

# Introduction

Diversity matters. Whether it is in the context of talking about ecosystems, educational institutions, corporations, the media, or politics, diversity is now widely recognized as something positive and worthy of being both preserved and actively pursued.

This has not always been the case. Indeed, it is only quite recently that “diversity” came to connote, not just factually manifest differences, but also the *valuable* presence of difference. The first usage in this sense was in connection with the scientific correlation of species diversity with ecosystem vitality and resilience. Roughly a half century ago, this positive conception of diversity began being generalized through a confluence of social, philosophical, and political movements insisting on the productive *salience of difference*: the women’s, anticolonial, and civil rights movements; deconstructionism and postmodernism; and the advent of identity politics and multiculturalism.

Over the intervening decades, however, although “diversity” has become an increasingly important part of the critical lexicon, it has remained relatively undertheorized as a synonym for variety. In the contexts of education and politics, for example, diversity has continued to be seen as an essentially quantitative measure of inclusion for those who differ from the majority by reasons of race, culture, religion, age, or gender. In the contexts of biology and ecology, it has likewise remained a basically numerical index of species density. In both cases, while more diversity has come to be affirmed as better than less, the predominant, fundamentally quantitative conception of diversity itself gives no clues as to why this should be so. Notwithstanding the positive aura it has acquired, “diversity” continues to refer simply to the coexistence of many different kinds of things in a given setting.

This book develops a more theoretically robust conception of diversity. At its heart is the recognition that differences are ultimately always *processes*

of differentiation, and that significant critical advantages follow if we distinguish between diversification and variation as distinct modes of differentiation, with diversity understood as an *emergent quality and direction of relational dynamics*. More broadly, it is a book that attempts to weave a multilayered historical and philosophical narrative that shows why difference came to be such an important issue and concern in the mid-to-late-twentieth century; why difference can no longer be viewed as just the conceptually vacuous opposite of sameness; and why a richly qualitative conception of diversity affords crucial resources for evaluating and practically engaging our increasing social, economic, cultural, and political interdependence.

The dramatic origins of this narrative, however, are not purely theoretical. They are rooted in deeply troubling questions about the meaning-of and means-to greater equity in a world that is characterized by both fabulous wealth generation and the no less fabulous widening of wealth, income, resource, and opportunity gaps, making our era at once the most developmentally advanced and uneven in human history. The claim that will be advanced here is that diversity is not just valuable. It is a value crucial to working out from within the global dynamics of the twenty-first century to change the way things are changing in a shared commitment to improvising and sustaining ever more equitable modalities of human-with-planetary flourishing.

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Among the key features of contemporary global dynamics are their non-linearity and complexity: their tendency to be recursively structured and prone to *significant* discontinuities. Accounts of how to work out from within these dynamics in pursuit of more equitable futures cannot be expected to take the form of clearly specified plans based on a “blueprint” of the grand architecture of global interdependence. Instead, they are likely also to be complex and nonlinear, more akin to performance notes for a piece of situationally responsive improvised music than a utopian engineer’s urban master plan. That, at least, is true of the narrative that follows, in which key distinctions and themes appear and reappear as interactive parts of an emergent, recursively structured whole. Given this, it is perhaps useful here to call attention to some of these distinctions and themes and the global contexts for composing them.

## I. CONTEXTS

### Getting Things Right and yet Going Ever More Globally Wrong

From a certain point of view, it could be said that humanity is mostly getting things right. Globally, we can produce more than enough food to adequately feed everyone on the planet. We have created living conditions

that, along with new medical practices, enable the world's people collectively to enjoy the longest life expectancies in history. Literacy is at an historical high. Communication takes place at the cosmic limit of light speed. The contents of world-class libraries are available anywhere on Earth to anyone with access to an Internet connection. And the range of choices exercised daily in pursuit of lives worth leading by the world's seven billion people is wider and deeper than it has ever been—a pursuit that is now globally recognized as a basic and universal human right.

But in the global systems supporting these positive developments, there is more than just a “devil in the details.” Of the world's population, more than eight hundred million are chronically hungry and fully one in five live in what the World Bank terms “absolute poverty”—conditions so degraded and degrading that they do not afford even the *hope* of a dignified life. Today, 1 billion people are without access to clean drinking water and 2.6 billion live without adequate sanitation. Conservative estimates of the effects of human-induced climate change suggest that by 2050 between one and three billion people will lack adequate drinking water of any sort. One out of every seven people in the world is illiterate (two out of every three of these being women or girls). The rate of functional illiteracy in many of even the most highly developed countries is nearly one in four. And for a tragically large number of people, the abstract possession of universal human rights is no compensation for the very concrete effects of being chronically subject to systematic human wrongs.

For those who are hungry and thirsty and who live without even the hope of dignity, the fact that we are mostly getting things right offers scant consolation. The number of people living today in absolute poverty would have been the entire world population in 1865. The number of those who live on less than two dollars per day—figured according to purchasing power parity—is equivalent to every man, woman, and child living in 1965. What must be done to open spaces of hope for these mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters? How do we work out from present conditions, as they have come to be, to realize—at a bare minimum—dignified lives for all?

