

Uichol Kim, Henriette Sinding Aasen, Shirin Ebadi, eds, *Democracy, Human Rights, and Islam in Modern Iran: Psychological, Social, and Cultural Perspectives*, Fagbokforlaget, Oslo 2003, pp. 411-442.

Krzysztof Gawlikowski

DIALOGUE AMONG CIVILISATIONS AS A NEW CHALLENGE IN THE ERA OF GLOBALISATION

1. The notion and the scope of dialogue among civilisations

The United Nations promotes a new idea: a dialogue among civilisations. On 5 September 2000, on the eve of the United Nations Millennium Summit in New York, UNESCO and the UN organised a round table debate *Dialogue among Civilisations*. It was held on the initiative of Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and with the support of this country. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the UN, and Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of the UNESCO, opened this exceptional gathering of numerous eminent personages, including many heads of state. The UN also declared the year 2001 as the Year for Dialogue among Civilisations (and the UNESCO dedicated even the first decade of the 21st century to such dialogue).

At the occasion of the Round Table, Koïchiro Matsuura indicated that this dialogue should set a new frame for the better co-operation in an increasingly interconnected world, where intensifying globalisation encompasses and affects all social activities, but also increases disparities and divisions. Thus a human face should be added to globalisation processes. "This quest must be based on universally shared values while safeguarding the diversity of individuals and cultures, and it must be targeted at the urgent needs of the disadvantaged and excluded groups or geographical regions. Solidly anchored in democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, dialogue is the key because dialogue alone can lead to long-term understanding, reconciliation and peace".

As he pointed out, globalisation offers new great opportunities, but it also brings marginalisation for many. In various regions of the world, peace remains fragile and tenuous. Poverty and conflicts endanger human life and dignity (*Dialogue*, Foreword). So, dialogue, the active, mutually enriching exchange, is closely interconnected with development and is essential to peace between nations and peoples. As he indicated, the need of dialogue is increasingly acute both on international and national levels. Only such dialogue gives chances to resolve problems inherited from the past, of the long-standing

memories of historic grievances and sufferings. It should lead to long term understanding and reconciliation, to a proper assessment of the merits of each part, and could promote universal observance of basic human rights (*Dialogue*, 2001, 17-8, Introduction).

The UNESCO's editors of the *Preface* to the book, that contains materials of the Round Table, define the aims of such dialogue more precisely: "The aim is to acquire a better understanding of the long- term processes that are the mainsprings of the memory of the peoples – and that can either fuel prejudice and incomprehension or lay the foundations for renewing dialogue between different civilisations, cultures, religions and spiritual traditions – by going beyond the traditional, reductive approach to intercultural dialogue considered solely as the mutual knowledge of cultures and civilisations. It will thus be possible to analyse the basic concepts of heritage, identity and creativity as they take shape, in order to highlight their composite nature. The Organisation is therefore seeking to strengthen the process, both historical and contemporary, that are conducive to a favourable convergence between cultures through the discovery of a common heritage and shared values" (*Dialogue*, 12, Preface).

Thus the dialogue among civilisations aims not only at simple mutual understanding and respect, but at the promotion of a certain convergence of the existing cultures and civilisations, based on their common values. Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the UN, presented even a more ambitious vision. According to him "alongside an infinite diversity of cultures there does exist one global civilisation in which humanity's ideas and beliefs meet and develop peacefully and productively". He added that such a civilisation must be defined by its tolerance of dissent, its celebration of cultural diversity, its insistence on fundamental, universal human rights, and its belief in the right of people everywhere to have a say in how they are governed. In his opinion with such a civilisation we should embark on a new century and should defend it, since the use of cultural diversity is our asset in an increasingly interconnected world. This diversity makes dialogue among civilisations necessary. The perception of this diversity as a threat is the very seed of war (*Dialogue*, 20).

So, he advocated and hailed both cultural diversity and unity of mankind in the sphere of essential values. As one can notice, in his vision the term "civilisation" appears in two meanings. The first is simply descriptive, close to "culture", whereas the second is normative, and constitutes an ideal of social and political organisation that embodies noblest principles. In the first, civilisation can simply be "shared together", whereas in the second should be promoted and defended, as something commonly valued by mankind. These opinions represent the concepts that predominate at the United Nations' headquarters.

President Khatami, who launched the initiative of dialogue among civilisations, offered us more details. It seems that he was inspired by the

experience of Islamic civilisation: “a single message of Koran interpreted and understood in a variety of ways”. “Global culture – as he stated – cannot and ought not overlook the characteristics and requirements of native local cultures with the aim of imposing itself upon them. Cultures and civilisations that have naturally evolved among various nations in the course of history are constituted from elements that have gradually adapted to collective souls and to historical and traditional characteristics. As such, these elements have become cohesive and are consolidated within an appropriate network of relationships. In spite of all existing plurality and diversity, a unique and harmonious form can be abstracted from the collection (...) Compared to local and national cultures, a world culture is a selective culture deliberately formed and abstracted from a natural set. This culture is therefore intrinsically non-uniform and non-monolithic both in form and in content. It also lacks any primary or essential elements and as such, there can exist no cross-composition between primary and secondary elements”.

As he indicated, in order to provide natural unity and harmony for this global culture, and to prevent anarchy and chaos, all parties should engage in dialogue to exchange knowledge and their historical experience. Having criticised the old “master paradigm” in international relations based on a discourse of power and on glorification of might, that resulted in human catastrophes, he offered a new one: of dialogue among civilisations. And he concluded: “From an ethical perspective, the paradigm of dialogue among civilisations requires that we give up the will for power and instead appeal to the will for empathy and compassion (...) The ultimate goal of dialogue among civilisations is not dialogue in and of itself, but dialogue towards attaining empathy and compassion”. In his opinion there are two ways to carry out such a dialogue. The first consist of spontaneous interactions of cultures and civilisations. The second is a deliberate dialogue among representative members of various civilisations that aim in mutual understanding or even some agreement. It ought to involve fundamental questions, such as the ultimate meaning of life and death, or good and evil, and also substantiate and enlighten a dialogue on political and social issues. “When superficial issues masquerade as ‘real’, ‘urgent’ and ‘essential’, and where no agreement, or at least mutual understanding, obtains among parties to dialogue concerning what is truly fundamental, in all likelihood misunderstanding and confusion will proliferate instead of any sense of empathy and compassion”.

Reading such statements one immediately realises that the speaker is an eminent political and religious leader who understands in depth the significance of a “meta-historical discourse” and a moral dimension of such a dialogue. He is certainly right by pointing to eternal human questions of philosophical and religious nature as necessary elements of any fruitful dialogue on more practical social and political issues. The essential differences among civilisations are rooted in their fundamental values and paradigms. For instance,

understanding of the different attitudes towards the concept of human rights requires acknowledgement that there are fundamental differences in interpretations of the individual and social interrelations, of human nature and destiny, of sense of human life, and so on. When somebody rejects the Western notion of human rights or essentially modifies it, he could do it not because he wants maintain a dictatorship, but because this Western concept does not fit to his vision of the world and of human life, since he was raised in a non-Western tradition. The dialogue among civilisations has strictly practical aspects as well.

President Khatami clearly stated that: “What may be termed the ‘Cartesian-Faustian’ narrative of Western civilisation should now give way by listening to other narratives, proposed by other human cultural domains”. In particular he indicated the ecological disasters provoked by the unstoppable destruction of nature. “Another goal of dialogue among cultures and civilisations is to recognise and to understand not only the cultures and civilisations of others, but also one’s own (...) seeing in essence requires taking distance in perspective, and distance provides the ground for immersion into another existential dimension (...) In order to exchange understanding instead of proliferating misunderstanding we need special moral and ethical training as well as a special rational and logical methodology. Dialogue is a bilateral or even multi-lateral process in which the end result is not manifest from the beginning. We ought to prepare ourselves for surprising outcomes, since every dialogue can provide grounds for human creativity to flourish”.

