Cultural Essentials versus Universal Values?

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It is generally accepted to define the time we live in as an epoch of globalization. The UN Millennium Declaration (of 8 September, 2000) affirms the aim of globalization to be the formation of a *common future* for all the peoples on the planet. Globality as a new dimension of human existence cannot be achieved if it is not based on universally shared values. Yet, do universal values really exist? If universal values exist what is the relation between them and the essentials of different cultures? Is an opposition between them inevitable? What is the way to reduce tension and conflicts between the two? These are some of the most urgent questions that need to be answered.

In our attempt to find the answers to these questions we should first clarify a number of notions.

Philosophical usage of a term 'value' is no doubt various and conflicting. In the context of the issue under discussion it might look proper (joining a long line of philosophers including the ancient like Aristotle and the modern like Santayana) to regard value as the end of our pursuit, as a quality ascribed to what we desire.

Are there values shared by all human beings? Some, who adhere to what is called metaphysic essentialism (associated with such different thinkers as Plato and Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel, Alfred North Whitehead and Jorgen Habermas), do not doubt the existence of universal values rooted in human nature as such. David Hume affirmed that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations. Mankind is so similar, in all times and places that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature.

Universalism is partly shared by some of our contemporaries. Thus, for instance, a distinguished Indian philosopher Daya Krishna (1988: 71), while being aware of the significance of differences between various cultures, yet claims: '. . . if philosophy is an enterprise of the human reason, it is bound to show similarities across cultures

to some extent and, similarly, as a human enterprise it is bound to be concerned with what man, in a particular culture, regards as the *summum bonum* for mankind'.

Those who oppose universalism mainly belong to such trends of thought as post-Nietzschean, post-Darwinian, American pragmatism (William James, John Dewey, Hilary Putnam, Donald Davidson, Richard Rorty). Thus Rorty (1989: 177) argues that 'There is nothing deep inside each of us, no common nature, no built-in human solidarity, to use a moral reference point.' He is convinced that there is nothing that is necessary, nothing that escapes time and chance, no essential nature of what we really are. Consequently, so-called universal truths turn out to be the platitudes of entrenched vocabularies, only part of the rhetoric of our historically contingent vocabularies (Bernstein, 1991: 278).

There are difficulties in accepting the two extreme stands on the problem under consideration. Many reservations could be expressed; a number of questions might be put to both sides. Here is just one question to each.

How can one explain from the point of view of metaphysic essentialism the striking diversity in the vision of 'the end of our pursuit'? How is uniformity in values possible if what we desire in the long run is defined in a dissimilar way: *eudemonia* (Aristotle), unity with God (Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas), knowledge (Benedictus de Spinoza), self-realization (Bradley), power (Friedrich Nietzsche), etc.?

It is quite proper then to ask the adherents of the relativist approach if there is nothing deep inside each of us, no common nature, no built-in human solidarity, to use a moral reference point, why do millions of individuals belonging to a particular culture demonstrate a common approach to the end of their pursuit? Is not the Hindu *moksha*, which means to put an end to *sansara*, (that is to the migration of souls after death), or Chinese harmony of man (human being) with Heaven and Earth, strikingly different from the typical Western pursuit of happiness associated with justice and prosperity at the same time?

There are of course plenty of other questions which will always remain hotly disputed. Yet common people are looking not so much for the final answers as for practical suggestions on how to deal with the diversity in values which provokes or justifies the tension, hatred, and aggressiveness in the long run threatening their future if not their actual survival.

It seems to be helpful and reasonable to take into consideration at least the following few points.

