

Social Intelligence in a Multicultural World: What Is It? Who Needs It?
How Does It Develop?

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A Little Song on a Big Subject: Tolerance

“George Washington liked good roast beef. Haym Solomon liked fish. When Uncle Sam served liberty they both enjoyed the dish.” When I was a child growing up in New York City in the early days of television that jingle was part of a public service advertisement linking American patriotism to tolerance for differences in the beliefs and customary practices of ethnic and religious minority groups in the United States.²

George Washington, of course, is the iconic father of our country. In that jingle his food preference speaks for the habits of the dominant ethnic group:

¹ Forthcoming in New Perspectives in Human Development, edited by Nancy Budwig, Elliot Turiel, and Philip Zelazo, Cambridge University Press. This essay was originally delivered as a Keynote Address at the 2013 meeting of the Piaget Society in Chicago, Illinois. Sections of the essay concerning Montaigne and moral realism recapitulate or expand upon formulations in my essay “Relativism and Universalism” in A Companion to Moral Anthropology, Didier Fassin (Editor), Wiley Blackwell, 2014, pages 85-102 and in other essays of mine about the moral domain.

² Recounting my memory of the song on another occasion (I have written about and narrated this memory before) it was suggested to me by someone who shared that memory that Levi’s Rye Bread may have been the sponsor of the public service advertisement. This remains to be verified.

a White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant population with a taste for bloody red meat. Nevertheless, following along with the lyrics of the song, the United States is represented as a complex multicultural society where its citizens (Haym Solomon, for example) have permission to be different from one another in their enjoyment of food and views about what is good to eat. Haym Solomon liked fish, not roast beef, and no one interfered with his pursuit of his preferences.

Haym Solomon, in case you did not know, was a personal friend of George Washington, a banker and a patriot who helped finance the American Revolution. My own knowledge of his biography and actual food preferences is quite limited. But as you may have guessed he was a Jew. His name and character appear in the verse as a symbol of the liberty of ethnic and religious minority groups to carry forward their way of life in the United States. The two revolutionary era friends, one Protestant and one Jewish (yet both good Americans), were creatively appropriated as icons of an imagined national disposition to make space for the free exercise of culture and religion, which is an outlook the public service advertisement encourages us to share. “Celebrate diversity” is its take home message.

Recently I discovered that the George Washington/Haym Solomon verse comes from a book called “Little Songs on Big Subjects” which is full of morally loaded pluralistic and humanistic ditties about social understanding, the gist of which can be summarized by these lines: “Nature has no fav’rite nation, Color, creed, or occupation - Any place [on the globe] you point your finger to, There’s someone with the same type blood as you!”

I have occasionally wondered if that rhyme about George Washington and Haym Solomon is one of the early influences on my much later decision to become a cultural anthropologist. Recently I have begun wondering whether the song's "everyone-is-the same-wherever-you-go" humanistic perspective is really reconcilable with its "different-but-equal" pluralistic message; after all, wherever you point your finger to on the globe, including fingering members of your own in-group, there will be many whose blood type is not the same as yours.

I have also wondered how far one can successfully extend the "to-each-his-own-bag" premise of moral subjectivism; or universalize its associated principles of liberty and expressive equality conveyed by the catchy lyrics of the song. That premise – of moral subjectivism - encourages a rather breezy and expansive sense of tolerance for variety in the customary practices of different ethnic groups. But it does so, one must admit, by indiscriminately (and presumptively) reducing cultural differences to the idea of taste, desire or personal preference. And that is a problem.

"George Washington [the WASP] liked good roast beef. Haym Solomon [the Jew] liked fish. When Uncle Sam served liberty they both enjoyed the dish." Let's be a bit more discriminating, or at least discerning in our food preferences. What if I were to interrogate the social intelligence of my Hindu Brahman informants in the temple town of Bhubaneswar in Orissa, India³ by asking them to react to that verse? They live in a coastal area of

³ This is a location where beginning in 1968, and on and off over the decades, I have conducted research on cultural mentalities and social intelligence.