Perhaps he indicated here the most difficult aspect of the dialogue: a particular “openness” of our mind and soul, and respect for other cultures and styles of life. Cultural pluralism ought to be appreciated as such whereas all attempts to impose one’s own cultural norms on other societies ought to be rejected and condemned. Without such an approach it is virtually impossible to enter spiritually into other forms of human existence and into “other worlds” that exist side by side with our own. And this requires a certain preparation, intellectual and moral, and – of course – a person who once entered another civilisation would perceive his own culture from another perspective. Using the metaphor of the story about Gulliver, one would know that “an egg can be opened from one or another side”, and that we should not necessarily annihilate in war those who open the egg from a “wrong side”.

President Khatami indicated that such a dialogue requires a true engagement of intellectuals and artists, as well as academic institutions. One could mention that teachers who should lead their students to such other worlds of thought and promote respect for others ought to play a prominent role. He also pointed out that it needs governmental commitment, which is certainly even more difficult to obtain in the world dominated by the politicians whose prime concern are egoistic interests and constant popular support. President Khatami concluded his speech with the statement: “Let us hope that enmity and oppression will end and that the clamour of love for truth, justice and human

dignity will prevail” (*Dialogue*, 23-30, Presentation). Unfortunately we may merely hope that the world will follow this path in the 21 century, and the very beginning of the new century does not contradicts such expectations.

As one can notice, President Khatami presented a very broad and simultaneously quite practical vision of the dialogue. He put an emphasis on mutual understanding, although he also aimed at a new “world culture”. One could probably sum up his concept of this culture as follows: it ought to be formed in such a dialogue, as a result of purposeful efforts, by reaching a consensus in some essential principles that could be shared by all cultures, perhaps in various forms and with slightly different interpretations. These concepts correspond to the opinions of some eminent Western scholars.

For instance, Charles Taylor adopted a similar approach, although he outlined the process of a dialogue in a more complex way. According to him, mutual understanding is an essential condition of arriving at a consensus, and this second step should lead towards a mutual learning and eventually to a “fusion of horizons” (the concept introduced by H. G. Gadamer). However, in practice the order of preliminary phases could be modified or even reversed since some consensus could be necessary to initiate a mutual understanding, although in general the path to agreement lies through some degree of sympathetic mutual comprehension. He also indicated that sometimes we face a vicious circle. A blanked condemnation of certain traditions and cultures or contempt for them presented by foreigners provokes a “fundamentalist” resistance. Thus perceived external condemnation helps to feed extreme reaction, which calls down further condemnation and further reactions in a vicious spiral. One can detect such dynamics in the present unhealthy relations between the West and a part of Islamic world. In Taylor’s opinion mutual respect is the most essential factor, without it the other side is inevitably presented as “inferior” and “unworthy”, her standpoint as “ridiculous” or “obviously false”. This in turn results in anger and resentment among those who are depreciated, and in this way conflicts originate. The only cure for contempt is understanding that could prevent too-facile depreciatory stories about others and the increasing sense of one’s own rightness and superiority. Hence Taylor agrees that the dialogue among civilisations is a bare necessity in our inter-connected world (Taylor, 1999, 138-40).

In principle the concepts of such a dialogue could be accepted by open-minded politicians and intellectuals from various countries. However, there are various practical obstacles and theoretical difficulties that emerge when we enter into details. For instance, how should a “cultural convergence” be achieved and on which basis a “world culture” ought be formed? Could it be based on one of the existing civilisations (in particular Western that aims at predomination), or should it be a new entity, inspired by various civilisations and cultures in more or less “equal shares”? Whether this “common ground” should constitute a rather amorphous body of principles followed by all

governments, similar to UN covenants, or should it be a kind of a new “global civilisation” adopted even by the “ordinary citizens” and shaping their everyday life? If the second option is accepted, other problems appear. For instance, to which extent should it substitute the existing civilisations (rooted in a definite religious and spiritual tradition), or should it rather function above them, as a new normative and spiritual entity that penetrates and modifies “national cultures”? In the last case the “world civilisation” would constitute a particular set of “global principles, values and customs” shared by “regional civilisations” and “local cultures”.

It appears that numerous participants of this debate in New York preferred the latter approach. For instance R. K. Ramazani (from the United States) pointed out that the principal aim of dialogue among civilisations should be the search for shared values. Such a dialogue, in his opinion, should be based on the “unity in diversity”, be free of any model and aim at a new paradigm. It has a normative dimension and ought to indicate that what is desirable in the terms of aspiration of humanity in the post-post-modern period to eliminate the adverse side effects of globalisation. According to him it should be holistic and encompass all dimensions: political, economic, ethical, and religious, should also concern lifestyles and other spheres of social life. The unity for mankind constitutes - for him - a “new aspiration” (*Dialogue*, 103-4). Hans van Ginkel (of the Netherlands) pointed out that the creation of the world community of peoples in the 21st century requires a different type of pedagogy and of school programmes. They should be focused not only on their own country and people, but on other countries and peoples as well (*Dialogue*, 119). Koh Byong-Ik (of the Republic of Korea) indicated as the main purpose the elimination of hatred and contempt towards other ethnic groups and civilisations, but in his opinion this can only be achieved through organised and centrally planned efforts. Thus the dialogue should be arranged by UNESCO or other international bodies (*Dialogue*, 107).

According to Ru Xin (of China), the new era of globalisation requires a global consciousness: “We must not take actions out of individual, narrow interests alone, but have a broader perspective of the common interests of all human beings. We must realise that the world is an integrated whole and we have to live on this planet together in peace, be dependent upon each other and help each other, live our lives well and let other people live well”. In his opinion globalisation promotes economic and social development, on the other hand, it creates difficulties of preserving the characteristics and cultural traditions belonging to each country. Globalisation ought to allow diversification. “People in different countries live in societies with different political and economic systems, different cultural values, different religions and different historical backgrounds. It seems to me that it is not possible to them to adopt a unanimous development model or to impose certain cultural values upon them. People in different countries have the right to choose their own path of development

according to the state of affairs in their own countries and to preserve their own culture and values (...) I do not think that the clash of civilisations is inevitable but rather that civilisations can and must coexist in peace, learn from each other, understand each other, and replace confrontation with dialogue. Only then shall the process of globalisation be beneficial to the development and progress of all nations” (*Dialogue*, 88-9). However, Richard W. Bulliet (of the USA) warned that the type of knowledge about civilisations that arose and climaxed in the decades just after the World War II was oriented towards the era of imperialism. “We must try to formulate new parameters, new expectations, for a new type of study of other civilizations, one that is formed within the sense of dialogue of civilizations rather than simply exploring the museum of humanity from a Western point of view” (*Dialogue*, 82).

During the debates of the Round Table, and discussions held afterwards in various places, many other interesting opinions had been presented. For instance, at the international Symposium *Methodology in Dialogue, or How Intercultural Dialogue Works* (organised in Luxembourg, September 27th, 2002) Michael von Brück analysed complicated mechanisms of cross-cultural understanding. Understanding of the Other is – according to him – a process of transforming that what is “alien” into something “own”. Hence understanding is a precondition for an enlargement of identity, and new phenomena ought to become a part of one’s own structures of perception. Therefore understanding of the Other and the formation of one’s own or group’s own identity are mutually interdependent, since “we” is always a counterpart of the “other”. The formation of group’s identity depends on the processes of assimilation and differentiation, and is based on the stereotypes: cohesion of a group and identity of its members are related to certain generalisations concerning the group itself and the Others. Hence the “Other” serves as a source of self-affirmation and this is not merely a cognitive process but involves emotions, evaluations and other psychological components. He rightly indicates that the Other embodies that what is opposite, what we wish to obtain or to fear. Therefore he calls for “building identity in partnership”, developing the sense of community with “soft” and flexible identities, as much rational as possible (Brück, 2002). From this perspective dialogue among civilisations and cultures contradicts to a certain extent the natural social mechanisms and requires a fundamental reshaping of nation-building processes and of national identities.

