

# Post-Modern Cosmopolitanism & Discourse Ethics

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my supervisors – Jay Shaw, who has a huge pile of books on his desk, there for the sole purpose of helping him better comment on my drafts, and Kate Schick, who has read through my thesis so many times that I am sure she knows it better than I do – for all the work and dedication they’ve put in to help me write this thesis, despite having large workloads of their own.

I would also like to thank Reuben Schrader, who spent a great deal of time and mental energy editing my chapters when he had far better things to do with his time. His assistance improved my thesis immeasurably.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Mariko, for supporting me, in almost all senses of the word, throughout my MA. I could never have done it without her help.

## ABSTRACT

This paper sets out an approach – post-modern cosmopolitanism – that seeks to allow moral conversation and moral justification between groups and individuals who do not share any substantive values. It does this without denying the plurality of value systems (universalism) and without allowing groups to retreat behind inviolable walls of ethical self-containment (relativism). The approach relies on many aspects of Jurgen Habermas's discourse ethics, but it takes discourse ethics in a new direction, leading to a unique approach.

I start the paper by showing the problems with the current dominant alternatives – universalism and relativism – both in terms of their lack of internal consistency and in terms of their inability to mitigate and resolve conflict in practice.

I then introduce some of the important concepts that form the basis of the post-modern cosmopolitan approach: discourse ethics, communicative reason, the principles of discourse, and the idea of fundamental goals.

Following this I discuss the nature of 'reasons,' in order to make sense of the claim of discourse ethics that we should engage with each other via an 'exchange of reasons,' and also to outline some of the key distinctions necessary for understanding the praxis of post-modern cosmopolitanism, the 'cosmopolitan conversation'.

Finally I examine some of the deficiencies in Habermas's discourse ethics, and show how post-modern cosmopolitanism can overcome them. I conclude by outlining the nature of the 'cosmopolitan conversation,' and gesture at how we might begin to apply post-modern cosmopolitanism in real-world situations.

## INTRODUCTION

It is a cliché that the world is getting smaller due to changes in such things as technology, trade and immigration. Precisely what these changes mean for the future, few can agree. Whether the majority of these changes are for the better, as thinkers like Thomas Friedman<sup>1</sup> suggest, or whether globalisation is a more or less negative process, as theorists like Robert Cox,<sup>2</sup> or environmentalists such as Vandana Shiva<sup>3</sup> argue, it would be difficult to contest that interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds, with different sets of values, are increasing, both in number and importance.

Inter-cultural conflict is happening in many different places, on a range of scales: for example, the growing ethnic diversity of many countries, New Zealand among them (whose non-European population is projected to reach 60% in the next fifteen years<sup>4</sup>). This is also seen in the increasing inter/trans-nationalisation of business and investment, or global environmental issues such as climate change, where the lifestyle choices and economies of people and nations in one part of the world can have a direct impact on those living on the other side of the planet. It is indisputable that in the world in which we live, “not only what we say and think but also what we eat, burn, produce, and waste has consequences for others about whom we may know nothing, but whose lives are affected by our actions.”<sup>5</sup> It is clear that the “condition of global interdependence has practically transformed all cross-cultural communication and exchange into a real confrontation.”<sup>6</sup>

What makes these kinds of conflicts all the more challenging is that, due to differences in culture and values, there is no guarantee that the various parties in these confrontations will even be able to understand each others’ points of view, or to engage with those whom their actions are affecting. Can Pakeha New Zealanders accept and acknowledge the perspectives of, for example, Chinese immigrants, who might be operating on the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Anchor Books, c2000)

<sup>2</sup> Robert W. Cox & Michael G. Schechter, *The Political Economy of a Plural World: Critical Reflections on Power, Morals and Civilization*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2002)

<sup>3</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*, (London: Zed Books, 1988)

<sup>4</sup> Statistics New Zealand, *National Ethnic Population Projections: 2006(base)–2026 update*, [www.stats.govt.nz](http://www.stats.govt.nz)

<sup>5</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, c2002), 35

<sup>6</sup> (Ibid.)

basis of entirely different ethical, cultural and moral assumptions than New Zealand's European population? How can transnational corporations make sense of the arguments of people in areas they're doing business, who might critique their activities in terms that don't fit within the corporation's existing moral and cultural understandings? In what way is it possible for rich nations to appreciate the need to protect and preserve things that poorer nations might value, despite entirely failing to value those things themselves, or valuing them only instrumentally, such as the purity of a river?

Questions of inter-cultural morality demonstrate the necessity for some kind of method of negotiating difference, and of allowing disputes to be resolved despite differences in worldview. I want to put forward the approach of post-modern cosmopolitanism as the best way of doing this. In short, post-modern cosmopolitanism is an approach that utilises aspects of discourse ethics to successfully allow for moral conversation between groups that do not necessarily share any norms or values.

This thesis will be divided into four chapters. The first chapter will outline some of the difficulties of competing approaches – moral universalism and relativism – and show why the new approach of post-modern cosmopolitanism is necessary. Specifically, I suggest that universalism ultimately abstracts too far from the kind of real-world situatedness that individuals typically exist within. Furthermore, it is a view that tends to hide its origins and interests and glosses over, or even reinforces, existing power relations, and hence is problematic from a feminist perspective, among others. On the other hand, I show that relativism has problems maintaining consistency when we try to find the ultimate source of moral justification. Furthermore, relativism entirely fails at providing a means for inter-society moral conversation. Finally, it suggests a kind of radical incommensurability in morality that we simply do not find in our everyday experience.

In the second chapter I introduce Habermas's discourse ethics. While I do not think any current approaches manage to avoid the trap of falling into either the universalist or the relativist camp, including discourse ethics, I believe that discourse ethics, with some alterations, can form the skeleton of an approach that finds a third path. This section discusses two important concepts to discourse ethics: the nature of reason, or the difference between communicative and instrumental action, and the principles of discourse that are implied by this distinction. In this chapter I will also introduce the third important concept for post-modern cosmopolitanism: fundamental goals. Together, these concepts are the cornerstones of the post-modern cosmopolitan approach.



The third chapter looks into discourse ethics more closely, and elaborates on how we utilise it in practice. Specifically, it focuses on the three kinds of claims we can raise in discourse. Without being able to separate out the three kinds of claims we cannot understand how to use post-modern cosmopolitanism in practice, and we cannot know the boundaries and the capabilities and strengths of the approach. Additionally, without understanding the different kinds of claims that can be made, we cannot appreciate what it actually means to persuade someone with reasons, as we cannot know what counts as a legitimate reason in the context of communicative action.

In the final chapter I explore the limits of discourse ethics as Habermas understands it, specifically in terms of its difficulty in dealing with inter-society moral discourse. In doing so I am able to distinguish the post-modern cosmopolitan approach from traditional discourse ethics, and show how my approach avoids the problems faced by Habermas. Finally, I draw the various concepts of the thesis together and outline what I call the 'cosmopolitan conversation,' which is the praxis of post-modern cosmopolitanism.

## CHAPTER 1: UNIVERSALISM & RELATIVISM

In this chapter I show that the two standard ways of understanding morality – universalism and relativism – are inadequate, and that we therefore need a new approach. I argue that my theory of post-modern cosmopolitanism is this new, third method. I show in this chapter that universalism fails because not only is it characteristically suspicious and unwelcoming of difference, but the requirements of universalism lead to an attenuated, unrealistic form of identity. What's more, it is difficult to imagine a universalistic ethic coming about in a peaceful, uncoerced way. Finally, while the proponents of universalistic views generally talk as if universalism is in some way natural and neutral, in fact it has very specific origins. That is, it is not a universalism of reason, an abstracted, unattached point of view, but is the universalisation of a particular way of being. As many feminist thinkers point out, universalistic positions are typically the universalisation of the world-view of one kind of person: white, wealthy men.

Looking at cultural relativism, it provides no real way of resolving disputes between individuals from different cultures. Furthermore, even if it could, for cultural relativism to make sense it relies on the idea that cultures are real, bounded, natural things, rather than convenient generalisations. I will argue that cultures are, in fact, not real in this way. Lastly, cultural relativism relies on the idea of radical incommensurability, but in practice we find that values, morality and ethics are not untranslatable between cultures and persons.

When it comes to questions of cross-cultural communication the positions of universalism and relativism are, admittedly, the furthest extremes. However, even more nuanced views, such as Will Kymlicka's multiculturalism, tend to have as their basis the assumptions of one or the other, and hence are open to the same criticisms that beset either universalism or relativism. As such, I argue that it is quite reasonable to address only relativism and universalism, and to treat them as paradigm cases of certain groups of position.

The fundamental assumptions of universalism and relativism are almost entirely incompatible, so it is difficult to imagine a view that is genuinely partly one or the other. Hence, those views that *do* seem to combine the two are inconsistent. Nevertheless,

post-modern cosmopolitanism does, on the surface, appear to be situated somewhere between the two poles. However, as post-modern cosmopolitanism rejects the fundamental assumptions of both, this is only a superficial similarity.

## COSMOPOLITANISM & UNIVERSALISM

A representative example of universalism, when operating on a global stage, is cosmopolitanism (I will refer to it as ‘classical’ cosmopolitanism, in order to differentiate it from the post-modern cosmopolitanism that I propose). Classical cosmopolitans believe that “the social relations that connect us to others are not restricted to nation-state borders,” and acknowledge that what we do affects distant others, and their actions affect us.<sup>1</sup> Classical cosmopolitanism argues that we should transcend the “boundaries of traditional authority,” and that we should cease “belonging to [our] nation, ethnicity and religion.” For classical cosmopolitans, the aims are to see ourselves as members of a worldwide community of humankind<sup>2</sup> rather than members of local or particular polities first and foremost, and to detach ourselves from the parochial commitments, connections and affiliations that are typical of nation-bound lives.<sup>3</sup> In other words, we should devote ourselves to the world as a whole; we should become global citizens.

Underlying the classical cosmopolitan view of citizenship is the idea that different cultures and nations are like streams, “whose destiny [is] to flow irresistibly into the great ocean of universal humanity.”<sup>4</sup> We may each come from a different place, but these places are merely contingent; ultimately we are all human beings, and hence if we become aware of this, and realise how artificial our national, ethnic, gendered identities are, we can all end up in the same place – the ocean of universal humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> Iris Marion Young, “Responsibility and Global Justice,” in *Justice and Global Politics*, ed. Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller Jr., Jeffrey Paul (Cambridge, UK ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2006), 106

<sup>2</sup> Peter Van der Veer, “Colonial Cosmopolitanism,” in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: ethic, context and practice*, Ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford : Oxford University Press, c2002), 165

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Robbins, “Introduction Part 1: Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism,” in *Cosmopolitics: thinking and feeling beyond the nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c1998), 1

<sup>4</sup> John Gray, *Enlightenment’s Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 1996), 120-125

This concept of shared humanity is quintessentially universalistic, however, in that emphasising our collective humanity puts us all on the same page in terms of worldview. It allows us to understand each other by removing the local, particular differences that get in the way; ultimately, we interact with each other purely through what we share – our humanity – and put aside what we don't – our local cultural, national, ethnic, gendered identities. This leads us to a moral point of view that considers itself a 'view from nowhere,' or a 'god's eye view.' From this position we generate universal moral claims by abstracting or bracketing our particularistic, situated experiences.<sup>1</sup> In short, when we act as global citizens we are all expected to assume the same kind of impartial point of view, and to transcend all particular interests and concerns.<sup>2</sup>

On the surface, this kind of classical cosmopolitan approach seems like an ideal way to negotiate the difficult problems of climate change, immigration, and so on. However, there are a number of grounds to reject universalism as a basis for engaging in intercultural dialogue, both theoretical and practical. For example, it is important to ask whether our shared humanity is deep enough to function as a shared global culture. Is a global culture even possible? We cannot offhandedly dismiss the more local, particularistic affiliations that make up our identity, whether they relate to our gender, ethnicity, or the nation. Local attachments, the ones we come across in our daily lives, surely provide the context, and hence the depth, to our identity.

Furthermore, the acknowledgement of our shared humanity is all well and good, and surely something to be celebrated. However, do we really want to treat human diversity as a problem, rather than as something to be celebrated?<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, classical cosmopolitans are forced to do so. For classical cosmopolitans, the local and the global are two dichotomous poles; you cannot get closer to one without moving further from the other. Either we move into the shared ground of global humanity, in which case we have to create a global culture that provides the basis upon which we can interact, or we move towards the local, in which case the global becomes increasingly unimportant to us. We certainly cannot do both, as if we bring our particularisms with us when approaching the global they prevent us from understanding each other. One of the

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<sup>1</sup> Iris Marion Young, "Situated Knowledge and Democratic Discussion," in *The Politics of Inclusion and Empowerment: Gender, Class and Citizenship*, ed. John Andersen and Birte Siim (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 31

<sup>2</sup> Iris Marion Young, "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship," *Ethics*, Vol. 99, No. 2 (Jan., 1989), 257

<sup>3</sup> David A. Hollinger, "Not Universalists, Not Pluralists: The New Cosmopolitans Find Their Own Way," in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: ethic, context and practice*, Ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford : Oxford University Press, c2002), 231

assumptions of classical cosmopolitanism that is problematic is that we all share the same worldview and the same basic moral assumptions – that is, we are all more or less on the same page – and to the extent that we bring along our local, particular interests, attachments, and affiliations, we cease to operate within such a shared worldview.

So, we can do either of two things: one option is to give up local, particularistic attachments and accept a thin, superficial identity as a member of the human race. This is surely not enough on its own to provide the kind of contextual, particularistic identity that human beings require, and that typically forms the thick content of our moral conversations. After all, if we negate and remove all difference, and claim to be primarily a global citizen, then it is hard to see what we are left with that can actually form the immediate context for an individual's identity. Individuals certainly cannot form an identity based on their local community, regardless of how the community is composed. However, for classical cosmopolitanism to achieve what it sets out to, we are *necessarily limited* to this kind of abstracted identity *only*, because any more specific affiliations threaten the classical cosmopolitan project.

Alternatively, we can universalise a particular local identity, make it a world culture, and have everyone adhere to this. However, whose world culture would this be? Practically speaking, it is difficult to imagine a process whereby a particular culture is universalised without this, itself, leading to further conflict. History abounds with examples of groups attempting to universalise a particular world view through the use of force.

More importantly, however, the very act of universalising a culture saps it of the 'thick' content that made the local culture worth universalising in the first place. Even assuming a culture could be universalised entirely non-coercively, the fact is that the more universal something is, the more general it becomes. A global culture is at the practical limit of universalisation – after all, you can't get bigger than humanity without bringing animals or nature into the moral sphere (which classical cosmopolitans might have difficulty with, considering the key role 'humanity' plays in their thinking) – and therefore classical cosmopolitanism is also maximally general. As such, we run into the same issue of 'thinness' as when we all adhered to the concept of universal humanity.

To be fair, people's local identities may be more similar to each other once this process of universalisation has taken place, but classical cosmopolitanism requires more than this; it requires the *absence* of the local and the particular. For example, if I were to primarily focus my attention on the way that a certain action affects women, or my local community, or my ethnicity, I would be accused by classical cosmopolitans of failing to

have a sufficiently broad view of the issue. However, these kinds of local affiliation cannot simply be brushed aside and made unimportant to an individual. Furthermore, few would consider it desirable to live in a world where we stigmatise, rather than accept, or even celebrate, diversity.

## SOME GENERAL PROBLEMS WITH UNIVERSALISM

Despite its claim to universality, and hence its claim to take the general, abstracted point of view, classical cosmopolitanism is not a view from the outside, as it claims to be. It is most certainly a view from *somewhere*. For example, when the classical Stoic cosmopolitan Zeno called on all human beings to “belong to a common *deme* or polis,” he was not saying that people should join just any *deme* or polis, but that all men should become members of Athens, the *deme* or polis to which *he* belonged.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that in most cases, the call to universalism is not a call for everyone to vacate their identities, values and cultures and adopt a general point of view, outside of the problems and messiness of particularism; rather it is a call for *others* to become more like *us* (and most certainly not the other way around). *My* culture is universal; *my* reason is self-grounding, and it is *my* identity that becomes the definition of abstraction, of ‘human.’ Hence, from my point of view, by becoming more like me you *are* adopting a universalistic viewpoint.

In particular, feminist thinkers have criticised the kind of philosophical project that aims to seek objectivity in a god's eye view that transcends any particular perspective.<sup>2</sup> They argue that such an impartial perspective is a myth, and that where some groups are privileged and some are not, insisting that individuals, in order to act moral, should give up their particularistic affiliations and experiences does nothing but reinforce the privileges of the dominant group.<sup>3</sup> It is the perspectives of those with power that will inevitably end up dominating a unified public, and it will do so by marginalising other

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Pagden, “Stoicism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Legacy of European Imperialism,” *Constellations*, Volume 7, Number 1 (March 2000), 3-4

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, “Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism,” *Social Text*, No. 21, Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism (1989), 91

<sup>3</sup> (Young 1989, 257)

groups by suggesting that, to the extent that they act and believe differently from the dominant viewpoint, they are failing at the central moral goal of impartiality.<sup>1</sup>

Feminists are concerned about the way that *one* kind of identity is universalised at the expense of others. For example, Iris Marion Young argues that the process of universalisation “[parades] as universal values and norms [values that have been] derived from specifically masculine experience: militarist norms of honor and homoerotic camaraderie; respectful competition and bargaining among independent agents; discourse framed in unemotional tones of dispassionate reason.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, “by ignoring the genealogy of the moral self and the development of the moral person out of a network of dependencies, universalist theorists often view the moral agent as the autonomous, adult male head of household, transacting in the market-place or in the polity with like others.”<sup>3</sup>

The idea of universalism perpetuating gender discrimination can be expanded to include other aspects of identity, such as race or ethnicity. In claiming that a particular identity is universal, “the blackness of blacks, the Jewishness of Jews, and the womanhood of women are for the first time stigmatized as morally inferior ‘particularisms’ in the boundary-negating universalism.”<sup>4</sup> In this view “the particularity of others is sacrificed to an assumed universal equality which denies its own origins and interests.”<sup>5</sup>

This way in which dominant groups set the rules can be seen in the history of democratic citizenship. That is, there is nothing obvious about understanding citizenship as a universal rather than a particularistic idea that implies that it should be naturally extended to all groups. Young points that that, in fact, there were at least some modern republicans who thought just the opposite. Such thinkers extolled the virtues of citizenship and universal humanity, they at the same time excluded various groups, arguing that groups such as women and blacks are unable to adopt a general point of view, or that including them would unnecessarily divide the public.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid., 253)

<sup>3</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York : Routledge, 1992), 50

<sup>4</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge : Polity, 2006), 52

<sup>5</sup> (Ibid., 49)

<sup>6</sup> (Young 1989, 253)

## UNIVERSAL REASON

Universalism can be seen to come from one place in particular. It is a view from a specific place and a specific time; the European Enlightenment. It is an important part of European modernity, and the claim that the reason of modern Western civilization is universally applicable.<sup>1</sup> Universalism has a specific set of assumptions, one of which being that we can resolve our differences by appealing to something like universal reason. However, for reason to play this role, it has to have a very particular nature. By looking at the views of various enlightenment thinkers, as well as some of the classical cosmopolitans that preceded them, it is possible to get an understanding of what these necessary qualities are.

