

International Progress Organization



Organisation internationale pour le progrès

**Dr. Hans Köchler**

President, International Progress Organization

Co-President, International Academy for Philosophy

Professor emeritus of Philosophy, University of Innsbruck, Austria

Member of the International Coordinating Committee, World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations”

**Dialogue among Civilizations in the Global Era \***

Lecture delivered at the

11<sup>th</sup> International Forum on Lifelong Integrated Education

*The Space Age – Awakening to the Unchangeable Values  
Our Responsibility to the Future*

Seminar on Nomura Lifelong Integrated Education

Chapter III: Views on the Human Being

organized by

Nomura Center for Lifelong Integrated Education

Tokyo, 17 November 2014

**I.P.O. Online Publications**

International Progress Organization, A-1010 Vienna, Kohlmarkt 4, Austria

© Hans Köchler, 2014

---

\* This paper is a synthesis of the positions presented by the author in his capacity as President of the International Progress Organization (I.P.O.) since that organization's establishment in 1972.

## Principles and Requirements of Dialogue

In our era of globalization, dialogue between different, and potentially contradicting, worldviews and value systems, as embodied in the world's civilizations,<sup>1</sup> has become indispensable for global peace. In conceptual terms, we understand “civilization” as general notion under which “culture” is subsumed as specific manifestation, both being related to the human being's perception of the world (“life-world”) as such. In this sense, a civilization may have distinct cultural expressions in different historical periods and within a variety of linguistic, ethnic and political settings.<sup>2</sup>

In our global era, the encounter of cultures and civilizations – on the basis of a transcultural philosophical awareness of the origins of our “life-world”<sup>3</sup> – has gained new significance as element of world order. Particularly in large multicultural states or groupings of states, cultural dialogue has become an essential element of social and political cohesion and stability.

In view of the unequal international power balance (whether in military, economic, political or social terms), it is of special importance to highlight a *basic principle* of a credible and sustainable dialogue among cultures and civilizations, namely that dialogue can only be conducted on an *equal level*. Accordingly, *cultural hermeneutics* (the interpretation of cultures) must be based on a non-discriminatory approach according to which cultures and civilizations, though not factually identical, are treated as manifestations of the same *universal spirit of humanity*.<sup>4</sup> This is also in line with Yoshiko Nomura's vision of “education for human

---

<sup>1</sup> For the initial elaboration of the notion of inter-cultural dialogue see the text of the author's 1972 lecture at the University of Innsbruck: “Kulturelles Selbstverständnis und Koexistenz: Voraussetzungen für einen fundamentalen Dialog” [Cultural Self-comprehension and Co-existence: Preconditions of a Fundamental Dialogue], published in: Hans Köchler (ed.), *Philosophie und Politik. Dokumentation eines interdisziplinären Seminars*. (Veröffentlichungen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Wissenschaft und Politik an der Universität Innsbruck, Vol. IV.) Innsbruck: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Wissenschaft und Politik, 1973, pp. 75-78. See also the lecture delivered by the author at the Royal Scientific Society of Jordan (1974) on “Cultural-philosophical Aspects of International Cooperation,” fn. 11 below.

<sup>2</sup> For the distinction between “culture” and “civilization” see also Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” in: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72/3 (Summer 1993), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> The term is understood here in the phenomenological-hermeneutical sense as introduced by Edmund Husserl. See his *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*. (Ed. Walter Biemel) Husserliana, Vol. VI. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 2nd ed. 1962. Cf. also the chapter “Phenomenology of the Life-World,” in: Hans Köchler, *Phenomenological Realism. Selected Essays*. Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1986, pp. 42ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hans Köchler, “The Clash of Civilizations Revisited,” in: Hans Köchler and Gudrun Grabher (eds.), *Civilizations – Conflict or Dialogue?* Studies in International Relations, XXIV. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1999, pp. 15-24.

restoration,” which means that each individual, in an unceasing mutual effort of self-education, eventually expands the “circle of solidarity” towards the global level.<sup>5</sup>

Dialogue is a basic feature of the human being’s self-realization, individually as well as collectively. It must thus be seen in a *comprehensive* and *multidimensional* framework and can in no way be abstracted from the very realities of the life-world (including its political and socio-economic dimensions). At the same time, dialogue will not be credible – and will not succeed in terms of realpolitik – if one party tries to exploit the supremacy it may enjoy at a given moment in history in the economic, social, or military domain.