1. If there are universal human values, due to a certain uniformity of human nature, they are still *nominal*. The values are getting their 'fillings' from a particular culture. Let us take for example the notion of justice. Those who consider justice to belong to the set of universal human values habitually ignore differences in the interpretations of justice, and thus succumb to illusions about the essential sameness of the different ways in which it may be realized (democracy). The notion of justice, however, is always enclosed within the framework of a particular value system. Thus, the traditional society differs in its approach toward the ideal of justice in at least four respects from the approach taken by the post-traditional society.

a) Before the emergence of Western liberal society, there were basically two types of moral prescriptions: the first, sanctioned by religion, and the second, by local authority. Indian, Muslim, and Medieval Christian civilizations are characterized

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by the recognition of morality as a system of ethical norms prescribed by the corresponding religious belief. In the Islamic world, for example, the source of any law, including the moral law, is Allah. Hence, there is a rejection of any right to law-making by mere human beings and a demand that one strictly follow the law of Allah, Shariah.

As for an authoritarian moral system, the most vivid example of it one can find is perhaps provided by the dominant Confucian tradition in traditional Chinese society.

b) The realization of justice in traditional societies usually refers not to the present but to the future, by which is meant the life after death, when we have passed from this mundane life. In Christianity and in Islam, justice will reign only at the Day of the Last Judgment, when God will test each human in accordance with his or her sins and virtues. No human being or society, but God alone, is absolutely just.

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged to their works, by the things which were written in the books. (*The Bible, Book of Revelation*, 20, 12)

Similarly, the Koran warns believers:

For those who do good is the best (reward) and more (thereto). Neither dust nor ignominy cometh near their faces. Such are rightful owners of the Garden, they will abide therein. And those who earn ill-deeds, (for them) requital of each ill-deed by the like thereof; and ignominy overtaketh them – They have no protector from Allah – as if their faces had been covered with a cloak of darkest night. Such are rightful owners of the Fire; they will abide therein. (*Koran*, Surah X, ayats 26–27)

According to the Indian tradition, after death, which is thought of as the death of the body, the soul transfers into another form – that of a human being (either of a higher or of a lower caste), an animal, an insect, a plant, etc. The transition is done in conformity with *karma*. It is in this way that justice is achieved.

c) Justice is related to a certain 'collective' to which an individual belongs. That could be a caste, a community, a class or a social stratum, a religious confession. For equal virtues or sins, different blessings or punishments could be expected. Thus, for example, when a *kshatria* (a member of a caste of warriors) engages in violence or even kills on the battlefield that is not only excused but considered a virtue.

In traditional society, where a 'stratified labor division' (Max Weber's phrase) exists, an individual is expected to fulfil those functions that are prescribed as a result of his or her belonging to a particular social community. Here justice is measured on the basis of how successful an individual has been in following the prescribed behaviour patterns of the social stratum to which he or she was assigned by birth.

d) Justice is regarded rather in terms of duty than of law, without consideration of human 'rights'.

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The post traditional or liberal society differs from the traditional one in all the above-mentioned respects. The source of justice and the ultimate judge, ruling it, is the people itself, represented by the elected members of parliaments and the courts. Justice is thought of in terms of the categories of the present: it should be realized in full here and now, in this life. Everyone should have an equal right to justice in full accordance with his or her own deeds. Justice and the law are undivided.

2. Along with nominally all-human universals, each and every culture has a set of its own universals which form its 'spine' (or 'back-bone'). In a culture, which is an intricately structured set of extra-biological programmes of human behaviour, there are, among other things, the universals of *Weltanschauung*. They accumulate historically formed social experience, and it is in the framework of their system that the person of a particular culture evaluates, makes sense of and experiences the world, organizes in a totality all the phenomena of the reality that is encompassed by his or her activity.

For Hindus the universals of this kind are brahman, atman, dharma, moksha, karma, etc. The 'backbone' of Chinese culture is formed, in the first place, by dao and de, yin-yang, da tong, ren and li. No dialogue with Indians and the Chinese would be possible, if the 'other' side do not have at least elementary knowledge about the key concepts of their cultures, if it is not open to perceiving and interpreting these concepts.

