continues. Hegel generally considered each resolve to be a synthesis of the spirit, providing for an expansion of its meaning, until it could be realized once again in a glorious, comprehensive purity. The idea itself, in all its ramifications, he sometimes called reason, sometimes freedom and sometimes, simply, idea. For Hegel, such *Zeitgeists* were universal and one could interpret some form, even if an antithesis, of them in the history of any culture in any era.

Freedom is a magnificently powerful notion. But Hegel's reasoning prompts us to recognize that many ideas have the same guiding, transforming power and some of these, as he pointed out, are in opposition to freedom. All of the ideas, in their opposition or not, belong to societal life. These ideas are developed expressed and sometimes, oppressed, in many and diversified, traditions, customs and rationales.

Because concepts like freedom are universal, they are transcultural and so, when two or more cultures interact, the taking in of each others' cultural attitudes, customs or thought patterns is a natural opening or expansion of fundamental conceptual elements found in each of their homeworlds. In the case of an individual, the process of taking in widens the horizon of the individual's lifeworld. However, whether the taking in process is collective or individual, it is a "mundialization" of home."<sup>2</sup> In the mundialization process, ideas, beliefs, values and customs of different worlds interact and are transformed through the interaction and, altered, they come to roost again in their respective homeworlds, which, then, also change. What was once strange and unfamiliar transforms into something familiar and intimate. That is to say it is accommodated or assimilated into the homeworld. Through such mediation of common, universal elements found in the orientation schemata of two or more homeworlds, cultures and individuals change, becoming more complex, more capable of communicatively expressing humankind's multifaceted potential.

Traditional societies and modern societies share elements or orientation schemata. For example, the primary type of action in both agrarian societies and industrial ones is work or labor in which humans relate to nature. From time immemorial tilling arid lands, sowing seeds and tending them, or devising hunting spears, and other means of securing food have been planned actions, requiring observation and calculation, all in the interest of survival. In the long ago beginnings of human societal living, work came to be viewed as a way to release humans from their

physical bond to nature and prompted them to contrive entities which were not part of nature. From this effort of contrivance arose science and technology whose principles are objectivity and rationality. Science is a form of knowledge about nature, and technology is a tool with which humans control nature to serve their needs. Science and technology spurred and assisted in the establishment of towns and cities, the building of dams and temples, and, most significantly, they spurred rationalization for constant productivity and the institutionalization of commerce and trade, thus generating whole civilizations. The ubiquitous propensity to work with tools is a strong common element in the orientation schemata of traditional homeworlds and modern homeworlds. Such elements act as mediators and resonate from one age or culture to another. As mediators, they are complex and intricate, but they are not mystifying.

### CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS

All labor is interactive in essence, even that which seems to be performed in isolation. Work is essentially communal, and its sociality is evident in the division of labor by gender. The product of work is always shared or traded. Working with others creates a sense of solidarity and communal purpose. From such collective solidarity stems the codes of morality for living together in peace. It is really not too far fetched to assert, as Hegel did in his *Phenomenology of Mind* that ideas such as mutual recognition, social justice and civil rights are derived from our awareness of the true collaborative, collective character of human labor. Indeed, the administrators of the current project of globalization often stress the power of collaboration in labor for successful development and for peace. Yet, for some time, the social nature of labor with its ramifications for peaceful co-existence has been denied in instance after instance during this current economic globalization, just as it had been in periods characterized by empire building and colonization. This denial is, of course, a contradiction of the goals for democratization that all nations participating in the globalization project claim to espouse. One of the most blatant examples of this denial is the practice of moving industries to locations where safeguards for laborers and the environment are weak or non-existent, rendering the promise of freedom through development. Advanced developed nations began to promote this practice within their own borders in the 70's, but for some years now they have been moving industries to developing countries which are often in competition regarding the lowest wages and lowest safety costs. What has ensued, of course, are growing pockets of impoverished and unemployed workers in the advanced developed nations and a guarantee of continued poverty in the developing nations and a concentration of extreme wealth in the hands of small numbers of citizens in both types of nations.