On the one hand, one could notice Western stereotypes of various non-Western civilisations, on the other their stereotypes of the West and of their non-Western partners. All of them are to a certain extent false by their nature and owing to their involvement in the process of the identity formation. As one can notice, civilisations and cultures differ in various degree. For instance, the Western culture is much closer to the Islamic tradition than to Confucian-Buddhist heritage of East Asia. Islam evolved in the Mediterranean and shares the same holy book – the *Bible*, worships the same God-creator of the universe,

sharing with the West numerous fundamental concepts and values. The Chinese, on the other hand, have an entirely different tradition, had no idea of God-Creator, nor ontological Good and Evil that fight each other, their dualism of Yin and Yang presumes that these forces complement each other and are mutually changeable. In the Western/Near Eastern tradition time is measured by weeks with one “holy day” (Sunday for Christians, Saturday for Jews and Friday for Moslems), whereas the Chinese measured time by decades and 24 seasons of the year, knowing no “holy day” for collective praying.

Apparently smaller “cultural distance” should facilitate dialogue, and greater “cultural distance” should make mutual understanding difficult. It is not, however, so simple because of various stereotypes. As historical realities prove, dialogue and mutual understanding could be in some respects much more difficult between “sister-cultures” than between very distant ones, because of prejudices and hatred accumulated for centuries towards the neighbours. Under such circumstances it is sometimes even more difficult to reach an agreement, although both sides could understand each other rather well. On the other hand, it is easier to agree with a representative of an entirely alien civilisation on some practical matters, notwithstanding the very superficial or even misleading understanding of the partner’s fundamental principles. In this case true and deep understanding is difficult to achieve, but good will, lack of highly emotional stereotypes, and even superficiality of communication facilitate reaching an agreement on practical matters. In our differentiated world, in which national, ethnic, or religious identities are often based on certain cultural values and norms, and serve various political aims, it is extremely difficult to develop such a dialogue among civilisations and cultures. The formation of a global “human family”, in its practical and moral dimensions, constitutes perhaps, the greatest challenge of the 21st century.

The events of September 11th enormously increased its significance.

2. The problem of Western domination and of the “Western universalism”

One may presume that we could freely choose the best form of the dialogue and of the “global civilisation”. There is, however, much less room for manoeuvre than it appears, and our future somehow has already been settled. We may dislike these solutions, but we cannot ignore them. It is not true that the dialogue among civilisations involves all of them in a similar way. One should acknowledge that we live in the world dominated by the West. Since the very end of the 15th century the West initiated its colonial conquests and at the beginning of the 20th century they culminated with the division of almost the entire non-Western world into colonial empires and spheres of influence. The only non-Western power that joined this imperialist race was Japan. This country as the first successfully absorbed the essential technological achievements of Western civilisation and embarked on its own colonial conquests.

The World War II, that was initiated by emerging powers for a new division of the spheres of influence, marked an end of the imperialist policy itself. Initially the United Nations merely condemned the military conquests and wars. Later on, in the 1960's, owing to the numerous successful struggles of liberation and the competition of the West with the Communist bloc, the UN condemned foreign oppression in all forms and eventually dismantled the remains of the colonial system. Thus political enslavement and exploitation of the indigenous peoples by Western powers were eliminated. The deprivation of the "coloured people" of their civil and political rights and other forms of racial discrimination lasted, of course, much longer. Their extirpation required not only changes in political and legal systems of individual countries, but first of all in mentality and in social relations, which was a much more complex task.

Undoubtedly, an enormous progress was achieved and the most brutal and cruel forms of Western domination have been wiped out. However, the West still predominates in almost all respects: in military and economic affairs, in science and technology, in the sphere of political relations and of ideology, in high and in the popular cultures, in sport, fashion, etc. The Western countries have also determined the essential principles that regulate international relations.

After the World War II the USA started to dominate the West and the world affairs, competing with the Communist bloc led by the Soviet Union. Although the Communist ideology evolved in Europe, this system (at least its bolshevik-Leninist version) was much less "Western-minded" than the American system, and much better suited to the non-Western social realities. Therefore, notwithstanding its low economic efficiency, the Soviet system could expand so much in Asia and Africa. But since the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union itself we deal with an almost absolute domination of one country: of the United States (that represent a particular version of Western civilisation). And this country propagates – with a true missionary zeal – its own values and norms as universal. The most prominent in the political and ideological spheres are Western ideas of "freedom" (interpreted first of all as "individual freedoms"), embodied in the concept of "human rights" (in particular civil and political) and in "democracy" (based on political pluralism and free competition of political forces).

Since the 1970's the United States demanded with an increasing insistence an introduction everywhere of the Western standards of human rights and of the Western forms of democracy considered values *per se*. Their contemporary Western advocates usually forget that for centuries it was the West that violated them in the most brutal way maintaining its domination in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and that the developed Western countries themselves fully implement these norms merely for some twenty or thirty years. The Western demands to introduce them immediately and everywhere became a new important tool of Western political domination. Thus barbaric violations of human rights in "a friendly state" often remain "unnoticed", whereas even their

slight violation in a certain respect in another country would provoke heated debates and condemnations, if it is useful for a certain political objective. Unfortunately, such manipulations are still practised and this discredits to some extent the noble ideas.

The West imposes its own norms, ideals, and philosophical, political and economic concepts directly or through international organisations. Therefore, in fact, the “soft” forms of domination substituted “hard” ones, although sometimes a threat of military intervention is still used. The Western domination is based, however, even more on a widely diffused fascination with the West and admiration of the West in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Such an approach predominates among the elites of numerous non-Western countries. As Mahathir bin Mohammad, Prime Minister of Malaysia, pointed out, in Asia opinions are diffused that everything from the West is good and superior to native, and everything Asian is inferior and bad simply because it is Asian (Mahathir, 1996). Similar attitudes occur also in Africa and to a certain extent even in Latin America, much closer to the West. Many members of the local elite follow “Western customs”, in their work and life, sometimes they even try to think in a Western way and to see the world through Western glasses. Even Asian and African nationalists very often present an incoherent mixture of exaggerated pride in their native traditions and at the same time blind appreciation of various Western norms and concepts.

The vision of the world outlined above, presented by various anti-Western activists, though justified to some extent, is one-sided, and the real situation is much more complex. Hassan Hanafi is certainly right pointing out that the Western domination produced a superiority complex in the West and an inferiority complex in the “Third World” countries. It is also true that the West created for itself the image of an original and unprecedented culture, portrayed as the only culture based on reason and science, and as the model for all other societies to imitate and adopt (Hanafi, 2000, 420). One may agree that both sides suffer from such complexes and the both ought to liberate themselves from them, but one has also to acknowledge the real significance of the Western achievements. The Western domination does not result merely from military and economic power on one side, and from weakness and “intellectual enslavement” from the other. One could admire Asian and African traditions, but all non-Western nations have to acknowledge that the West has made a great contribution to the humanity and in various respects was and still remains truly superior. Among its principal achievements one can enumerate science and modern technologies, industrial economy and capitalist free market, and modern state with the rule of law system. In international sphere it is the principle of the equality of nations and of their self-determination. Perhaps, numerous Asian and African intellectuals would also agree to include an appreciation of the individual, whereas much more specific concepts of human rights and of democracy, in particular of their Western forms, would be more controversial.

Numerous states also appreciate an American involvement in the affairs of their regions or even seek for such an involvement to resolve local conflict. American hegemony constitutes, undoubtedly, a key factor for maintenance of peace and stability in the world.

Owing to the Western contributions, enumerated above, the mankind achieved enormous progress and unimaginable prosperity during the tragic and splendid 20th century. Although one has to acknowledge that benefits are distributed unequally, and we are still very far from the ideal of a prosperous and dignified life for all. The entire world absorbed more or less these Western achievements and to a large extent became westernised. Today everywhere we could find cars, telephones, TV, newspapers, movies, youngsters wearing jeans, football fans, state anthems, central banks, Western-style belles-lettres, etc. Notwithstanding all complaints on the injustices and vices of the modern period, almost nobody would prefer the return to the pre-modern realities. Modernisation was in general, in particular in its earlier stages, equivalent to Westernization. Every scholar who studied traditional non-Western cultures realises how enormous changes occurred in Asia and Africa in the modern period and how they were painful and fruitful. One could even state that the ability of each society to absorb Western civilisation and to modernise itself determined its fate and prosperity (with a sole exception of the great producers of crude oil and natural gas, which could reach prosperity without modernisation).