3. Time has always left its imprints on values. This statement is particularly true and topical when we talk about the age of radical transformation of Oriental societies, of their 'joining' the modern post-industrial world. The destruction of traditional socio-economic and political structures in countries of the East brings about not just some 'corrections' or exterior modernization but basically a new interpretation of accepted and established ideas.

It will not be an exaggeration to state that contrary to the West, the discourse on values in the East has been prompted rather by ideological than by pure theoretical reasons. A universalistic approach here is often taken as a theoretical justification of cultural neocolonialism, as an attempt to impose Western values on others just because allegedly they possess universal validity. At the same time an extreme relativism is also strongly opposed since it is viewed as a means to undermine the foundation of cultural identity whose 'pillars' are related cultural universals.

Let us demonstrate the stand taken by the Eastern philosophers on the matter by turning to the views of an Indian and a Muslim thinker.

Values are considered by D.P. Chattopadhyaya[1] in the context of the polemics on progress-development issues. It is natural that, for the former colonial countries like India, the most vital problem has been how, after obtaining political independence, to overcome socio-economic backwardness and to acquire prosperity.

D.P. Chattopadhyaya (1996: 229) strongly opposes those who claim 'development . . . to be an invariant value of *all* cultures' and that progress is an inherent law of history. He is categorical in rejection of any interpretation of progress in terms of linear process or development and he declares that this approach 'needs no modification, but rejection' (ibid.).

In Chattopadhyaya's understanding, 'progress is basically cultural and not

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natural and there is nothing like natural law of progress' (277). Consequently, 'our attention is likely to be focused on the human aspect of progress' (ibid.).

Just because progress is basically a cultural phenomenon, it lacks universality since universal culture as such does not exist. Chattopadhyaya affirms that culture, like language or morality, is universal only as a concept. Cultural, linguistic or moral universals are 'intellectual constructions', they are 'universals only by courtesy' (279). Claims for universalization are not only wrong but dangerous. Referring to some examples, Chattopadhyaya reminds us that in the name of universal religion 'many unholy wars have been fought, resulting in the death of millions of human beings', and in the name of universal science 'pseudo-sciences have been promoted and different forms of science ignored or even crushed' (281).

It is well known that in the West progress is primarily associated with the realization of the ideals of freedom and of justice. Aiming to prove that the claim concerning universality of the Western model of progress has no foundation, Chattopadhyaya often turns to critical analysis of those universals. He focuses special attention on the views of justice presented by John Rawls since they are nowadays the most widespread.

Chattopadhyaya admits that Rawls, along with the other great Western minds like Hobbes and Locke, have been motivated by noble considerations in constructing their theories. However, he is of the opinion that their ideas are too abstract. 'In his understandable eagerness to construct a "moral geometry" around the concept of justice, – Chattopadhyaya (1982: 245) writes about J. Rawls – he has resorted to an abstractionist strategy without looking into diverse, puzzling, and interesting sociological contexts of justice that perhaps might threaten his "clear and coherent" geometry. The only real society which apparently has weighed on his mind . . . is understandably the American one'.

Chattopadhyaya insists on the necessity of a contextual approach to the notion of justice (equally to the other so-called universal values). He shows that Western concepts of justice, in particularly, Rawls' theory, do not work in many parts of the world. In his view:

> Justice does not command that all needs of all men should be given equal weight . . . What justice demands is the *equality of concern*: needs of all men deserve the earnest and rational *attention* of society. When it comes to the question of *recognition* of needs, a stratified society (marked by inequality) would be well-advised to accord priority to original needs (of food and house) over imitative needs (of a color TV set) and to original needs of the worst-off group over those of the better-off . . . *Equality of concern* and *inequality of recognition* are consistent components of a just decision. (237)

Summing up his reflections on the notion of justice Chattopadhyaya affirms that the theory of justice that he defends 'is ability-based *and* need-oriented' (260). He specially explains why 'and' in that affirmation should be taken very seriously: 'for it is indicative of the close relation between a historical concept of freedom and the moral desirability of its need-oriented application' (ibid.).