India where many of the local Brahmans customarily eat fish, but would never eat bloody red meat. In fact, it is precisely because of their fish eating habits that Brahmans in the State of Orissa are viewed as somewhat lower in status by Brahmans from other regions of India who characteristically maintain a strict vegetarian diet.⁴ And in rural Hindu India, including the state of Orissa, beef eating of the sort indulged in by George Washington and his ethnic group is pretty much restricted to very low status castes, one of whose specializations and caste duties is to undertake the spiritually polluting task of getting rid of dead “holy cows.”⁵

⁴ The local Brahmans are themselves differentiated into a series of hierarchically arranged Brahman sub-castes. The ranking is done on the basis of the importance and purity/sanctity not just of what they customarily eat but also of their family life practices and their social and traditional occupational duties. For example, manual labor is thought to be somewhat degrading of status compared to the reading of sacred texts or the performance of ritual activities in the presence of a god; and hence (for example) one local sub-caste of Brahmans who are believed to have historically engaged in farming is ranked lower in the Brahman sub-caste hierarchy because they labored with a plow.

⁵ I realize of course that some of you may also be inclined to make degrading status and identity judgments about George Washington for not being a vegetarian or even a fish eater. The premise of moral subjectivism (which accords a privilege and authority to matters of taste or personal wants) is not necessarily taken for granted even in the coastal regions of the United States. Health has become a pervasive concept for hierarchically scaling and making “objective” moral judgments about the behavioral habits of individuals in our society. Public regulations (for example, prohibiting the creation of restaurants for smokers) and social judgments stigmatizing “fat people” (on the assumption they are overweight because of what they eat) make one less and less free to choose what to ingest into one’s own body. This type of moral mapping and grading of individuals and groups is even (or perhaps especially) commonplace within the most elite sectors of American society where many tend to view themselves as superior to others because of their “enlightened” food habits.

But let's go a step further and not just tip toe around in the moral domain focusing merely on variations in food taboos. What if George Washington and Haym Solomon had different conceptions of marriage or gender relations or the meaning of bodily integrity or how to discipline children? What if George Washington liked monogamy and Haym Solomon liked polygamy? What if one of their wives liked to wear short dresses at social occasions while the other had a personal code of modesty and preferred to shield herself from the male gaze by wearing a burqa in the public square?⁶

Continuing for a moment with this interrogation of the moral implications of that rhetorically appealing punch line (“When Uncle Sam served liberty they both enjoyed the dish”) what if we move from the choice between surf versus turf on the dinner menu to cultural “tastes” of a somewhat different sort? What if we discovered that George Washington (who one can reasonably assume was not circumcised by his parents) was personally disgusted by the very thought of neonatal male circumcision and judged the Jewish practice to be child abuse and a violation of various supposed inalienable human rights, such as the right to self-determination and the right

⁶ If you drive 90 minutes North of the Upper West Side of Manhattan to the nearly 100% Jewish Satmar Hasidic village of Kiryas Joel in Orange County, New York you will be greeted by a prominently displayed sign, sponsored by a local Jewish congregation, which reads as follows: “Welcome to Kiryas Joel, a traditional community of modesty and values. We kindly ask that you dress and behave in a modest way while visiting our community. This includes: wearing long skirts or pants, covered necklines, sleeves below the elbow, use appropriate language, maintain gender separation in all public areas. Thank you for respecting our values and please ENJOY YOUR VISIT!”

to physical integrity? While Haym Solomon (who probably was circumcised) approved of the practice; and indeed, might well have viewed the Jewish custom as an act of religious piety or at the very least as a significant sign of one's ethnic identity? Are you still prepared to say "When Uncle Sam served liberty they both enjoyed the dish?" And, one might ask, what should feelings of personal disgust or enjoyment have to do with judgments of right and wrong anyway?

Ultimately if you are striving to develop your own social intelligence you might find yourself asking this question: If the United States is to be a genuinely multicultural society what should be on your un-American cultural activities list, if anything at all, and why? That is the kind of question about social understandings addressed in this essay. Increasingly, given the renewed challenge of cultural migration into various regions of North America and Europe, that is a question contemplated by at least some anthropologists in the sub-discipline increasingly known as "moral anthropology" or alternatively "the anthropology of morality."