The new industrial nations of East Asia have not had modernization thrust upon them by the tides of history. On the contrary, they chose economic development so that they could enjoy the same human dignity, individual freedom and social justice that they perceived societies advanced in modernization practices to enjoy.

Yet one wonders if East Asia has not benightedly mistaken the counter or oppositional ideas of the past for the thesis or grand idea, and set up barriers to realizing modernity in their very modernization processes. It is no comfort to know that they are not alone in this venture. Most of the nations of the world today appear to have embraced the neo-liberal modernization scheme that favors plutocracy over democracy. How did this happen? How can nations who chose modernity end up with plutocracy and not democracy?

Both Kant and Hegel stressed the catalyst role of citizens' awakening to themselves as individuals in a collective for the achievement of modernity in advanced societies. It is generally believed that a high degree of social mobility is catalyst to developing an awareness of individuality in an expanding middle class. Modernization through industrialization and urbanization holds the promise of leading new industrial societies to acknowledge the rationality principle of the contractual relationships in a market economy and thus, of allowing every person to stand on his or her own merits, free from traditional bonds of caste. When modernization is seen in this light, it becomes essential to its success that each citizen become aware of being an individual and possessing a right to self-subsistence. For the people of East Asia, it can be said that the process of such self-awakening has already set in and ought to only deepen through its dynamic growth.

In Korean society, however, there are some great stumbling blocks lying ahead on the path to unfolding individuality. Despite the steady progress of science and technology in the instrumental rationalization of productivity, changes in traditional ways of thinking and perceiving proceed at a slower pace, and an unsettling discrepancy between modernity and tradition widens proportionally. While productive forces revolve on the axis of instrumental rationality, political and social consciousness still clings to traditional value systems. The process of rationalization does not appear to be accompanied by corresponding changes in the superstructures of society. Instead, we see patrimonial political and social consciousness guiding the rational direction of economic development. These entrenched patterns of thought strongly influence the orientation and disposition to action of those who make decisions and manage affairs at the level of rationalized formal institutions.

Historically, this phenomenon is understood as intrinsic to the very nature of society itself. Certainly, resistance to modernity has been recurring in one form or another in the West over the past two or three centuries, and in contemporary developing countries we witness its unmistakable signs again and again. It is the driving force of the divisive doctrine of cultural relativism. When modernization is deliberate, as it is in most developing countries, traditional sentiments counter reforms by seeking to absorb them into the old system. In this age of globalization, counter-modernization moves are often masked by an appeal to tolerance for feudalistic traditions in the name of various multicultural doctrines. Beseeching tolerance from the world at large, many East Asian political leaders espouse an ideology of development which is solely dependent upon their authoritarian and ultimately repressive rule. When traditional authoritarianism combines with modern technology, the result is an undemocratic technocracy. This form of government is

most damaging to those societies wherein a civic culture has not yet experienced circumstances by which it could mature. As a result, those institutional structures credited with the capacity to foster the development of civic culture, such as a free press, which includes theater, and all of the arts, interest groups, and access to dissent and participation through the internet are stifled or nonexistent.

Political leaders purport to achieve a stable economic development through technocratic management in the belief that citizens with “full beliefs” will eventually be able to embrace the freedoms and responsibility of democracy. Such a rationale generally appears to yield results in the beginning. But, as time passes, it becomes quite clear that the process of self-awakening for citizens as individual subjects does not emerge simply because the quality of their lives has been enhanced by abundance. In the absence of self-awakened citizenry, authoritarian leadership encourages people to become consumers, concerned only with economic growth managed by an efficient government. For such a state as this, they reason, there is no need for democracy.