The Western powers obviously committed various crimes towards non-Western nations, and the West could be accused of numerous crimes against humanity committed in the West itself. One could find in its heritage not only science, rationalism, noble ideals of human rights and of democracy, but also inquisition and religious wars, admiration for bellicosity and conquests, traditions of enslavement, racism, as well as fascism (that produced the Holocaust) and communism. Numerous critics from Asia and Africa condemn its exaggerated individualism. For instance, Lee Kuan Yew, the founder of Singapore's prosperity, points out the following vices of contemporary West: "I find parts of [the American system] totally unacceptable: guns, drugs, violent crime, vagrancy, unbecoming behaviour in public – in sum, the breakdown of civil society. The expansion of the right of the individual to behave or misbehave as he pleases has come at the expense of orderly society. In the East the main object is to have a well-ordered society so that everybody can have maximum enjoyment of his freedoms. This freedom can only exist in an ordered state and not in a natural state of contention" (Zakaria, 111).

It is remarkable that Lee criticises the West in the name of individual and group freedoms indicating that the American model does not grant fundamental Western values, but produces opposite results. This could serve as an example how deeply Western values penetrated non-Western cultures and shaped contemporary political reasoning. One can notice that similar highly

critical opinions on the present state of the West are presented by the pope, John Paul II, who condemns its contemporary “civilisation of death” and “hedonism”, loss of values and of religious consciousness, and he demands a return to the “Christian roots”. Numerous Western scholars condemned other “pathologies” and advocated various remedies. For instance, Charles Taylor (1992) promotes the concept of communitarian values and institutions as complementary to individualism. Bilahari Kausikan, Singapore’s permanent representative to the UN rightly noticed that “the most trenchant criticisms of extreme individualism, of liberal democracy, and of key elements of Western-style systems (...) has been voiced not by Singaporeans or by citizens of any other Asian country, but by Westerners themselves. A small library could be compiled of such critiques by Western authors (Kausikan, 1997, 31). One has to bear in mind that critical debates and reflection “by a thinking subject” constitute one of the principal Western traditions, and this also concerns the Western civilisation itself.

3. The mission to diffuse the Western values and norms

There is also another, even more prominent Western tendency: a contemptuous attitude to other cultures that inspired efforts to impose the Western concepts and norms on other societies as “the only civilised” and “right”. It is true that many civilisations considered themselves “universal”, and their own norms and customs as “right”, but only Western civilisation manifests such a “missionary zeal”. As the result for centuries the West persistently imposed its own values and norms on other nations justifying such actions as aiming at their spiritual or material “benefit” and presenting them as fulfilment of its “noble moral obligations”. This approach has ancient roots, but it developed enormously merely in the 19th century, when the West outdistanced so much all non-Western countries. Undoubtedly, the concept of “mission” served as a justification to the Western domination, but such a mission constitutes also an important element of the Western cultural identity and mentality. Merely the “universal truths” change, but the “mission of their diffusion” remains. Christians propagated their faith, French revolutionaries - republican ideas, civil rights and nationalism, the colonisers - “civilisation”, Communists - freedom from foreign and class oppression, nationalisation of everything, and collectivism, whereas contemporary Western advocates of “liberal democracy” promote human rights, democracy, individualism and free market. One could almost be certain that in the second half of the 21st century the Westerners will again attempt to “save the world” with another their invention which will embody a new “absolute truth” and “natural tendencies”. Francis Fukuyama could profess the “end of history” and believe that the Western-style democracy and free global market constitute the apex of human development, since he did not realise that such claims are made at the West almost in each century, even several times. Westerners at each stage of their modern history declared that they approach such an “ideal state” and lead entire

mankind to a “new most perfect order”, and there were numerous such competing courses.

Some embryo forms of the idea of “mission” could already be detected in Ancient Rome. It flourished together however with the evolution of Christianity. The concept of the unremitting struggle of the forces of Good and Evil, of the forces of light and of darkness, of God and Satan, in the world, in the society, and in each human soul - involved a moral and religious duty to fight evil. Barbarians became pagans, devil’s sons, who should be annihilated or baptised in the name of God. The mediaeval *Song on Rolland* and the calls for the Crusades clearly propagate such ideas. The religious concept of duties towards our fellowmen inspired the beliefs that one should help others even against their will. Thus a particular mixture of ideas evolved, rooted in Christianity, but applied in non-religious forms as well. When in colonial India the British prohibited *sati*, they were motivated by compassion for the miserable widows who are condemned to a cruel death by a “barbarian custom”. It was irrelevant what the widows in question wanted, and how they would live afterwards. In a similar way the human rights are imposed on the foreign countries, since political rights appear to the Westerners inalienable requirements of dignified human existence, and it is irrelevant what actually people in these countries want or need mostly. Such ideas of mission could even culminate in the idea of a struggle against the “empire of evil” (launched by President Ronald Reagan). Bolsheviki also professed similar ideas of struggle against imperialism to “liberate the entire mankind”.

Such ideas have truly ancient roots. For millennia in the West the war-mongering orientation predominated and struggle was glorified. Hence conquests, booty taking, and killing of the enemies have been highly appreciated, and military victory granted “eternal glory”. A “true man” was presented as a “fighter” and for centuries the ruling aristocracy was composed of warriors. Struggle was considered the essence of existence and the fundamental principle of the universe without which development and progress would be impossible. The elements of such a worldview and beliefs could already be detected in Ancient Egypt. Heraclitus (6-5th century B.C.) states: “Man should know that war (*Polemos*) is general and that justice is strife; all things arise and pass away through strife”¹. The idea of eternal struggle as the very essence of the human existence has been even more elaborated in Iran, by Zoroaster (7-6th century B.C.), and by his followers. Thus the Christian beliefs in the eternal struggle between God and Satan is deeply rooted in the Mediterranean tradition. Not only Christ-Saviour combats the forces of Evil, but each individual should carry out a similar struggle in his life, and this will last until the very end of the

¹ It is the famous fragment no 80, quoted here after Horowitz, 1973, 6. For a slightly different interpretation of this sentence and for an excellent analysis of Heraclitus’ concepts of war and strife see: Cacciari, et al., 1987, 154-160.

world. Similar ideas could also be found in Islam which shares a significant part of the same heritage.

When one would compare these Mediterranean traditions with the Chinese, the essential difference would be obvious. In a Confucian classic, the *Doctrine of Mean* one could read: “Such Equilibrium is the great root of the world [and from this originates all things and beings], and such Harmony is the universal path [which should be pursued by all beings]. Let the states of equilibrium and harmony exist in perfection, and a happy order will prevail throughout heaven and earth, and all things will be nourished and flourish”². The Chinese example demonstrates that the Mediterranean concept of a “universal struggle” in both the divine and profane dimensions, is merely a paradigm of a group of co-related cultures, not a universal concept, even less an intrinsic characteristic of the world itself.

As Georges Dumézil indicated (1977) very high social position of warriors (and in the religious dimension of the corresponding deities) characterises the Indo-European peoples (to which Iranians also belong) and their cultures from the most remote times. Therefore war – as a “sphere of nobility” and of “sacredness” – enjoyed in these cultures exceptionally high prestige and military victories granted there an “eternal glory”. All spheres of life in the West tended to follow the model of “honest struggle”. Relations between the states were interpreted as antagonistic and competitive; democracy evolved as an institutionalised and idealised form of free struggle of political parties and of the freedom to criticise the authorities. The relations between the state and the society, by the rulers and the ruled, were often treated as antagonistic by nature. So, the Westerners could not imagine that other societies could have a different view of political life, based on consensus, co-operation and harmony. As Tu Wei-ming points out social and political life in the West is based on “adversary structures” (at the best checking and balancing one another), whereas in the East on “fiduciary communities”, in which mutual confidence and fulfilment of duties is a primary requirement (Tu Wei-ming, 1994, 86-8). He points out that “the basic Confucian idea that the government assumes full responsibility for the wellbeing of the people remains persuasive in East Asia”. And first of all it has “to provide, to enrich, and to educate” the people, should grant proper co-operation and restrain egoistic tendencies (Tu Wei-ming, 1991, 35). This is, of course, an entirely different view of social life.