Zeno, the classical cosmopolitan philosopher, can give us a good idea of the assumptions underlying universalism. He believed that the cosmos was permeated and guided by a purpose, or *logos*, and that this *logos* was implanted in every human mind as the principle of reason.<sup>2</sup> In this view, then, rationality is not simply a tool, but is also linked to a universal purpose. Human beings, regardless of their cultural context, can utilise a shared reason to arrive at the same conclusions about right action. As the human community is singular, so is the *logos*.

Similarly, Cicero identified 'right reason' as a gift of Nature, with the implication that Nature-with-a-capital-'N' is a universal source that takes over the role of Zeno's *logos* in Cicero's metaphysics.<sup>3</sup> We can see how this kind of idea was taken up by enlightenment thinkers, such as Hobbes, Descartes, Rousseau, Locke and particularly Kant, who believed that "reason is a natural disposition of the human mind, which when governed by proper education can discover certain truths." They also assumed that "the clarity and distinctness of these truths or the vivacity of their impact upon our senses would be sufficient to ensure intersubjective agreement among like-thinking rational minds."<sup>4</sup>

In Descartes' formulation there existed a "natural, transcultural relation of relevance that connect[s] propositions with one another so as to form... [a] natural order of

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<sup>1</sup> (Van der Veer 2002, 165)

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Pagden, "Cosmopolitanism as Imperialism," *Constellations* 7(1) (2000), 5

<sup>3</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Legibus*, trans. Niall Rudd and Thomas Wiedemann, (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1987), I.x.29; xii, 33

<sup>4</sup> (Benhabib 1992, 4)



reasons.”<sup>1</sup> He believed that we all possessed ‘right reason,’ a concept much like the *logos* of the classical cosmopolitans. Due to this kind of enlightenment view we can make sense of the idea of a ‘better argument,’ and hence we can see how our inter-cultural disputes might be resolved. This is made possible because reason is something external, natural, and singular.

According to classical cosmopolitanism, reason is not merely a tool but, in a sense, has an existence of its own, outside of any particular use of it. In short, proponents of a universalistic position must ultimately believe that there is a self-transparent and self-grounding reason, and that reason gives an individual an “Archimedean standpoint, situated beyond historical and cultural contingency.”<sup>2</sup> If there are disagreements between people, they can appeal to a reason that exists outside of their own cultural and social contexts in order to decide who is correct, as ultimately only one view can be. After all, if reason is singular, and forms a single, self-grounding realm of consistent propositions, then there can only be one *true* answer to any question of morality or ethics.

Of course, it is not at all obvious that this kind of external reason exists. Reason can *certainly* be used to establish whether propositions are consistent with *each other*; few would dispute this. Few would dispute, too, that you can derive an evaluative statement from an evaluative premise. Furthermore, using observation, induction, deduction and abduction we can use reason to establish whether a state of affairs obtains in the world; we can derive *descriptive* statements from *descriptive* premises. On the other hand, as David Hume famously argued, it is much more difficult, if it is possible at all, to derive an evaluative statement from purely descriptive premises.<sup>3</sup> Hence, as Habermas argues, “the normative propositions of moral and political theory [cannot] be inferred from propositions of empirical science.”<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, universalists certainly *do* attempt to derive at least *some* evaluative claims from descriptive propositions. For example, the enlightenment philosopher the Marquis de Condorcet, argued that “all errors in politics and morals are based on philosophical

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Rorty, “Justice as a Larger Loyalty,” in *Cosmopolitics: thinking and feeling beyond the nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c1998), 56

<sup>2</sup> (Benhabib 1992, 4)

<sup>3</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. (London, J. M. Dent & sons, ltd; New York, E. P. Dutton & co. [1911]), 469

<sup>4</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1: The Reason and Rationalization of Society* (London: Heinemann Education, 1984), 150

errors and these in turn are connected with scientific errors.”<sup>1</sup> He believed that “the general laws directing the phenomena of the universe, known or unknown, are necessary and constant,” and following from this he suggested that that this is no “less true for the development of the intellectual and moral faculties of man than for the other operations of nature.”<sup>2</sup>

Self-grounding reason has to derive an ‘is’ from an ‘ought’ if it is to operate as an external arbiter that we can appeal to in order to resolve our inter-cultural disputes. If we aren’t simply to derive our oughts from culturally contingent values, thereby abandoning universal reason as a useful method of settling our differences, we have to be able to say that at least some oughts are derivable from facts in the world – or from a *logos*, right reason, or from Nature. This is because facts in the world are shared between all of us – we all inhabit the same world. Facts are true for everyone in a way that evaluative statements are not.

Once again, however, it is not at all obvious that we *can* derive normative claims from factual ones. Furthermore, there does not seem to be much evidence of a *logos*, a shared ‘right reason,’ or an ought-containing nature-with-a-capital-N, and the burden of proof would have to lie with those who argue for their existence. If it turns out that none of these things exist, and that evaluative statements cannot, after all, be derived from descriptive ones (as I suspect is the case, and will assume from here-on out, in order to not stray too far from the central focus of this paper), then the only role for ‘universal’ reason is the imperialistic one opposed by feminists, among others.

## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE: CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Cultural relativism, on the other hand, avoids the quite serious problems that beset universalism and classical cosmopolitanism. It does this by arguing that there is no abstractable core of moral knowledge that exists outside of the socially and culturally situated existences of human being.<sup>3</sup> Not only does every society have its own aesthetic

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat Condorcet, *Sketch for a historical picture of the progress of the human mind*, trans. June Barraclough (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, [1955]), 163

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid., 173)

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study In Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 263

tastes, customs, beliefs, and the like, but they also have their own set of values, and these values are incommensurate with the values of other societies.

Relativists believe that different societies have different moral systems due to a range of possible factors, such as their purely contingent histories, traditions or geography, and that there is no way we can judge one moral system as better or worse than any other, as there is no evaluative criteria that exists outside any particular world view with which we could do so. In addition, even if there *were* an external means of evaluation, we are far too deeply conditioned by our own society to ever be able to discover it.<sup>1</sup>

Not only does the contingent nature of values manage to avoid the difficulties of universalism, but it also has some decidedly positive aspects. For example, it insists that there is no way of life that is objectively the best, and this intuition fits with our experience of liberal and/or multicultural societies. It also argues that the good life cannot be defined independently of the nature of the individuals involved in its pursuit. Lastly, it believes that “moral beliefs and practices cannot be detached from the wider way of life and abstractly judged and graded.”<sup>2</sup>

Relativism also acknowledges the indisputable fact that we are initiated into morality within a particular community or communities. When we pursue questions of morality we rely on various assumptions (often called intuitions) as our starting point, and as reliably shared reference points. These assumptions do not appear out of nowhere, but arise due to our being raised inside an actual, existing moral community.<sup>3</sup> In other words, our socially/culturally contextual situation is enough for us to make moral judgements; there is no need to move to some problematic ‘outside’ perspective, as universalism would have us do.

However, things are not quite this straightforward, especially if we want to resolve problems in which the actions of members of one culture affect members of another. “Live and let live,” is an approach that ceases to be effective once we bring inter-cultural issues, such as the operations of transnational corporations, or climate change into the picture. Saying “sorry, but this is what I believe is right, and there is no grounds on which you can judge my actions,” is inadequate in these kinds of situations. If the spread of a universalistic viewpoint is likely to cause conflict, the complete inability to even

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<sup>1</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, “Non-ethnocentric universalism,” in *Human Rights in Global Politics*, ed. Tim Dunne and Nicholas J. Wheeler, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 128

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> (Walker 2007, 266)

*begin* to critique the actions of members of other cultures whose activities affect you is sure to lead to as much, if not more, conflict. Without a means of discussing problems, violence is the only way to stop someone doing something that harms you. In short, having no morality that transcends the local makes it impossible for us to make rationally-grounded moral criticisms of the moralities of other cultures or societies.<sup>1</sup> This is undoubtedly a problem, especially when we are trying to resolve difficulties and disputes that are not local in character.

### ARE CULTURES REAL?

Relativism, or pluralism, presupposes collective notions of difference, and is based on the idea of more or less homogeneous groups, which are thought of as demarcated from one another, containing certain prescriptions regarding belief, behaviour or ethics that are binding for members of the group.<sup>2</sup> Not only does this make it impossible for people of different cultures to understand each other, but it also has implications for *members* of a particular culture.

For example, pluralism tends to essentialise culture as being the property of an ethnic group, race, or polity. It risks reifying cultures as entirely separate from one another, as it puts too strong an emphasis on the boundedness of cultures, as well as their distinctiveness.<sup>3</sup> Pluralism also tends to overemphasise how internally homogeneous cultures are, which risks legitimising oppressive and repressive demands on individuals, forcing them to abide by a narrow range of behaviours for the sake of cultural conformity. It treats cultures as “badges of group identity,” and “fetishize[s] them in ways that put them beyond the reach of critical analysis.”<sup>4</sup> According to this viewpoint, the individual disappears; people become to be thought of as merely “epiphenomena of their cultures.”<sup>5</sup>

A further problem is the question of whether it even makes sense to talk about cultures as real, self-contained entities, rather than as useful fictions. Do we want to assert that

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Gewirth, “Is Cultural Pluralism Relevant to Moral Knowledge?” in *Cultural Pluralism and Moral Knowledge*, ed. Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller and Jeffrey Paul (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 29

<sup>2</sup> (Beck 2006, 67)

<sup>3</sup> Terence Turner, “Anthropology and Multiculturalism: What Is Anthropology That Multiculturalists Should Be Mindful of It?,” *Cultural Anthropology* 8 (1993), 412

<sup>4</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>5</sup> (Beck 2006, 67)

cultures are more than, or other than, the sum of their individual members; are they natural kinds? This kind of claim suffers from a raft of problems. Benhabib argues that “any view of cultures as clearly delineable wholes is a view from the outside that generates coherence for the purposes of understanding and control.” On the other hand, “participants in the culture... experience their traditions, stories, rituals and symbols, tools, and material living conditions through shared, albeit contested and contestable, narrative accounts. From within, culture need not appear as a whole; rather, it forms a horizon that recedes each time one approaches it.”<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately for pluralists, unless they can justify the claim that cultures are ‘real’ bounded, natural entities, it is difficult to see how they can argue that cultures, rather than individuals, are the fundamental moral units. If they cannot prove that cultures are real, they either have to adopt a different fundamental unit, such as the nation, city, etc., or they have to deny that morality has any inter-subjectivity *at all*.

It is hard to understand the first alternative – settling on another fundamental unit of moral difference – as anything but arbitrary. On what possible grounds can we argue that the nation, for example, or the city, forms the natural boundaries of a moral space? If cultures are not bounded entities, it is even harder, or at least equally hard, to see how nations or cities could be. Unlike culture, which at least has an intuitive connection to values and belief systems, other units do not have enough cohesiveness, or apparent naturalness, to function in this role.

In terms of the second alternative – individual moral relativism, or asserting that morality is entirely lacking in inter-subjectivity – few would support this position. Even putting aside the fact that it is incredibly impractical, in the sense that a functioning society lacking entirely in inter-subjective morality is nigh inconceivable, it is important to note that, in practice, we *do* have inter-subjective morality. Individuals *can* and *do* persuade other individuals, *with reasons*, to change their behaviour, using moral arguments. For example, imagine if a friend were to pick up a dropped wallet from the street, planning to keep it, arguing that they were justified in doing so because lost items were ownerless. We could, for instance, try to persuade them that items cannot be considered ownerless until we have made every reasonable attempt to return them to the owner, and therefore keeping the wallet is theft. It is at least possible that this argument would change the friend’s mind and they would attempt to return the wallet. People *can* be persuaded to change their behaviour by moral arguments put forward by

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<sup>1</sup> (Benhabib 2002, 5)

others. If every individual's morality was entirely incommensurate with every other individual's, this would simply not be possible.

For the sake of argument, however, let us entertain the idea that cultures *are* real, bounded entities. When we look inside these cultures, we certainly do not see agreement about moral issues, so how can we claim that cultures form the basis of a moral point of view? If cultures are real, how can we deal with this? In reality, there is a great deal of diversity of opinion within cultures, including about matters that we might consider quite fundamental. In fact, one could argue that the more vibrant and alive a culture is, the more its members contest the culture's core elements."<sup>1</sup> Do we want to say that those who contest fundamental elements of their own culture only *appear* to be members of a culture, but are in fact inauthentic? This would force us to divide the population of any culture into authentic and inauthentic members.

Or, shall we say that we were incorrect in our drawing of cultural boundaries in the first place? Do we say that those who support position *a* are members of culture *x*, and those who support position *b* are members of culture *y*, and that neither are members of culture *z*, as we had mistakenly thought in the first place? But, if we are splitting off cultures every time there is a disagreement, this is ultimately not different from the absolute, individualistic relativism discussed earlier. After all, it is unlikely that we can find two individuals who agree on absolutely *everything*.

A third possibility is that there are a few, core positions that constitute a culture and, while people can disagree all they like about everything else, they are still a member of the same culture if they agree on the core views. However, once again, there are few societies in which fundamental questions are *not* contested, at least by some.

Furthermore, cultural relativism cannot deal with the fact that cultures change over time. A good way of understanding why this is the case is by looking at the classification of genera in biology as an analogy; that is, one species changes into another over time, and over longer amounts of time one genus changes into another. However, every link in the evolutionary chain is only a generation away from the links on either side. Fish and human beings are of different genera, despite being related through a step-by-step chain of links, made up of both changes between individuals from generation to generation, and links between species. But, "every fossil that might potentially be intermediate

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<sup>1</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *The rights of others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens* (Cambridge, UK ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2004), 120

[between genera] is always classified...,” and “none is ever classified as intermediate.”<sup>1</sup> But, this is “an inevitable consequence of the conventions of zoological nomenclature, not a fact about the real world.”<sup>2</sup>

The only reason that human beings and fish belong to different genera is that we have created the concept of genera for convenience by taking a snapshot of species at a particular moment in time, and ignoring all of the continuous line of intermediate cases between them. It has its use in broadly classifying categories of species, but this works only so long as you ignore the difficult, intermediate cases. You can only use genera meaningfully so long as you are either unaware of all of the intermediate cases linking the two genera, or if you arbitrarily draw a line in the sand about which species belong to one, and which to the other. In short, genera are not natural kinds, and genera have no essence, as the change of species over time demonstrates.

Similarly, cultures change over time. One culture can change to quite a considerable degree over a long period of time, from being, say, culture *x* into culture *y*. It can quite easily change to the extent that none of what might have originally been considered culture *x*’s ‘core’ remains. However, there was no stage in which the culture suddenly ceased being culture *x* and became culture *y*. In fact, identifying a culture as *x* or *y* can be shown, like taxonomy, to be entirely a matter of convenience, only possible with the benefit of hindsight, and by ignoring the no-longer-existing intermediaries, or by arbitrarily classifying them; it is like a Wittgensteinian language-game.<sup>3</sup> If this is so, then identifying the ‘core’ of a culture is meaningless.

We would not say, for example, that a fish and human are part of the same genus; similarly, we would not say that the early colonial society in New Zealand and modern New Zealand both share exactly the same culture. However, if both genera and cultures are to be thought of as natural, there must be no overlap in the essence of fishness, humanness, Britishness, or New Zealandness, which, of course, there is. There were individuals existing at every possible intermediate stage between the early colonial period in New Zealand and modern Aotearoa. Both societies have different values, at least to a certain extent, and would have to have had different cores, but there was no non-arbitrary point where individuals suddenly ceased to be British colonists and became modern New Zealanders.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The greatest show on Earth: the evidence for evolution* (London: Bantam, 2009), 202

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid., 203)

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 21

There is no *natural* way of identifying a culture's essence, and so the existence of a culture's 'core' is also merely for convenience. As such, we cannot say that we can derive morality from a cultural core, just as we cannot say that the particular qualities of a genus' composite species are its essence. The ideas of a 'cultural core,' or the defining qualities of a genus, are created *after* we have drawn the spatially and temporally arbitrary boundaries around what a particular culture or genus actually is, *not before*.

We can see that, by any account, we cannot argue that cultures are natural kinds rather than artificial creations. We are forced, therefore, to either abandon cultural relativism entirely, or to accept absolute moral relativism on the level of the individual.

### RADICAL INCOMMENSURABILITY

There is one final point regarding relativism: whether the idea of incommensurability resembles what we actually find in the real world. As we discussed previously, individual moral relativism implies untranslatability between the moral views of individuals. However, in practice we find that people most certainly *can* provide each other with reasons, of varying levels of persuasiveness, for changing their moral positions. Any time we persuade others in our daily lives to do or not do something based on an argument involving the term 'should' is an example of this. Additionally, when we behave in ways that others might not initially understand, we are usually able to provide moral reasons for why we did what we did, and it is at least *possible* that others can understand us. Because of this we can see that it cannot be the case that there is complete incommensurability and untranslatability between individual's moral views. If there were, both the concepts of persuasion, at least regarding moral issues, and also of justification, would simply not make any sense.

It is similarly inappropriate to talk about radical incommensurability and radical untranslatability between cultures.<sup>1</sup> If we are able to identify other cultures as being complex, meaningful systems, we first of all need to have understood that the "concepts, words, rituals, and symbols in these other [cultures] have a meaning and reference that we can select and describe in a manner intelligible to us."<sup>2</sup> We do not see the behaviour of individuals who live in other cultures as consisting of purely random acts with no

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<sup>1</sup> (Benhabib 2002, 30)

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid.)



possible meaning or motivation. Furthermore, when someone of another culture attempts to justify a particular action, we certainly cannot say that it is *impossible*, a priori, for us to understand their reasons, or even accept their justification as reasonable.

However, if cultural relativism were true and moral values *were* entirely down to the whims of a particular culture, we would be unable to even make sense of their justifications, and it would be impossible for people of different cultures to provide each other with persuasive reasons to change their behaviour. The fact that we *can* sometimes make sense of the justifications of individuals from other cultures, however frequently or infrequently, shows that cultural relativism does not fit with the world as we find it.

We can see that neither universalism nor relativism are particularly useful as ways of understanding morality, and therefore as theories on which we can base the resolution issues such as those outlined in the introduction. Both are inadequate for a number of theoretical reasons, in addition to being impractical.