Chattopadhyaya's views concerning justice differ sharply from those which are commonly shared by the philosophers in the West. The Indian philosopher appreciates giving priority to the liberty principle over the inequality principle only in the

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theory of justice. But 'when it comes to the question of *practice*', he does not see 'in the context of developing countries how the socio-economically worse-off people could be benefited by it in the intended manner' (241). In the developing countries ''the very institutions of equal liberty are in many cases almost nonexistent . . . mainly due to the wide social and economic gap and conflict between different classes and groups' (242).

Chattopadhyaya insists, in the same way as he did it while talking about justice, on the need for a conceptual approach to the notion of freedom. Freedom is not autonomous, it is historically determined; it dialectically depends on internal and external human factors. Chattopadhyaya means among the external factors, first of all, cultural environment: if freedom lacks positive connections with the specifics of a corresponding culture, it can have not a positive but rather a destructive impact.

The stand taken by Chattopadhyaya is quite representative since it adequately reflects the views of a particular intellectual stratum in non-Western countries – mostly belonging to academic, university circles. It is the position of the enlightened (in a modern sense of this word) man who shares secular views. Secularism here manifests itself in staying at a distance from the values of a traditional religion (in case of Chattopadhyaya that is Hinduism). Pure Western values are chosen as the subject of philosophical reflection. Consequently, the discourse is carried on in the framework of the paradigm suggested by the contemporary Western society: Freedom, Equality and Justice are taken as unconditional and priority social values. The strong influence of the Western philosophical views on non-Western thinkers like Chattopadhyaya is vividly apparent from the conceptual language they use, from the methods and forms of polemics they adopt. Yet, it would be a matter of simplification to ascribe Chattopadhyaya and the scholars of his kind to the ranks of the 'westernized' -modernists aiming at unconditional acceptance of Western ideal and institutions. If a formal side is discounted then actually Chattopadhyaya should be ranked among the reformers who never ignore historical and cultural factors in designing value systems. Over and over again he challenges those who (starting with Plato) 'defend' the eternal values, he asserts 'practical inadequacy or uselessness of the legislative or definitional approaches to the problems of values' (275).

The reformative spirit of Chattopadhyaya equally manifests in his clearly activist position: he is sure that values are changeable, and it is man who brings about those changes. 'Values – he states – are basically human, cultural products, and subject to the extremely complex laws of cultural evolution. Man is *not* a copyist. He is a creator. He does not create out of nothing . . . Man can *initiate* actions and though processes. In other words, he creates values both as a *part* of nature *and a partaker* in a cultural process' (224).

Though Chattopadhyaya himself does not work with the cultural essentials of Indian culture, he lays a theoretical foundation with a warning about the dangers of reforming traditional culture along the lines of blind uncritical imitations of the foreign Western experience, even if the latter has been quite successful. More that that, he strongly protests against any attempt to impose alien values: 'It is not merely unwise but also dangerous to allow one to dictate others' values disregarding the latter's culture, time, needs . . . This shows, once again, the futility of search for values which are not culture-bound' (295).

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Let us recall: Chattopadhyaya's stand is clearly secular. That is due to subjective factors – for example, the education he received. And also due to the objective causes – first of all, thanks to the secular nature of the Indian state. This was declared by the founding fathers of the independent republic and carried on by the Indian political leadership. No less important has been the specific nature of Hinduism (the philosopher's genetic religion) characterized by polytheism, by a lack of centralized religious institutions and a canonized system of dogmas, etc.