James Madison's Social Intelligence Concerning Factions in a Multi-Cultural Society

James Madison, another founding father of the American experiment, had some profound things to say about the reasons for the persistence of group differences in social understandings in any complex multicultural society. He too was impressed by the role of liberty as a source of diversity, although he added two other factors as well, which he called "self-love" (and which we might gloss as visceral or affect-laden identity-maintenance) and the fallibility of reason. His observations appear in his famous treatise

concerning factions in American society (in Federalist 10, originally published on November 22, 1787): a faction being a sub-group of citizens, whether in the majority or in the minority, who are bound to each other by some shared interests, values, social understandings, passions, customary practices or historical identity that sets them in contrast to the interests, values, social understandings, passions, customary practices or historical identity of some other sub-group of citizens.

James Madison writes, “There are two methods of removing the causes of faction: the one, by destroying the liberty which is essential to its existence; the other, by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests. It could never be more truly said than of the first remedy [the tyrannical destruction of liberty], that it was worse than the disease. Liberty is to faction what air is to fire, an aliment without which it instantly expires. But it could not be less folly to abolish liberty, which is essential to political life, because it nourishes faction, than it would be to wish the annihilation of air, which is essential to animal life, because it imparts to fire its destructive agency. The second expedient is as impracticable as the first would be unwise. As long as the reason of man continues fallible, and he is at liberty to exercise it, different opinions will be formed. As long as the connection subsists between his reason and his self-love, his opinions and his passions will have a reciprocal influence on each other; and the former will be objects to which the latter will attach themselves.”

I have brought forward the George Washington/Haym Solomon jingle from the early 1950s and those observations by James Madison from 1787

because they seem especially relevant for any cultural anthropologist interested in the development of social intelligence in a multicultural world. But what do I mean by a multicultural world? I mean the kind of world in which peoples who belong to different historical ethical communities (or to different value factions within a single society) seem to disagree with each other in self-involving and affect arousing ways about the legitimacy of particular social norms and family life practices. And what do I mean by social intelligence? I mean everything a person thinks, feels, knows, and values that makes it possible for that person to successfully function and feel at home in some particular social group.

Feeling at Home in Your In-Group: Is Ethnocentrism a Vice or a Virtue?

As ironic as it may sound, social intelligence could not exist without a good deal of ethnocentrism – that is to say, ethnocentrism with a happy face. To be ethnocentric with a happy face means feeling at home in a particular way of life and embracing its local or parochial points of view about what is real and of value.

Nevertheless, that is just one side of the story of ethnocentrism in any society. Social intelligence in a genuinely multicultural society is also marked by the ability and willingness to de-center – to be at home with your ethnocentrism even while knowing when and how to step outside of it as well. In other words to be socially intelligent in a complex multi-cultural society one must also be able to accurately and sympathetically comprehend the different ways of life of others and understand *their* parochial and historically situated point of view too. Perhaps you have already guessed

where I am heading: While theorizing about social intelligence I am going to idealize the aims and methods of cultural anthropology and posit them as models for the development of social understanding.

If ethnocentrism is defined as the privileging of one's own habitual and familiar native point of view, then the sharing of a native point of view is probably essential for life among members of any cultural in-group. Members of a cultural in-group who feel at home in their way of life tacitly accept that they are parties to an agreement with other members of the in-group to uphold a particular way of life, picture reality in similar ways, and value the world in similar terms; and in that sense they must be ethnocentric if they are going to effectively function as cooperative and accepted members of their group. Ethnocentrism (the anthropologist's analogue to Jean Piaget's concept of egocentrism) is thus not only pervasive but also unavoidable. Indeed, within any cultural group ethnocentrism is likely to be a starting point for the ontogenetic development of social understanding. In a purely mono-cultural world ethnocentrism might even be an ideal (or at least defensible) endpoint for social development.

Nevertheless ethnocentrism remains a potentially hazardous frame of mind. In a genuinely multicultural world, especially one with power imbalances between cultural groups, ethnocentrism can become a problem. Members of different ethnic groups or historical ethical communities living in multicultural societies are likely to customarily, habitually or even deliberately do things that elicit spontaneous judgments of opprobrium (outrage, disgust, moral disapproval, condescension) from members of other historical ethical communities or ethnic groups. They may disagree, for

example, about whether it is morally permissible to engage in sex selective abortion; or about whether circumcising a male infant on the eighth day after birth is a legitimate parental right and morally defensible custom.