In regard to global order, there exists a complex relationship, indeed *interdependence*, which the philosophy of civilization, and in particular philosophical hermeneutics, has to be aware of:

- (a) on the one hand, the dialogue of civilizations is a basic requirement for global peace and stability because it contributes to the building of a *just* world order, i. e. a world order *perceived as just* by the world’s peoples;
- (b) on the other hand, a just and balanced world order is a fundamental prerequisite of *dialogue* since an encounter among civilizations does not happen in a political and socio-economic vacuum.

The “interactive circle of dialogue,” as one might describe this interdependent relationship, does not result from, nor is it indicative of, a logical contradiction. It is structurally similar to the interdependence in the act of human understanding (*Verstehen*), which Hans-Georg Gadamer in his “Truth and Method” described as the “hermeneutic circle.”<sup>6</sup> Any form of cultural or civilizational hermeneutics must pay attention to this interdependence.

When, during the 1990s, a “clash of civilizations” was first identified as major threat to global order, almost everyone, including the paradigm’s foremost exponent, Samuel Huntington,<sup>7</sup> affirmed a commitment to dialogue, not confrontation, as basis of lasting peace among nations. This, albeit superficial, consensus has manifested itself in the contemporary global discourse on dialogue in the form of solemn proclamations, diplomatic initiatives,

---

<sup>5</sup> Yoshiko Nomura, *My Vision for Lifelong Integrated Education*. Nomura Center for Lifelong Integrated Education, [www.nomuracenter.or.jp/htm\\_eng/synopsis/e\\_syn\\_wish.htm](http://www.nomuracenter.or.jp/htm_eng/synopsis/e_syn_wish.htm), accessed on 26 October 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 5th ed. 1986. (English version: *Truth and Method*. Trans. by Garrett Barden and John Cumming. London: Sheed and Ward, 1975.) See also Hans Köchler, “Zum Gegenstandsbereich der Hermeneutik,” in: *Perspektiven der Philosophie*, Vol. 9 (1983), pp. 331-341.

<sup>7</sup> “The Clash of Civilizations?,” in: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49; and *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

summit conferences, etc. – all dedicated to that noble goal which no one dares to object. It found its political expression in the United Nations General Assembly’s proclamation of 2001 as the “Year of Dialogue among Civilizations” and in the establishment (in 2005) of the so-called “Alliance of Civilizations” upon the joint initiative of the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey.<sup>8</sup>

In the majority of cases, however, the conditions of the co-operative relationship on which dialogue has to be based in order to be effective and meaningful, were overlooked in the political realm. This is where the *philosophy of dialogue* comes into play – as a reflection of and corrective against the instrumentalization of civilizational and cultural differences for ulterior (political) purposes. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this has become all the more urgent since force is increasingly being used in the name of universal *civilizational* values (such as democracy, human rights and rule of law)<sup>9</sup> and the “clash of civilizations” seems to have become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I shall briefly try to identify the principles and indispensable requirements that have to be acknowledged if “dialogue of civilizations” is to become a *sustainable* feature of international relations in our global era:

- (1) **Equality of civilizational (cultural) “lifeworlds,”** including value systems, in the *normative* (not descriptive) sense: This excludes any form of patronizing attitudes on the part of one civilization (culture) towards another. “Sovereign equality,” one thus might say, is not only an attribute of states as entities of international law, but also a principle that can be used to describe the inalienable right to civilizational and cultural identity.
- (2) **Awareness of the “dialectics” (i.e. interdependent nature) of cultural self-comprehension and self-realization:** A civilization (culture) can only fully comprehend itself, and thus realize its identity, if it is able to relate to “the other” in the sense of an *independent* expression of *distinct* worldviews and value systems, i.e. perceptions of the world, which are not merely an offspring of one’s particular (inherited) civilization. The process of civilizational or cultural self-realization is structurally similar to how the individual human being achieves self-awareness: *re-*

---

<sup>8</sup> For details see: *Alliance of Civilizations: Report of the High-level Group, 13 November 2006*. New York: United Nations, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> For a critique see Hans Köchler, “Civilization as Instrument of World Order? The Role of the Civilizational Paradigm in the Absence of Balance of Power,” in: Fred Dallmayr, M. Akif Kayapinar, Ismail Yaylaci (eds.), *Civilizations and World Order: Geopolitics and Cultural Difference. Foreword by Ahmet Davutoglu*. (Series

*flexio* (reflexion) implies that the subject looks at itself from an *outside* perspective, making it the very object of perception (“subject-object dialectic”).<sup>10</sup> As has been explained in the philosophy of mind, particularly since Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Immanuel Kant, individual self-awareness is the synthesis in a dialectical process in which the *ego* defines (or realizes) itself in relation to “the other.” The same applies to the collective self-awareness of a civilization (or culture). Only if a particular civilization is able and willing to see itself through the eyes of “the other,” will it achieve a status of *maturity* (in the sense of its *internal* development, not in regard to external evaluation!) that eventually allows it to overcome the fear of the other as “the alien” and, thus, to take part in global interaction (“dialogue”) with other civilizations. This collective self-realization is also where the Nomura notion of “mutual education,” based on *self-education*, comes into play.

- (3) **Acknowledgment of meta-norms as foundation of dialogue:** Derived from the normative equality of civilizations, these norms at the meta-level are logically prior to any *material* norms and have to be subscribed to by all partners in a meaningful undertaking of dialogue. “Tolerance” and “mutuality” (mutual respect) are two such examples of meta-norms; they are to be understood as *formal* (as distinct from *material*) values that determine the interaction between civilizations in general and, as such, are non-negotiable. They are the very “conditions of possibility” (*Möglichkeitsbedingungen* in the Kantian sense) of any such process, enabling an individual civilization to realize its specific, i. e. materially distinct, value system.<sup>11</sup> Due to their general (formal) nature as quasi-transcendental preconditions in the Kantian sense, they cannot be attributed to just one particular civilization. As “unchanging values,” their status is obviously *trans-cultural* and transcends the reality of time and place.<sup>12</sup>
- (4) **Ability to transcend the hermeneutical circle of civilizational self-affirmation:** In order to be able to position itself as a genuine participant in the global interaction

---

"Global Encounters: Studies in Comparative Political Theory.") Lanham (Maryland) / Plymouth (UK): Lexington Books, 2014, pp. 19-33.

<sup>10</sup> For details see Hans Köchler, *Die Subjekt-Objekt-Dialektik in der transzendentalen Phänomenologie: Das Seinsproblem zwischen Idealismus und Realismus*. (Monographien zur philosophischen Forschung, Vol. 112.) Meisenheim a. G.: Anton Hain, 1974.

<sup>11</sup> For details see Hans Köchler, *Cultural-philosophical Aspects of International Cooperation. Lecture held before the Royal Scientific Society, Amman-Jordan* [1974]. Studies in International [Cultural] Relations, Vol. II. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1978.