Surely, one of the greatest hindrances to the self-awakening of individual citizens as subjects of thought and action is consumerism. Consumerism is not new, nor does it necessarily have to stifle subjectivity, but when it is driven by the pervasiveness of high technology, it can hardly avoid becoming totalitarian. As Marcuse so aptly noted in his critique of modern technology and consumerism in the West,<sup>3</sup> illusory needs, fueled by techno-scientific innovations, are concocted by mass media and the consequence is that workers, who were supposed to have been freed by technological advances, are instead socially and psychologically forced to work harder and more in order to satisfy an insatiable need to possess. Technology is neutral. It is a tool. It is the rhetoric of a positive and idealistic view of modernization that technology should be used to support a good quality of life in every aspect for all citizens. In the less than utopian world we inhabit, technology has always been and, is still, a formidable instrument for political and social control. Consumerism, invigorated by endlessly refined information technology, paralyses the intelligence of even reflective citizens by glossing over reality and luring them with materials and convenience to a shallow, vacuous consciousness. This callow sense of individuality, described so well and lamented so vigorously by Marcuse, now pervades in emerging market societies. Material satiation alone does not foster subjectivity. Indeed, in the world Marcuse described, materialism encourages insensitivity to others and to one's environment, creating a numbed ignorance of life itself. Marcuse, of course, was describing consumerism in the age of post World War II renewed industrialization. That age, in the America he was writing about, also produced a strong middle class, but a contented one whose progeny were characterized by the self-involvement of the “me” generation in the '80s.

### ENDANGERED MODERNITY

Don Ihde, an eminent philosopher of technology of long standing, places the shift in technological paradigms from mega-industrial technologies to the information

technologies of the cyberage in the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> This shift was certainly very apparent in advanced nations, but, even today, for most developing countries, such as those in East Asia, the two stages exist side by side. However, in the metropolitan areas of East Asia's newly industrialized countries, the cybercultural world of computers and the Internet, that is, the world of virtual, not actual, reality may already constitute the lifeworld of many an urbanite.

It may be needless to point out here that for those whose daily routines belong to cyberworlds, virtual communities will regulate their perceptions, thoughts and, consequently their actions, forming their identities. Not so very long ago, sociologists warned that cyberculture would eventually become the prime determining force in the lives of citizens in every country.<sup>5</sup> Today, we see that this is already true for a great many of the younger generations in East Asia. The United States still has the highest number of broadband users at 60 million, but China, with 56 million at last count is close behind. Japan is next, and South Korea is slightly behind Germany to place fifth in the world for its use of high speed internet, at the time of this writing at least. How did this occur in countries which have only recently become industrialized and are in the throes of that phenomenon? One might say the dangers have been divided among classes, with the lower classes feeling the brunt of whatever industrialization has to wield and a middle class caught in a cyber web. Many East Asian countries had a middle class primed to enter into cyber use and, as that class expanded, so has access to the many uses of the internet, not only in the workplace, but in the home. Despite varying degrees of government restrictions, these countries have been able to make extensive, communicative use of blogs, discussion forums and internet networking to wage huge protests and rallies. South Korean teens were able to organize one of the largest anti-government demonstrations in this century. Yet reputable social scientists and observers of democratic trends noted that misinformation sped across the internet faster than rumor in a small village, firing up students who accepted it without question and mobilized their protests electronically. While presumably, web forums are a place to debate both the pros and cons of an issue that did not take place in this instance. Anyone who wanted to enter the web discussion forums to critique the issues was not welcome and rudely dismissed. Whatever tools for communication the internet generates can be used for noble or life-saving causes, but they work just as well for mindless ones. The instant and frenzied gratification for the young people involved brings to mind the hysteria of shamanism with its reliance on fetishes and emotional release. Ideologies seeped in irrationality are aided and abetted by technology.

From the nations which use the internet heavily, we also learn of young people playing internet games for sixteen or seventeen hours a day. In Korea, desperate parents elect to send such youngsters to camps where they are forced to engage in physically demanding sports and activities and to take risks in the outdoors. As well, they are restrained from using the internet or watching TV for the duration of their stay. Boot camps for cyber addicted teens seem like a drastic measure. A



million teens organizing themselves for protest based on misinformation and taking to city streets with fiery sticks is a nightmare. Is it we who have lost our way in modernity or has modernization failed us?