In the West even the most general theories presumed that struggle is a fundamental principle. Charles Darwin used the concept of the eternal struggle for survival to explain the evolution of species, whereas Karl Marx presented class struggle as determining the course of history. One could notice that

² This work is attributed to Zi Si (483-402 BC), Confucius’ grandsons. The translation adopted here follows Legge (1883, I, 384-5), although some modifications had been introduced. For a slightly different translation and an excellent analysis of the text see: Tu Wei-ming, 1989, 6.

Huntington's concept of the clash of civilisations belongs to the same tradition. One could enumerate, of course, many other similar theories concerning search for the truth (through controversies and free discussion), reaching economic prosperity (through free competition), etc. It is true that in the West during the last three hundred years the use of force was certainly restricted, more "civilised" relations and solutions have been promoted, and in the second half of the 20th century wars, conquests, enslavement and oppression of people were eventually condemned and prohibited. Thus the human rights concept, respect for human life, and glorification of peace and co-operation eventually prevailed.

This is, perhaps, the most radical and the most fundamental change in the Western civilisation during its entire history, but we witness merely the very beginning of this processes, and only most cruel forms of oppression had been condemned so far. The old Western mentality still predominates, struggle is considered essential for a "normal social life", whereas "orderly society" is treated as resulting from dictatorship, since without it such an "unnatural state" could not be introduced and maintained. The Westerners simply could not imagine that the people could expect from the authorities controlling of private individuals and restrictions of "excessive and deviated freedoms" to maintain social harmony as the primordial social interest, although it was an age-old Chinese tradition and still determines to some extent the social life in Hong Kong, the most modernised part of China (Lau Siu-kai, Kuan Hsin-chi, 1995, 55).

Fighting against the "forces of evil" in the world, and against the "oppression of our fellowmen" is still consider in the West, in particular in the USA, the noblest, and almost religious, duty. Hence the Western civilisation, being to a certain extent truly universal, in some essential aspects still remains bound by its particular Mediterranean traditions. Numerous Western social theories wait for fundamental revision to become truly universal. Without such changes and acknowledgement that an extreme individualism, and specific Western style of life are not universal but merely shaped by the Western cultural tradition, fruitful co-operation with non-Western civilisations would be difficult.

4. A gigantic Western "melting pot"

One has also to acknowledge that Western civilisation is more universal than any other in the past. This civilisation offers unprecedented well being and comfort to the majority of inhabitants of the countries that adopted it. The West (and westernised Japan) offer to the "developing countries" a particular way of life and a social model of "consumerist society", as well as various new goods that make life better, easier and more colourful. The United States occupy a particular place in the structures of the West, and now they not only became the global superpower, but they also represent the most advanced, dynamic and universalistic part of the Western civilisation. The state and culture created there by emigrants from dozens of states, are rooted in Western

traditions, but to an exceptional extent are liberated from the limits of ethnic cultures. A particular “universalistic law-oriented model” evolved there, that characterises even more pronounced idealism and missionary zeal than in Europe. Various non-Western traditions have also been adapted and integrated to the American heritage. Thus America offers a particular model of a prosperous, open and democratic society that could fascinate and attract people of various countries of the world. The American political and intellectual elite propagates it as a „global civilisation”. The question remains open whether it can become truly universal?

The capacities of the West to absorb, utilise and develop inventions of other civilisations are, indeed, exceptional. One could give as an example interrelations with China, apparently so distant and different. As everybody knows the compass was invented by the Ancient Chinese, and in the Middle Ages it was used by them for navigation. This invention has been learned by the Arabs, and from them by Italians, and later on by other Europeans. Thus they could start their sea expeditions to other continents. It appears that the Chinese also equipped the Westerners with gun-powder and artillery, although the Europeans quickly improved these Asian invention, so that already in the very beginning of the 17th century Western missionaries could instruct Chinese officials how to make much more efficient cannons. Without both these inventions the colonisation would be impossible, but it was accomplished by Europeans, not by the Chinese, the original owners of these new technologies.

Without paper and printing, also transmitted from China to the West, there would be no such development of science and of the mass education. The birth of a modern state was facilitated by an introduction of the civil service system borrowed by the Europeans directly from the Chinese. The firsts public examination for civil service was hold in Prussian Berlin in 1693. It is worth mentioning that the Chinese have also invented examinations and academic grades, so important for the modern universities³. Almost each great civilisation of the world could point out to its contributions to the development of the West. Simply we still lack detailed studies that would document well these processes.

It is true that the West maintains some of its ancient traditions, but the modern Western civilisation was shaped during the period of its increasing domination, in the complex interactions with non-Western cultures. The main reason for its world triumph appears to be its exceptional ability to adapt and develop that what has been learned from others. One could notice this characteristic already in ancient Rome, but it reached its apex in the modern times. The West became, in fact, a gigantic “melting pot”, the most successful in

³ For a description of various Chinese inventions and of their ways to the West see: Needham, 1954-, (the work not completed yet). For the Chinese inventions in social and political spheres, in particular for civil service and examinations, and for their transmission to the West see: Creel, 1970, 1-28.

history, and the United States play a particular role in the formation of the new consumerist “global civilisation” in the second half of the 20th century.

Therefore there are various reasons why so many Westerners consider their contemporary civilisation – “universal” and expect that all other nations of the world will enthusiastically adapt it. When it is criticised or rejected, they are usually shocked, frustrated, and presume that there must be some “evil forces” that obstruct the spreading out of the Western “most progressive” values, norms and principles. In turn, in non-Western countries it is, of course, difficult to comprehend such Western-centrism, and Western efforts to impose its ideals and norms often face a fierce or a silent resistance. But one has to acknowledge that a large part of the local elite in the non-Western countries usually accepts Western civilisation. This approach dominated until the 1980’s, although even earlier the value and universal applicability of the Western model was sometimes contested.

5. Controversies over the universal applicability of the Western model

Since the 1980’s universalistic Western claims encounter growing resistance and criticism, in particular in Asia. It was related to the processes of globalisation and to the rapid development of new means of communication. New technologies brought Western movies, advertisements, and style of life even to the remote villages. In the Western part of this continent the opposition was mostly related to Islam and aimed at a defence of religious values and native traditions. In rapidly developing East Asia, where the most advanced countries started to approach the Western level (and Japan, Hong Kong, or Singapore even reached the level of the most developed nations), reasons were more complex. On the one hand, the concepts have been promoted that this exceptional development has been reached there owing to the specific Asian traditions. On the other, there coincided two processes: of unprecedented speed and scope of Westernization, and growing fears of the loss of cultural identity, progressing “moral decline”, “loss of values”, growing criminality, decay of social bounds and old norms, etc. The latter were related to enormous economic and technological changes that in the West lasted more than one century, and in East Asia occurred merely within two or three decades. This mixture of contradictory phenomena and processes produced a fertile ground for debates on native cultural identity and indigenous values, related to a growing national pride.

There was a specific factor that triggered critical attitudes towards the West: the USA increased their pressure for an introduction of the Western standards of human rights and of Western-style democracy, in particular after the end of the cold war. These demands offended Asian authorities and intellectual elite and appeared unacceptable for a number of reasons. First of all the method of public criticism and of blaming independent countries was widely considered inappropriate, harming national dignity and manifesting “Western

arrogance” and “lack of respect” for Asians. According to East Asian customs an obedience to such demands would mean a “lose of face”. East Asians in general were uncomfortable with direct and very public approach, and resented confrontational threats, preferring instead consultations and negotiations behind closed doors and solutions of controversial problem step by step. They also expected more respect for them and tolerance for differences (Hitchcock, 1997, 48). Hence a supposition appeared that the Westerners are not interested so much in the improvement of the real situation, since they did not pay attention to the real state of affairs and to an enormous progress in the sphere of human rights achieved already there, but in humiliating Asians. This was the only logical explanation why the West, in particular USA, demand something in a way that could not produce expected results and is obviously counterproductive.