<sup>12</sup> See also the exposé by Yumiko Kaneko, Director-General of the Nomura Center for Lifelong Integrated Education: *The 11th International Forum on Lifelong Integrated Education 2014: Forum Aspiration*. Tokyo, June 2014.

among cultures and civilizations, a given civilizational or cultural community has to go beyond what Hans-Georg Gadamer described as *Wirkungsgeschichte* (“Reception History,” referring to the exclusive impact of the respective community’s “autochthonous” traditions on the formation of socio-cultural identity).<sup>13</sup> In view of the lasting impact on global order, reference to *Eurocentrism* as basic feature of “the West’s” collective identity formation can most pertinently illustrate this hermeneutical dilemma. Over hundreds of years, nations of the Western civilization had been accustomed to propagate their worldview, value system and lifestyle vis-à-vis “the rest” of the world, a process that has often been accompanied by a strategy to reshape the very identity of those other cultures and civilizations.<sup>14</sup> Against this background, international cultural exchanges have all too often been mere self-encounters of the dominant actor. However, a civilization will only be able to fully understand itself and define its place in the global realm of ideas, if it is able to reach out to worldviews that have developed *independently* of it, namely those that have not already been shaped by that civilization. This is indeed the essence of the *dialectics* of civilizational self-comprehension or self-definition; it means the ability to see what is *beyond* the (civilizational) border, and to understand one’s own civilization or culture *with regard* to the other, while at the same time preserving – and developing more fully – the very integrity of one’s position.

### Political Implications at the Domestic and International Level

A *philosophy of dialogue* according to the four principles and requirements of self-comprehension and self-realization we have outlined above, may help politics to manage the ever more complex realities of civilizational and cultural diversity – at the global as well as at the regional and domestic level. It is imperative that politics acknowledge the existing *multitude of civilizations and cultures* and adopt a set of clearly defined rules that ensure respect of the *right to diversity* on the basis of mutuality. Any rejection of this principle is a recipe for conflict and may threaten the stability of political order, and in the long term even the very survival of a polity (a state).

---

<sup>13</sup> See his work *Wahrheit und Methode*, fn. 4.

<sup>14</sup> For a critical look at these attitudes see also Hisako Matsubara, “The Dialectic of the Process of Cultural Consciousness,” in: Hans Köchler (ed.), *Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations*. Tübingen/Basel: Erdmann, 1978, pp. 31-34.

The time for measures to ensure, or reestablish, a “monocultural reality” has long passed – and not only for Europe, which has itself triggered a “multicultural development,” first through colonization and, later, through an economically-driven immigration policy and, in tandem with industrialized countries on other continents, through the globalization of the economy. The cultural dynamic these historical processes have activated cannot suddenly be stopped, or “switched off,” just as the process of industrialization cannot be reversed for the sake of the nostalgic revival of a pre-modern encounter with nature. What can and should be done, however, is to develop a new, self-critical approach towards technology – a *spiritual attitude* that frees us from the enslavement in our own artifacts, and an awareness of the unchanging values shared by all human beings and all civilizations.

Responsible politics has to create the organizational framework in which distinct – and often (not only geographically) distant – cultural and civilizational identities can develop and interact *without* threatening the stability of the respective system, and without alienating a country from the rest of the world. The simultaneity of distinct civilizations, each in a different phase of identity formation, and at the same place – in the same global *polis*, is an existential challenge from which decision-makers cannot escape lest they will be “punished by history,” if we may allude here to a dictum of former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. The emergence of the “Islamic State” on the territory of Syria and Iraq (and beyond) is dramatic evidence of this challenge to which the international community has no answer yet.

Those who engage in the *rhetoric* and *politics* of peaceful partnership among civilizations – certainly the vast majority of UN member states, and especially those assembled in the “Alliance of Civilizations” – should be reminded of the philosophical principles of dialogue, which do not allow a policy of “civilizational double standards.” *Equality* of civilizational expressions requires more than mere lip service to equal rights; it necessitates *mutual recognition*. What a state claims for itself (in terms of national sovereignty), it also has to be prepared to accord to the other. The application of the reciprocity principle to issues of communal identity means that states have to abstain from any claim to civilizational supremacy or hegemony. In order to be credible and sustainable, the politics of global dialogue – within and outside the United Nations – have to incorporate these principles.