One year ago for example, an appellate judge in Cologne declared childhood male circumcision (as practiced by Jews and Muslims) unconstitutional in Germany (where male circumcision has never been customary, at least not among its dominant Germanic ethnic group), setting off a moral panic among Jews and Muslims around the world.⁷

Notably, overcoming ethnocentrism is the standard challenge confronting the cultural anthropologist in the field when seeking to understand other cultures from “the native point of view.” Typically a cultural anthropologist conducting ethnographic field work stands outside a form of life different from his or her own which initially he or she does not really understand. He or she must exercise considerable discipline and self-restraint to get beyond this type of epistemic subjectivity or ethnocentrism. Why? So as not to react to all the local things he or she does not really understand as if those things could be readily assimilated to one’s native point of view and fairly

⁷ As much as I would like to discuss the secular liberal progressive thinking (full of references to self-determination, human rights, beneficent safekeeping and protection of the vulnerable from harm) that went into the legal ruling I will restrict my discussion of the challenges posed by ethnocentrism for social understanding to the intellectually provocative and viscerally charged case of sex selective abortion in India, which I examine later in this essay. For further discussion of the German court decision banning male circumcision in Germany see Richard A. Shweder, *The Goose and the Gander: The Genital Wars*,” *Global Discourse* (2013) available online at this website address:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23269995.2013.811923#.VB9nyhZpKno>

judged by one's own self-affirming gut feelings. A willingness to bracket one's fast cognitions and gut reactions (thereby temporarily set them to the side) and to leave oneself open to the much slower process of accommodative understanding of the point of view of others (the anthropologist's analogue to "decentering") is an essential feature of the anthropological process of understanding others.

When Even the Gods Don't Agree (About Moral Absolutes)

I would like to suggest that the development of social intelligence in a multicultural world is a process of keeping ethnocentrism and epistemic subjectivity in their proper place. The development of social intelligence in this respect amounts to a never-ending struggle to honor and make sense of two propositions.

The first proposition is nicely stated by the anthropologist Raymond Firth. He conducted field research on the Island of Tikopia in the Southwestern Pacific ocean and wrote the following about the moral beliefs of the Tikopia people: "The spirits, just as men, respond to a norm of conduct of an external character. The moral law exists in the absolute, independent of the Gods."

That proposition – which abstractly stated postulates the existence of an objective moral charter for life in society comparable in ontological status to mathematical or logical norms - will be familiar to cognitive developmental theorists who study morality. You really can't be a cognitive developmentalist, at least not in the tradition of developmental studies

forged by Jean Piaget, Larry Kohlberg, Elliot Turiel or Larry Nucci, without subscribing to a metaphysical belief essentially the same as that of the natives of Tikopia: that there are normative moral truths which exist in the absolute, independent of both humans and the gods. Piaget's so-called constructivism is largely about the process of discovering those moral truths. Piaget's theory of constructivism is not about the creation, constitution or invention of moral truths. With due respect to social constructivists of an anti-realist stripe, Piaget himself was not an anti-realist and he assumed that moral truths, if they are truly true are also really real and must pre-exist their discovery by any individual or group.

Henry Sidgwick identifies this objectivism or realism presupposed by moral judgments. In his classic and highly influential 19th century text in moral philosophy The Methods of Ethics (1884) Sidgwick begins with an analysis of the key moral concept expressed in the English language by the word "ought." He argues that any expression of an attitude of approval for a social action that deserves to be called moral approval is "inseparably bound up with the conviction, implicit or explicit, that the conduct approved is 'objectively' right – i.e., that it cannot, without error, be disapproved by any other mind" (1884: 28).⁸ That is precisely what Piaget, Kohlberg, Turiel, Nucci and the Tikopia say too. You can't be a socially intelligent and moral human being without making judgments of that sort, relying, rightly or wrongly on some notion or other of universal moral truths or an objective moral charter for life in society.

⁸ Sidgwick contrasts the expression of a genuine moral judgment to an expression of approval which is merely of personal liking or is a report about the shared opinions of the members of some group or is the expression of nothing other than feelings of pleasure.

The second proposition that plays a part in the struggle to develop one's social intelligence in a multicultural world is sometimes attributed to Socrates. That second proposition, unlike the first, is not a normative ontological assumption about the existence of the moral truths contained in some posited objective moral charter (for example, the Ten Commandments). Rather it is an observation about diversity in social and moral judgments, which goes as follows: "There are some things about which even the Gods disagree."