My own conviction is that truly dignified lives cannot be lived by *any* unless the conditions are realized by means of which dignity is a reality for *all*. I am also convinced that the time has long passed for wishing or waiting for such conditions to materialize. Our dignity is sluicing at an unprecedented and accelerating rate into the chasm of inequality that now separates the 14% of the world's people who use 85% of its resources from the 86% majority compelled to exist on the remaining 15%, or the richest 2% of the world's population who possess 50% of global wealth from the bottom 50% who have less than 1%. Contrary to the central modern myths of increasing equality and universal progress, the depths of such chasms are not decreasing. They are increasing. They are everywhere in

our midst. And there is no backstage for the somatic, psychic, and social tragedies they are generating. What can we do in caring response?

### Contemporary Globalization: New Scopes, Scales, and Complexity

Any viable answer to this question must take into critical account the dynamics of contemporary globalization processes. The term “globalization” was first employed in something like its current use in the 1960s to capture new sensibilities about the nature and reach of corporate activity. By the 1990s, however, centers studying globalization as a wide array of economic, social, political, and technological processes had become standard fixtures on university campuses as well as in research and policy circles. And at least since the protests of the 1999 ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, globalization has come to connote a fundamentally contested process that constitutes “a leading edge of political conflict” (Robinson 2004, 1). Yet, minimally characterized as a range of processes through which people, goods, and senses of “the good” are placed into global circulation, globalization is hardly an exclusively contemporary (or even modern) phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

What is new is the scope and scale of exchanges that are now regularly and globally taking place, and the pace and types of change both driving and driven by these exchanges. In brief, the circuits of exchange in goods, services, peoples, and ideas that are primary causes and consequences of globalization have crossed critical thresholds of scale and intensity to begin bringing about truly *complex relational systems* that are both self organizing and novelty generating. This means that present scales and scopes of globalization processes are *not* bringing peoples, countries, economies, and social systems into new patterns of relationship from which they will later be able to extricate themselves, wholly and at will.<sup>2</sup> The relationships into which we are being ushered by contemporary globalizations are not “external” relationships that we will be able to exit without remainder; they are “internal” or constitutive relationships. As is now being recognized, these relationships affect every aspect of our lives, including even the contours of our emotional makeup, significantly altering both who and how we are.<sup>3</sup> Once they are established, breaking these relationships means a breakdown and diminution of who we have come to be, both as persons and as communities. Having crossed crucial scales of scope and complexity, globalization entails deepening both *interdependence* and *interpenetration*.

### Globalization and Differentiation as Challenges to Making Sense

To anticipate here how the complexity of contemporary globalization processes will factor into our later discussion of the need for a reconception

of difference, two points should be stressed. First, multiplying and magnifying differences are crucial to both the systemic (internally focused) and situational (externally directed) adaptations through which emerging systems of network-organized complex interdependence sustain themselves. This means, in effect, that the differences generated and sustained by globalization ramify *significantly* and *recursively* across scales, sectors, societies, and spheres of interest.<sup>4</sup>

Second, at every scale from the personal to the social, from the local to the global, conditions now obtain for a delamination of the multidimensional “lifeworlds” that allow joint meaning making to occur in everyday circumstances in a taken-for-granted manner. As a foreign traveler quickly discovers, what native and long-term local residents experience as transparently common sense interactions in fact always express dense arrays of distinct—and distinctively overlapping—contexts of relevance that nonnatives experience as a confounding opacity. For the nonnative traveler, even the most mundane patterns of interaction can simply fail to make sense, offering very concrete proof of the existence of deeply uncommon or unshared assumptions about how the world is and should work. When lifeworlds begin coming undone, things stop making complete sense even to lifelong local residents. Under such conditions, it is not just that things can no longer be taken for granted; there is a progressive unraveling of the threads of tacit understanding that normally connect us meaningfully with one another: a comprehension-foiling dislocation of dispositions regarding what and how things *are* and *should be*. This amounts to a disintegration of customary means of constructing meaning and relevance—the growing prevalence of conditions in which the difficulties we face can no longer be framed as problems to be solved because we lack consensus on what would even count as a solution.<sup>5</sup> This is what the anthropologist James Clifford (1988) has called the modern “predicament of culture”—a condition in which distinct meaning systems overlay, interleave, and compete with one another in ways that place the very possibility of making sense in question.

Put somewhat more generally: the multiplication and magnification of differences associated with contemporary globalization processes subject the grammars of daily life to destabilizing arrays of both centripetal and centrifugal forces. Crucially, because this fragmentation and subsequent reconfiguration of lifeworlds amounts to a process of compartmentalizing and re-compartmentalizing commitments, it also raises questions about the status and meaning of the self. Lifeworld disruption is correlative with the opening of spaces for reconfiguring priorities and for ongoing deconstructions/reconstructions of identity that can be simultaneously creative and coercive.

Critics of globalization view with great concern the centripetal forces that threaten to sediment effectively coercive grammars favorable to

market-aligned power structures and forms of identity that ultimately disenfranchise a global majority. Proponents of globalization view with positive anticipation the individual empowerment resulting from the dissolution of traditional structures and identities, envisioning the centrifugal forces propagating throughout the public sphere in ways fundamentally aligned with increasing autonomy and democracy. What can be said with certainty is that the coevolution of complex systems of global interdependence is now actively reconfiguring global topographies of advantage/disadvantage, and it is doing so in ways consistent with the dominant constellations of values embedded throughout those systems.