Nevertheless, both universalism and relativism have their benefits, which tend to be exactly opposite the deficiencies of the other. For example, while relativism makes intercultural discussion impossible, universalism makes all of humankind part of the same moral conversation. Conversely, while universalism, in giving rise to a single, shared morality, abstracts its values from cultural or historical context, relativism acknowledges the way that we are raised inside a cultural and moral context, and recognises that these contexts have a particular nature, and a special meaning to us.

Having shown the flaws in the existing methods of global moral conversation, I will now outline my own alternative of post-modern cosmopolitan. The next chapter will begin to do this by introducing three of the most important conceptual building blocks of the approach: communicative actions, the principles of discourse, and fundamental goals. Together these ideas form the foundation for post-modern cosmopolitanism.

## CHAPTER 2: POST-MODERN COSMOPOLITANISM & HABERMAS

In this chapter I raise four issues. Firstly, I briefly discuss the differences and similarities between post-modern cosmopolitanism and relativism and universalism, by way of a discussion of the choice of name for the approach.

Secondly, I examine the concept of reason from a post-modern cosmopolitan perspective, and explain Habermas's distinction between instrumental/strategic reason-based action, and communicative action. This is a distinction that is central to post-modern cosmopolitanism as well.

Following this, the third section discusses the two fundamental principles of discourse, as propounded by Benhabib, which are implied by the distinction between communicative and instrumental/strategic reason. This distinction, along with the principles of discourse, forms the basis of both discourse ethics and the post-modern cosmopolitan approach.

Finally, I put forward the concept of 'fundamental goals' in the fourth section. This is an idea not found in discourse ethics, but it is absolutely essential for the post-modern cosmopolitan approach, as it is the method by which it safeguards cultural difference from universalism.

### WHY 'POST-MODERN' AND 'COSMOPOLITANISM'?

A good name for a theory or approach ought to indicate something of its content. Looking briefly at why I have given post-modern cosmopolitan this name is a useful way of getting at some of its important qualities, and also of situating it in relation to the approaches discussed in the first chapter.

The term 'post-modern' here is indicative of the fact that I reject the view that there is a single realm of interconnected propositions that form a 'true' morality; basically, that there is no such thing as a *logos*. I argue that there are many equally legitimate moral systems. Referring to it as 'post-modern' does not necessarily situate post-modern cosmopolitanism inside the space of post-modern theory. Rather, it draws on one of the

crucial insights of post-modern thinking in particular; that 'grand narratives of legitimation' are no longer a credible proposition.<sup>1</sup> In short, there is no 'pure core of moral knowledge,' that we can gain access to through pure reflection.<sup>2</sup> Values-systems are plural, rather than singular.

To a post-modern cosmopolitan, there is no such thing as stepping outside your context into a universal, general, 'god's eye' perspective. In fact, to a post-modern cosmopolitan, as to many post-modernists, the very shape of criticism becomes "more pragmatic, ad hoc, contextual and local,"<sup>3</sup> and claiming to have an impartial position, or a universalised, 'god's eye' perspective on moral issues, is seen to be the privilege-retaining pretence that it is.

There are two important aspects of universalism that informs post-modern cosmopolitanism: firstly, post-modern cosmopolitanism draws on the classical cosmopolitan ideal that there are no limits to the moral community. That is, you cannot claim that you have a moral obligation to one person and not to another due to factors as contingent as which state or nation they belong to, let alone features such as their ethnicity or gender. Post-modern cosmopolitans agree with classical cosmopolitans that every moral agent with interests, and who is affected by my actions or the consequences of my actions, is a potential partner in moral conversation. In practice, this means that we have an obligation to justify our actions, with reasons, to those affected, or to representatives of those affected.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, like classical cosmopolitans, post-modern cosmopolitans identify the individual as being the fundamental moral unit. Any value attributed to units larger than the individual – such as ethnicity, or the nation – is entirely instrumental, i.e. due to the value such groupings have for each individual of which they are composed. So, it is impossible to talk about a 'greater good,' or a 'national interest' in any terms other than their being good, or in the interests of, individuals themselves. When we say something like 'for the good of my nation,' this is shorthand for 'for the good of the individuals of which the nation is comprised.' It does *not* mean 'for the good of an entity called the nation that exists in its own right.' This is, of course, in stark contrast to the relativism discussed in the previous chapter, which identified culture groupings as having inherent value.

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<sup>1</sup> (Fraser & Nicholson 1989, 86)

<sup>2</sup> (Walker 2007, 73)

<sup>3</sup> (Fraser & Nicholson 1989, 85)

<sup>4</sup> (Benhabib 2004, 14)

In a sense, we can think of 'post-modern' as referring to those features of relativism that we think should be part of the post-modern cosmopolitan approach. Similarly, 'cosmopolitanism' refers to those aspects of a universalist theory that we might want to include. Furthermore, as relativism and universalism are such thorough opposites, the good points of one are the bad points of the other. So we can think of 'cosmopolitanism' as indicating which aspects of relativism we want to reject, and 'post-modern' as which features of universalism we find less than appealing.

Of course, post-modern cosmopolitanism is a genuine third way, so the similarities between it and universalism and relativism are in terms of the implications of the approach, rather than similarities in terms of its fundamental theoretical underpinnings. Post-modern cosmopolitanism *appears* to be situated between relativism and universalism due to how it looks when put into practice, but it should not be thought of as merely 'relativism + universalism.' It is an approach truly distinct from either.

## POST-MODERN COSMOPOLITANISM & REASON

Post-modern cosmopolitanism is an approach that tries to take the best of the results of universalism and relativism, while leaving behind the worst. So the question now becomes whether or not post-modern cosmopolitanism can do this in a coherent way, or whether it is a philosophical muddle that simply picks and chooses features of other theories arbitrarily, without anything holding them together. Is post-modern cosmopolitanism a consistent theory; can it be superficially similar to universalism and relativism, while having a different philosophical basis?

I argue that post-modern cosmopolitan *is* consistent, and that it *can* take the best of both worlds. This is possible because post-modern cosmopolitans reject an assumption shared by both universalists and moral relativists: that reason can only be conceived of as instrumental. It may seem strange to claim, after spending so long discussing how fundamentally opposite the two views are, that relativism and universalism share assumptions with each other. However, like many pairs of theories, they are able to disagree on such a range of very specific points in part *because* they have enough in common to allow them to do so.

I argue that the main reason why neither universalism nor cultural relativism really work is because they both share a mistaken understanding of what reason is. As we have

discussed, universalists believe the idea that there is a moral truth 'out there' somewhere, to be discovered by us, and this truth transcends merely human moralities.<sup>1</sup> Relativists disagree with this. However, the assumption of both is that the only possible kind of reason is instrumental reason, which is only really appropriate for dealing with things in the objective world. In the case of universalists, their external, *logos*-like reason is a clear example of requiring something to exist in the external world on which to base its perspective, but moral relativists, too, share this view. Why else would they need to postulate cultures as natural kinds, hence outside the 'merely subjective' views of human beings themselves? Cultures fill the role of the *logos* in the moral relativist's worldview. Both views are hampered by the need to, ultimately, derive an 'ought' from an 'is' – an impossible task which, as we have seen, they attempt to do in different ways.

On the other hand, post-modern cosmopolitanism follows Habermas' understanding of reason. Habermas identifies different kinds of reason that apply differently, depending on the situation. For example, what we tend to think of as the only valid kind of reasoning – reasoning about objects, and the external world – Habermas identifies as 'instrumental' rationality (or, in some situations, 'strategic rationality'). This kind of reasoning treats *everything* as if it is in the external world – values and objects both. This is the view that universalists and relativists hold about the nature of reason. However, they apply this kind of reason in all situations; for them, this is the only kind of reason that exists. Habermas, on the other hands, wants to widen the concept of rationality, arguing that "questions of truth about the objective world, [are] not the only form of rational discourse."<sup>2</sup>

It is important here to emphasise that we are using the word 'widen.' We are *not* talking about replacing entirely the concept of reason. For example, instrumental reason is certainly useful, and is an essential component of what it means to be rational. We need to reason about the external world in order to find the most efficient means of achieving whatever it is we want to achieve. Our common-sense idea of what it means to be rational in day-to-day life certainly agrees that the ability to make well-grounded assertions and identify the most efficient way to achieve one's ends are necessary components of being rational, and both of these uses are facets of instrumental reason.<sup>3</sup> It would be mistaken to assert that properly understanding means-end relations is not

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<sup>1</sup> (Walker 2007, 260)

<sup>2</sup> Arie Brand, *The force of reason: an introduction to Habermas' Theory of communicative action* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 7

<sup>3</sup> (Habermas 1984, 15)

an important part of what it means to be rational.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, being able to understand logical consistency and entailment are vitally important.

Instrumental reason (when applied to human beings) Habermas calls 'strategic action'. Strategic action consists of individuals treating others as if they are objects in the world. In strategic action, an individual has a particular end in mind, and it is important for the achievement of that end for others to perform or not perform certain actions. Here, the aim is to achieve the end, and so the intention is to cause others to do what you want them to, whether it be through threats, sanctions, or rewards.<sup>2</sup> The issue is purely one of cause and effect, and other human beings are considered part of this world of cause and effect, and treated accordingly. Essentially, the thinking is 'if I do *a*, then *b* will occur.' We judge strategic action using only one dimension of rationality; that is, we appraise in terms of how efficient it is at influencing the behaviour and decisions of rational opponents in our favour.<sup>3</sup>

However, Habermas identifies another kind of reasoning; 'communicative reason,' or 'communicative action.' Communicative action differs from strategic or instrumental action in that it focuses on questions of rightness or appropriateness in the social world.<sup>4</sup> The goal of communicative rationality is entirely different from instrumental or strategic rationality, which are both concerned solely with means-end relations. Communicative action is essentially a method of social interaction that is based on the exchange of communicative acts. These acts, which rely on language, or other non-verbal expressions, are intended to orient us towards reaching understanding with others.<sup>5</sup> Unlike with instrumental reason, communicative actions occurs when "social intercourse is co-ordinated not through the egocentric calculations of the success of the actors as an individual, but through the mutual and co-operative achievement of understanding among participants."<sup>6</sup> This is different from how rationality is typically understood, but it is closer to how we relate to each other in our every-day moral interactions. After all, someone who always acted entirely rationally in the instrumental/strategic sense would probably be considered sociopathic.

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<sup>1</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid., 268)

<sup>3</sup> (Brand 1990, 15)

<sup>4</sup> (Ibid., 7)

<sup>5</sup> (Habermas 1984, 234)

<sup>6</sup> Rick Roderick, *Habermas and the Foundations of Critical Theory* (Basingstoke : Macmillan, 1986), 109

In order to understand communicative action, we need to understand more about what it means to attempt to reach understanding. The most important feature of understanding is that it comes when one or more individuals set out to successfully convince others to do something, with reasons, so that the subsequent behaviour of those involved in the conversation is then motivated on the basis of these reasons.<sup>1</sup> Hence, communicative rationality is not about a relationship based on means and ends, but is about communicating with others in order to persuade (or be persuaded), with reasons, so that our actions are motivated by a shared understanding. Rather than seeking a particular goal, communicative action can be considered a means by which goals themselves are created, or modified.

By moving our focus from instrumental to communicative rationality, we can understand that what is important about moral justification does not lie in the relation between a solitary subject to objects in the external world that can be manipulated,<sup>2</sup> but the inter-subjective relationships that we acknowledge when we come to an understanding with others about something. When we acknowledge the existence of communicative rationality in *addition* to instrumental/strategic rationality, we begin to call someone rational not only if they can point to appropriate evidence for their assertions, but also if they can elucidate an established norm of behaviour and can justify their actions in terms of legitimate expectations.<sup>3</sup>

To distinguish the two kinds of reason more clearly, in instrumental rationality we judge someone rational depending on their success at goal-directed interventions. On the other hand, to call someone rational in the communicative sense, we judge rationality as depending entirely on whether individuals, as members of a community, can orient their behaviour towards normative validity claims shared by others.<sup>4</sup> In short, it is about social interaction, and as language is the most fundamental means of social interaction,<sup>5</sup> rationality can be understood as a human disposition that is essentially grounded in the use of speech.<sup>6</sup>

When we perform an utterance, or engage in a 'speech act,' using language, whether the utterance is verbal or non-verbal, we are making at least one kind of claim. By doing so

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<sup>1</sup> (Brand 1990, 15)

<sup>2</sup> (Habermas 1984, 392)

<sup>3</sup> (Ibid., 15)

<sup>4</sup> (Ibid., 14)

<sup>5</sup> (Brand 1990, ix)

<sup>6</sup> (Ibid.)

we assert that certain things are valid. An utterance can only be made sense of when we know that a speaker is both able and willing to put forward convincing reasons for their validity claim and, if these reasons are disputed, to defend them.

The requirement to convince with reasons is the aspect of speech acts that give them their binding force on action.<sup>1</sup> The fact that we can be made to understand someone's utterance, due to the fact that it is, or can be, justified with reasons that we can make sense of, makes it possible for it to coordinate the actions following communication.<sup>2</sup> In other words, if we exchange validity claims, provide reasons, and together come to an understanding on the basis of claims that are mutually recognised, then this binds our future actions.<sup>3</sup> The very fact that we have reached understanding implies that our goals have been coordinated by the exchange of reasons.

In social contexts, when participating in argument, we show the extent of our rationality by how we respond to the offering of reasons for and against claims that have been made. If someone is rational, they must be open to argument, and they will either acknowledge the force of the reasons that have been put forward, or they will attempt to reply to them with reasons of their own. Regardless of which approach they use, they are thereby dealing with the claims of the other in a rational way. However, if the individual is 'deaf to argument,' and ignores reasoned criticisms of their position, or replies to them with merely dogmatic assertions, then it cannot be said that they are acting rationally.

It should be noted here that the discussion of 'reasons' naturally begs the question of how we define what 'good' reasons actually are. This is an extremely important point, and will be the focus of the third chapter. Hence, I ask the reader to put it aside for the time being.<sup>4</sup>

In social contexts instrumental and communicative action are in conflict with each another, and this conflict can help us to understand the basis of a shared morality. You cannot engage in both kinds of reason at the same time. For example, if we relate to our family members instrumentally, by trying to maximise our preferences in regards to their behaviour, we cannot at the same time be trying to reach an understanding with

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<sup>1</sup> (Habermas 1984, 297-302)

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, U.K. : Polity Press, 1991), 3

<sup>4</sup> S. Toulmin, R. Rieke, and A. Janik, *An Introduction to Reasoning* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 13



them based on the exchange of reasons.<sup>1</sup> For example, if our goal were for our partner to do more housework, because we wanted to do less, and we established sanctions in order to pressure them to do so, we cannot at the same time be trying to work out, in partnership with them, what it means for housework to be distributed fairly, based on the exchange of reasons and an attempt to reach a shared understanding. You cannot simultaneously attempt to reach understanding with someone while treating them as an object. The latter entirely undermines the former. As soon as you treat someone as an object, you are no longer trying to reach agreement with them.

I argue that relating to other human beings strategically is not simply inappropriate, but is in fact immoral. Engaging with others communicatively is how we determine what course of action is appropriate. If we do not engage communicatively, then we are rejecting the possibility of determining what course of action is morally appropriate, and so we are rejecting morality at the same time.

To best understand how communicative rationality and morality are related, it is important to take a close look at Habermas' elaboration on the communicative approach: discourse ethics. Discourse ethics utilises communicative rationality, and has as its basis certain fundamental principles of discourse.<sup>2</sup> These fundamentals of discourse ethics allow us to have an approach that incorporates the more desirable features of universalism, *without* universalism's deficiencies. More specifically, conflating rationality and morality allows us to put forward, in a certain sense, a universal basis for morality, without having to assert that there is only one true realm of interconnected propositions, and without arguing that we all need to agree about morality, values and norms more generally.

## DISCOURSE ETHICS, RATIONALITY, AND THE PRINCIPLES OF DISCOURSE

The central concern of morality is how we can regulate interpersonal relationships in a legitimate way.<sup>3</sup> It does not make much sense, at least in the modern world, to think about a morality that aims to do anything else. For example, we would not consider asking whether mere physical processes are moral or immoral. Similarly, we would not

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<sup>1</sup> (Brand 1990, 63)

<sup>2</sup> (Habermas 1984)

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, trans. Barbara Fultner (Oxford : Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003), 261

discuss morality in the context of animals and their behaviour. Or, at least, it does not make sense to talk about morality in the context of animal's relationships to each other, or how they relate to *us*. The only appropriate realm of morality is that of the social and the interpersonal.

Morality is solely about how human beings relate to *each other*, or to other beings that are able to communicate in some form (such as when animals express non-linguistically the fact that they are happy, or that they are suffering). If we assume that humanity, as a fundamentally social species, maintains itself through the coordination of its members, and coordination itself has to be established through communication, then the reproduction of the species itself requires that we engage with each other communicatively.<sup>1</sup> In other words, if we are to continue to exist in societies, rather than as isolated, self-sufficient individuals, we cannot deny the social purpose of communication.

Habermas argues that the use of language itself implies that we share a common goal of trying to achieve consensus.<sup>2</sup> The ultimate purpose of all communication, and hence the purpose of language, is to reach understanding, to coordinate our actions, and to be motivated, and to motivate, through the use of mutually recognisable reasons. So, morality is entirely about the relations between human beings or other beings capable of communication, and the relations between such beings are mediated entirely through communication. Furthermore, communication, to operate effectively, to motivate, and to be binding for the individuals involved in it, it has to be aimed towards reaching understanding. If we reject this, we relate to each other as "but complicated objects in a complicated routine."<sup>3</sup> To recognise another as a person, or a moral agent, we must respond to them and act towards them as one.

We can see, then, that one kind of immorality is acting in ways that impede the ability of individuals to reach understanding, and thereby coordinate their actions and participate as part of a human community. Being deaf to argument – that is, unresponsive to reasons – is immoral, as there is no morality without discourse, and no discourse without being open to argument. If you refuse to engage with others through the use of reasons, you have refused to communicate in a comprehensible way. As such, you have refused to participate in the endeavour to coordinate action through the only means that

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<sup>1</sup> (Habermas 1984, 397)

<sup>2</sup> (Brand 1990, 11)

<sup>3</sup> John Rawls, "I. Justice as Fairness," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 54, No. 22 (Oct. 24, 1957), 659

we have of doing so, and have therefore denied that others are beings worthy of being taken into consideration. This substantiates my previous assertion that relating to others purely strategically is immoral; doing so rejects the need to justify our actions with reasons, or at least with reasons that are appropriate to the social world that we find ourselves in.

The importance of communication to morality generates a series of principles, or rules, which must be accepted by all. These rules are not derived from something external to ourselves, in the sense of a *logos*, or an essence of humanity, as with universalistic theories, but originate from the nature of communication itself, which is something inter-subjective rather than objective. The fact is that even if we *were* to take a skeptical stance on the claim that we need to engage with each other using reasons, there are only two ways of articulating ourselves against such a position. Firstly, we might provide reasons as to why we might reject this view. However, by attempting to provide reasons we are in fact admitting that it is possible, and in fact necessary, to provide reasons to reject a position that you do not agree with. This is itself acknowledging that there are rules inherent to communication; if there were not, giving reasons would be an utterly meaningless gesture.