A secular stand is difficult, if possible at all, in societies based on a culture like Islam with its absolute monotheistic belief and an uncompromising disapproval of the separation of religion and state. What could be the attitude taken by a Muslim philosopher is well demonstrated by referring to the views of Muhammad Iqbal who made the most significant attempt to interpret Islam in modern philosophical terms?[2]

The values are considered by Muhammad Iqbal indirectly in the framework of his general project to reconstruct religious thought in Islam. He acknowledges that 'during the last five hundred years religious thought in Islam has been practically stationary' (Iqbal, 1962: 7). However, there was a time when European thought received inspiration from the world of Islam. That time has passed and the position has been reversed: 'The most remarkable phenomena of modern history, however, is the enormous rapidity with which the world of Islam is spiritually moving towards the West' (ibid.). Iqbal fears that 'the dazzling exterior of European culture' might arrest this movement and the Muslims 'may fail to reach the true inwardness of that culture' (ibid.). He comes to the conclusion that with the reawakening of Islam 'it is necessary to examine, in an independent spirit, what Europe has thought and how far the conclusions reached by her can help us in the revision and, if necessary, reconstruction, of theological thought in Islam' (8). Hence, the poet-philosopher looks at the indisputable Islamic values which he calls either 'the essentials of Islam' (8–9), or 'the ruling concepts of Islam' (125), or 'the foundational principles of Islam' (135).

It is worth noting that though Iqbal concedes that the period the Muslims are passing through is 'similar to that of the Protestant revolution in Europe', in other words – the Reformation (163), he chooses to use instead of 'reformation' another word – 'reconstruction'. This substitution is not made by chance. Iqbal believes that the Reformation had brought in the long run crucial changes: the universal ethics of Christianity was gradually displaced by the systems of national ethics (ibid.). Consequently, due to the Reformation Christianity lost some of its essentials. That is just what worries Iqbal the most. Hence, he suggests reconstructing Islam not so as to get rid of its fundamental principles but rather to revive them through replacing dogmatism, which means death for culture, by a rational critical approach, which enables one to look at the basic ideas of Islam in the light of modern achievements of the sciences (55).

Iqbal focuses attention on the principle most fundamental for Islam which is considered as 'the first pillar' of Muhammad's teaching, that is the formula (*shahada*): 'There is no god, than the God and Muhammad is His prophet' (the more commonly used English translation is: 'There is no other God, than Allah and Muhammad is His prophet').

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Let us see how the philosopher interprets the first part of the formula. He concentrates on such attributes, ascribed to God, as Creativeness, Knowledge, Omnipotence and Eternity (65). Iqbal tries to obtain a fresh look at the *ayats*, which mention those attributes of God; he wishes to be free of the burden of their traditional, dogmatic interpretation. At the same time the philosopher seeks to use contemporary scientific knowledge about nature, time and space, causality, mind and consciousness, etc. (There are plenty of references to the writings of Alfred North Whitehead, Arthur Stanley Eddington, Oswald Spengler, and Albert Einstein.) Iqbal reads the *ayats* as 'the Divine signs' which indicate, first and foremost, that existence, including the existence of human beings, is a process of constant changes, and that it is man's duty to participate in that process.

Considering the Divine attribute of Creativeness, Iqbal categorically rejects the traditional theological argumentation following which God at best looks as 'a skilful external contriver working on a pre-existing dead and intractable material the elements of which are, by their own nature, incapable of orderly structures and combinations' (29). The philosopher states that, according to the Koran, the universe is not something static but 'a structure of events possessing the character of a continuous creative flow' (45).

Divine Omnipotence and, related to that, a key Islamic notion *taqdir* or destiny, in Iqbal's view, have been mistakenly understood and wrongly interpreted in the world of Islam as well as outside it. Destiny is not an unrelenting fate working from without like a task master. 'Destiny is time rewarded as prior to the disclosure of its possibilities'. It is nothing other than 'realizable possibilities which lie within the depth of its (human) nature, and serially actualize themselves without any feeling of external compulsion' (49–50).

Iqbal believes that 'the world regarded as a process realizing a pre-ordained goal is not a world of free, responsible moral agents; it is only a state on which puppets are made to move by a kind of pull from behind' (54). To his mind 'nothing is more alien to the Koran outlook than the idea of a pre-conceived plan' (55). Since 'if history is regarded merely as a gradually revealed photo of a predetermined order of events, then there is no room in it for novelty and initiation' (79).