## II. DISTINCTIONS AND THEMES

### From Problem Solution to Predicament Resolution: A Change of Eras

A key element in opening spaces of hope and dignity for all from within existing global dynamics is to recognize that such tragically consequential phenomena as global poverty, hunger, water shortages, and climate change cannot be effectively responded to as problems. They are locally experienced and yet globally constituted predicaments. Problems arise when circumstances change in ways that render existing strategies and techniques ineffective for pursuing our values, aims, and interests. Solving problems involves developing new means to abiding ends. Predicaments occur when we are forced to confront the presence of conflicts among our own values, aims, and interests. For example, while there is global consensus that it would be best to avoid major climate change and instability, the readily apparent technical means of doing so (reduced carbon emissions) runs afoul of prevailing social, economic, and political interests and values. Predicaments cannot be solved or treated with some new technical fix precisely because conflicts among our own values and interests make it impossible to define what would count as a solution. It is the very *meaning* of success that is in question. Predicaments can only be *resolved*. This entails increased *clarity* about how things have come to be as they are, and new and more thoroughly coordinated constellations of *commitments*.

As a combined result of the problem-solving successes of our scientific, technological, social, economic, and political systems, and the difference-generating and risk-amplifying dynamics of reflexive modernization and industrial globalization (Beck 1999; Beck et al. 1994), we are in the midst of a transition from an era dominated by problem solution to one characterized by the centrality of predicament resolution. Among the implications of this, two are crucial for the pursuit of more equitable global interdependence. First, it suggests that we are witnessing the progressive obsolescence of the constellation of values that have informed the social, economic,

political, cultural, and epistemic dynamics of global industrial modernization for nearly half a millennium—a constellation that includes such hallowed values as universality, equality, autonomy, sovereignty, control, competition, and choice (Toulmin 1990). Second, it implies that the defining challenges of the present moment and the foreseeable future are not centered on the acquisition of practical knowledge (knowing what can be done and how), but rather on the shared consolidation of wisdom (knowing what ought to be done). In other words, we are also in the midst of a transition from predominance of the *technical* to that of the *ethical*.

Yet, in addition, the global historical trajectory that has carried us to the point of the problem-to-predicament transition, combined with the apparent intractability of such issues as global hunger and climate change, makes it clear that in turning critical attention from the technical to the ethical we must be open to turning in the direction of a significantly different kind of ethics—one that departs from the modern paradigm of assuming the centrality of individual agents, of identifying freedom with choice, and of forwarding universal definitions of the good life according to which differences are simply contingent attributes attaching to a purportedly common human nature.

### The Contemporary Aporia of Difference

One way of bringing the imperatives for such an ethical paradigm shift into clearer, critical focus is to see the problem-to-predicament transition and the difference-generating and difference-amplifying attributes of contemporary global dynamics as forcing confrontation with an *aporia*: an impasse or paradox.

Whether within societies or in the context of their interaction, the complex and interdependent dynamics of contemporary social, economic, cultural, and political realities invalidate the assumption that we have common perspectives and purposes. We are now continuously confronted with needs to acknowledge, not only the increasing significance of differences (for example, in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, and culture), but also the increasing variability of the kinds of difference that are critically significant. At the same time, however, as is powerfully evident in connection with the prospects of global climate change or the threat of a global HIV/AIDS pandemic, these same dynamics also insure that imperatives for arriving at robustly shared and globally coordinated forms of action are themselves deepening, not lessening.

We thus find ourselves in the troubling position of needing to address two seemingly opposing needs. First is the need to more fully acknowledge differences, going beyond merely tolerating differences from (and among) others to enabling differences to matter more—not less—than ever before.

Second is the need to realize ever more extensively and deeply shared sets of values, subsuming our manifold differences within ever more comprehensively articulated and yet globally coherent patterns of commitment.

One response to this aporia and the fissures opening in the modern world has been to see them as occasions for reinstating some preferred set of premodern ideals and institutions. This is the approach taken by the many fundamentalisms that champion turning back from modern values and restoring (or reinventing) cultural regimes that would subvert secular universalism in favor of a particular religious, social, and political totalism—an approach that would forcibly reinstate conditions in which all difficulties can be framed as problems open to utterly certain solution.<sup>6</sup> Doing so would, of course, dissolve the conditions of possibility for any significant “predicaments of culture.” For those involved, there would be but one value system and one set of interpretative assumptions. Fundamentalisms typically involve assumptions of monopoly with respect to truth—a denial of the ultimate significance and dynamism of differences. A global fundamentalist future would bring either a patchwork world of independently governed moral ghettos or the global domination of a single and necessarily coercive vision of right living.

Another response has been accepting the paradoxical or aporia-like character of contemporary life as concomitant with renouncing all claims of absolute truth and common essences; with cultivating skepticism about all metanarratives and rejecting their potentially coercive implications; and with affirming inalienable human rights-to-differ. This is the approach of what can be loosely called postmodern theories and practices that counter modern and premodern emphases on “the same” with contrary emphases on difference and otherness. But accepting the aporia of difference—affirming the particularity and relativity of all forms of life and claims to truth—is also to accept the impossibility of truly global predicament resolution.