Secondly, the alternative to communicative action is to deny these common features of social life entirely. However, “a full denial of them would be a completely imaginary achievement, itself incomplete because such a life, in fact, is not imaginable.” Such a thoroughly skeptical response would be “empty, a wordless, demonstration of arbitrary refusal.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the fact that such an individual is almost certainly going to continue being a member of a human community *in fact* belies this refusal. After all, “as long as [an individual] is alive *at all*, a Robinson Crusoe existence through which [they] could demonstrate mutely and impressively that [they have] dropped out of communicative action is inconceivable, even as a thought experiment.”<sup>2</sup>

All human beings have an interest in achieving mutuality.<sup>3</sup> This interest is derived from the very nature of communication itself, and from our necessarily social existence. This fact has some implications for how argumentation is to take place; specifically, all those

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Braaten, *Habermas's Critical Theory of Society* (Albany, N.Y. : State University of New York Press, c1991), 46

<sup>2</sup> Jurgen Habermas, “Discourse Ethics: Notes on Philosophical Justification,” in *The Communicative Ethics Controversy*, ed. Seyla Benhabib & Fred R. Dallmayr (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, c1990), 97

<sup>3</sup> (Braaten 1991, 37-38)

affected by actions should be included in discourse, argumentational rights and obligations are evenly distributed, and discourse itself should be free from coercion.<sup>1</sup> Engaging in discourse in any other way would not make sense.

If the purpose of communication is to coordinate our actions, and if our actions are coordinated by our reaching understanding, and if the reaching of understanding can only be achieved by persuasion using reasons, then coercion, exclusion, or the like are simply illegitimate; it contradicts the very purpose and nature of communication itself. For example, the statement “I persuaded X that *p* using threats,” does not make any sense. The very concept of persuasion rests on the uncoerciveness of the communicative situation. You could restate the statement as “I forced X to do *p* using threats.” However, this is strategic, not communicative, interaction. Such a scenario fails entirely to reach understanding; it does not even attempt to do so, and the situation itself belies what it means to ‘persuade’ in the first place.

Additionally, while it may be possible for individuals to act strategically rather than communicatively in individual cases, we are not able to absent ourselves from communicative involvement in the long term. Doing so would mean “regression to the monadic isolation of strategic action – or schizophrenia and suicide.”<sup>2</sup> Refusing to justify your actions to others excludes you from the human community by definition.

Another action ruled out by the nature of communication is limiting those who are able to participate. For example, if I were to say something such as “I persuaded myself that *p* by excluding certain dissenting views from the conversation,” this would be an incoherent sentence. Intentionally excluding dissenting views from the conversation undermines the very basis of the ability to be persuaded in the first place. To be persuaded of something implies that you have formed a belief based on all relevant information at hand. This is impossible if you intentionally ignore facts that do not suit you. As Habermas says, excluding relevant individuals from the conversation implies that I have formed my convictions “under conditions which simply do not permit the formation of convictions.”<sup>3</sup> The ‘other’ is absolutely necessary for there to be conditions under which convictions can be formed.

Additionally, the distribution of argumentational rights and obligations is absolutely necessary, and is also implied by the nature of communication. For example, bigots

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<sup>1</sup> (Habermas 2003, 269)

<sup>2</sup> (Habermas 1990a, 99)

<sup>3</sup> (Ibid., 87)

almost always consider it necessary to justify their beliefs to wider society. As Benhabib puts it, to the inegalitarian, “women should not only be treated differently but they should ‘want’ to be treated differently by assenting to the fact that this is ‘natural’; non-white peoples should willingly accept the superiority of the white man and be grateful for it; infidels should be converted to see the true path to God.”<sup>1</sup>

Even inegalitarian arguments, then, require that those at the receiving end are persuaded of the validity of the particular inegalitarian principles being put forward. If inegalitarianism is to be considered rational it must attempt to persuade those treated unequally. But, as we have seen, the very nature of persuasion involves allowing those particular others into the conversation. Until you have established that those others are *not* equal (by persuading them), they must be allowed into the conversation as equal partners, and the capacity to assent to these inegalitarian principles entails the capacity to dissent. It is difficult to see the kind of situation in which individuals, allowed into a conversation as equal partners, would assent to inegalitarian principles regarding themselves, unless the force of the reasons were incontrovertible. While this is not impossible in principle, the unreflexive nature of most inegalitarian positions makes the possibility seem unlikely in practice. Hence, “either inegalitarianism... cannot win the assent of those it addresses, or it... precludes the possibility that its addressees will reject it.”<sup>2</sup>

All those affected by a particular conversation, then, must be included in that conversation, and the default position is that they relate to each other as equals. It is up to critics of such equality to show, within discourse itself, and with good grounds, why some individuals or groups, due to certain characteristics, should not be allowed in the moral conversation, or should be allowed in with reduced rights.<sup>3</sup> This certainly cannot happen outside the conversation, or before it takes place, and it cannot happen without the consent of those affected.

It is these ideas that form the basis of discourse ethics. Benhabib argues that we can summarise them in two fundamental principles of discourse: *universal respect*, and *egalitarian reciprocity*. *Universal respect* entails “[recognising] the rights of all beings capable of speech and action to be participants in the moral conversation” by, for example, engaging with them non-coercively. In short, “no participant may be hindered,

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<sup>1</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 33

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> (Ibid.)

through coercion internal or external to the speech situation, in perceiving his [or her] rights”<sup>1</sup> vis-à-vis a communicative situation.

*Egalitarian reciprocity* “stipulates that in discourses each should have the same rights to various speech acts, to initiate new topics, and to ask for justification of the presuppositions of the conversations.”<sup>2</sup> That is, “any and every subject capable of speech and [social] action may take part in discourse.” Furthermore, any participant must be allowed to: a) problematise any assertion, b) introduce any assertion into discourse, and c) express his or her position, wishes, and needs.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, these principles of discourse are not set in stone – they can be challenged. In the moral conversations mediated by discourse ethics, “agents can also change levels of reflexivity, that is they can introduce metaconsiderations about the very conditions and constraints under which such dialogue takes place and they can evaluate their fairness.”<sup>4</sup> However, the principles of discourse must be challenged *within* the conversation itself. Essentially, even if we challenge the principles of discourse, in order to keep to conversation going we need to accept *some* principles, or discourse entirely falls apart as a method for reaching understanding. If the principles of discourse are entirely suspended, “violence, coercion and suppression follow.”<sup>5</sup>

The fact that the principles of discourse *can* be challenged, however, helps discourse ethics avoid the charge of circularity. We can question the presuppositions of the moral conversation, but as this necessarily happens within the conversation itself, the presuppositions are still within the realm of argumentation. In order to keep the moral conversation going, we can bracket the principles, but we cannot suspend them entirely.<sup>6</sup>

The existence of the two principles of *universal respect* and *egalitarian reciprocity* allows discourse ethics to have universal scope. Like classical cosmopolitanism, the principles of discourse mandate that every individual is potentially a conversation partner; there is no justification for excluding people from a conversation that are able to be defended, at least without first including those you want to exclude in the conversation, and

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<sup>1</sup> (Braaten 1991, 44)

<sup>2</sup> (Benhabib 2004, 13)

<sup>3</sup> (Braaten 1991, 44)

<sup>4</sup> (Benhabib 1992, 32)

<sup>5</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>6</sup> (Ibid.)

persuading them to accept their exclusion on grounds that are supported by reasons that they would accept.

Furthermore, discourse ethics gives all individuals a means of relating to each other; by deriving the principles of discourse ethics from the nature of communication itself, the rules of discourse are universally relevant, as there is almost no one in the world who is not part of a human community of some kind. The principles of egalitarian reciprocity and universal respect are a basis for interaction necessarily shared by every individual – or, at least, every rational individual.

However, discourse ethics manages to provide a common ground for all without suggesting that there is a shared *external, objective* reason that necessitates everyone ultimately agreeing on one definitive, self-consistent set of principles. Discourse ethics, prohibits singling out any *particular* moral or normative content as being definitive of moral theory. If we *do* raise substantive moral issues in discourse, it is merely one more contribution to practical discourse among many. However, we cannot use such substantive moral content to ground the moral point of view *as such*.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than setting up a substantive moral theory, discourse ethics provides a shared *procedure* that allows us to discuss, create, and judge substantive moral theories. Using discourse ethics, we do not have to refer to logic, or to the objective world, but rather “the rationality implicit in communication between subjects.”<sup>2</sup> Due to this, it is not necessary that everyone agree on their substantive moral theories, so long as in the process of forming or discussing these theories they abide by the principles of discourse.

## FUNDAMENTAL GOALS & RELATIVISM

By being based on discourse ethics, and by recognising the difference between instrumental and communicative rationality, post-modern cosmopolitanism manages to allow everyone to be partners in conversation, without this implying that everyone should agree. However, if the principles of discourse ethics are purely procedural, it is impossible to derive substantive moral theories from the principles of discourse themselves, and substantive moral theories can only come from actual, real-world

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<sup>1</sup> (Habermas, c1990, 122)

<sup>2</sup> Mark Devenney, *Ethics and Politics in Contemporary Theory: Between Critical Theory and Post-Marxism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 30

discourse and experience. If this is the case, discourse ethics does not help us to justify substantive moral theories, though, of course, discourse ethics is ever-present as the way that we *discuss* moral theories.

The question of the generation and justification of substantive moral theories, then, is one that needs to be answered in a different way, by looking outside the principles of discourse ethics. Fortunately, answering this question helps us to see how post-modern cosmopolitanism deals with the fact that individuals are necessarily embedded in a social and cultural context. Recall that this was one of the more attractive features of relativism. Post-modern cosmopolitanism can accept the embedded nature of human beings, without bringing along all of the inconsistencies and difficulties that beset relativism.

Fundamentally, post-modern cosmopolitans accept, like cultural relativists, that substantive moral theories are generated from within social contexts. However, post-modern cosmopolitans understand this very differently to cultural relativists, because in not having to justify values in reference to something in the real world – such as cultures as natural kinds – post-modern cosmopolitanism is compatible with the changing, inter-subjectively created nature of cultures.

Different societies have a store of values that inform what they do, and how they live their lives. Of course, this store of values is not a clear, unchanging set – new values can enter all the time, both by being generated from within a culture, and by entering from the outside. Furthermore, unlike cultural relativists, post-modern cosmopolitans do not believe that these values are necessarily consistent with each other, and they argue that values cannot be justified merely due to the fact that they are widely held.

As John Rawls puts it, “people have considered judgements at all levels of generality, from those about particular situations and institutions up through broad standards and first principles to formal and abstract conditions on moral conceptions.”<sup>1</sup> These judgements are not typically made into a logically consistent worldview. Nevertheless, they *can* be. Rawls proposes the idea of the ‘reflective equilibrium’ whereby each judgement, regardless of its level of depth, has a certain initial credibility and, “by dropping and revising some, by reformulating and expanding others, one supposes that

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<sup>1</sup> John Rawls, “The Independence of Moral Theory,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 48, (1974 - 1975), 8



a systematic organization can be found.”<sup>1</sup> According to Rawls, while we should take *some* judgements as strong enough to be used as starting points, these judgements, along with the rest, are ultimately revisable.

We might expect each member of a society to sit down and work out a systematic, logically consistent worldview based on their society’s general store of values, or even the values of other societies. But, is it practicable to ask everyone to sit down and work out an entirely consistent world-view and way of life? Certainly, moral philosophy, operating inside the social discourse of morality, has this as its aim. Moral philosophers are expected to “reflect on morality, moral judgement, and moral responsibility as they are familiar with it... from their own moral training, formed character, and social experience.”<sup>2</sup> However, while we might *like* everyone to become moral philosophers, this is unlikely to happen.

What we *can* expect people to do is to *at least* make their world-view consistent to the extent necessary for any *particular* moral discourse in which they are actually involved. If the failure to justify actions with reasons to those affected can be criticised as immoral, then the failure to rationally consider the norms and values that give rise to such actions can also be considered immoral. When a particular norm is at issue in a moral discourse, then the basis for the discussion is at the level of the highest norm that all participants can agree on from which the contested norm is supposedly derived. The question then becomes not “is my entire world-view and way of life logically consistent?” but “is the particular norm at issue logically consistent with other relevant norms with which we can all agree?” Hence, if someone refuses to consider their moral beliefs and to systematise them to a great enough extent that they are able to treat them as contents that can be raised in discourse about a particular real-world issue, they can be accused of failing to engage communicatively, and therefore we can say from our discussion above that they are acting immorally.

We can assume that individuals from the same society will share enough norms, at one level or another, to resolve whether a norm, or a set of norms, are consistent with the beliefs that they all already share. However, two points should be made here: firstly, I am not commenting on how *many* values they need to share; so long as they share *some*, it is sufficient. Those they do not share can either be left aside, if they are not relevant to any real-world disputes, or else made subjects of discourse themselves, in which case

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<sup>1</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> (Walker 2007, 4)

they can hopefully bring their differing views into line with each other through reasoned argument based on what those values they *do* share.

Secondly, it is worth having a brief discussion about what I intend by the term 'society.' I define 'society' as a grouping of people who share at least some norms or values, at any level of generality. So, you can have large societies and small ones, broad or narrow, as well as sub-societies, sub-sub societies, societies cutting across the boundaries of other societies, etc. However, for the purposes of this discussion we should focus on the fundamental kind of society; that is, societies that share fundamental goals. As these goals are fundamental, it is not possible for societies to be broader than the group who share such a goal (examples of which I will discuss shortly). In saying this I am not making any claims about whether or not there *are* different societies in this broad sense. I would say that there *are*, however this is more of an empirical question than a theoretical one. I *do* think that if I am right, post-modern cosmopolitanism provides a method for us proceeding on this basis, and if it turns out that I am wrong, post-modern cosmopolitanism is still an effective approach. In short, I will assume that there *are* different societies that have different fundamental goals, as this possibility is more troublesome and difficult than the alternative, and hence post-modern cosmopolitanism needs to be able to deal with it, should it turn out to describe the real world.

Furthermore, I am not arguing that these fundamental societies match anything in particular; they may be national, religious, class-based, cultural, or anything else we can imagine, and even if one fundamental society maps onto a religious group, for example, this does not mean that others cannot be national, sub-national, cultural, gender- or sexuality-based, or anything else. I do not want to argue that fundamental units have to be all of the same kind. Additionally, there is no reason whatsoever why individuals cannot be members of more than one society at the same time, whether one of those societies is nested within another or not. However, I *do* think that, to the extent that the fundamental goals of the different societies of which an individual is a member conflict, one goal must be prioritised over another (meaning that one's identity is more fundamentally based in one society or another, even if we are substantially a member of both/many). Though, of course, this conflict only becomes relevant when discourse requires the discussion to go down to such a deep level.

However, our discussion centres not on disputes between people who share a cultural and social context, but those who do not. It is at least possible for us to imagine a moral discourse in which the participants do not share *any* norms, at *any* 'level;' that is, they

are from entirely separate societies. What do we do in such a case? This discussion will be picked up in more detail in the next chapter. However, one of the essential concepts for understanding how this is possible is the post-modern cosmopolitan idea of 'fundamental goals.'

It is important to carefully define the concept of fundamental goals. The concept of fundamental goals acknowledges the fact that human beings are necessarily socialised. A fundamental goal is, in essence, the deepest, most unreflected, collectively shared aim. Here I use 'deepest' in a particular sense. Post-modern cosmopolitans recognise that the socialisation of individuals into whatever social group(s) they become a member of forms a necessary part of an individual's identity. The acceptance of certain values generally comes along with this. When this set of values is systematised, in order to avoid circularity certain values must be derived from others, and these values must be derived from further, 'deeper' values, and so on down until the fundamental goal.

Even if a value is *not* derived from another, it must, at the least, be made consistent with other values. Generally, I expect that we will find that, when one value or another must be changed to maintain consistency between them, one value is more likely to be altered (or altered more) than the other. In that case, the value that is left closest to its original form is considered the deeper one. So, deeper refers to: a) if value *x* is derived from value *y*, value *y* is deeper, and b) when there is inconsistency between values, if value *x* is changed, and value *y* is not, or if value *x* is changed *more* than value *y*, value *y* is deeper.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, however, potentially every value is able to be contested from within a society itself. Nevertheless, there are certain underlying, broad aims that cannot be contested in quite the same way as others, and that are at the 'deepest' level. While we *can* criticise and contest these aims, doing so is questioning the very basis of an individual's identity. After all, "ideas of the good life are not notions that simply occur to individuals as abstract imperatives; they shape the identity of groups and individuals in such a way that they form an integral part of culture and personality."<sup>1</sup>

When a person questions *any* of the shared values of their society, in a sense they question their very existence.<sup>2</sup> But ultimately there are certain things, at the deepest level of identity, which cannot be questioned and contested quite so easily. When we get

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<sup>1</sup> (Habermas, c1990, 177)

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid., 178)

to the deepest level – a value that is not derived from any other value, and is the most resistant to change – we can only contest it by bracketing certain aspects of it. This means that, unlike other values that can potentially be abandoned entirely, or altered significantly, in order to preserve our deepest value, this kind of value can only be altered slowly, piece by piece, otherwise we risk entirely undermining the basis for our identity. It is this value that is considered the ‘fundamental goal.’

I use the term ‘goal’ rather than ‘value’ to refer to the fact that the deeper a value, the more general and imprecise it necessarily is. Being the deepest, the fundamental goal is likely to be also the most unreflected and imprecise, so it is more like a general aim or motivation than a norm or a value. Both ‘norm’ and ‘value’ carry connotations of precision and specificity which are not appropriate in the context of fundamental goals. To give us an idea of what a fundamental goal might be, I will discuss the question of fundamental goals for two kinds of hypothetical post-modern cosmopolitan societies: one that could be considered to be based on the idea of ‘Vedantic cosmopolitanism,’<sup>1</sup> and one that we can call ‘liberal cosmopolitanism.’<sup>2</sup> In the former case, the fundamental goal is ‘spiritual emancipation,’ and in the latter, as ‘freedom.’

Both ‘freedom’ and ‘spiritual emancipation’ are vague and are able to be multiply interpreted. People in these societies may have different ideas about what these terms mean, if they reflect on them at all. However, for a Vedantin, to say that spiritual emancipation is a worthless goal is impossible. Similarly, no member of a liberal can ever say that freedom is entirely unimportant, as illustrated by the way that even authoritarian actions, such as the passing of the Patriot Act, are justified in terms of freedom; in this case, freedom from terrorist threats. We can certainly imagine, and in fact can see in practice, ‘freedom,’ or ‘spiritual emancipation’ being slowly changed over time, reinterpreted, and altered, but not abandoned entirely (though a future formulation may end with little or nothing in common with an earlier one).