Every new technology ushers a new way of communicating and thinking, of responding and relating to each other and ourselves. This has always been so. While we all know of ways in which technology isolates individuals from society, inter-subjectivity and action, we also know that technology brings people together, invites collaboration and creates new modes of collaborating as well as new language and concepts to do it with, and thus, it creates new norms for interacting and reflecting. We need to be sensitive to ways in which technological innovations can serve the humane values found in every society to continue thriving and advancing. But as societies little acquainted with the responsibilities of freedom in our past traditions and, being new to the competitive side of market globalization and modernization, our internal resources appear to be no match for the task. Whose task is it to bring subjectivity to citizens? How does a nation that has deliberately chosen modernity and modernization go about assisting the growth of subjectivity in its citizens? Marcuse wrote as witness of what not to do. Neither a materially satiated working class nor a self-absorbed middle class advance the lofty goals of modernity's vision.

Unfortunately, there is more to the endangerment of the modernity project than technology's potential to wed with consumerism and produce mindless, ineffectual citizens. Technology, as a tool of modernism, poses other dangers as well, but the culprit behind modernity's greatest endangerment may be modernity itself.

Any concept with the power to influence the structures and thrust of governance on so many levels is open to interpretation and criticism. In fact, its life expectancy, so to speak, depends on its potential to respond to criticism and new knowledge and to change course. As well, the concept must contend with other worldviews influencing governance. These views tend to take in and absorb or merge the concept's development into already established practices. I spoke of this phenomenon in relation to countries which came late to an acceptance of the modernization agenda and tend to fit modernity's development into their traditional structures of governance. The same tendency, of course, is true of modernity itself. Modernization has always had to contend with the lingering ghosts of colonialism and the constant rebirthing of nationalism. Now, modernization is endangered by ever reincarnated practices and ideologies of both colonialism and nationalism as well as with its proponents' failure to absorb new knowledge and information about the effects of modernization on the environment and what that means.

Modernization was first promoted as a way to freedom for all and, most importantly, a way of gaining control over nature, both in terms of controlling the harm nature could inflict and in transforming nature to serve human needs and desires. While this view is still prevalent, it began losing ground rapidly in the latter decades of the twentieth century when it became apparent that the accelerated advances in science and technology, while proliferating development and trade on a global level, were critically harming the environment. The damages provided insights into their human and ecological costs. Moreover, these new insights allowed many to



see for the first time the inequities in social justice that modernization imposes, and has always imposed, in every society.

Just at this juncture, characterized by an awareness of the dangers inherent in modernization and neo-liberalism's rise, many countries decided to join the modernization project. They carried into their venture, hopes for freedom from want and the good life, but as I mentioned, they had no mature civil society and no institutionalized structures to voice dissent or seek alterations when modernization methods created more poverty, not less. Moreover, there were no models of success in terms of sustaining a good life for all to be found in the modernity of well-established developed nations. Indeed, just at the time many Asian nations were opting for development at long last, many Western nations began to deliberately dismantle the safeguards of regulating vital industries and services and were cutting funding for long established institutions which had guaranteed basic rights to food, shelter and education for their citizens.

Many critics believe that the problems of modernity and neo-liberal economic globalization are inherent in the concepts themselves. For example they believe that capitalism and modernity, of necessity, must cause ecological harm and injustice and harm to groups of people or markets will suffer and modernity cannot advance. Some even argue that history will work through all the injustice and harm and, that new resources, perhaps in outer space, will be found to replace those destroyed and that surviving members of one destroyed group will be the leaders of a similar cycle. Still, other argue that the ends do not justify the means, and, moreover, that ecological modernization is a possibility, and sometimes, even now, a reality. They further maintain that embracing ecological moderation policies will encourage standards based on justice for both people and their environment. This last belief, assuming that it is not too late, can come about only if we can envision modernity in a different way than we do now. My contention is that the revised vision is already here, that its roots can be found in the earliest rationalizations of subjectivity.