Iqbal's interpretation of Divine Knowledge/Omniscience is strikingly different from that which is traditionally accepted, where Divine Knowledge regarded as a kind of passive omniscience – in the sense of a single indivisible act of perception which makes God immediately aware of specific events, in an eternal 'now' – 'suggests a closed universe, a fixed futurity, a predetermined, unalterable order of specific events which, like a superior fate, has once for all determined the directions of God's creative activity' (78). Consequently, Divine Knowledge, in Iqbal's view, should be understood 'as a living creative activity . . . The future pre-exists as an open possibility, not as a fixed order of events' (78–9). That possibility is enjoyed by man, and in a certain sense it limits Divine Omnipotence and Omniscience. However, this 'limitation is not externally imposed. It is born out of His own creative freedom whereby He has chosen finite egos to be participators of His life, power, and freedom' (80).

In a similar spirit Iqbal interprets the second part of the *shahada*: '. . . and Muhammad is His prophet'. The core Koran concept of prophecy is the finality of the prophecy of Muhammad who is called 'the seal of prophecy'. The traditional read-

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ing of that belief is that since Muhammad is the last of the prophets his message has been perfect and hence does not need any addition or correction. Iqbal suggests a quite different interpretation of what he calls 'the great idea': 'In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition' (126). That means, in Iqbal's view, that human life cannot for ever be kept on a leading rein: 'The intellectual value of the idea is that it tends to create an independent critical attitude . . . by generating the belief that all personal authority, claiming a supernatural origin, has come to an end in the history of man' (127).

The finality of prophecy is interpreted by Iqbal as an acknowledgement, besides internal, mystical experience, of the two other sources of knowledge – Nature and History (ibid.).

Iqbal's approach to Islamic essential values aims at a critical rethinking of the Islamic world view as such, to justify the need for radical reforming of the traditional society, and to affirm the leading role of man in that process. The ultimate aim of man, in Iqbal's view, 'is not to *see* something, but to *be* something' (198). Man should at last understand: 'the world is not something to be merely seen or known . . . but something to be made and re-made by continuous action' (ibid.).

From what has been said above the reformative character of Iqbal's approach seems to be quite vivid. However, he is often ascribed to the opposite ideological camp – to the site of the conservatives or so-called religious fundamentalists. Formally there is a reason for such an evaluation. However, in fact, Iqbal seeks to reform Islam by reconstructing or by revitalizing its fundamental notions – the essentials of Muslim culture. Nevertheless, his interpretation of those cultural essentials radically differs from that which is given by the Muslim fundamentalists who seek to prevent the transformation of the traditional way of life and to revive both the values and the institutions of medieval social structure.

Iqbal's appeal to the Islamic essentials is prompted by his belief that through liberating them from the distorting interpretations of the *ulema* and in this way through returning to them their genuine, sacred meaning, as well as through rethinking the whole system of Islamic essential values in the light of the achievements of modern sciences a 'durable civilization' (15) could be built in the long run.

D.P. Chattopadhyaya's and Muhammad Iqbal's approaches to the issue of values demonstrate two ways (there are of course some others as well[3]) of removing controversy between the universal values (which are habitually formulated in accord with the spirit of the Western culture) and the essential values of Indian and Islamic cultures. The first presupposes a 'step' by the West towards 'meeting' the East by acknowledging the right of the non-westerners to adhere to those meanings of the universal values which are in tune with their own cultural essentials. The second approach presumes a step on the part of the East 'to meet' the West by rethinking cultural essentials in the broader context of global processes and changes.

4. Though it is not realistic (nor admissible) to aspire to the uniformity of *Weltanschauung*, the uniformity in understanding the meaning of human existence and the norms of human behaviour, it is imperative to exert efforts in order to work out common approaches to the issues of world order, the issues which determine the fate of mankind. This urgency results from the reality: humanity is truly going through the processes of globalization.