The approach provisionally forwarded here is that responding to the aporia of difference in ways that open real prospects for equity-enhancing global predicament resolution requires moving at a “perpendicular” or “oblique” angle to the spectrum of premodern, modern, and postmodern conceptual resources and their contrasting valorizations of moral communion, universalist cosmopolitanism, and free variation—the construction of difference, respectively, as systemically and hierarchically prescribed; as vertically progressive and yet contingently ascribed; and as horizontally proliferating and autonomously subscribed.

### Cultural Differences as Critical Resources

It is not easy to envision what it would mean to move in such an oblique fashion. The needs to at once affirm and elide differences are apparently

contradictory, and yet the empirical forcefulness with which we are confronted with them suggests that this aporia or impasse is not circumstantial, but rather conceptual—a signal of the inadequacy of our prevailing conception of difference. If so, originating movement of the sort needed will require what might be called a paradigm shift in how we understand difference—a conceptual revision that may be only modest in apparent scope, but that must be utterly *radical* in the sense of reshaping the very *roots* of our experiencing and engaging difference.

Broadly speaking, a paradigm consists in a system of aims, values, assumptions, methods, and institutions that holds together in expression of a distinctive pattern of “family resemblances.” A paradigm shift occurs when some element in this system is altered in a way that triggers a reconfiguration of the whole. In the case of the paradigm shift from classical, Newtonian physics to the relativistic physics of Einstein, the radical revision was to see that light was ontologically ambiguous. The experimental evidence confronting Einstein was that light sometimes acted like a stream of particles and at other times like a wave. The prevailing assumption was that light *had* to be either one or the other. Einstein’s paradigm-changing insight was to draw the utterly radical inference that this manifestly “contradictory” evidence did not indicate a failure of experimental design (something that could be fixed); it indicated the failure or limited applicability of the either/or logic which had long been considered foundational for rational inquiry. This enabled him to recognize similar limitations in prevailing conceptions of energy, matter, time, and space as supposedly independent dimensions of reality.

Like physicists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who were confronting evidence of the failure of a scientific paradigm that had generated a broad spectrum of theories about light, matter, energy, gravitation, and motion, we are confronting no less confounding evidence of the failure of a critical paradigm that has generated the current global spectrum of competing ethical, economic, and political theories. The analogy suggests that the “contradictory” needs of enabling differences to matter more than ever before while at the same time subsuming these differences within globally shared commitments indicate our arrival at the limits of our prevailing conception of difference. Breaking through the aporia entails breaking with prevailing assumptions—logical and meta-physical—about what difference is and is not.

Such a conceptually radical break is not likely to be accomplished in either cognitive or cultural isolation. A key finding in the cognitive sciences over the last quarter century is that such apparently simple or elemental concepts as identity, sameness, difference, and change are in fact among the most difficult to model. What this means is that, in spite (or because) of informing virtually all of our sentient activity, such concepts

are very difficult to make “visible” in the way needed to formally define them or translate them into another language, precisely because they are constitutive of the very conditions of “visibility.” Directing critical attention to such concepts on our own is like trying to see our own eyes: an effort doomed to failure in the absence of an appropriately placed reflective medium. Much as mirrors enable us to see our own eyes, intercultural encounters enable us to see that we have *uncommon assumptions* about the basic constituents of human experience. They make visible what is usually invisible in ways capable of spurring quite radical revisions of how we understand the world and ourselves. The paradigmatic conceptual revision needed to break through the aporia of difference is most likely to be accomplished *interculturally*.

The French philosopher and sinologist Francois Jullien (2000) has argued well and at length on behalf of intercultural investigations of basic concepts, demonstrating the surprising degree to which cultural “detours” can grant new and critically incisive “access” to our own experience. But to press his language, it is not always easy to discern what will prove to be a revelatory detour; what will turn into a progressive immersion in being lost; and what will amount only to a circuitous and wearying course back to where we began. It is not easy to distance ourselves from the familiar in the resolutely open ways necessary to revise something as rudimentary as our conception of difference.

What is certain is that intercultural encounters of the kind needed will not result from booking a “cultural tour” to some far-flung part of the world or inviting home guests from afar. While physical relocation and “cultural immersion” can play important roles in bringing uncommon assumptions to light, paradigm-challenging cultural detours cannot be primarily geographical or motivated by simple curiosity. They are acutely conceptual and intentional, where concepts are understood as distillations of lived experiences and practices, and where intentionality implies recursively dynamic and values-generated commitment. Detours of this type are not abstract; they are existential.