### **MODERNITY AS SUBJECTIVITY**

Though it would not be apparent to an intelligent visitor from another planet today, the fundamental distinguishing feature of modernity is the awareness of the subject of his/her own existence as actor. Some Western intellectual historians assert that this self-awakening became manifest in the political form of the French Revolution of 1789 on one hand and in the form of German Idealism on the other. This historical perspective suggests that the process of individuation occurring in Korean society and elsewhere in this region requires a deeper reflection than is the case now on the ongoing changes in mentality being brought about by the rapid rationalization of social structure taking place.

In our attempt to link philosophy to reality, we will look now at some anthropological accounts which Kant and Hegel construed from their observations of the political and social conditions of their time. One of the political implications of Kant's transcendental theory of knowledge is the problem of subjectivity that is

characteristic of creative spontaneity. Those who achieve subjectivity become the self-determining, free individuals that Kant presumes to be essential to his political philosophy. Subjectivity is also taken as the unique mark of human dignity (*Menschenwuerde*) in his moral philosophy.

Reading Kant, it is difficult to believe that he lived his whole life in the same city and never ventured more than a few miles outside of it. Yet, without aid of any of the modern means of communication we know today, he knew much about the world outside of his city, his country and Europe. He ranted against slavery and against wars and the oppressive means used to open up markets in far away lands. He never wavered in his premise that all men were subjects. The federation of states that he conceived included those lands that were considered by others to be inhabited by savages. Kant commented that, in his view, the practices of the Europeans were far more barbaric than those of the “savages.” Article III in the conditions of a Perpetual Peace is titled “The Rights of men as Citizens of the world in a cosmo-political system, shall be restricted to conditions of universal Hospitality.”<sup>6</sup> He strongly believed that all nations want to trade but only under hospitable conditions. Under the conditions of an agreed upon practice of universal Hospitality, Anglo-European countries would be unable to treat foreign and strange lands as if they belonged to nobody whatsoever and available for them to conquer and plunder.

Yet, this same Kant, who insisted on hospitality among nations, well understood the conflicted, oppositional nature of all human beings. He is justly famous for his exploration of the “unsocial sociability” of human nature (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*)<sup>7</sup> Disciplining one’s unsociability in order to get along in society was the mark of a civilized person. Human beings, as individuals, came to this discipline because they realized that they needed to live in society, that it was essential to survival. Nations would come to the notion of keeping a Perpetual Peace for the same reason. When Kant spoke of the abuses European traders inflicted upon countries weaker and less developed than their own, he might well have been predicting the problems of today, though he surely thought there would be a Cosmo-political constitution by now. What we have instead however are calls from civil society, from various non-governmental organizations for global governance to achieve social and environmental justice through a global-political constitution or laws because modernization, as it is practiced today, has created unparalleled inequality among citizens within a single nation and among nations. Kant did talk about the ruination of nature through war, colonization and coercive marketing methods, but there is no evidence that he thought modernity as he perceived might endanger the resources of the world. However, just as Kant believed that human beings would reconcile their oppositional natures in order to maintain a peaceful society, so I think his message would be the same regarding re-visioning modernity so that it can not only be sustained, but be worthy of being sustained. And he would have no difficulty associating that re-visioning with social and environmental justice.

For Hegel, subjectivity actualizes itself in labor. In work we relate to objects of nature and to our fellow-human beings. In labor too, one individual may subsume others through intersubjectivity, but in the end, those enslaved attain subjectivity

when they realize the worth of their labor and rebel. Ideally, labor binds subjects together through its sociality and intersubjectivity. Labor is the objectification of human potentialities realized in the social act. Hegel is keen to point out that labor, which in essence is never solitary, allows human beings to receive the recognition from others that they inherently crave. This need for recognition is met in the division of labor within community. Labor is a universal element binding individual subjects in a community. Through the product of labor, individuals acquire mutual recognition as equals. As *homo laborans*, subjects are autonomous individuals bearing responsibility for others, and are thus collective as well.