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It is worthwhile to mention here the position of a prominent contemporary Iranian – Abdolkarim Soroush[4] who is convinced that 'there is a certain category of phenomena that require universal participation'. He refers to a tradition from the prophet of Islam which states: 'We are all travelers on a ship; if one person pokes a hole in it, all of us drown.' In Soroush's words (2000: 25) 'this is an excellent allegory, to see all the inhabitants of the globe as co-travelers on a ship. We Moslems have two kinds of problem, local problems and universal problems that are the problems of humanity as a whole. In my view, right now, problems such as peace, human rights, and women's rights have turned into global problems.' To the list of such global problems should be added those which are connected with ecology and new technologies. All such problems demand, for their solutions, collective efforts, which can be undertaken only as a result of intercultural dialogues.

Philosophers can and should play an especially significant role in removing controversy between universal values and cultural essentials since more than anybody else from the humanities they are capable of bringing understanding between the representatives of different cultures. When I say philosophers, I mean principally those of them who are involved in comparative philosophy studies. Genuine learning (free from any ideological burden and political purposes as happened so often in the past) about the philosophical traditions of 'the other' culture opens a way to a better understanding of its essentials, taking into consideration that philosophy as such is in some way 'the self-consciousness of culture'. However, the achievements of the scholarly researchers if they are shared just between academics will not be truly helpful. They can bring about changes in people's minds only by means of education which should become multicultural. Knowledge and understanding have always been the best remedies against prejudices and stereotypes which feed tension and hostility.

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Notes

1. Debi Prasad Chattopadhyaya (born in 1931) is one of the leading philosophers of India. He studied philosophy, history and law at Calcutta University and the London School of Economics. For many years D. P. Chattopadhyaya was teaching philosophy at Jadavpur University. He is the founder chairman of Indian Council of Philosophical Research (New Delhi). Currently, D. P. Chattopadhyaya is the Chairman of the Centre for Studies in Civilizations, and General Editor of the series on History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization. Besides academic work he actively participated in politics as a member of Indian parliament (1969–1981) and a Federal minister.
2. Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) – poet and philosopher of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. He studied in Lahore and then in Britain and Germany where he defended his Ph.D. dissertation 'The Development of Metaphysics in Persia'. Iqbal's fame as a poet is so great that he is called the Rumi of modern times. The admirers of his poetic genius constructed a mausoleum on the grave in the centre of Lahore. The mausoleum has become a place of pilgrimage.
   Iqbal's religious and philosophical views are expressed in his poetry, like his magnum opus Asrar-i khudi and poems Bang-i dara, Garb-i kalim. However, his major contribution in the field of

philosophy is The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, the six lectures that he delivered in 1928–29.

3. There are those who think that their culture, being based on a particular religious faith (for instance, Islam or Hinduism), does not need any reforming, because any transformation threatens to destroy the culture in question and to bring about the loss of national identity. Any reorientation guided by human understanding would mean the acknowledgment of the supremacy of human reason over the omniscience of God (Nasr, 1965: 61). According to the Iranian philosopher S. H. Nasr, in Islamic civilization there is no 'interest in changes and adaptation'. This civilization is symbolized 'not by a flowing river, but by the cube of the Qa'aba, the stability, embodying the stable and immutable nature of Islam' (Nasr 1968: 21).

4. Abdolkarim Soroush (b. 1945) is often called 'Luther in Islam', as he is the most remarkable representative of that reforming trend in Islam which was founded by Muhammad Iqbal. Having started his public career as one of the top ideologists of the Islamic revolution in Iran, Abdolkarim Soroush in ten years became an enfant terrible of the ruling regime. He criticizes the political elite and particularly the Iranian clergy. As a result, Soroush has been fired from the Academy of Philosophy, deprived of the right to teach, limited in his public pronouncements and in publications.

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