Even more important was the substance of such demands. Numerous East Asians considered that after the liberation of their nations from the Western oppression they developed their countries in an unprecedented way and significantly improved life of the people. Thus they expected admiration and congratulations for their exceptional achievements, not condemnations. And Westerners appeared to them the last who have moral right to criticise them, since Westerners in Asia violated all human rights in the most brutal way and deprived Asians of all essential political freedoms for centuries. Moreover, the Western, in particular the American, social system, was rejected and condemned by many Asian politicians and intellectuals as leading to “chaos”, to “moral and spiritual degradation”, and as harmful to individuals and to the society. Lee Kuan Yew’s opinions, quoted above, could serve as a good example of such attitudes, diffused in many Asian countries. Similar voices could be noticed even in the countries “most friendly” towards the United States (see, for instance, an opinion from Taiwan, expressed by an official of a ministerial rank, Chen Chien-jen, 1998). Francis Fukuyama summarised these opinions as follows: “virtually no one in Asia today believes it likely that Asian societies will ultimately converge with the particular model of liberal democracy represented by the contemporary United States, or, indeed, that such a state of affairs is remotely desirable” (Fukuyama, 1995, 30-3).

The rapid economic growth of East Asian countries – as numerous Asians believed - demonstrated that the industrial or post-industrial civilisation could have various forms rooted in native cultural traditions. On the advanced stages of modernisation it may be not identical with Westernization, and be based on other sets of values. East Asians from the most developed countries presumed that they already reached “orderly society” and “good governance” at the extent unattainable to the modern Western states. Their countries underwent profound Americanisation, but they still maintained their cultural identity. Singapore, with its “Confucian education” was at the forefront of such claims.

In the 1990’s these controversies erupted in the form of the debates on “Asian values”. This concept was promoted by Lee Kuan Yew, mentioned

above, and by Mahathir bin Muhammad, Prime Minister of Malaysia⁴. The first represented the Confucian tradition, whereas the second – a multi-cultural country dominated by Islam. Lee Kuan Yew indicated as a core difference of the “Asian model” of development the belief that the individual exists in the context of his family, not as an autonomous subject. As he maintained, in Asia the families function within an extended family, and in addition to this there are friends and local communities. The government must not substitute the family nor take over its functions, as it happened in the West. The impressive economic growth – according to Lee – and the social system that functions well ought to be based on the family. As he stated, the Singaporeans were fortunate inheriting a particular cultural backdrop, the belief in thrift, hard work, filial piety and loyalty in the extended family, and respect for scholarship and learning. The Japanese, the Koreans and other people of the Asians Dragons create the industrial societies, while maintaining essentially their own cultural identity and social traditions. The transition to the industrial society – in his opinion - is complex and it is an open question how and to which extent they could preserve their traditional core values. But these problems they should solve themselves, and nobody from outside has the right to impose his solutions (Zakaria, 113-4, 118).

The concepts promoted by Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohammad were supported by empirical studies. For instance, the latter referred to a survey carried out by David I. Hitchcock (1994, 38-41). According to this scholar, elite of East and Southeast Asia values much less than the Americans: personal freedom (respectively 32 and 82%), individual rights (29 and 78%), free expression (47 and 85%), and open debates on the solution of social problems (29 and 74%). Whereas Asians consider much more significant: orderly society (71 and 11%), harmony (58 and 7%), consensus (39 and 4%), respect for authority (42 and 11%), and rights of the society (27 and 7 %). A significant number of Asians considered private decisions behind the closed door the proper way of solving social and political problems (29 and 0% of the Americans). Respect for learning indicated 69% of Asians and merely 15% of the Americans. Asians also valued much more self-discipline (48 and 22%). One has to bear in mind that Hitchcock’s questionnaire was distributed in Asia among the Westernised elite. The survey that would include less educated and more traditional-oriented classes would give even more pronounced differences. There were also numerous other studies by Western scholars that produced similar results (see, for example, Rosina C. Chia, et al., 2002; Gisela Dahme, 2002; Ames et al., 1994). So, Lee Kuan Yew and other Asian leaders spoken about real and significant cultural differences in the sphere of values that

⁴ For their presentation see the works of Mahathir Mohammad (1996, 1999); the Singaporean government’s document *White Paper on Shared Values* (1991); Zakaria, 109-126. For various opinions on these concepts see, for instance: Han Sung-Joo (1999); Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner (1998).

distinguish East Asia from the West. This does not mean that all their theses must be right, but indicates that the concept of Asian values deserves a serious discussion.

The advocates of the “Asian values” – as it appears – first of all defended the right of Asians to maintain their own structure of values and moral principles, although there were also present more universalistic overtones. For example, Mahathir bin Muhammad indicated that the Asian values in fact are very close to, if not identical with, the Victorian values, now forgotten in the West. He also expressed his hopes that cultivation of each culture’s traditions will coincide with adaptation of the best elements from other cultures and this will result in their enrichment and deeper mutual understanding.

Bilahari Kausikan, Singapore’s politician mentioned above, pointed out that the principal issue of the debate on Asian values is not a difference between “Asian” and “Western” values, nor the superiority of one set to another. First of all it concerns – according to him – the direction of Asian societies’ future development. Now not only Asians but numerous Westerners as well realise that serious problems resulted from an overemphasis on liberal values and individual rights, in particular as we face erosion of the very concept of legitimate authority. “The real debate is not about the values of any particular geographic area, but about values *per se*: it is about which values and, in what degree and in what proportion, are necessary for sustained development, the maintenance of social cohesion, and the avoidance of serious problems. This is now a matter of grave concern to many Westerners as well as to Asians” (Kausikan, 1997, 31-3).

He directed his criticism towards the Western liberals and their intolerance to other concepts, not to Western civilisation as such. As he states: “The real choices are always those involving the *appropriate balance* among different values, rights, duties, and freedoms. The real choice is not between pure individualism and pure communitarism; the alternative to complete freedom of expression is not blanket censorship; the options are not total liberty and utter repression. The appropriate balance between different sets of values – between individual rights that guarantee personal freedom, and social duties that stem from society’s needs for stability and discipline – depends on the particular circumstances of each society. The balance of each country will therefore shift over time, and not only in one direction (...) No society anywhere in the real world will ever find a fixed point of perpetual and perfect equilibrium” (Kausikan, 1997, 32). Many leaders of Southeast Asia and China to some extent subscribed to these concepts, although various reservations and modifications were made.

The concept of “Asian values” was condemned, however, by both numerous Western politicians and intellectuals and by their pro-Western Asian colleagues, in particular political dissidents in the numerous authoritarian regimes (see, for instance, Kim Dae Jung, 1994). Zbigniew Brzezinski presented

such opinions with an exceptional clarity. As he maintained, all human beings share the same values and aspirations. There are no cultural differences that could shape various paths of social and political development, and references to them result merely from political manipulations or backwardness. Some societies could be “immature” for an immediate introduction of the Western democracy, but a transition to this model constitutes the “universal path”. As he stated, there is nothing parochial about the notion that a human being who is literate, is educated, can perceive reality, and is exposed to it will aspire to freedom. On the contrary, he indicated, human beings do want to fulfil themselves by maximizing their range of opportunities. And this requires the freedom to make choices, and a political order that provides recognition of one’s dignity and respect for one’s viewpoint. “These are universal aspirations. It so happened that we in the West simply got there a little sooner than others, but not because our culture (...) predisposes us that way; we are predisposed that way because we are human beings. Through a variety of historical incidents, it happens that the West created societies in which that human potential could be fulfilled earlier than elsewhere. The ‘Asian values’ doctrine is nothing but a rationalisation for a certain phase of historical development (...) The Indian experience confirms a very basic principle: the concept of human rights, the idea of human freedom, and respect for the individual are universals. They may not be achieved universally at the same time, but they remain universally pertinent, and we must promote them to the extent that we can” (Brzezinski, 1997, 5-6). Chris Patten, when directing European Union’s foreign policy, indicated that the current differences in implementation of universal values, like human rights and democracy, between East and West is much more related to the differences in the level of development than in profound cultural characteristics (Patten, 2001, 7).

Thus two points of view have been presented. According to one there are specific values fundamental to each culture or civilisation. They could change but essentially could survive industrialisation and even contribute to modernisation. According to the second view, Asian, African, or Islamic values basically represent traditional values, whereas the Western values essentially represent modern values. Therefore the difference between the Asian and the Western values reflects more temporal/historic than spatial/cultural distance. Of course, the cultivation of traditional values related to backwardness is obviously harmful for modernisation. There were also scholars who tried to reconcile these contradictory approaches (for almost a full scope of opinions see, for instance, Han Sung-Joo, 1999).