Both Kant and Hegel were well aware of the consequences of a flourishing market economy, and their portrayal of subjectivity as awareness of one's ability to think and act independently, and to collaborate was certainly a response to the problems accruing to the modernization of German society at the dawn of the Great Industrial Revolution. Especially, the latter demanded the transcendence of a state in which individuals were objectified and treated as cogs in a market machine. He envisaged a society that fosters personal subjectivities and universal recognition of the free, thinking individual.<sup>8</sup> This thought is echoed in the Critical Theory of late capitalism with even stronger basis for doing so. First, there is even more evidence to suggest that subjectivity exists in all lifeworlds, and that the hall mark of subjectivity, free will, prevails even in the most authoritarian and oppressive of them. States may or may not transcend their oppressive operations and subjectivity may be stifled, but it exists and never ceases to find expression on some level.

### HERMENEUTICS FOR A TRANSCULTURAL ETHICS

We exist in the world relating to other fellow-beings. The modes of social relationships vary within lifeworlds. After laboring together, early peoples began to relax together, family and neighbors came together to share food at the evening table. Communal relaxation at the end of long days soothed the pains of the body and lifted the spirits. Shared food and drink invited them to chant and dance life's burdens into oblivion, and the hardships of work receded as make-believe set in. Thus, in our earliest history of communal living did fantasy and play emerge. The concept of play is a universal conception, existing in every culture. The capacity to imagine and so to conjure up alternative realities is uniquely human. Through such play did metaphysics delineate the distinction between reality and appearance.

In imagination we are infinitely free to do what we will, but in real life we are confined to our bodies within given situations. Yet in playing with others, we glean the true meaning of what it is to be free. In imagination, human beings learn the genuine meaning of freedom of thought and expression, affirming our individual subjectivity against the actual world. In childhood human beings learn to revel in fairy tales, ruling the fairylands into which no outsiders are allowed. And out of imagination springs the power of creation, by virtue of which humans transform nature into something entirely new and, by this ingenuity, distinguish themselves from nature.

Through these distinctly human traits, Hegel's *homo laborans* becomes Weber's *Kulturmensch*. This is the authentic mode of human existence. Labor proclaims how free humans are by way of changing imaginary worlds into the actual world. True enough, the transformation more times than not brings new obstacles, but today, the very act of imagining change is being pitilessly endangered by our techno-scientific age. We cannot turn back the clock and summarily have philosophy reinstate human subjectivity to its original metaphysical position, but we can ask philosophy to ground subjectivity in all aspects of our lifeworlds and so restore its power to transform and influence those lifeworlds, and above all, to develop an ethics to promote and protect universal subjectivity.

At the turn of the twentieth century Husserl's transcendental phenomenology of subjectivity made its illustrious way as part of philosophical endeavors to secure human subjectivity from the threat of its reification, and the Existentialism of Heidegger and Sartre followed suit along with the Critical Theory of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Habermas. Each of these philosophers tackled the problem of vanishing subjectivity by approaching it from different perspectives and resources. The crisis of a vanishing subjectivity has never quite gone away, no matter what the perspective. At the dawn of the new millennium, industrializing societies of East Asia, having entered the cyber-world as well, are confronted with similar anthropological crises and philosophers are called upon to reinstate subjectivity in this precarious contemporary moment when cyber dreams and consumerism choke not only the subjects' propensity to oppositional reasoning and action, but also their creativity and will.

Subjectivity develops in modes other than labor and play. Human beings relate to other humans in the modes of social relationship such as love, hate, domination and death.<sup>9</sup> The notion of love has informed all cultures in human history. Love alone is capable of bringing together separate individuals and groups into communal solidarity. In love one learns the meaning of oneness with others and becomes imbued with a sense of wholeness. Hatred finds its infinite ways to divide; it often leads to violent strife, which separates victors and the defeated. This in turn creates notions of superior and inferior among fellow beings that justify political-social orders of domination and subjugation. Human history has witnessed numerous cases of this kind and continues to do so.