The detours that will be invoked here in pursuit of clear passage through the aporia of difference will thus be at once personal and provisional. They are personal in the sense of being detours that I have taken in the course of my study and practice of Buddhism (and to a lesser extent, Confucianism and Daoism) and in the sense of having been undertaken in hopes of revising the meaning of personhood. They are provisional in the sense of being edited “reports from the field,” rather than exhaustively detailed accounts of journeys completed, and in the sense of being locally coherent expressions of insights rather than purportedly absolute truths.<sup>7</sup>

For those who (I think, too narrowly) regard Buddhism as a system of meditative practices for individually attaining spiritual liberation,

the merits of undertaking Buddhist detours for insight into contemporary global dynamics are likely not immediately evident. But, the central insight of Buddhist practice is that all things occur interdependently. And as I hope to make evident, the conceptual resources that have been developed over the last 2,500 years in support of realizing this insight are extraordinarily useful in challenging foundational assumptions about identity and difference, in critically engaging the emergent dynamics of complex systems, and in resolving conflicts by means that eschew both force and compromise.<sup>8</sup>

Confucian and Daoist traditions emerged (in China) at roughly the time as Buddhism (in India), and from about the third century enjoyed considerable interaction with it. All three traditions have sought distinctively to discern how best and most appropriately to sustain appreciative (that is, value-according and value-generating) continuity in a world wherein relationality (not things-related) and change (not the unchanging or eternal) are ontologically primordial. As such, they afford distinctive resources for rethinking difference; for challenging the assumption that the individual is the natural and proper unit of ethical, economic, and political analysis; and for developing an ethics of interdependence and relational equity.

### Ontology Matters: The Primacy of Relationality

There is now considerable evidence and increasing recognition that contemporary realities are best understood in terms of relational concepts like “interdependence, conjoint construction of meaning, mutually interacting entities, and systemic process” (Gergen 2000, 211). More strongly stated, the patterns of interdependence and interpenetration that are emerging with globalization at contemporary scales, scopes, and complexity cannot be adequately or accurately engaged as long as we remain critically wedded to the ontological primacy of individual and independent existents that only contingently enter into relationships. Attempting to do so is like trying to eat soup with a fork—an effort that will inevitably leave behind what is most distinctive about contemporary realities. What these realities invite us to see is that relationality is not contingent; it is constitutive. Rather than continuing to take individual existents to be the basic “building blocks” of reality, we should understand them as abstractions from more rudimentary relational dynamics. Again, it is relationality—and not things-related—that is ontologically primordial.<sup>9</sup>

It is, of course, one thing to recommend such a change of ontological paradigms and quite another to carry through with it. It is not merely that we are being compelled to trade in one set of world-constructing building blocks for another; we are being compelled to abandon the very idea of

a “building block world” and to relinquish our commonsense notions of what it *means to be*, and thus also what it *means to change*.

To return to the analogy suggested earlier, we are not unlike those who witnessed the circumscription of classical physics by then emerging relativity and quantum paradigms based on empirical demonstrations that Newtonian concepts of time, space, energy, and the independence of the observer and the observed were useful only in a middle range of physical phenomena and only as approximations. In the realms of the very small and the very large—the microscopic and the cosmic—time and space, matter and energy, observer and observed are revealed to be related in ways not unlike the “two sides” of a möbius strip: a three-dimensional object that strangely has only one edge and one side.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, from the perspective of a relational ontology, separately existing things—any given “this” and “that”—occur only as aspects or abstractions of relational dynamics: opposing “aspects,” “edges,” or “sides” of a situational whole that are ultimately continuous.

If this is so, then such modern dichotomies as those of “mind” and “body,” “free will” and “determinism,” the “individual” and the “collective,” “self” and “other,” “progress” and “stasis,” “order” and “chaos,” or “facts” and “values” can have only conventional or heuristic utility. To use a phrase from the philosophy of science, they do not “cut the world at its joints” because, as it turns out, the world is not originally jointed. Seeing relationality as more primordial than things-related is, in other words, to see that difference cannot be a simple *fact* of discrepancy or an essentially static “relation.” Difference is a complex, historically realized and value-laden function of qualitatively charged, implication-generating, and recursion-rich relational dynamics. Put more simply: differences never simply *are*, they always *mean*.

From this ontological perspective, the kinds and degrees of differences being generated by contemporary globalization processes and network-structured industrial modernization can be seen as indices of changes in what we mean to and for one another, and it is critically important to ask: changes that are benefiting whom? in consonance with what values? in favor of which and whose grammars of life? in support of or antipathy with what structures of feelings, what kinds of communities, and what kinds of politics?

### III. NARRATIVE CURRENTS

The ten chapters of this book offer a recursively structured approach to answering these questions, oscillating at different registers between historical and philosophical vantages from which it becomes evident how and why the dynamics of global interdependence have been biased

overwhelmingly toward variation, how this is connected to global inequalities being at historical highs, and why the pursuit of greater environmental, social, economic, cultural, political, and cognitive diversity is crucial to realizing and sustaining conditions for greater equity. Brief descriptions of the main narrative currents are offered here to provide a synoptic—albeit partial—overview of the whole.

### The Nonduality of Sameness and Difference

Modern conceptions of difference arguably began acquiring important new philosophical depth with Hegel's use of the dialectic. But it was not until the late twentieth-century advent of what can broadly be called postmodern thought that a paradigmatically new approach to understanding difference began being articulated. As is discussed in Chapter 1, postmodern thinking offers important correctives to the coercive potentials that attend modern essentialism and universalism, explicitly rejecting the foundational nature of sameness—either ontologically or ethically—and asserting instead the primacy of difference. Postmodern thought, however, does not so much break with as it inverts the values constellation that defines modernity. And its emphases on the relative, the particular, and the local work against its effectiveness in addressing the kinds of equity-eroding differentiation processes that have been so manifestly apparent in the last two centuries of market-driven industrial modernization and globalization.