It cannot be stressed enough that fundamental goals are *not* the same as the concept of a cultural ‘core’, and that it does not in any way indicate that post-modern cosmopolitanism is a form of cultural relativism in the sense outlined in Chapter One. There are a number of essential differences between the two: firstly, a fundamental goal

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hemmingsen, “Post-Modern Cosmopolitanism as an Ethic of Encounter” (MIR Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2008), 44

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid., 27)

is changeable, not fixed, and can be contested.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, fundamental goals do not serve as the essence of a *culture*, but rather as a basis for the identity of a *socialised individual*. As Kwame Anthony Appiah puts it, “we make up selves from a tool kit of options made available by our culture and society... but we do not determine the options among which we choose.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it is individuals that are relevant here, not cultural groupings. Lastly, there is nothing necessarily preventing individuals from being part of more than one society, or changing their cultural membership throughout their lives. However, for cultural relativists, membership of a culture is absolute.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of fundamental goals helps us create a ‘bottom floor’ for the chain of justifications by which higher values are derived. We can criticise an individual’s values, but ultimately we have to accept their fundamental, deepest value. However, does the fact that we accept the fundamental goals of different societies entail that we accept *any possible* fundamental goal, simply because a group of people hold it? A post-modern cosmopolitan would say that we do not have to do so, due to the underlying role discourse ethics plays in the approach. Not just *any* fundamental goal can be accepted; if it is not consistent with the rules of discourse, it is not legitimate. For example, if our fundamental goal was, for example, to gain power at any cost, or to destroy those who disagree with us, we would put at risk the very possibility of a moral conversation. Hence, we could legitimately criticise and refuse to accept both our own society’s values, as well as another’s, if we could show that our/their fundamental goal was essentially incompatible with the principles of discourse ethics. This applies also to any ‘higher’ values that directly contradict the rules of discourse.

So, we can see that by acknowledging the difference between instrumental and communicative forms of rationality, and by applying them appropriately, the post-modern cosmopolitan is able to put forward a procedure – discourse ethics – with certain shared rules that are derived from the nature of communication. This allows the post-modern cosmopolitan to reasonably insist, like the classical cosmopolitan, that every human being is potentially a partner in conversation, that every individual has the right to expect to participate in a dialogue about issues that affect them, and that contingent differences between people, such as ethnicity, gender, or nationality, cannot

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<sup>1</sup> (Walker 2007, 261)

<sup>2</sup> K. Anthony Appiah, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1994), 155

<sup>3</sup> Jurgen Habermas, “Struggles for Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1994), 131

justify excluding people from the conversation. Moreover, it does this *without* implying that there is, ultimately, only one *true* substantive moral theory.

Additionally, by looking at the concept of fundamental goals we can understand how the post-modern cosmopolitan accepts the culturally and socially embedded nature of human beings. It also provides us with a way of critiquing the actions of members of other societies, even when we do not share any substantive values with them. We can do this by seeing the extent to which their worldview matches a set of criteria that must be met before substantive moral systems, like liberal cosmopolitanism or Vedantic cosmopolitanism, can be considered a 'post-modern cosmopolitan substantive moral system.'

To be considered post-modern cosmopolitan, a value system must:

- 1) Make its substantive values consistent with its fundamental goal (or, at least, they must do so to the extent that this is required by actual, specific moral discourses that individuals find themselves in).
- 2) Make its substantive values consistent with each other (but, once again, only to the extent that this is necessitated by real-world discourses).
- 3) Accept the difference between communicative and instrumental rationality, and apply this in regards to its moral discussion (where moral discussion focuses on the use of communicative rationality).
- 4) Make its substantive values, including its fundamental goal, consistent with the principles of *egalitarian reciprocity*, and *universal respect*.
- 5) Utilise discourse ethics in order to discuss, evaluate or modify its substantive values.

This does not tell us how we can criticise and engage with one another when we *do not* share fundamental goals, but when our respective goals *are* consistent with the above criteria. In order to understand how we might be able to do this we need to look deeper into discourse ethics, and we must examine what it means to say that a reason put forward in discourse is or is not legitimate and rational (reason understood here in the everyday sense of 'an explanation for an action or belief,' meaning that reasons are reasons independent of their rationality. Hence, it is possible to refer to reasons as either rational or irrational). The third chapter will go into these issues in more detail, and will outline the kinds of claims that can be raised in discourse as well as how we can judge them rational or not.

## CHAPTER 3: THE PROCESS OF DISCOURSE

In this chapter I look at each of the three most important kinds of reasons acknowledged as valid by discourse ethics – truth, truthfulness, and rightness – and how we justify them. I show that each kind of reason presupposes a different kind of ‘world’ for them to inhabit, and that by understanding the difference between the three worlds we can appreciate what it means for a reason to be valid, as well as how reasons in discourse ethics are different from reasons used in a method of moral justification that relies solely on instrumental reason. The differentiation of the three kinds of validity claim, along with fundamental goals and the principles of discourse, are tools essential for constructing post-modern cosmopolitanism. They do not make inter-society moral conversation possible in and of themselves, but they are nonetheless a key component of the post-modern cosmopolitan approach; the approach would certainly fail without these crucial ideas.

The concept of the ‘three worlds’ is extremely important, as without knowing how we establish the validity of a reason we cannot build an approach that relies on the *exchange* of reasons. If we are to have an approach that leads to rationally motivated understanding, and that rests on *egalitarian reciprocity* and *universal respect*, knowing how we can judge behaviour and justification as reasonable or unreasonable is absolutely essential. Furthermore, separating justifications into three different varieties helps us to both make communicative rationality possible, and it gives us the framework to avoid subsuming evaluative claims into descriptive ones, thereby making a simultaneously non-universalistic and non-relativistic approach feasible.

I begin by explaining how the concept of three different kinds of validity claims fits into the post-modern cosmopolitan approach. Following this I broadly discuss how we define what counts as a legitimate reason, and then look at each of the three kinds of reason in turn. Finally, I indicate what this kind of differentiation means in practice, when we actually engage in discourse.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE THREE WORLDS

The idea of the 'three worlds' refers to the way in which we entirely disengage three kinds of justification from each other – evaluative, descriptive and affective – and then provide different criteria for the substantiation of each. Due to this, we can discuss the different kinds of claims as if they inhabit three different 'worlds' or 'spheres' that exist independently of each other. It is this separation that makes communicative action possible.

It is fine to say that instrumental action and communicative action are different, and that we should persuade each other using reasons appropriate to communicative action. But this begs the question of what a good reason actually *is*. If we do not know what *counts* as a reason, and how reasons in a communicative context are different from those we might give in an instrumental context, then we really have no clue about what discourse is, and how we utilise it. In order to make sense of the idea of exchanging reasons, both in the context of intra- and inter-society discourse, we need to know what it means to say that something counts as a legitimate reason. As such, I will define the kinds of reasons that can be considered rational by delineating the three different 'worlds' that are supposed by discourse ethics. Without doing so, we miss out on or confuse a number of very important elements of post-modern cosmopolitanism. For example, without discussing the way that reasons rely on three *different* kinds of validity claims, it is difficult to see how reasons given in a communicative context would differ in any important respect from reasons given in an instrumental one.

Furthermore, without going into detail regarding the nature of potential reasons, we fail to emphasise the difference between normative and factual content, which is necessary in order for concepts like 'fundamental goals' to make sense. Fundamental goals, values, and other normative claims need to be strictly differentiated from factual content in order to avoid folding everything back into a universal framework that claims to derive evaluative propositions from descriptive ones. Understanding the nature of valid reasons as consisting of three different components, and in particular strictly disengaging values from facts, allows us to maintain that there is no one way of life that is objectively that best for everyone.<sup>1</sup>

A better understanding of what we mean by 'valid reason,' also allows us to understand what we *do* have in common, and provides us with tools for critiquing the beliefs of

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<sup>1</sup> (Parekh 1999, 128)



others, even when we do not share their values. Once again, this is made possible by separating descriptive from evaluative claims, though in the case the emphasis is on the factual rather than the normative.

Understanding the third kind of valid reason – the affective – as distinct from the descriptive and evaluative makes it possible to ground the post-modern cosmopolitan approach in real-world practice, relate it to real-world situations, and allow it to involve the personal concerns of real-world individuals. By allowing for people's assertions regarding their affective response to situations to be morally relevant it prevents us from abstracting problems entirely out of their context.

So, without a strong comprehension of the nature of reasons – in particular, the fact that reasons come in three different kinds – we are unable to properly maintain our distinction from either the universalist or the relativist approach, we cannot distinguish between instrumental and communicative action, and we are also forced to abstract from real-world situations so that discourse becomes formalised to an extent that makes it impractical as a means of resolving everyday concerns.

It should also be reiterated here that the use of the word 'reason' is in line with the common, day-to-day usage of word; that is, it means 'justification,' rather than the more technical usage relating to the use of reason and logic. Hence, to say 'rational reason' is not a redundancy, as it refers to a justification that is rational, rather than a rational use of reason.

## GOOD REASONS

It is necessary to define a *good* or *rational* reason (again, 'reason' here should be understood as a justification for action given inside the context of discourse) independently from the agreements people make when they utilise reasons to engage in discourse and reach understanding. If we said that a good reason is defined merely as a justification that people accept, then we are forced to say that understanding is the agreement reached through the exchange of rational reasons, and a rational reason is defined as the arguments used to successfully reach an agreement. Obviously, defining a legitimate reason in this way is circular, and it leaves us in the unfortunate position where we have to say that a reason counts as rational when someone accepts it, and irrational when someone does not. This leaves the rationality or irrationality of a reason

entirely up to the response of the person to whom it is addressed, and makes it impossible for us to say that the *failure* to accept or respond to certain kinds of reasons constitutes an irrational act. I do not think that we really want to say that a rational reason is one tailored to achieve acceptance, regardless of the attitude of those accepting it.

We also need to defend to be able to explain what moral judgements are without assimilating them into statements about the external world, which would make our theory naturalistic, or relate them back to statements about the preferences of individuals, which would make our approach emotivistic.<sup>1</sup> Naturalism would entail a universalistic outlook, in the worst possible sense, and emotivism would necessitate a relativistic approach. However, these two approaches gesture at the approach taken by Habermas and discourse ethicists. In the context of discourse ethics, in order for us to define a good reason in a non-circular way, without being a naturalist or emotivist, we need to break good reasons into four different kinds, three of which will be discussed here. For Habermas, an acceptable speech act is one that raises defensible validity claims of at least one of four varieties: truth, normative validity, truthfulness or sincerity, and intelligibility.<sup>2</sup> A rational reason is one that speaks to one of these four claims.

The fourth of these claims, intelligibility, refers to the way that a reason is expressed, in terms of using appropriate grammar, vocabulary, and so on, in order for it to be intelligible to the person to whom it is addressed. Obviously, if a reason is stated in a way that, due to the misuse of language, does not actually makes sense in terms of its grammatical structure, or if it does not use known vocabulary, it can hardly be considered acceptable. Because this is such a straightforward point, I will not say any more on it, although in the context of inter-cultural moral discussion it does hint at the importance that being bi- or multi-lingual might have for a discourse ethics-mediated world.

The other three kinds of claims are differentiated in terms of the three different 'worlds' that they inhabit. Speech acts can make reference to, represent, or presuppose states of affairs, causal relationships or events, in which case the speaker refers to something in the *objective* world. They can also refer to the world or legitimately ordered social interaction, in which case they serve to produce or renew interpersonal relations. In this

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<sup>1</sup> Seyla Benhabib, "Liberal Dialogue Versus a Critical Theory of Discursive Legitimation," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 150

<sup>2</sup> (Braaten 1991, 60)

case, the speaker refers to something in the *social* or *inter-subjective* world. Finally, they can express individuals' lived experience and to present affective information to which the speaker has privileged access, in which case they are referring to something in the *subjective* world.<sup>1</sup>

In short, we have three different worlds: the objective, subjective, and inter-subjective, and these three worlds are what we rely on for defining rational reasons in a non-circular way. Each world has different justificatory criteria, and so the reasons that are generated within them are used differently in discourse. Nevertheless, in everyday moral discussion people rest their arguments on propositional knowledge, shared understandings of normative appropriateness, and on mutual trust;<sup>2</sup> that is, on truth, rightness, and truthfulness.

In order for us to have the possibility of reaching agreement, we need to put the conditions in place that allow us to understand reasons as rational. Separating statements into these three categories allows us to do this.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the ability to understand how we can agree rests on understanding what it means to put forward rational justifications, and the concept of the three worlds helps us to define reasons in a non-circular way within the context of discourse ethics.

## THE OBJECTIVE WORLD

Due to the important work of post-modern and post-structuralist theorists, it may seem as though the objective world is no longer reliably objective.<sup>4</sup> After all, it is generally conceded that language and reality are inextricably connected. Because facts are unable to be explained without using factual statements, and because we can only dispute the truth of such statements through the use of *other* statements, we cannot "step outside the circle of language."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, c1990), 136

<sup>2</sup> (Habermas 1990b, 136)

<sup>3</sup> Kimberly Hutchings and Kimberley Hutchings, "Toward a Feminist International Ethics," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 26, How Might We Live? Global Ethics in a New Century (Dec., 2000), 122

<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Existence and Being*, (London: Vision, 1949), 295

<sup>5</sup> (Habermas 2003, 249)

However, even accepting this, the objective world is still sufficiently objective for our purposes. Regardless of the fact that our *descriptions* of the world have a contingent or subjective element, we all share the same objective world within which we attempt to reach an understanding.<sup>1</sup> According to Habermas, saying that the world is 'objective' is saying that it is 'given' to us, and is the same for everyone. Linguistic practice, and particularly singular terms, forces us to presuppose a shared objective world.<sup>2</sup> After all, "facts owe their facticity to their being rooted in a world of objects (about which we state facts) that exist independently of our descriptions of them."<sup>3</sup> Additionally, all languages differentiate between things that are true, and things that we believe to be true. Hence, the "supposition of a shared objective world is inherent in all linguistic usage."<sup>4</sup>

For discourse ethics, things that exist in the objective world *can* be represented in true statements, even if we interpret facts in a language that is our own. While we impose our language on the world, it does not work the other way around; the world does not speak to us, it does not impose its own language on us, and "it 'responds' only in a figurative sense."<sup>5</sup> We can define the objective world, then, as all the things that are not made by beings capable of action and speech through communication and that are available to all.<sup>6</sup> We can refer to things by different descriptions, but even so we are able to understand that we refer to the *same* object, even if we differ in our descriptions of it. Due to this, we have to accept the fact that the way the world is not determined by us and our perception of it, and also that the world is the *same* for all of us.<sup>7</sup>

When we say that something is 'true,' we are saying that it represents an actual state of affairs in the world, and this state of affairs is potentially able to be confirmed by every individual independently. Additionally, 'truth' refers to knowledge gained by the application of the scientific method,<sup>8</sup> as it is through this method that we can generate the strongest and, most importantly, most reliably independently verifiable knowledge of the objective world. In short, we can determine truth by actually *looking* and seeing

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<sup>1</sup> (Ibid., 89)

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> (Ibid., 257)

<sup>4</sup> (Brand 1990, 119)

<sup>5</sup> (Habermas 2003, 90)

<sup>6</sup> (Ibid., 254)

<sup>7</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>8</sup> P. Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," in *Understanding and social inquiry*, ed. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy (Notre Dame, Ind. : University of Notre Dame Press, c1977), 82

for ourselves. Due to this, when dealing with facts in the objective world, it could be argued that the position of Habermas, as well as that of post-modern cosmopolitanism, is closest to the 'correspondence' theory of truth.<sup>1</sup> This is, admittedly, a contestable interpretation of the meaning of 'truth,' and there are certainly various schools of philosophical thought that would disagree. However, the question of truth is a large topic in and of itself, and so for the purposes of this paper I will leave aside this question.

'Truth' in the objective world needs a different means of justification than purely moral discourse. For example, although cultures may differ in their interpretations of the objective world, we cannot resolve these differences of opinion by engaging with each other in discourse. If we do, then we are forced to say that, while some "hold that the earth is a disc, others that it is a sphere, or that it is a turkey,"<sup>2</sup> and that even though the second view is undoubtedly correct, we cannot guarantee that the fact that the earth is a sphere will actually be confirmed by discourse between these three groups. Few would be comfortable accepting the proposition that objective truth, such as the nature of the earth, rests solely on the baseless opinions and preferences of individuals or groups.

Therefore, despite the fact that we have spent, and will spend, a great deal more time discussing norms and the inter-subjective world than facts and truth, the importance of the objective world to post-modern cosmopolitans should not be underestimated. If the objective world is shared by all, regardless of cultural or social membership, this provides a potent tool for helping people to engage with each other. By presupposing the existence of this world, individuals in different societies can agree about a single truth. Where moral claims rely on descriptive premises as well as evaluative ones, this allows members of one culture to criticise the actions of another, providing reasons that are acceptable for all.

For example, imagine that a group tried to restrict the right to govern the actions of global institutions, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, to developed, predominantly white countries only. If they attempted to justify doing so by arguing that non-whites were not intelligent enough to participate in global decision-making, then, even if we were to accept that a lack of intelligence is an adequate justification for the exclusion of groups from participation in the governing of the

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Craig (General ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* v. 9, (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 472

<sup>2</sup> (Habermas 1984, 22)

organisation, we could have this norm overturned by demonstrating that non-whites are not, in fact, less intelligent than whites.

As Margaret Urban Walker argues, unjust or brutal social orders such as the above one are very often supported by factually disconfirmable beliefs, and we can oppose them by pointing out that the factual beliefs such orders are based on are not actually true.<sup>1</sup> If someone then refused to accept or respond to a factual criticism of a norm that required certain states of affairs in the world to be true in order for it to be valid, then we can reasonably say that such a person is acting irrationally. In fact, inasmuch as they are refusing to justify their position with reasons, they are refusing to engage in discourse. To that extent we may even be justified in calling actively immoral the denial of factual states of affairs, or the continuing, groundless belief in certain factual states of affairs when those states of affairs have been problematised by someone affected by norms derived from them.

However, while Walker is certainly correct that there are many situations where norms and values mistakenly rely on incorrect truths about the objective world, and that we can criticise others in this kind of situation by disputing the factual accuracy of certain claims, there are also many situations in which norms do *not* rest on claims of truth. For example, a discussion about the rightness of capital punishment could revolve around a dialogue about the appropriateness of killing to protect innocent life. This discussion does not have to involve questions of fact. Therefore we need to acknowledge that when we try to reach understanding with others we need to take up relations to more than just the objective world, unlike approaches that are based on instrumental/strategic reason only would suggest.<sup>2</sup>

## THE SUBJECTIVE WORLD

The subjective world deals with the internal states of individuals, and their aesthetic-expressive assertions. Rather than attempting to find objective 'truth,' however, the subjective world seeks 'truthfulness.' The subjective world deals with things that are real, and so, like in the objective world, does not justify its claims by inter-subjective agreement. However, unlike truth it does not deal with things that are available to all.