Awareness of one's mortality defines what it is to be human. The dread that I shall no longer exist *hic et nunc* reveals to me and to every individual the true meaning of being and non-being. Facing the immanent nullification of my own being, I come to see the dark abyss of nothingness, and struggle to regain my potentiality to prolong my existence. The inevitability of our own demise holds us captive in thought and imagination. Death illuminates the disparity between transience and eternity. Perhaps, philosophy derives its inner driving force from one's awareness of mortality, from our "being-toward-death" (*Zum Tode sein*),<sup>10</sup> while our moral consciousness attains its strength from the gnawing anxiety about what will become of us after death. Yet, we yearn for eternal life and envision it as a place where will

be no more hate, quarrels, wars and destruction, a place where we can live together in perpetual peace and fulfill our potentials without hindrance.

In the evolution of human history oppositional categories are always paired and intertwined: unity and division, peace and conflict, and creation and destruction exist together in tension. The mediation involved in this complex of commonly acknowledged meanings imbued with oppositional tensions which humans acquire from childhood on through the modes of social relationships of love and hate, work and play, and living and dying takes place daily in our lifeworlds. These meanings, constantly nuanced through mediation, in turn constitute the basis of our intersubjective understanding by virtue of which we relate to our environments and fellow human beings in thought, feeling and action. Practical reasoning in every society grows through the mediations of primary and secondary social relationships and matures in articulation at those societal levels so that conciliation of divisions and hostilities can come to be addressed collectively. Mediating the oppositional elements of societal life, or as Kant would have said, our “unsocial sociability” takes place at every level. Historical contexts change, the scope of the concepts available to social mediation widens in each generation, but the tensions of oppositions and the ever emerging variations of their reconciliation can still be viewed as viable contributions to a theoretical foundation for establishing communities, even for establishing a global community of peace and harmony wherein each of us may realize all of our potentialities as freely as we can.

Democratic concepts such as “individual,” “equality before the law,” “social justice” and “human rights” are not given to us a priori. They belong to the legacy built by those philosophers and thinkers who reflected on humanity’s relentless struggle for self-liberation from bondages in the past. These concepts have been able to reach so many through centuries of complicated and varied processes of dissemination and now have come to embrace nearly all of humanity. The complex of meanings, acquired through our social relationships of love, hate, work and play, and life and death, catalyses the connections, which are transcultural. Today, most lifeworlds brim with potential schemata by which to render practices insuring human dignity and social justice for all human beings. Two more concepts, discussed briefly in this essay, have entered our general vocabulary, “environmental justice” and “sustainable modernity”, sometimes associated with “sustainable development” but going beyond even that in its scope. We owe our understanding of the depth and importance of these concepts to the ever growing urging from civil society around the world to reinstate the essential vision of modernity, with its emphasis on equality. It is civil society, after all, from philosophers and critics to mobilized non-governmental organizations dedicated to the original notions of modernity that have pointed out to various national governments that subjectivity, equality, social justice and observance of human rights have gone missing in today’s global economics. It is civil society that urges governments to pay attention to what scientists are telling us about our environment. It is civil society that informs the most vulnerable in our societies of the dangers the current neo-liberal ideology and managerial economics poses to them and their environment as well as to the

environments of the world. And it is civil society that has called attention to the limits of modernization. What shall we do with our understandings?

Subjectivity demands agency or it is nothing at all. Conversely, action is ineffectual if knowledge and reflection do not inform it. This understanding urges me to advocate for education in critical thinking, problem solving and awareness of world threatening issues. I note that many universities throughout the world have courses, even majors in environmental studies and social justice. Such education should be a priority of modernizing countries. It should not wait until students reach university years, it can begin much sooner. There are fine programs featuring what early childhood educators refer to as a community of philosophical inquiry (CPI) for kindergarteners which explore several types of reasoning, including moral reasoning. Continuing education should certainly offer community courses in environmental studies for adults of all ages.

There are many other ways of educating citizens to subjectivity and action. I have mentioned above some of those I know about in Korea and elsewhere. It seems to me that those nations which have chosen modernization have the best chance of exploring it with their citizens of all ages. Hope exists in keeping the transculturated concepts of freedom, subjectivity and equality alive and growing through education, discussion and debate locally and globally.

## NOTES

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