The multicultural reality, which has become a *fait accompli* in many polities that used to define themselves in the tradition of the nation-state, has plunged many states into a deep identity crisis. Unless the new reality is also acknowledged at the *global level*, the world will be headed towards an era of *perpetual confrontation* along civilizational lines. Accordingly, those

who promote the goal of dialogue *internationally* can only do so credibly, and consistently, if they recognize the equal rights of cultural and religious minorities in *their own* countries. In our era of global interdependence, “peace at home” and “peace in the world” are intrinsically linked. The application of *double standards* (in regard to cultural recognition) will only undermine a state’s credibility in the global dialogue among civilizations and cultures, and subsequently weaken its position within the community of states.

*Monocultural nostalgia* should thus give way to *intercultural openness* and *civilizational curiosity*, which alone will ensure a polity’s long-term viability and success (including economic competitiveness) under conditions of an ever more complex interdependence between the realms of local, regional and global dimensions of cultural diversity. In this context, the notion of *lifelong integrated education* gains special relevance also for the realization, and assertion, of a distinct national and cultural identity that is shaped by the constant interaction with other cultures.

A sustainable policy of dialogue has to be based on genuine respect for each other’s value system – an attitude that in itself is rooted in basic human rights (individual as well as collective), which the community of nations has solemnly confirmed on repeated occasions since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In distinction from – though not in contradiction to – the specific values inherent in each civilization, these basic rights form a *system of meta-values*, which are the common ground for dialogue.

As explained above, the fundamental values of freedom, tolerance, etc., expressing the essence of human dignity, are all norms on the basis of *mutuality*. As regards Western civilization, those norms may be derived from Kant’s transcendental philosophy, in particular his notion of the autonomous subject, and they may be explained by means of his *Categorical Imperative* (“Handle so, daß die Maxime deines Willens jederzeit zugleich als Prinzip einer allgemeinen Gesetzgebung gelten könne“ / “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law”).<sup>15</sup> Those norms are indispensable for the enjoyment of the distinct and specific rights represented – and advocated for – by different cultures and civilizations. In this sense, they are not “exclusive” norms imposed by one side upon the other on a discriminatory basis. However, as rightly stated by the participants of the 2001 Conference on the Dialogue of Civilizations in Kyoto, in

---

<sup>15</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*. Ed. Joachim Kopper. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun., 1966, § 7, p. 53).



order to develop a global ethos – as basis for peaceful co-existence – “it is necessary to reach consensus on which norms are universal and which norms are cultural and specific.”<sup>16</sup>

In conformity with this normative approach – that highlights common norms of second order (so-called meta-norms) as condition for the acceptance of a plurality of normative systems of the first order, the practice of civilizational dialogue must be *comprehensive* (in regard to its global outreach towards *all* civilizations) and *inclusive* (in so far as it integrates the economic, social and political levels) at the same time. This requires that no one civilization alone try to establish itself as global “standard-bearer.”<sup>17</sup> The above-mentioned Kyoto Dialogue stressed the need to “carefully contain[ing] attempts at ‘globalizing’ the specific value systems of those currently in power politically or economically.”<sup>18</sup> In this regard, the Conference called for a “respectful dialogue between members of different civilizations,” emphasizing that “no judgment should be made about the norms of other cultures unless one has first critically examined similar norms within one’s own culture.”<sup>19</sup>

### Universal Civilization and the True Meaning of Globalization

If conceived in its genuine hermeneutical meaning, a dialogue among civilizations and cultures may bring out the true meaning of “universal civilization.”<sup>20</sup> By its very nature, dialogue, as quest for mutual understanding, is nurtured by an attitude of openness towards different expressions of humanity – synchronically as well as diachronically. In all historical periods, mankind has expressed itself in a variety of life-worlds and distinct horizons of understanding – a process that is still continuing in our era, which is commonly characterized by the term “globalization.” Unlike as proclaimed by an apologist of Western supremacy in the post-Cold War environment, history has not come to an end yet.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> United Nations University in cooperation with UNESCO, *International Conference on the Dialogue of Civilizations. Tokyo and Kyoto, 31 July – 3 August 2001*. Conference Report, Par. 32, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> See also Hans Köchler, “Civilization as Instrument of World Order? The Role of the Civilizational Paradigm in the Absence of Balance of Power.”