One could add that the thesis “universal modernity” represented by the West finds no sufficient proofs. Its advocates are simply convinced that all humans *must be* alike, identical to the Americans, and share the same values and aspirations. Their viewpoint is essentially based on Judeo-Christian religious universalism. The defenders of the former position could refer to numerous

historical examples and to innumerable scholarly studies, such as comparative surveys of public opinion, psychological studies, and endless recent studies, by Western and Asian scholars, of Asian canonical books and traditions, which contain visions of man and nature entirely different from these of the West. They could also indicate, for example, Japan and Hong Kong as two cases of political and economic entities that became modernised to the Western level (or even above!), and still maintain their East Asian characteristics and traditions⁵. One could not exclude that in the future the significance of the traditional Asian values will diminish, but it is an open question to which degree, and how the Western values and principles would be adopted. It seems rather improbable that in the foreseeable future we will witness even in the most developed East Asian countries “complete Westernization”, although modernisation certainly requires and provokes essential changes in traditional values and social interrelations.

Towards conclusions

Numerous intellectuals, including these from non-Western countries, could agree that the politics should aim at “common benefit” and maintain a certain moral dimension. But the “idealistic” option and beneficial engagement against dictatorships must not be reduced to the forceful imposition of Western values and norms on the entire world. Whereas a “realistic approach” cannot justify the support for inhuman regimes for strategic reasons (as everybody remembers for years Pol Pot’s regime for geopolitical reasons was supported by the USA in the UN when Vietnam overthrew its administration in Cambodia). The respect for moral values and principles in foreign affairs is certainly a complex issue that deserves serious discussion in the framework of the dialogue among civilisations.

Samuel P. Huntington (1996) was, perhaps, aware of various moral hazards and dangers involved in politics based on the both orientations, when he prepared his famous book on the clash of civilisations. He certainly exaggerates the conflicts among cultures and civilisations, presents them as inevitable, neglecting possibilities of mutual enrichment and co-operation. However, he opposes American policy promoted by Brzezinski and other advocates of expansionist and idealistic course, that enjoys also some popularity in the European political circles. Huntington promotes instead a kind of “cultural isolationism”. He maintains that the West, in particular the USA, must not impose their moral values, or social and political norms, on other civilisations allowing them to observe their own standards. Only in this way the inevitable “clash of civilisation” could be prevented or at least limited. In his less known article (1996a), he adds that Western civilisation is unique in the world, and

⁵ See, for instance the description of contemporary Hong Kong (Lau Siu-kai, Kuan Hsin-chi, 1995); an analysis of the Japanese “friendly authoritarianism” based on Confucian traditions (Sugimoto, 1997, 245-59); an explanation how function contemporary Japanese firms (Mente, 1981).

does not represent “universal values and principles”. To the American leaders he recommends a pull-up-the-drawbridge, protectionist foreign policy that aims at the defence of the West against challenges of other cultures. The idea that the West should concentrate its efforts on itself and return to its roots – is already present in his famous book.

One can consider the “love of our fellowmen” and readiness to help even unknown human creatures a noble Western/Christian tradition, but it is an open question whether one should help others even against their will. Even less convincing and morally justified is an imposition of one’s own cultural norms on members of other societies and enforcement of one’s own rules in international scale under the threat of sanctions and use of military forces when it concerns such complex issues as “democracy” or “civil and political rights”.

It appears that the scope of the dialogue among civilisations should not be excessively maximised: less ambitious efforts could be much more efficient and productive. Perhaps, the most rational way would be to search for specific agreements in various practical matters. An exchange of opinions in the sphere of philosophical and religious truths is certainly recommendable, although it is a thorny and hazardous path. For instance, the views of human life in the Buddhist countries significantly differ from the Christian tradition: instead of unique human dignity and soul given by God for the only life, one faces there the concept of the unity of all living creatures, of various levels of existence, and of innumerable incarnations. In China even the term “human rights” can not be precisely expressed (since the very idea of somebody’s rights is missing) and is substituted with a similar concept of *renquan* (literally: “the powers of each man”, similar to powers of state officials). It is truly difficult to comprehend each other’s concepts, and East Asians do not understand why the Westerners consider human rights and democracy values *per se*. But it would be much easier to reach agreements on some practical matters (such as prohibition of tortures or extra-judicial imprisonment, introduction of civil rights and rule of law, etc). As efficient measures that improve quality of life they could be accepted, not as Western values obligatory for everybody and imposed without any consideration of local conditions and standards of life. One could notice that even in the Islamic tradition, so close to Christian, the expression of “human rights” is understood first of all not as the rights of the individual, but as “people’s rights” (Ghaderi, 1991/2, 774). And scholars from various non-Western countries are certainly right that the principles of human rights should be enriched by historical experience and aspirations of numerous civilisations.

As Abdullahi A. An-Na’im rightly points out, the present system of the international norms concerning human rights has clearly evolved from the Western cultural perspective that was “universalised” through colonial and post-colonial mechanisms of hegemony, inconsistent with the fundamental collective human right to self-determination. Many concepts contradict native, non-Western traditions, such as Islam, but deserve to be introduced universally,

others provoke various doubts since they refer merely to the Western values. In order to be accepted and efficiently enforced human rights regimes must necessarily be premised on a particular cultural framework of specific human societies in their respective historical context. On the other hand, a universally applicable set of specific human rights and international enforcing mechanisms are necessary. An-Na'im rejects the most radical opinions that other concepts, less culturally-determined, should be introduced. According to him from practical and tactical points of view it is better to improve the existing system, if only as a point of departure and a framework for critique, than to seek to dismantle and replace it with a new system (An-Na'in, 1999, 151-3). And such matters ought to become central for the dialogue among civilisations. It seems that this approach deserves serious consideration and could be applied for other issues as well. The Western-style (or even American-style) "universal civilisation" could constitute a basis for further modifications and enrichment through truly international debates and in the real globalisation processes. And in this way a "universal framework of ethical and social principles" could evolve shared by all advanced nations.

The Westerners often insist that the general principles of democracy and of human rights (in both individualistic and collective interpretation) must be implemented precisely in the Western forms, which is counterproductive and quite often inspires building-up of "Potemkins villages". Without rooting in native traditions, incorporation of indigenous values and axioms, human rights and democracy can not flourish in the non-Western cultural context. The Western theoreticians, and their Asian and African admirers, usually do not distinguish the essential principles and specific, historical social and institutional Western forms. In order to apply successfully these principles in non-Western cultures the society in question should elaborate adequate indigenous forms.

The Western politicians ought also acknowledge that an introduction of various Western norms and standards certainly requires essential changes in economy, infrastructure, mentality and social structures, values and way of life, aspirations and beliefs, etc. This is a slow process and not all changes would be beneficial to non-Western societies. One ought to acknowledge that an introduction of Western-style democracy based on Western values and institutions by force, in the countries with different cultures, and where the most elementary conditions for a Western-type state are missing (like contemporary Afghanistan), is simply unrealistic. How could it be introduced without industrialisation and urbanisation, and practised by a rural population, ruled by clan and tribal leaders? In particular democracy is the system that cannot be imposed from abroad against the will and aspiration of the local population. In a similar way the civil and political rights cannot be commonly respected when the most essential human needs cannot be satisfied, when hunger prevails and the state administration is virtually non-existing, and where essential concepts on which these rights are founded remain entirely alien to the local population

and to native local leaders. The most fundamental requirement towards the Western politicians and intellectuals could be formulated as follows: be patient, be willing to understand different realities, conditions and aspirations, and be ready to tolerate and comprehend differences.

In the era of globalisation a true dialogue among civilisations is indeed necessary to fruitful and beneficial co-operation on an increasing scale. Only in this way we can stimulate and arrange economic and social development, and could avoid political and military clashes. Without such a dialogue mutual enrichment of all nations and cultures, and their progress for common benefit will be impossible. Karl-Heinz Pohl indicates three principal conditions of its successful course.