Buddhist thought offers an alternative to both the modern subordination of difference to sameness and its postmodern inversion. The core Buddhist insight that all things arise and abide interdependently entails seeing that there are no ontological gaps between things and hence no metaphysically ultimate boundary between what something “is” and what it “is not.” As Buddhist logicians were quick to point out, this means that one of the foundation blocks of propositional logic—that there is nothing “between” identity and difference—must be seen as a conventional truth, not an absolute one.<sup>11</sup> The logical assertion of the so-called “excluded middle” affirms that things are either the same, or they are different. This implies that while sameness or identity has potentially limitless content or meaning, since difference consists only in the absence of identity, it can have only minimal (and at that, ultimately parasitic) significance. Seeing all things as interdependent disallows understanding the relationship between sameness and difference as an asymmetrical disjunction of this sort and challenges the notion that either identity or difference should be understood as primary or foundational.

As is affirmed in a very early canonical text, the *Sutta Nipāta*, conflict and suffering are unavoidable whenever we divide the world up in terms of conceptual opposites. Rather than granting priority to either identity

or difference—or to either universality or particularity—it is more appropriate to regard them *nondualistically*. Elaborating on the work of the seventh-to-eighth-century Chinese Buddhist thinker Fazang, Chapter 1 closes with a nondualistic reading of sameness and difference. Concisely stated, all things are the same, precisely insofar as they differ significantly from one another. That is, all things *are* what they *mean* for one another.

### Diversity as Value

From such a nondualistic perspective, difference is not ultimately a static absence of identity; it is the dynamic presence of conditions for mutual contribution. In Chapter 2, this insight is used as a point of departure for exploring the merits of undertaking a conceptual bifurcation, using “variety” and “diversity” to point to two distinct qualities and directions of differentiation processes, with variety indicating only the minimal relationship of coexistence, and diversity the realization of a certain quality of interdependence or mutual contribution.

This distinction enables a novel critical approach to examining the multiplication and magnification of differences that characterizes contemporary modernization, marketization, industrialization, and globalization processes. Specifically, since this distinction specifies the conditions in which differentiation processes will be relationally enriching, it has considerable explanatory and evaluative potential, especially in clarifying the means-to and meanings-of equity. Moreover, Buddhist nondualism implies that, notwithstanding the conventional utility of the fact/value and means/ends distinctions, they are without any ultimate metaphysical or ethical warrant. A nondualist affirmation of the ontological primacy of relationality enables developing a relational theory of values that is used in the second half of Chapter 2 to explore the merits of seeing diversity as a *value*—a modality of appreciating relational resolution and refinement that has critical relevance across a broad range of domains from the environmental to the political.

### Changing the Meaning of Change

A core Buddhist teaching is that if we aim to dissolve the conditions of conflict, trouble, and suffering, we should see all things as changing. While the conventional logic of the excluded middle depicts differences as static and instantaneous matters of fact, the Buddhist perspective is that, like all things, differences should be seen as aspects of dynamic relationality and hence as irreducibly temporal phenomena. Being different is, in actuality, always a function of *differing*. Or more simply stated: difference entails change.

It could also be said, however, that change is a primordial expression of difference, and this implies that our conceptions of change may be as much in need of paradigmatic revision as prevailing conceptions of difference, especially if we are intent on changing the *way* things are changing. With this in mind, Chapter 3 undertakes an intercultural consideration of “uncommon assumptions” about time and change. As with difference, non-Western conceptual resources are used to open possibilities for seeing change as qualitatively differentiated. This enables introducing two sets of polarities—control and contribution; choice and commitment—that exemplify contrasting modalities of change associated with variation and diversification, and that direct attention to links between the meaning of change and the meaning of freedom that become critically important in evaluating the dynamics of contemporary globalization processes.

### Histories and Possibilities: Reorienting the Dynamics of Change

Another, related Buddhist teaching is that positively and sustainably addressing conflict, trouble, and suffering can only be done on the basis of critical clarity about how things have come to be as they are. That is, histories make a difference. And so, while asking and answering philosophical questions about the meaning of change is crucial, responding to these questions fully cannot be undertaken usefully in either a cultural or a historical vacuum. On the contrary, critical engagement with the meaning of change is inseparable from engaging cultural differences in the meanings and uses of history.

A common popular assumption is that history is a study of the past with the aim of developing a complete and accurate view of all that has transpired. Contemporary historiography rejects this simplistic view, but is itself divided as to how best to understand the proper scope and aims of history. The first part of Chapter 4 considers tensions between modern “histories from above” and postmodern “histories from below,” and in response forwards a Buddhist-inspired historiography according to which an important function of history writing is discerning resources for normatively reorienting, rather than simply explaining, current change trajectories.

The second part of the chapter initiates such a recursively structured reading of changes in the political, economic, social, cultural, and technological spheres that are correlated with the global spread of modernity and the progressive dominance of industrially powered market economies. The purpose is to develop a broad understanding of how the merger of modern and market values served to accelerate differentiation processes, especially in the social sphere, ironically bringing about conditions for both the problem-to-predicament transition and the intensification of

paradoxical imperatives to at once accept, accentuate, and sublimate differences in identity and values both within and among societies.