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Loc. cit.*, Par. 33.

<sup>20</sup> On the notion of universality in the context of culture see also Hans Köchler, “Unity in Diversity: The Integrative Approach to Intercultural Relations,” in: *UN Chronicle*, Vol. XLIX, No. 3 (2012), pp. 7-10.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” in: *The National Interest*, Vol. 16 (Summer 1989), pp. 3-18; and: *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992. For a philosophical critique see the author’s *Democracy and the New World Order*. Studies in International Relations, XIX. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1993.

In view of the universal history of civilizations<sup>22</sup> and the simultaneity of a multitude of civilizational horizons, dialogue requires a genuine *cosmopolitan* attitude. This implies the awareness that preserving one's cultural and civilizational identity is possible *without* excluding the "other," and that one's identity is conditioned by the very awareness of and tolerance towards other civilizations.

The deeper meaning of "globalization" is in fact expressed by the "*globality*" (or universality) of civilization. The essence of globality lies in positioning one's own cultural and civilizational awareness as member of a *distinct* community while at the same time defining one's specific life-world in the framework of *universal* culture – by interacting with other civilizations on the basis of equality and mutual respect. This attitude, out of hermeneutical necessity, lets each member of a civilization appreciate the *common* spiritual heritage of mankind. As explained by Mrs. Nomura, "creating a new civilization on a global level" is indeed one of the major preconditions for peaceful co-existence among all nations.<sup>23</sup>

*Globality*, understood in this sense, is not identical to, or to be confused with, economic *globalization*. The latter tends to impose "commercial" values upon virtually all fields of life. It is characterized by a drive towards socio-cultural *uniformity*, subordinating all spheres of life to the economic domain and in particular to the supposed necessity of exploiting all available resources – material as well as human – for material gain.

Although the apologists of this development, or trend, describe it as irresistible or unstoppable, the underlying argument is philosophically not convincing. The rationale of the process of globalization is based on the assumption that only unhindered economic and technological development, not restrained by ethical considerations or respect for cultural differences, will bring out the full potential of the human race and thus guarantee prosperity to all on a long-term basis.

In sharp distinction from this position – with its "particularist" outlook, based on the supremacy of the economy over all other spheres of life, the project of a dialogue of civilizations is in and of itself *universalist* and, therefore, represents *globality* in its original meaning: as a system of open – virtually "borderless" – interaction, on the basis of mutual respect, between distinct expressions of humanity in each and every culture and civilization. This *comprehensive* approach is not to be confused with cultural or ethical *relativism* because it is

---

<sup>22</sup> For a Western view see esp. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*. London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1948-1961.

<sup>23</sup> *My Vision for Lifelong Integrated Education*, loc. cit.

based on the commitment to *common* (i.e. universal) cultural and civilizational values shared by all members of the human race.

By definition, this attitude precludes any form of exclusivism and *unilateralism*. The *ethos* of civilizational dialogue is only compatible with a *multilateral* approach in the cultural as well as the political fields. A genuine and sustainable dialogue among cultures and civilizations may thus prove to be the only viable alternative not only to the divisive forces of economic globalization and its underlying trend towards socio-cultural uniformity, but to perpetual confrontation on a global scale.<sup>24</sup>

\*\*\*

---

<sup>24</sup> On the implications of the paradigm of the “clash of civilizations” for the global system see also the author’s lecture “The Dialogue of Civilizations and the Future of World Order.” *Foundation Day Speech*, 43rd Foundation Day, Mindanao State University, Marawi City, Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, Philippines, 1 September 2004.