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<sup>1</sup> (Walker 2007, 239)

<sup>2</sup> (Habermas 1984, 84)

Internal states are perceptible only to those who 'own' them. It does not matter whether or to what degree we share a social context with someone, or whether or not there is a shared objective world; their internal states are not open to us to perceive directly. So, we need to ask how we can know that internal states even exist, and how we can substantiate that they are what individuals assert them to be. In doing so, we can discover what counts as 'rational' when it comes to internal state-related claims, and what role such claims might play in discourse ethics.

It is clear that individuals do not 'have' desires or feelings in the same way that an object 'has' weight, colour, size, and so on.<sup>1</sup> However, does this mean that either: a) internal states, being immeasurable, do not exist, or b) that even if they do, they can play no role in discourse? I argue that internal states exist, and that they *do* play a role in moral justification. Even though we cannot perceive internal states, we can say that we 'have' desires and feelings in the sense that we can express them to others, and if those others trust our expression they then attribute to us the desires or feelings that we have expressed.<sup>2</sup>

So, rather than raising claims about truth, the discussion of internal states raises 'sincerity' or 'expressive-aesthetic' claims. The two kinds of claims are slightly different, and so should be looked at separately. Firstly, a sincerity claim is a claim that one has spoken honestly.<sup>3</sup> However, this begs the question of how we can know whether someone has expressed themselves honestly. In short, we can tell by how consistent their behaviour is with their professed desires or feelings. It is this consistency that can be discussed in argument.<sup>4</sup>

For example, a person with a pork-hating spouse, and who claims to care about this spouse, would not regularly serve pork for dinner if they could avoid doing so. Even though we have no way to directly see whether or not the person has the internal state of caring for their spouse, we can match their actions to their assertions. If the spouse regularly serves pork, we would have good reason to think that their assertion that they care about their partner is a dishonest, untruthful one. On the other hand, if they do *not* serve pork, and in other ways act in a manner consistent with caring about their spouse, we have grounds to think that they *do*, in fact, have the internal state that they claim to;

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<sup>1</sup> (Ibid., 91)

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> (Braaten 1991, 34)

<sup>4</sup> (Brand 1990, 28)

that their assertion was a truthful one.<sup>1</sup> So, in the context of sincerity claims, we can call someone rational if they make known their desire, intention, feelings, mood, and so on, and then can then “reassure critics in regard to the revealed experience by drawing practical consequences from it and behaving consistently thereafter.”<sup>2</sup>

A slightly different way of justifying a subjective claim is the expressive-aesthetic. Unlike sincerity claims, which are validated by matching the consistency of a person's actions and expressions, expressive-aesthetic claims are validated by simply providing reasons that relate to qualities possessed by the things we enjoy. It may seem strange to suggest that we can be considered irrational due to our aesthetic preferences, but in practice this is not quite so odd. For example, we might say that wanting to eat a dangerously hot curry is irrational, because we expect a further reason for someone wanting something like of that nature. If the person who wants such a curry is unable to provide a further reason, then we would consider them an irrational person. However, if they explained to us that they want the dangerously hot curry because they like the feeling of numbness it creates in their face, we might think of them as strange, but no longer irrational. The specifying of a quality that they like about the object is sufficient to rationally justify their desires.<sup>3</sup> It is not important that it is a reason that *we* would give; it is enough that it is a reason that refers to a particular quality of the desired object. We can then understand *why* someone wants something, even without wanting that thing ourselves.

So, there are two ways of validating claims in the subjective world: the consistency of action and utterance, and being able to identify a quality that explains our desires or preferences. Both cases are tied together, however, by the understanding that being unable to account for our actions to others suggests that we have not acted reasonably.<sup>4</sup>

An example of a claim relating to the subjective world could be a claustrophobic student asking their university to hold their tutorials in a different room, due to the fact that the current room makes them uncomfortable. We would assess this kind of claim in two ways: firstly we could see if the person's behaviour in other situations is in line with their claim of being claustrophobic, though we may have no reason to doubt their word and so may not do so in practice. Secondly, we might ask the person to explain what it is

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<sup>1</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> (Habermas 1984, 15)

<sup>3</sup> Richard Norman, *Reasons for actions: a critique of utilitarian rationality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 63-64

<sup>4</sup> (Habermas 2003, 93)



about the current room that they have an issue with, to which they might reply, for example, that the lack of windows causes them to feel shut in.

The subjective world and its justificatory claims raise some difficult questions, however. In particular, the effects of social and cultural contexts on internal states should not be underestimated. There are three possible ways in which this can occur. Our social context can: 1) affect the way that we interpret consistency, which is to say how we decide which actions are consistent with which internal states; 2) influence the formation of our internal states themselves; and 3) decide which wants are particularly in need of further justification.

These three problems are particularly acute for situations of moral exchange between people from very different societies, where individuals have their needs formed and their interpretory frameworks constructed in very different contexts. However, there are a number of responses one can make to this. Firstly, while the range of human societies is extremely diverse, it is not infinite. We may have different ways of life, but ultimately we have a shared 'form' of life: some needs and desires we possess are rooted in our anthropology, such as "physical integrity and health, freedom of movement, and protection against betrayal, insult and loneliness."<sup>1</sup> These are things that we can take for granted, and that seem to exist in all cultures. Almost everyone would recognise, for example, a desire for physical integrity. Hence, there is *relative* but not *absolute* difference between the internal worlds of individuals from different societies.

Secondly, if the way people act to express certain internal states is culturally-dependent, the consistency between action and utterance is interpretable with knowledge of that social/cultural context. Understanding a speaker and knowing whether their behaviour is consistent with their avowed internal states may require that we familiarise ourselves with contexts that are an important part of their identity, such as their race, gender, or cultural milieu.<sup>2</sup> Post-modern cosmopolitans argue that we can reasonably ask individuals to learn about the culture of those with whom they interact. This process may be easy or difficult in particular cases, and it may be successful sometimes, and unsuccessful at other times, but it is at least not impossible in principle.

Thirdly, as we will discuss later in this chapter, the application of the post-modern cosmopolitan approach *already* requires us to make an effort to understand the culture

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<sup>1</sup> (Ibid., 268)

<sup>2</sup> (Braaten 1991, 67)

of others in order for us to successfully engage in the cosmopolitan conversation. The more cultures and societies we are familiar with, and the more perspectives we are confronted with, the more able we will be at understanding others' motivations.<sup>1</sup> For the post-modern cosmopolitan, being asked to understand the social context within which others express and interpret internal states is not being asked to do anything in addition to what we should already be doing.

Knowledge of others' social context for the purpose of making sense of their sincerity and expressive-aesthetic claims should not be seen as merely a bonus. Not only is the ability to successfully judge others' claims of internal states necessary to assess any speech acts that rely on things in the subjective world for their substantiation, but it is also necessary to prevent us from imposing our interpretations on others. For example, the act of putting ourselves in the place of others often mistakenly involves putting ourselves, with our own particular experiences and privileges, in the place that we imagine others to be. As Young argues, "when privileged people put themselves in the position of those who are less privileged, the assumptions derived from their privilege often allow them unknowingly to misrepresent the others' situation."<sup>2</sup> We should avoid self-interested misinterpretation of other's contexts at all costs. When, for example, the privileged put themselves in the place of the less privileged, too often they "carry projections and fantasies through which the privileged reinforce a complementary image of themselves."<sup>3</sup> This same problem can occur between cultures, genders, sexualities, and across many other kinds of difference. If this process occurs, rather than a true, sympathetic understanding, we would be forced to say that those making the falsifying projections are failing to engage suitably with others, and it could be said that they are not acting rationally in doing so.

However, as with the objective world, only some moral questions rest on sincerity or expressive-aesthetic claims. Hence, we need to look at the third and most important world to capture the full range of justificatory claims.

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<sup>1</sup> Iris Marion Young, "Comments on Seyla Benhabib, Situating the Self," *New German Critique*, No. 62 (Spring – Summer, 1994), 166

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid., 171)

<sup>3</sup> (Ibid.)

## THE INTER-SUBJECTIVE WORLD

The inter-subjective world, the world of norms and values, is very different from both the subjective and objective worlds. With the objective world, we deal with things 'out there,' but with the inter-subjective, we judge the *worthiness of recognition* of a norm or value.<sup>1</sup> With the subjective world we at least suppose that internal states truly exist, even if we're only ever party to our own. However, the contents of the inter-subjective world only exist because we agree that they do; they are outside of any particular individual, while at the same time only existing because we are there to give them being. In short, norms and values do not exist independently of us determining, through discourse, that they are worthy of being recognised.<sup>2</sup>

The other big difference between the inter-subjective world and the objective and subjective ones is that the inter-subjective world is restricted to the world-view of a particular society – what Habermas calls a 'lifeworld.' According to Habermas, “in everyday life we start from a background consensus pertaining to those interpretations taken for granted among participants.”<sup>3</sup> It is this background consensus that forms the lifeworld, and the inter-subjective sphere, and this means that claims as to the moral validity of a norm or value, unlike claims of the truth of a state of affairs, have nothing to do with the objective world of objects and causal relations. Instead, the reference to an external world or to an internal world is replaced by “an orientation toward extending the borders of the social community and its consensus about values.”<sup>4</sup>

Rather than accepting that the realm of norms and values is arbitrary, or only justifiable if connected ultimately to something in the world (an 'ought' from an 'is'), discourse ethics allows us to make norms and values alone a subject of rational discourse.<sup>5</sup> According to discourse ethics, a norm or value is rational if it can be justified in terms of other norms or values that exist within a given lifeworld. In this regard, as we discussed in the previous chapter, what is important is the consistency between a norm or value and the norm or value from which it is supposedly derived, as well as its consistency with other values held by individuals within a particular lifeworld. For example, if someone were to argue that music piracy was morally acceptable, while also believing that theft is wrong, another individual could try to establish that music piracy is a case of

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<sup>1</sup> (Habermas 2003, 257-258)

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid., 258)

<sup>3</sup> (Habermas 1991, 3)

<sup>4</sup> (Habermas 2003, 257)

<sup>5</sup> (Brand 1990, 10)

theft. If they were successful in doing so, then they would have shown that it is inconsistent to believe both that music piracy is acceptable *and* that theft is wrong. Those who support both positions are then expected to be either persuaded by the argument and change their opinion on the issue, or to provide further reasons why both norms can be held simultaneously, without contradiction (such as that theft is only wrong if it causes certain outcomes, such as a loss to the victim).

Usually we raise normative validity claims in our everyday interactions only indirectly. For example, if I wanted to pass someone in the street and I politely asked them to move aside so I can do so, I would be indirectly raising a claim that it is appropriate to ask others to make space in public causeways, or that making requests of people we have not met is acceptable.<sup>1</sup> If the person in front of me refuses to move, then they have challenged this norm, the norm in question is made explicit, and those involved enter into practical discourse.

In practical discourse, claims regarding values and norms that until this point had operated as unquestioned points of orientation in our everyday interactions are “thematized and made problematic.”<sup>2</sup> When this occurs, participants are expected to then take a hypothetical attitude towards the norm, and the validity of the norm is temporarily suspended during the process of discourse,<sup>3</sup> where the participants engage in a discussion with all involved trying to prove or disprove that the norm in question is or is not a valid and consistent part of their lifeworld.

An example of a moral question that rests on inter-subjective validity could be the norm in many Asian societies that parents should live with their eldest son in old age, and that their daughter-in-law should care for them.<sup>4</sup> This norm is supposedly derived from the value of filial piety. When increasingly individualistic daughter-in-laws object to this arrangement, however, the validity of this norm is problematised. The parents, daughter-in-law, and son then enter into discourse about this norm, and can hopefully ultimately come to an understanding about it by appealing to norms shared by all. For example, the daughter-in-law could show that this norm effectively amounts to a form of

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<sup>1</sup> (Braaten 1991, 31)

<sup>2</sup> (Habermas 1990b, 125)

<sup>3</sup> (Ibid.)

<sup>4</sup> Pei-Chia Lan, “Among women: migrant domestics and their Taiwanese employers across generations,” in *Global Woman: nannies, maids, and sex workers in the new economy*, ed. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 169

non-consensual servitude, and if all three parties agree that non-consensual servitude is wrong, then the norm must be changed.

Disputing the norm requiring daughter-in-laws to care for their parents-in-law in their old age does not mean necessarily that the norm will have to be abandoned entirely. For example, all three groups could agree that the norm amounts to non-consensual servitude when daughters-in-law are obliged to shoulder the responsibility alone, regardless of circumstance. If, for instance, the parties could agree to a flexible arrangement whereby the son, as well as the elderly parent's other children, are also expected to assist in care, or if the children are expected to provide financial aid enabling the parents to live independently of the daughter-in-law's care, or if the daughter-in-law's care is seen as a gift, rather than an obligation, both the norm of filial piety and the norm against non-consensual servitude can continue to be held, so long as all parties are brought to agree to this interpretation. Whatever the final agreement ends up being, what is important here is that all three groups can come to an understanding about the situation by reference to norms shared by all parties.

On the other hand, if the parents-in-law in this situation agree that the obligation for the daughter-in-law to care for them *does* constitute non-consensual servitude, and they agree that this is wrong, yet they continue to insist on the validity of the original norm, then they are acting irrationally. Similarly, if they are shown that the norm equates to non-consensual servitude, but they refuse to accept this out of self-interest, and refuse to provide a response to this assertion, or provide only an inadequate one, or use their authority to shut down the discussion before understanding can be reached, then they can be accused of irrationality. Finally, if they claim to not agree that non-consensual servitude is wrong, yet their attitudes to other examples of non-consensual servitude or their actions in other situations belie this, they are also acting irrationally. Thus, we are able to differentiate between a rational and irrational response, and see how norms can be justified, contested, and discussed within a particular lifeworld.

### THREE WORLDS COLLIDE

The concept of the three worlds means that different kinds of statements are justified, or 'grounded', in different ways. The type of statement that is being discussed at any given time depends on the particular variety of objection raised by an individual when they problematise a speech act. These objections can only be of one kind at any given time –

that is, we cannot object to a speech act's relation to the objective world and the subjective world at one and the same time, as the difference in grounding the two types means that they need to be treated as separate questions (though, of course, there is no issue with objecting on more than one basis, so long as these different claims are discussed and addressed separately).

Each of the three worlds require different means of substantiation. When we 'ground' descriptive statements we establish that a state of affairs truly exists; when we do so for normative and evaluative statements, we attempt to establish the acceptability of particular actions, or establish the preferability of values; lastly, grounding expressive statements establishes the honesty of self-presentations.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, though each world is separate, in the sense that statements relating to them must be substantiated in entirely different ways for them to be considered rational, in practice statements that we make typically contain all three kinds of claims. For instance, if I request that you pick me up some milk at the supermarket while you are out, this request presupposes a norm that, given our relationship, this is an acceptable request to make. It also presuppose that certain things exist in the world, such as that there is a supermarket that contains bottles of milk, and that this supermarket is sufficiently close that my request is covered under the norm of appropriate requests, given our relationship. Lastly, it supposes that I am making a genuine request, and I am sincerely expressing my needs and wants.<sup>2</sup>

My request can be objected to on any one of these grounds, and if it is then we will enter into discourse and exchange appropriate reasons. Thus, if a hearer rejects the acceptability of a speech act on the grounds of sincerity, truth, normative correctness, or intelligibility, we have a means for rationally resolving this disagreement. For example, in response to my request that you buy me some milk from the supermarket, you might reply that I am not sincere in my request for milk, and that I am trying to get you out of the house for reasons I am not articulating; or, you could say that our relationship is not such that buying milk is an appropriate request for me to make of you; or, you could point out that there is no supermarket nearby where you can buy milk. Whichever claim is raised, we then discuss that in discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> (Habermas 1984, 39)

<sup>2</sup> (Braaten 1991, 61)

If we are discussing the sincerity of my request, I might reply that I *am* sincere, as I was planning to cook something with milk for dinner, as evidenced by the other ingredients I have taken out of the refrigerator. If we are talking about the appropriateness of the request, I might point out that it is generally accepted that being flatmates entails the responsibility to respond to small requests involving flat-related issues, of which this is one. Finally, regarding the absence of a nearby supermarket, I could point out that a new supermarket has recently opened nearby. This exchange of reasons continues until one or the other party, or both parties, are persuaded to change their position.

The possibility of resolving disagreements in this way, and the existence of the three worlds, relies on the idea that there *are* different kinds of reason, and hence different kinds of justification required for different kinds of statements. If there were only one kind of reason – instrumental reason – then we would be left with only one world; the objective one. Habermas argues that this reference system is presupposed by the communication process, and by breaking things up in this way we can come to know “what there can possibly be understanding about *at all*.”<sup>1</sup> In doing this, we provide ourselves with tools for resolving disagreements between individuals or groups.

By understanding the different ways we can problematise statements, and how it is appropriate to justify them, we can come to know a number of important things about the post-modern cosmopolitan approach. Firstly, by disconnecting normative claims from claims of fact, we avoid ultimately assimilating morality into the natural world, as well as the tricky problem of deriving an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’. Similarly, by separating the inter-subjective and subjective spheres, we prevent the post-modern cosmopolitan approach falling into emotivism, and hence extreme relativism.

Secondly, understanding the concept of the three worlds means that we can make sense of the exhortation that we should persuade each other with reasons in discourse. Without this concept, we cannot really know what counts as a good reason and what counts as a poor one. Additionally, we certainly cannot differentiate the communicative from the instrumental approach, as if we do not discriminate between the different worlds morality becomes a matter of sheer instrumental efficiency, and the ideas of discourse and communicative action are lost, along with the principles of discourse and fundamental goals.

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<sup>1</sup> (Habermas 1984, 84)

Finally, and most importantly for the next chapter, by separating out the three spheres of justification we also separate the various grounds on which we can criticise each other. By criticising different things in different ways, we make it possible to critique other cultures without lapsing into universalism, and defend our situated forms of belief without becoming relativists.

However, discourse ethics, communicative action and the idea of the three different kinds of validity claim, on their own, do not make post-modern cosmopolitan inter-society moral discussion possible. They are tools upon which we can build a post-modern cosmopolitan approach, but the fact that questions of norms and values can only properly be discussed between individuals who share the same lifeworld means that discourse ethics, as it stands, is not sufficient for our purposes; we need an approach that can discuss normative claims *across* lifeworlds. Hence, the final chapter looks at the ways in which discourse ethics can be made into a distinct post-modern cosmopolitan theory. Doing so will allow us to create an approach with which we can discuss difficult conflicts, such as those caused by climate change, globalisation, or culture-clashes between immigrant communities and the dominant cultures of their new homes. In short, conflicts between those who may share few norms and values, if any.