More tightly focused readings of roughly the same period of time are presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7. In Chapter 5, the focus is on how modernity- and market-driven changes in mass media have been correlated with changing conceptions and practices of personhood and community; with the emergence of a global attention economy and the progressive colonization of consciousness; with the increasing identification of the optimal with the optional; and with a progressive normalization of both multiple identities and elective communities. Chapter 7 concentrates on the period from the stock market collapse of 1929 to the present, offering an account of the rise of the military-industrial-communications complex; its relationship both to the spread of rational choice theory into public policy making and the development of postmodern ethics; the dissolution of the modern agenda of global unification and the building of "*cosmopolis*"; and its replacement by a postmodern agenda of free variation and utopian constructions of "*netropolis*."

### Toward an Ethics of Interdependence

As with globalization, differences in conduct, values, and personal and cultural identities are nothing new. What is new are the scales, scopes, and complexity of differentiation, including the production of differences in who enjoys which outcomes and opportunities associated with economic growth and industrial modernization. Morality, law, and ethics can be seen as distinctive responses to perceived needs to manage or constrain "deviance" and promote congruent conduct through, respectively, strategic exercises of communal pressure and persuasion, objectively prosecuted punishment, and rationally constructed proof. In premodern and modern contexts, all three can be argued to have had the primary aim of subordinating difference to sameness.

Late modern patterns of social differentiation and intensifying tensions between competing political and economic universalisms considerably complicate this focus on the same. While the contexts of morality and law remain communally or state focused, the context of ethical discourse has undergone remarkable expansion. Although always oriented toward determining what all reasoning persons should do to secure the conditions of the good life, there has been a marked expansion of both who is considered capable of ethical deliberation, and who and what is to be granted ethical consideration.

Chapter 6 opens with reflections on how modern constructions of the private and public as separate "spheres" of life affected the conception and conduct of morality, law, and ethics; how the globalization and

social differentiation processes spurred by industrialization and marketization combined with philosophical and political valorizations of universality, autonomy, and equality to produce conditions for an ethical tension between competing universalisms; and how liberally framed values pluralism emerged as an attempt to make space for differing conceptions of the good in a world recovering from the horrific effects and implications of the Second World War and grappling with the prospects of a nuclear winter ending of the Cold War. But while pluralism of this sort was a reasonable response to tensions between competing universalisms, it was wedded to the idea that rational deliberation was capable of establishing a single, hierarchically ordered set of values valid for all. And in the context of the historical conditions that led to deepening cynicism about claims made for one or another route to global unification, this struck many as being neither tenable nor desirable.

One response was the gradual articulation of a postmodern, particularist (or relativist) ethics of difference. Yet, in spite of their otherwise stark opposition, an ironic kinship obtains between universalist and particularist ethics. Both express commitments to the value of equality that—however disparate their scopes of application—eventuate in the denial of critical relevance to difference. That is, although with irreconcilable reasons and objectives, universalist and particularist ethics have in common a *de facto* strategy of *disarming difference*. Because of this, neither approach is suited to responding to the variation-amplifying inflection of contemporary global dynamics—a world in which equality remains a fiction (however powerful), and in which equity (understood as equality of opportunity) remains an attractive, but ever distant goal.

Chapter 6 concludes by anticipating the need for an alternative to modern universalism and postmodern particularism—an ethics of interdependence and diversity that would neither work against nor simply accept the presence of uncommon assumptions about the meaning of the good life, and that would instead work out from within those differences in the direction of a shared conception of human-with-planetary flourishing.

For reasons developed more fully in Chapter 8, the failure of efforts to realize truly equitable patterns of global interdependence can be seen as reflecting the inadequacies of current models of collective action and the basic incongruity of modern ethical tensions (and dichotomies) in an “other-than-modern” world characterized by the problem-to-predicament transition and the emergence of complex patterns of global interdependence and interpenetration. To reprise an earlier metaphor, while the divisions within modern ethics purport to cut the world at its “ethical joints,” they in fact constitute a consistent pattern of imposition upon it. And while the many merits of this imposition are historically evident, no less evident now is that these tensions—between agents and actions, free

will and determinism, virtue and duty, individual rights and collective responsibilities, egoism and altruism, principles and consequences, discovered and constructed conceptions of the good, and the universal and the particular—reflect modern sensibilities that divide the world up in terms of categories that obscure rather than clarify concrete possibilities for effective commitment to greater equity.

### Relational Equity: Beyond Equality of Opportunity

The concept of equity has historical roots in classical Greece where it was invoked in legal contexts to avert unfair rulings that would result from the universal application of law. That is, equity was invoked in cases where, in the interest of justice, differences should *not* be ignored. Over the course of the modern era, however, equity underwent significant conceptual revision in the historical context of a split between economics and ethics that occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This revision culminated in the twentieth century with the identification of equity with equality of opportunity.

Chapter 8 begins by tracing the historical development of the concept of equity, the gradual migration of its focus from legal matters to considerations that are economic, political, and ethical in nature, and its eventual presence at the center of debates between liberal theorists and their communitarian, feminist, and postcolonial critics about the meaning-of and means-to justice. Consistent with this complex history, practical considerations of equity over the past quarter century have come to focus predominantly on calibrating *how much* wealth, power, access, and opportunity various individuals or groups have—an objectively measurable state of affairs—and are essentially agnostic with respect to *how well* these individuals and groups relate. Inequity is taken to consist in the persistent *absence* of sameness or equality in some specified and measurable senses, and equity in the lessening of those differences. This is true even for those who insist on recognizing and respecting differences as crucial to the achievement of justice.