- a. The dialogue cannot be carried out by the West as a one-way-street and serve merely for the diffusion of the Western ideas, values and standards, but should aim at an elaboration of a certain “common ground” of shared values, concepts and principles.
- b. The dialogue requires a heightened awareness of one’s own cultural identity.
- c. On the other hand, it requires a willingness to question the validity of one’s own cultural background and world-view (Pohl, 1999, ix-x).

Perhaps, the last principle would be the most difficult to apply since it requires from the Westerners of liberation from contemptuous attitudes towards other civilisations and paternalism towards non-Western nations. Only by respecting these conditions a “political and cultural dictate” could be substituted with a true dialogue, and it is the hegemonic West that should change first its approach to the rest of the world and to the non-Western nations.

Quoted works:

Ames, Roger T.; Dissanayake, Wimal; Kasulis, Thomas P., eds, (1994), *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

An-Na’im, Abdullahi A., (1999), “The Cultural Mediation of Human Rights: The Al.-Arqam Case in Malaysia”, in: Joanne R. Bauer, Daniel A. Bell, eds, *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*, Cambridge - New York: Cambridge University Press, 147-68.

Brück, Michael von, (2002), “Cross-Cultural Understanding – Principles and Methods: Understanding of the Social Construction of Altering”, a paper presented at the Symposium *Methodology in Dialogue – or How to Make Intercultural Dialogue Work*, Luxembourg, September 27, (organised by the Institute for Asian Studies of Luxembourg and by the Polish Asia Pacific Council).

Brzezinski, Zbigniew, (1997), „The New Challenge to Human Rights”, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 8, no. 2, 3-8.

Cacciari, Massimo; Dona, Masimo; Gasparotti, Romano, (1987), „Se è pensabile

- la pace”, in: Carlo Jean, ed., *La Guerra nel pensiero politico*, Milano: Franco Angeli 1987, 154-176.
- Chen Chien-jen, “Modern Values Rooted in the Past”, *The Free China Journal*, July 31, 1998.
- Chia, Rosina C., *et al.*, (2002), “Indirect Internal Control among College Students in Four Countries”, in: *Civilizations*, in: Pawel Boski, Fons J. R. van de Vijver, M. Chodynicka, eds, *New Directions in Cross-cultural Psychology; Selected Papers from the Fifteenth International Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Warszawa: Polish Psychological Association, 465-70.
- Creel, Herrlee, G., (1970), *The Origins of Statecraft in China*, vol. I, *The Western Chou Empire*, Chicago – London: Chicago University Press.
- Dialogue among Civilisations, The Round Table on the Eve of the United Nations Millennium Summit*, (2001), Paris: UNESCO, (referred to as *Dialogue*).
- Diamond, Larry, Plattner, Marc, F., eds, (1998), *Democracy in Asia*, Baltimore – London: John Hopkins University Press.
- Dumézil, Georges, (1997), *Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens*, Paris: PUF.
- Fukuyama, Francis, (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: The Free Press.
- , (1995), “Confucianism and Democracy”, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 6, no. 2 (April), 30-3.
- Gawlikowski, Krzysztof, (2002), “Conflict and Aggression in Western and Chinese Civilizations”, in: Pawel Boski, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 71-90.
- Ghaderi, Seyyed Ali, (1991/92) „Report of the Conference on Human Rights: Fundamentals”, *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 3, n. 4 (Winter), 763-74.
- Gisela Dahme, Claudiaia Rolko, Bernard Dahme, (2002), “Menon *et al.*’s., (1999), Results on Cultural Differences in Attribution to Individuals vs. Group Can Be Replicated Only for Success Outcomes in Achievement Situations”, in: P. Boski *et al.*, eds, *op. cit.*, 2002, 471-83.
- Han Sung-Joo, ed., (1999), *Changing Values in Asia, Their Impact on Governance and Development*, Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange.
- Hanafi, Hassan, (2000), *Islam in the Modern World*, vol. II, *Tradition, Revolution and Culture*, Heliopolis: Dar Kebaa Bookshop.
- Helgesen, Geir, (2001), “Korean Democracy and the Asian Values Debate: Observations and Findings”, in: Henriette Sinding Aasen, Uichol Kim, Geir Helgesen, eds, *Democracy, Human Rights, and Peace in Korea: Psychological, Political, and Cultural Perspectives*, Seoul: Kyuyook -Kwahak-Sa Publishing Company, 95-120.
- Hitchcock, David I., (1994), *Asian Values and the United States: How Much*

- Conflict?* Washington, D. C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies.
-----, (1997), *Factors Affecting East Asian Views of the United States; The Search for Common Ground*, Washington, D.C.: The Center for Strategic & International Studies.
- Horowitz, Irving Louis, (1973), *War and Peace in Contemporary Social and Philosophical Theory*, London: Souvenir Press, (2nd edition).
- Huntington, Samuel P., (1996), *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- , (1996a) "The West: Unique, Not Universal", *Foreign Affairs*, 75, no. 6 (November/December), 28-46.
- Kausikan, Bilahari, (1997), „Governance that Works”, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 8, no. 2 (April), a special issue: „Hong Kong, Singapore, and ‘Asian Values’”, 24-34. Reprinted in Diamond, Plattner, *op. cit.*, 17-27.
- Kim Dae Jung, (1994), „Is Culture a Destiny? The Myth of Asia’s Anti-Democratic Values”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 73, no. 6 (November/December), 189-194.
- Kim, Uichol, (2001), “Ethnography of Korean People and Culture”, in: H. S. Aasen, Uichol Kim, G. Helgesen, eds, *op. cit.*, 245-278.
- Lau Siu-kai, Kuan Hsin-chi, (1995), *The Ethos of Hong Kong Chinese*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, (first edition 1988).
- Legge, James, (1883), *The Chinese Classics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, vol. I.
- Mahathir Muhammad, (1996), “Debate on Asian Values, Speech at the 29th International General Meeting of the Pacific Basin Economic Council”, Washington D.C., May 21st, 1996, *New Straits Times*, 22 May 1996 (distributed also as a separate paper by Malaysian Foreign Ministry).
- , (1999), *A New Deal for Asia*, Kelana Jaya: Palenduk Publications.
- Mente, Boye De, *Japanese Manners & Ethics in Business*, Phoenix – Tokyo: Phoenix Books.
- Needham, Joseph, (1954), *Science and Civilisation in China*, Cambridge – London: Cambridge University Press, vol. 1st 1954.
- Patten, Chris, (2001), *Enhancing Europe’s Partnerships with Asia; never the Twain Shall Meet? Adapting Kipling to a Globalised World*, (the Muller Lecture delivered on 15 October 2001 for the Netherlands Society for International Affairs and the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden), Den Haag: Nederlands Genootschap voor Internationale Zaken.
- Pohl, Karl-Heinz ed., (1999), *Chinese Thought in a Global Context: A Dialogue between Chinese and Western Philosophical Approaches*, Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Sugimoto, Yoshio (1997), *Japanese Society*, Cambridge – London: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, Charles, (1992), *The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- , (1999), „Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights”, in: J. R. Bauer, D. A. Bell, eds, *op. cit.*, 124-44.

Tu Wei-ming, (1989), *Centrality and Commonality; An Essay on Confucian Religiousness*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

-----, (1991), "A Confucian Perspective on the Rise of Industrial East Asia", in: Silke Krieger, Rolf Trautzettel eds, *Confucianism and Modernization of China*, Mainz: Hase & Koehler Verlag, 29-41.

-----, (1994), *Confucian Ethic Today: the Singapore Challenge*, Singapore: Federal Publications.

White Paper on Shared Values, (1991), Singapore National Printers.

Zakaria, Fareed, (1994), "Culture Is Destiny: A Conversation with Lee Kwan Yew", *Foreign Affairs*, 73 (2, March/April), 109-26.

This paper has been published in a collection of studies: *Democracy, Human Rights and Islam in Modern Iran: Psychological, Social and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Uichol Kim, Henriette S. Aasen, Shirin Ebaldi, Fagbokforlaget, Oslo (Norway), 2003, (Rafto Human Rights Series, vol. II), pp. 411-442.

Mrs Shirin Ebadi, to our surprise and satisfaction, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003.