## **CHAPTER 4: POST-MODERN COSMOPOLITANISM & THE COSMOPOLITAN CONVERSATION**

In this chapter I outline how the cosmopolitan conversation actually functions. In particular, I show that discourse ethics, as proposed by Habermas, is insufficient when we ask it to operate between lifeworlds. I outline the differences between the Habermasian approach and the approach used by post-modern cosmopolitans, which I differentiate by calling the cosmopolitan conversation. The cosmopolitan conversation, I argue, overcomes the difficulties faced by Habermasian discourse ethics when it comes to inter-cultural discourse. In short, the purpose of this chapter will be to differentiate post-modern cosmopolitanism from traditional approaches to discourse ethics.

### **INTER-CULTURAL DIALOGUE**

So far we have established that we can resolve differences of opinion by relying on a form of argument using reasons, which we call 'discourse.' In an argument, all available and relevant information, evidence and suggestions are supposed to be brought into the discourse, and the best arguments should always come out on top.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the content of an argument is restricted to reasons or arguments that are connected with the validity claim that has been problematised as discourse begins.<sup>2</sup>

What counts as an appropriate, legitimate reason depends on the kind of validity claim at issue, but actors affected by a particular norm or action are expected to measure each speech act against the fit between it and the three worlds of truth, rightness and sincerity. Each of these three worlds has a different character. The objective world is shared between us, and hence we can all appeal to things in the world to resolve differences that rely on certain facts obtaining or not. The contents of the subjective world are directly available only to individuals to whom they 'belong'. However, when individuals express their subjective world, we are able to infer its contents, so long as we have a sufficiently accurate interpretive framework. By looking for consistency between expressions and actions, both of which are things in the world, the contents of the subjective world are potentially, at least to an extent, indirectly available to us all.

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<sup>1</sup> (Habermas 2003, 269)

<sup>2</sup> (Habermas 1984, 18)

Lastly, we have the inter-subjective world, which is composed of all the shared norms and values that individuals of a society hold (even if there are significant differences of opinion). We utilise the inter-subjective world by finding values that we share, and then showing how our position is more consistent with those values than competing ones.

However, while the contents of the inter-subjective world are shared, their usefulness for discourse is restricted only to those sharing a particular lifeworld, or society. The operation of practical reason regarding the inter-subjective realm presupposes that the participants have a shared preunderstanding. This preunderstanding is not necessarily "at their disposal but constitutes and at the same time circumscribes the domain of the thematized validity claims."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, while neither the subjective nor objective worlds deal with norms or values directly, the inter-subjective world operates in a way that allows us to resolve issues involving norms with others in the same lifeworld, and hence is extremely important.

The question we set out with, unfortunately, was not how we could resolve issues between members of the same society, but between individuals from different ones; it was not about relations between those who share values, but between those who do not. Hence, we need to extend discourse ethics in a way that allows us to do this. There are two ways of doing this: the Habermasian method, or that of post-modern cosmopolitanism, through the 'cosmopolitan conversation'.

One clear difference between the Habermasian and post-modern cosmopolitan methods is that when Habermas recommends that we treat norms hypothetically in practical discourse, he intends that we abstract from our particular situations and discuss not whether a norm should be observed in this specific case, nor whether it should be observed in like cases involving the individuals or groups involved in discourse at that particular time. Rather, he asks us to discuss whether the norm should be applied *generally*, to all people.

In asking us to only assent to a norm that we could agree to when it is applied generally, a principle Habermas refers to as '(U)', he is *not* suggesting that we entirely abstract ourselves from our particular situations, as John Rawls does with his veil of ignorance. Rather, he is saying that, by the very act of asserting the validity of a norm, we *must* believe that it is universally applicable. We cannot believe that a norm or value is both valid and non-universal at the same time. According to Habermas, normative validity

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<sup>1</sup> (Ibid., 42)

claims “inherently possess universal scope.” He argues that “the universal scope of normative validity claims is entailed by the content of the norms that make communication possible: the norms of communicative rationality.”<sup>1</sup> Hence, (U), for Habermas, is a principle of discourse, implied by the nature of communication itself, just like *egalitarian reciprocity* and *universal respect*.

If we expect individuals to agree to a norm only if they can agree that it is applicable generally, then when we engage in discourse we are addressing not only the individuals with whom we're engaged with, but a universal audience.<sup>2</sup> In a context where we differentiate between instrumental and communicative rationality, this makes a good deal of sense. That is, if we assert that a norm is right, we must believe so ourselves. If not, we must only be asserting it in order to convince someone to act in a way that we desire them to; hence, we are acting strategically, not communicatively. To be acting communicatively we must be attempting to reach understanding, and if we do not believe the grounds of our supposed understanding, it cannot really be understanding at all.

Similarly, if I assert a norm towards a particular rather than universal audience, this can only be because I am attempting to influence the behaviour of that audience in a strategic way. If I believed in the rightness of the norm that I am asserting, I would also believe that it is universally applicable, and hence able to be addressed to a universal audience. In short, tailoring reasons to specific contexts, while saying that those reasons are not applicable generally, suggests that I am being disingenuous, and hence strategic, in my actions.

One of the consequences of (U) is that understanding entails that those participating not just agree on the norm in question, but also on the reasons for that norm being right. According to Habermas “consensus brought about through argument must rest on *identical* reasons that are able to convince the parties in the same way.”<sup>3</sup> If individuals provided different reasons for a norm being valid, Habermas suggests, this would mean that those involved were not addressing a universal audience.

Habermas wants to say that understanding is more than just a compromise; discourse is not just about finding solutions that *work*, a solution that people can agree on, but is also

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<sup>1</sup> (Braaten 1991, 30-31)

<sup>2</sup> (Habermas 1984, 26)

<sup>3</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 411

about reaching agreement about the rightness of a state of affairs. If this were not the case, we would not need to exchange reasons; we would merely need to bargain or negotiate, rather than discuss. Bargaining and negotiating, however, are typically strategic, not communicative, exercises. That is, if we are only or primarily interested in the *success* of our actions, then we are necessarily going to be trying to influence our opponent's decisions and motives in a strategic manner. Whether or not we are successful in our exchange will depend only on the degree to which our egocentric utility calculations mesh.<sup>1</sup> The very idea of compromise assumes a model of individuals attempting to maximise their preferences as best they can, which is the quintessentially instrumental way of thinking about human interaction.<sup>2</sup>

With this in mind, there are a number of possible ways to interpret Habermas if we intend to apply discourse ethics to inter-lifeworld relations. One interpretation is that, due to the fact that we share the rules of discourse, we all *must* share the same lifeworld, at least to enough of an extent that we can engage in practical discourse. The rules of discourse form the shared content of a shared lifeworld. However, this would mean that at least *some* substantive moral content is necessarily implied by the rules of discourse, and it is this that constitutes our shared lifeworld. That is, we would all treat the principles of discourse as substantive and derive further substantive moral content from the principles themselves.

A second possibility is that some norms and values have a source outside the inter-subjective realm. That is, they are derivable from either facts in the objective world, or we share a capacity for a transcendental, shared reason that causes us to all have similar internal states, and norms can be derived somehow from these. Because these norms are derivable from either something in the objective world, which is available to and shared by everyone by definition, or we derive them from a shared, transcendental kind of internal state in the subjective world, at least some norms and values will be in common between all people. As such, we would share enough of a lifeworld to successfully engage in moral discourse across cultural boundaries.

However, the first and second options are quite straightforwardly universalistic. They create exactly the kind of problems that we began to use discourse ethics to avoid in the first place. For example, if we ultimately derive substantive values from the rules of discourse, this suggests that there is, fundamentally, only one proper set of consistent

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<sup>1</sup> (Habermas 1990b, 133)

<sup>2</sup> (Benhabib 2002, 144)

values. If we are all using the same procedure – reason – and we are all starting from the same place – the rules of discourse – it is difficult to see differences between us as anything but temporary errors that will be repaired once we engage with each other. This applies, too, if we try to derive our fundamental values from the objective world, or transcendental shared experience.

A third alternative is to say that we rely on the values that just happen to be shared between different lifeworlds. After all, it is unlikely in the extreme that, in practice, individuals from two different lifeworlds will fail to share *any* values whatever, even if they share them purely by chance. Despite our different lifeworlds, there is a fair probability that we will have *some* kind of convergence of values, *somewhere*, even if those values come from different places, and we hold them for different reasons. For example, different groups might agree that killing is wrong, even though one group might argue that it is wrong because it causes suffering to the family and friends left behind, while the other opposes it because it takes away someone's freedom to continue living their life the way they choose. The chance that this will occur is further increased by the fact that norms that conflict with the rules of discourse are disallowed, which restricts the range of permissible norms and values.

If we can find values that have converged purely by chance, can we perhaps use those points of convergence to begin discourse? Using Habermas's approach, there are a number of reasons why not. Firstly, the fact that Habermas defines understanding as requiring that we agree on the reasons why we hold a value creates a situation where every time we engage in discourse our lifeworlds will merge to the extent that we reach understanding about anything. That is, if the only way to come to understanding is to share values *and* the reasons for holding that value, then we will either fail to come to agreement, or our lifeworlds will become substantially more similar. By this approach we will ultimately end up sharing the same values, as we will then need to agree on why we agree about the value on which our previous discourse was derived, and then agree on the reason we agree about this, and so on, until our lifeworlds are essentially identical.

Secondly, it is difficult to see how reasons from one lifeworld would make sense in the context of another lifeworld, if the similarity in values is purely by chance. That is, any reasons I give to persuade someone of something may make sense for others within my lifeworld, but will not make sense to those outside it, even if they share *some* values with me. So, if I give reasons for a particular norm, and those reasons are in fact the reasons I

hold, then those reasons are going to be easy to make sense of in the context of the lifeworld of which they are native. However, it is much *less* likely that those reasons are going to fit into the lifeworld of the individual I am addressing in a way that is at all persuasive, if they can even be translated at all.

Thirdly, there is no real way to critique the values of others, or for them to really defend their own values, if we rely only on coincidentally shared values. By this I mean that, once we reach the boundaries of what we agree on, there is no further way to move forward. If someone puts forward a reason that is not found within my lifeworld, there is very little I can do about that. I have absolutely no grounds on which to criticise it, or even comment on it. For example, if someone argued that voting is wrong because it undermines the patron-client relationship between ruling and ruled (and this was in fact the case), and I placed no value on patron-client relationships, the discussion ends there. Conversely, the person putting forward that reason has no way to show me its legitimacy. In short, the exchange breaks down.

The three alternatives outlined above all fail to provide an adequate method for engaging in inter-cultural moral discourse. However, in their failings they do gesture at an approach that *does* allow discourse across lifeworlds. It is this application of this approach that I call the cosmopolitan conversation.

## THE COSMOPOLITAN CONVERSATION

There are three main ways in which the cosmopolitan conversation diverges from discourse ethics as it is propounded by Habermas: universalisation, understanding, and fundamental goals. I will deal with each one in turn.

### UNIVERSALISATION

According to Habermas, when we engage in moral dialogue we abstract from our particular circumstances and attempt to defend a norm as it applies generally; we assume that any norm we discuss has universal scope. On this face of it this seems reasonable. Certainly, it is important for people to take a critical distance from “their

own immediate desires and gut reactions”<sup>1</sup> in order to discuss moral questions. However, the process of universalisation does more than this; it tries to find the answer to the central question of morality since Plato: how human beings should live *as such*. This way of thinking about ethics has some instinctive attraction to us. We typically think of morality as not “what any group of people is doing in a place at a time, but something that transcends all places and times at which human beings work out ways to live.”<sup>2</sup> It conflicts with our intuitions to say that values, if they are right, are not right for everyone.

This way of thinking is expressed clearly in the hierarchy of moral growth of the psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, a thinker Habermas himself refers to a great deal in his writings. According to Kohlberg, the highest stage of moral development is the ability to create and act upon impartial, universalist principles.<sup>3</sup> For Habermas, too, this is the ideal. However, this impartial, universalistic way of thinking about ethics is not necessarily the only, or even the best, way for us to do so. For one thing this approach can be insensitive to cultural difference. After all, “it is important that any ethical theory recognize that there may be nonuniversal forms of relationship and practices that should not be automatically overridden, in every case, by *prima facie* universal norms.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition, there is some difficulty in implementing such a process of universalisation in practice. For example, universalising a norm fundamentally rests on being able to treat like cases alike. However, it is not at all obvious what a ‘like situation’ would actually be in practice. How do I know what it means for another person to be in a situation that is relevantly similar to mine?<sup>5</sup>

Thirdly, it is not clear that this process of universalisation is even necessarily implied by the nature of discourse, in the same way the *universal respect* and *egalitarian reciprocity* are. Benhabib argues that the principle of universalisability requires significant additional assumptions to be substantiated, and that these assumptions are likely to be unacceptable to at least some. This would violate the principle that the principles of discourse should be accepted by all. Specifically, in order for us to accept (U) as a principle of discourse on the same level as the other two principles, Habermas would have to introduce an assumption that there can never be such a thing as a valid

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<sup>1</sup> (Young 1989, 258)

<sup>2</sup> (Walker 2007, 12-13)

<sup>3</sup> (Hutchings & Hutchings 2000, 113-114)

<sup>4</sup> (Braaten 1991, 36)

<sup>5</sup> (Benhabib 1992, 163)

particularistic moral intuition. However, she says, “those who have such intuitions would surely disagree.”<sup>1</sup>

So what are our alternatives? Feminist philosopher Carol Gilligan argues that, rather than solely utilising the “impartial, universalist approaches more typical of adult men,” the “contextual, relational and empathetic features of moral reasoning, more often displayed by adult women,” are “equally sophisticated and valuable.”<sup>2</sup> For Gilligan, morality seems more related to special obligations and responsibility for consequences situated in a contextual frame of reference, rather than the application of universal principles.<sup>3</sup> Benhabib agrees, suggesting that, rather than treating discourses like “thought-experiments that can be carried out by isolated moral philosophers,” we should instead think of them as “actual processes of moral dialogue among real actors,”<sup>4</sup> where moral agents communicate with each other.<sup>5</sup>

According to Benhabib, we should relate to each other in discourse not as generalised but as concrete others. The idea of the concrete other “describes an open-ended phenomenological perspective, and hence can never be adequately captured by or stated from the standpoint of the theoretical observer.”<sup>6</sup> The concrete other requires the articulation by participants of their standpoint in social situations. So, she suggests that rather than viewing discourses as being between participants who consider each other as ‘generalised others,’ we should understand them as being like ordinary moral conversations where we try to appreciate the concrete others’ point of view.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Benhabib argues that if we do not relate as concrete, rather than generalised, others, we are entirely unable to utilise *any* kind of universalisation procedure, as we “lack the necessary epistemic information to judge my moral situation to be ‘like’ or ‘unlike’ yours.”<sup>8</sup>

This does not mean that we do not discuss moral issues hypothetically; that is, we should still assume an attitude towards moral issues that treats them as dealing with

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<sup>1</sup> (Ibid., 169)

<sup>2</sup> (Hutchings & Hutchings 2000, 113-114)

<sup>3</sup> C. Gilligan and J. M. Murphy, “Moral Development in Late Adolescence and Adulthood: A Critique and Reconstruction of Kohlberg’s Theory,” *Human Development* 23 (1980), 159

<sup>4</sup> Seyla Benhabib, “The Utopian Dimension,” *New German Critique*, No. 35 – Special Issue on Jurgen Habermas (Spring-Summer 1985), 88

<sup>5</sup> (Benhabib 1992, 169)

<sup>6</sup> Seyla Benhabib, “In Defense of Universalism. Yet Again! A Response to Critics of Situating the Self,” *New German Critique*, No. 62 (Spring – Summer, 1994), 180

<sup>7</sup> (Benhabib 1992, 52)

<sup>8</sup> (Ibid., 163-164)



unsubstantiated values. However, in discourse ethics, we do not raise issues for their own sake. When we enter into discourse, we do so in response to real situations, as a guide for our actions.<sup>1</sup> Hence, in order to understand how a particular norm or value can relate to the particular case that has led to the norm being problematised in the first place, we need to exchange perspectives with the concrete other to get an idea about how it might apply given their particular, situated position. As we can only learn about the concrete other through their own first-person descriptions, it is only through actual dialogue with a concrete other that we can find out “those aspects of the otherness of the other which the other wants us to respect and/or to take into account in our deliberations.”<sup>2</sup> We cannot engage in discourse as if we are dealing with a generalised other to whom the result of our discourse applies in a simple, generic way. Rather, we must “listen across [our] differences to understand how proposals and policies affect others differently situated.”<sup>3</sup>

I reject the unwarranted assumption by Habermas that, in order to hold norms and values as right, we must at the same time believe that they have universal applicability. Or, more specifically, we should not assume that we have any way of working out what it means for a norm to be applied universally *a priori*, as even if we think that a norm is universally right, that does not mean that we have any way of working out which situations fall under the authority of that norm without engaging in actual discourse with concrete others. According to Benhabib, if we do not relate as concrete others, it is impossible for a universalisability test to even be carried out in the first place.<sup>4</sup>

## UNDERSTANDING

The second main distinction between Habermasian discourse ethics and the discourse ethics of the cosmopolitan conversation regards the way that they interpret what it means to ‘understand,’ in the context of discourse. Of course, both views have a lot in common. For example, we both agree that reaching understanding involves rationally motivated agreement based on criticisable validity claims.<sup>5</sup> We also agree that the goal of discourse is to create an agreement based on “the intersubjective mutuality of

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<sup>1</sup> (Habermas 1990b, 179)

<sup>2</sup> (Benhabib 1994, 180)

<sup>3</sup> (Iris Marion Young 2004, 28)

<sup>4</sup> (Benhabib 1992, 163-164)

<sup>5</sup> (Habermas 1984, 75)

reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another.”<sup>1</sup>

However, Habermas believes that in order to reach understanding we must agree on not only the particular issue at question, but also on the reasons why we believe that the particular norm or value under discussion is right. I disagree with this, as we can still reach understanding so long as we agree on the norm in question, regardless of whether or not we agree on why we agree. Habermas would undoubtedly claim that, in diluting understanding in this way, we are shifting it from the realm of communicative action to strategic action by making agreement nothing more than a compromise. However, this is not necessarily the case.

The difference in opinion here rests on the fact that Habermas thinks that, because we believe that a certain norm is right, and because we have, hopefully, good reasons for thinking that the norm is right, this entails that we have to reject all other perspectives as mistaken. Disagreeing with this position is not relativistic, however. As Margaret Urban Walker puts it, while it *is* possible for our beliefs to be better or worse justified, and while we can make reasonable criticisms of the moral practices of others, this does not mean that we can assume that “our judgements ought to have *authority* for them, much less that it is a test of our or anybody else’s moral beliefs that they achieve *universal* authority.”<sup>2</sup>

In the context of the cosmopolitan conversation, ‘understanding’ consists of each party having good reasons for their own support of a norm of value, while also appreciating that *others* have legitimate reasons, too, even if those reasons are different. It is possible to recognise that others have rational reasons for believing what they do, without agreeing with those reasons yourself. So long as you understand what those reasons are, and can judge them rational, then that is enough.