Placed in the context of the dynamics of differentiation-accelerating and advantage-skewing reflexive modernization and world risk society (Beck 1999; Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994), however, recognizing and respecting differences is clearly not enough, and the identification of equity with quantitatively indexed comparisons of equality of opportunity has the critical liability of directing attention to absolute changes in, for example, wealth, income, and educational access, rather than relative changes that manifest concretely as relational transformations consistent with values, aims, and interests that are embedded within and embodied by existing power hierarchies and their institutional infrastructures.

Addressing issues of justice in a world of complex interdependence and interpenetration requires a fully *relational* conception of equity that does not resist differentiation processes, but rather focuses on evaluating and reorienting them as needed to realize the conditions for systematically enhancing relational quality. According to such a conception, inequity consists in the *presence* of debilitating or degrading relational patterns: the differential atrophy of interactive strengths, often in the context of deepening power asymmetries. Equity is not a comparative state of affairs, but rather a process of inflecting differentiation processes in ways conducive to strengthening relational dynamics and fostering increasingly mutual contribution to sustainably shared flourishing—an open-ended process of relational appreciation. Greater relational equity does not mean greater equality, but rather greater diversity.

### Rethinking Global Commons, Global Public Goods, and Collective Action

Over the last quarter century, equity—that is, equality of opportunity—has come to be seen as a global public good that is crucial for realizing social, economic, and political justice. Would this hold true after delinking equity from equality and developing relational conceptions of both equity and justice? And if so, what would this imply more generally about needs to expand or revise our conceptions of resource commons, public goods, and the kind of collective action needed to ensure that their protection and provision are actually conducive to sustained human-with-planetary flourishing?

The development of contemporary discourses on global public goods and global commons can be seen as a response to needs for new kinds of analytical and practical traction in efforts to address justice issues in the context of increasing global interdependence and industrially powered global market economies (Buck 1998; Kaul et al. 1999; Keohane and Ostrom 1995). Chapter 9 investigates what it would mean to see diversity as a global relational commons crucial to realizing greater global equity.

The difficulties associated with the protection and provision of resource commons and public goods are often referred to as problems of collective action,<sup>12</sup> as those associated with addressing issues like global climate change, poverty, and hunger might be. In this context, the “problem” of collective action refers to the necessity of generating individual choices and actions that may not be optimal in terms of every individual’s self-interest, but that will maximize collective benefits or those benefits shared among all the individuals involved. Seeing these difficulties as *predicaments* suggests that addressing them effectively will not be a finite and primarily technical endeavor, but rather an ongoing and explicitly ethical one in which diversity and equity would function as *coordinative values*.

The most widely prevalent models for understanding and addressing the difficulties of collective action—the “prisoner’s dilemma” being far and away the most influential—are wedded to an ontology of autonomous, rationally self-interested individuals acting independently in the context of relatively fixed external constraints on the basis of constant and coherent interests. Whatever their utility in sharpening theoretical issues related to the exercise of choice, these models greatly oversimplify the situational dynamics that are foregrounding issues of collective action, imposing on them a gamelike structure in which benefits accrue (or fail to accrue) to individual players who entertain essentially similar and yet practically incompatible sets of outcome priorities.

In the context of the problem-to-predicament transition, however, assumptions built into predominant game theoretic models of collective action—that actors already know what outcomes are desired, that they agree on what “winning the game” means, and that they know and will follow a common set of rules for play—become a serious liability. To use a helpful distinction drawn by James Carse (1986), predicament resolution is not a “finite game” played in accordance with the assumptions just noted, but rather an “infinite game” in which the point is not winning, but rather sustaining and enhancing the *quality* of ongoing “play” for all involved.

It is characteristic of finite games that winning them results in increased *power* for the winner(s)—that is, increased capacities for determining situational *outcomes* or “how things turn out.” By contrast, well-played infinite games characteristically advance the *strengths* of all players—foregrounding their capacities for generating *opportunities* to keep playing and to enhance the value of doing so. As I will draw the contrast: skill in playing finite games leads to increasing freedoms-of-choice; skill in playing infinite games leads to steadily appreciating capacities for relating-freely. Importantly, while the benefits of finite play consist of individual “gains” of some sort, the benefits of infinite play are fundamentally relational in nature.

Seeing the pursuit of collective action as a finite game has some merit so long as the action needed is, in fact, problem solution. But if the requisite action is to engender globally shared commitments in ways that will yield sustainable courses of predicament resolution, thinking in terms of strength-oriented infinite play has marked advantages over the power-oriented pursuit of calculable gains. In Buddhist terms, these reflect the disparate karma or patterns of experienced outcome and opportunity that are associated with a bias, respectively, toward the valorization of control (power) and contribution (strength).

In the context of the problem-to-predicament transition, the central difficulty of collective action is not overcoming our individual differences to act in our common interests, but rather activating and sustainably coordinating the relational strengths made manifest as a function of *how well*