So, understanding consists of believing in the rightness of the same norm as others, while at the same time appreciating the rationality of their reasons for holding to it, whether or not those reasons are the same as your own. However, this does not mean that we can simply *assume* that the other holds their belief for a rational reason. If we did so, then we truly *would* be acting strategically, as we would essentially be saying, “I am not concerned *why* you think what you do, so long as you agree with me.” On the

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<sup>1</sup> (Habermas 1991, 3)

<sup>2</sup> (Walker 2007, 208)

contrary, we need to be very concerned with why others believe what they do in order for us to reach understanding.

The cosmopolitan conversation requires a particular attitude towards the other. This attitude is a middle ground between two extremes: on the one hand, the attitude that we should take it as a fact that the beliefs of others *are* irrational, and that we should therefore “seek to explain how they came to be held, how they manage to survive unprofaned by rational criticism, what their consequences are, etc.,”<sup>1</sup> and on the other hand that we should simply blithely assume that the beliefs of others are always rational or, worse, fail to care whether or not they are. Rather, we should treat the beliefs of others *charitably*, and assume that what may seem to me to be irrational at first glance might actually be rational once its context is fully appreciated.<sup>2</sup> This naturally involves actually trying to understand the others’ context, rather than passively accepting their claims to rationality, or rejecting their rationality out of hand. In short, we need to understand why they believe what they do, and we need to be able to see that the reasons they hold the norm or value coherently fits within their wider framework of values.

## FUNDAMENTAL GOALS

The third key difference between the two approaches is that I argue that societies situate their value systems on top of fundamental goals, whereas Habermas does not acknowledge that such things exist. However, as Habermas’s main focus in his discussions regarding discourse ethics tends to be about how it applies between individuals in the same lifeworld, it is understandable that Habermas would have no need for a concept such as fundamental goals.

In the context of inter-cultural discourse using the cosmopolitan conversation, fundamental goals are essential for two reasons: firstly, and most importantly, they provide a basis on which we can assess the rationality of the justifications of others. That is, if reasons are not, at the very least, consistent with the general aims of the society of which a person is a part – aims that the individual themselves claims to

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Lukes, “Some Problems about Rationality,” in *Rationality*, ed. Bryan R. Wilson (Oxford, Blackwell, 1970), 194

<sup>2</sup> (*Ibid.*)

espouse, whether overtly or through the general tenor of their actions and values – then we can certainly claim that a person is acting irrationally.

Additionally, the concept of fundamental goals also provides a focal point (albeit not a particularly *fixed* focal point) within a lifeworld that we can build our value system around, ensuring that the system is not entirely arbitrary. This is especially the case due to the restriction that, in order to be considered acceptable, values, and fundamental goals in particular, must not contravene the principles of *egalitarian reciprocity* and *universal respect*. In practice, this means that I can see the legitimacy of the values of another society because I can appreciate that, whatever else they are, they are consistent with the aim of reaching communicative agreement and understanding.

## APPLICATION

The process of applying post-modern cosmopolitanism in practice – the cosmopolitan conversation – relies on all three of the previous differences from Habermasian discourse ethics in order for it to be effective. Also, though it does not absolutely *require* prior agreement about any values at all, it is more than happy to work with any norms that are in common purely by chance, and hence is closest to the third interpretation of how discourse ethics might apply inter-culturally. In practice, it is not unreasonable to expect that there would be some kind of prior agreement between lifeworlds, even if it comes about purely by chance, especially as the set of values and fundamental goals societies might potentially hold has been limited to those compatible with the rules of discourse.

You will recall that, according to this interpretation of how we might be able to engage in inter-lifeworld moral discourse, there are three main problems: 1) that it causes our lifeworlds to merge, and hence leads to only one set of values; 2) the unlikelihood of *my* reasons making sense to *you*, if we do not share the same lifeworld; and 3) the impossibility of critiquing the values of others when we do not share the same lifeworld, and when the values do not rest on objective truth or subjective truthfulness for their substantiation. Fortunately, by changing discourse ethics in the three ways outlined above, we can put forward a method of inter-cultural moral discourse that is free of these problems.

To begin with, if we are to think that a) any values that we hold are necessarily universal, b) that we should relate to each other as generalised rather than concrete others, and hence apply these universal norms and values in a generic way, and c) hold that we must agree on the reasons why we both hold the same norm or value, then every time we engage in discourse our lifeworlds will merge. On the other hand, the cosmopolitan conversation allows us to hold the same values or norms, but allows us to do so for different reasons. It also does not require that values or norms be considered universal to be considered true; that is, I can hold that a norm or value is true without necessarily believing that, by virtue of that, that norm or value must be binding for you in your particular, concrete situation also. When we *do* come to agreement, as post-modern cosmopolitans we recognise that the application of the norm or value that we have come to share is contingent on the particular situation we have found ourselves in and our particular relationship, and we therefore have no expectation of universality. Particularly, we do not expect the outcome of our discourse to be binding for those uninvolved in our exchange. Hence, we can come to agreement with each other about the particular norm or value at issue, while continuing to hold substantially different values in other respects, even on issues closely related to the one under discussion.

Additionally, because the cosmopolitan conversation defines understanding not as agreeing, and agreeing about *why* we agree, but as agreeing while understanding the differing reasons why others might hold the same norm or value, we are also able to avoid the issue of the translation of reasons between lifeworlds. This is because rather than providing reasons why someone should hold a norm or value from within our own lifeworld, the cosmopolitan conversation expects us to provide reasons that make sense from *within the lifeworld of the individual we are addressing*.<sup>1</sup> We do not *need* to translate our reasons into terms that individuals from different lifeworlds can understand; instead we should look for reasons within *their* lifeworld, and put *them* forward.

Providing reasons from within another's lifeworld rather than our own is easier said than done, however. Naturally, it would involve a quite difficult process of actually *learning* about the lifeworld of those with whom you are engaged in discourse. This is no small thing. But, as Nancy Fraser points out, while communication across difference is

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<sup>1</sup> (Young 1994, 166)

difficult, it is not impossible. It requires multi-cultural literacy, but this is something that we can acquire through practice.<sup>1</sup>

It would be a mistake to think that the application of post-modern cosmopolitanism is something easily done. However, understanding and appreciating the ways of life and value systems of others is certainly not an impossible task, and it is not an unreasonable thing to expect. In fact, anyone who thinks that they can discover a viable way of discussing moral issues between people from different societies that does not expect us to learn more about each other is fooling themselves. There can be no solution to the difficult problems the world faces that relies on us staying ignorant about those with whom we interact.

However, how *can* we provide reasons from within another's lifeworld? What does this actually mean, in practice? The answer to this comes partially from the way that the cosmopolitan conversation defines understanding, and partially from the concept of fundamental goals. Of course, it is one thing to expect people to learn about the societies of others, but quite another to expect them to have such a degree of familiarity with the lifeworlds of other societies that they can consistently provide good reasons, from inside the other's lifeworld, as to why they should hold a certain norm. This is why, in practice, the cosmopolitan conversation is likely to mostly consist of criticism, rather than of putting forward positive arguments. This is not to say that we can never put forward positive arguments; in fact, I expect this will happen fairly often. But, more often, I expect that the building and rationalisation of value systems will happen in response to criticism.

For example, it easier to point out that the norm against killing is inconsistent with the death penalty, and let those who believed both work out what needs to be changed for their worldview to be consistent, than to undertake the process of fixing their inconsistencies, by yourself, from the outside. They are more familiar with what they intend by certain norms, what the other relevant values that exist in their lifeworld are that might come into play during this change of view, and the weight that they place on certain norms, and so they are in a better position than us to make their own worldview consistent again.

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere; A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, No. 25/26 (1990), 69

Criticism itself should be considered an extremely positive force in this context. It facilitates the productive rationalisation of the others' lifeworld, as well as ours, as it encourages us to reassess our previously taken-for-granted beliefs. In short, relying on criticism makes post-modern cosmopolitan a strengthening rather than universalising way of relating to each other. Rather than saying "you are mistaken in your views, you should believe what I believe instead," criticism acts as an enabler than sparks the agency of those in other lifeworlds, causing them to adjust their world-views in ways that still make sense to *them*, while still ultimately allowing for rationally motivated understanding between us.

How, specifically, do we criticise? Simply, we point out the irrationality of the norms and values of others. We do this by pointing out one of five things: a) their norms or values are not consistent with the shared world of objective truth; b) their norms or values are not consistent with what they have claimed to be their internal states or, if their values are consistent with their expressions of their internal states, that their expressions are themselves inconsistent; c) their actions are inconsistent with their own norms or values; d) that their norms and values are internally inconsistent, that is, they are not consistent with *each other*, and in particular with their fundamental goals, or; e) their values or norms are not consistent with the rules of discourse.

Fundamental goals are very important to the process of criticism, both because I think that there *are* values, however imprecisely defined, that form a fundamental and essential part of our identity, and because the concept leads to the expectation that our norms and values *can* be rationalised into a system. It is this expectation that allows talk about consistency to be ultimately meaningful. Additionally, it allows us to resolve circularity within a value system, and provides the definitive point beyond which we are unable to criticise.

In argumentation, aside from the application of *egalitarian reciprocity* and *universal respect*, we can expect justification for any particular value or norm professed by others to be the explanation for their actions, but we cannot expect justification for fundamental values. This means that fundamental goals are the fundamental point of difference between societies. Unlike other values, we cannot ask why people hold their fundamental goal. However, having a particular aim running through the values of a lifeworld allows for the construction of a rationally consistent world-view, and while it certainly prevents us from criticising the values and norms of others beyond a certain

point, it also provides us with a criterion with which we can assess the validity of the values and norms of others.

While the fundamental goal is, in a sense, a value much like any other, the fact that it is basic means that it is potentially connected with *every* value in a value-system. This means that even from the outside we can hold the beliefs of others up to a particular standard. For example, in the case of liberal cosmopolitans, we can ask about *any value* whether or not it, at the very least, is not detrimental to freedom. So, while fundamental goals limit criticism in some ways, it enables it in others.



## CONCLUSION

The problem we started out with was how we could resolve differences of opinion in cases where the actions of individuals from one society affect members from a different society, despite the fact that the two groups have entirely different beliefs and values. The two typical approaches – relativism and universalism – are inadequate for a variety of reasons, and unfortunately existing theories ultimately fit within one camp or the other. Hence, I created a third approach that would allow us to resolve these differences of opinion that is neither universalistic nor relativistic, and that has the strengths of both, without their weaknesses. I rested this approach on an expanded and altered form of Habermas' discourse ethics.

Using discourse ethics by itself as the third approach, however, does not provide us with a suitable theory. Habermas' idea of discourse ethics works well within the context of a particular lifeworld. So long as we share a lifeworld, and hence substantive values, we are able to use these shared assumptions to engage in successful discourse. However, once we ask Habermasian discourse ethics to operate *between* lifeworlds we run into problems. It is here that post-modern cosmopolitanism and the cosmopolitan conversation differentiates itself, contributes to the literature, and adds to our understanding of cultural exchange and moral discussion.

Of the three interpretations of how we might extend Habermasian discourse ethics – that we derive shared norms and values from the principles of discourse, or from shared objective facts or subjective states, or that we rely on random similarities between lifeworlds – only the third is not explicitly universalistic. For the other two, no matter what we change about discourse ethics they still lead to a universal morality.

However, the third approach also ends up failing for three reasons if we retain Habermas' assumptions about discourse ethics: 1) it necessarily leads to a universal lifeworld; 2) it makes it almost impossible for reasons put forward by someone from one lifeworld to have any relevance, or make any sense, to someone from another, and; 3) it makes it impossible for us to critique the actions, norms and values of people from outside our lifeworld, even when they are acting in ways that affect us. If we cannot criticise their actions, then we cannot engage in discourses of justification with them, and the only remaining possibility is conflict.

The cosmopolitan conversation differs from Habermasian discourse ethics in three main ways: 1) it assumes that discourses are between concrete individuals, and hence that norms and values cannot be universalised as easily as if discourses were between generalised individuals; 2) it suggests that understanding does not necessarily have to involve agreement about the reasons why we agree, but is actually about appreciating the reasons why others believe what they do, and 3) it argues that individuals in a society share a vague, poorly reflected-on, but very real fundamental goal, and that this goal constitutes the deepest part of both their identity and their lifeworld. These three things, in particular, are what make the post-modern cosmopolitan approach novel, and it is here that it makes the greatest contribution to the literature.

Post-modern cosmopolitans are happy to utilise chance agreement between lifeworlds when it occurs, and I certainly think chance agreement is possible, or even likely. However, such initial agreement is not necessary, and instead I ask those engaged in discourse between lifeworlds to attempt to understand and appreciate the lifeworlds of those with whom they are engaged. In the cosmopolitan conversation, we do not provide reasons that necessarily make sense from within our own lifeworld (though there is no problem if they happen to by chance), but that instead make sense with the lifeworld of those whom we are addressing.

However, providing *positive* reasons – that is, adding or altering another's lifeworld from the outside – is a hard, though not impossible, task, as it requires an extremely high level of knowledge of the other's lifeworld. Therefore it is likely that the cosmopolitan conversation will more often involve criticism, leaving the positive rationalisation and construction of value-systems up to those within a lifeworld. Criticism still requires a good deal of knowledge of the other's lifeworld, but for the cosmopolitan conversation to be effective, the amount of knowledge required to criticise should be considered the minimum that is necessary for the approach to function at all.

There are a number of ways we can criticise the actions, norms and values of others, without being within their lifeworld:

- a) we can point out that their actions are inconsistent with objective facts. For example, if they claim to want to reduce crime, yet support policies that, given the evidence, are likely to increase crime, or will have no effect on crime, we can point out that their actions are misguided;

- b) we can say that their actions are not consistent with their expressions of subjective internal states. For example, if they rest their argument of having certain attitudes, needs or beliefs, but then act in ways contrary to how someone with those attitudes, needs or beliefs would be expected to act, we can point out that this is inconsistent;
- c) we can draw attention to inconsistencies between their norms or values. We can show them that there may be a conflict between two values they hold, at least as they currently understand them. For example, we point out that they cannot both oppose killing, while at the same time believing in the doctrine of just war. Furthermore, we can argue that some norms or values they hold cannot be held at the same time as their fundamental goal. For example, a liberal who supports slavery can be criticised for being inconsistent;
- d) we can suggest that their actions are not consistent with their values. For example, if they claim that sweatshops are immoral but are at the same time buying goods made in sweatshops, we can draw attention to this. Once again, their fundamental goal has an important role here.
- e) lastly, we can show that their actions conflict with the rules of discourse.

Of course, it may turn out that our criticisms are mistaken, and that someone in a different society has a good explanation for why they acted as they did, or how they can simultaneously hold two values that may seem, at first glance, incompatible. But, where they cannot provide an explanation, we have the right to expect them to change their actions, or modify their norms or values. Hopefully, then, by the end of discourse we can agree on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the action that has given rise to the discourse in the first place. We may agree for different reasons, but this is fine so long as we understand why we are agreeing.

These five kinds of criticism, along with an improved form of discourse, and certain expectations regarding how discourse should take place, form my new, unique approach of the cosmopolitan conversation, which is the practical application of post-modern cosmopolitanism. I argue that, without this approach, inter-society moral conversation and justification is impossible.

Naturally, the cosmopolitan conversation does not *guarantee* a successful discourse. However, it at least provides a means for agreement to be *potentially* reached – something that other approaches have yet to offer. When the conversation, entered into

and carried out with good faith, fails, it delegitimises actions that have not been agreed on. For example, if the developed world cannot persuade the developing world that the unrestricted emission of carbon is legitimate, then by default failing to reign in carbon emissions to a level that all can agree on (and it is important to reiterate, here, that by 'agree' we mean agree communicatively, not agree strategically) is wrong.

We can see how post-modern cosmopolitanism, and its application through the cosmopolitan conversation, can be used to resolve some of the serious dilemmas caused by an increasingly inter-connected world. What's more, it does this all of this without expecting or giving rise to a universalistic morality or lifeworld, but by relying only on a shared approach. When one group or individual acts in ways that affect others, or when both or many groups or individuals act in ways that affect each other, the cosmopolitan conversation provides a means of coming to agreement and understanding about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of their actions, and can potentially give rise to joint action or agreement based on shared understanding.

Unlike relativistic approaches, which make the resolution of disagreements effectively impossible, or universalistic approaches, which are either aggressively assimilationist or not sufficiently respectful of the genuine, legitimate differences in forms of life and societies that human beings have created, post-modern cosmopolitanism and the cosmopolitan conversation allows us to talk *to* each other, not *past* each other. As such, while it does not guarantee successful discourse, it is the best means of at least making agreement and understanding possible.

Other approaches tend to rely on having a shared starting point, or focus solely on consequences. However, these methods fail. Post-modern cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, is about having a shared process. Unlike a view based on deriving a global morality from something we supposedly universally share, for example, or a view that argues for us just leaving each other alone in our otherness, a process approach does not guarantee success. However, when it comes down to it the other approaches do not work, both for practical and theoretical reasons. It is only a process approach like post-modern cosmopolitan that makes discussion between those who do not share any values possible.

Post-modern cosmopolitanism allows immigrants to express their political views without first having to adopt the world-view of their new country in order for their opinions to be made sensible (and thereby changing their opinions, or restricting their range); it provides a means for the issues of climate change and carbon emissions to be

discussed across societies, rich and poor, in a fair way that gives legitimacy to the moral claims of those affected, rather than just focusing on purely instrumental concerns, as is usually the case; it expects multi-national corporations to justify their activities to the citizens of the countries where they are operating, and provides a means for a conversation to happen between the citizens and corporations that could potentially create a situation agreeable to all.

Of course, for the cosmopolitan conversation to work we have to rely on the good faith of those involved. It will only work to the degree that people interact communicatively, rather than strategically. But, through the principles of *egalitarian reciprocity* and *universal respect*, shared by all due to the nature of communication, it gives legitimacy to those who oppose the structural injustices and inequalities that make communicative action impossible. It provides individuals with a means of critiquing institutions or actions, whether democratic or otherwise, to the extent that such institutions or actions fail to embody *egalitarian reciprocity* and *universal respect*, and to the extent that they prevent the cosmopolitan conversation from being possible. Hence, while a perfect post-modern cosmopolitan discourse is unlikely to ever occur in practice, it is nevertheless something to aspire to. But this is no different from any other approach to morality; no matter how you generate moral systems, there is always the issue of using an idealised approach on an imperfect world; there is no reason why post-modern cosmopolitanism should be different in this respect. However, utilising the approach of post-modern cosmopolitanism and the cosmopolitan conversation is the only real way we have of truly resolving difficult inter-cultural disagreements.

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