So my thesis is that the development of social intelligence in a multicultural world is the never-ending struggle to come to terms with those two propositions. This is one way to keep epistemic subjectivity and ethnocentrism in their proper place. It is the struggle to embrace some notion of an objective moral charter while trying to figure out what might explain apparent moral disagreements even among the Gods. If you are an attentive observer in a multi-cultural world you notice that among those who disagree in their moral judgments there are those who subject their attitudes or feelings of approval or disapproval to scrutiny and criticism and end up feeling justified and at home with their particular judgments of right and wrong. James Madison, as noted earlier, sought to explain the origin and persistence of ideological factions in any complex society by reference to the combination of liberty, the fallibility of reason and self-love. His observations are profound. If you are going to develop your social intelligence in a multicultural society you can't avoid wrapping your explanatory mind around the failure of moral judgments to converge, even among the Gods.

Two Visions of Social Intelligence: Currents and Counter-Currents

Perhaps it is obvious by now that my talk is a play on two different visions of social intelligence. One of those visions is sometimes associated with theorists of the European Enlightenment. The other vision is sometimes associated with the romantic rebellion against the Enlightenment. If my effort today seems dialectical, or perhaps just belabored and clumsy, it may be because I am trying to embrace the virtues (and avoid the vices) of each of those visions.

Isaiah Berlin draws the contrast between the two visions this way. For many progressive Enlightenment authors “there is only one universal civilization, of which now one nation, now another, represents the richest flowering.” Berlin goes on to say that for the romantic authors (he has in mind German romantics such as Johann Herder, who had a big influence on my own discipline) “there is a plurality of incommensurable cultures. To belong to a given community, to be connected with its members by indissoluble and impalpable ties of a common language, historical memory, habit, tradition and feeling, is a basic human need no less natural than that for food or drink or security or procreation. *One nation can understand and sympathize with the institutions of another only because it knows how much its own mean to itself.*” (My emphasis)⁹

In line with that observation I wish to suggest that a highly developed social intelligence is one that is able to understand and sympathize with the

⁹ Isaiah Berlin, Vico and Herder, Viking, 1976.

unfamiliar and even ego-alien perspectives and attachments of the members of different cultural communities without shedding the attitudes, judgments and feelings that give definition to one's own distinctive but culturally contoured and refined sense of self. The challenge or the trick is to figure out what type of multicultural experiences and understandings make that possible.

Of course that first vision of social intelligence – the one associated with the Enlightenment – will be very familiar to members of the Piaget Society, for whom the writings of Piaget, Kohlberg and Leonard Hobhouse (especially his 1915 book Morals in Evolution) are (or at least ought to be) canonical texts. Theirs are among the most influential (or at least well thought out) 20th century theories concerned with the development of social intelligence.

All three authors – Hobhouse, Piaget and Kohlberg - were liberal progressives who believed that the social intelligence of both individuals and members of different historical communities could be ranked on a universal developmental scale. All three subscribed to the view that there exists an objective moral charter for the organization of an ideal universal civilization. That objective moral charter defined the normative endpoint for a fully realized social intelligence, which can and should be used as the global standard for judging the validity of diverse ways of life and ranking them in terms of their moral worth (for example, on a developmental scale from savage to civilized or backward to advanced). Developmental moral mappings of that sort get made all the time both within and across societies. Both (fast) visceral and (slower) reflective judgments get made about such things as whether monogamy is superior to polygamy, democratic

governance superior to kingship or theocracy, or whether animism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and contemporary secular atheism can be lined up on some temporal developmental scale reflecting the supersession of superior forms and revealing historical progress in the human understanding of the God/Nature term.

This approach to the development of social intelligence is well-represented in the writings of Hobhouse, Piaget and Kohlberg. All three theorists believed that liberal enlightenment thinkers had come closest to discovering the terms of the one true charter for social intelligence. For example, all three viewed tribalism or in-group favoritism (which they judged to be incompatible with the principle of justice as equality) and deference to hierarchy (which they judged to be incompatible with individual autonomy) as lower forms of social understanding. All three argued that the social and moral consciousness of human beings had not only evolved over the course of cultural history but should be encouraged to continue to develop in what they viewed as the progressive liberal direction liberating the individual from the constraints of inherited tradition and the burdens of ancestry.

All three argued that the social understandings of the peoples of the world could be ranked from the earlier stages in which there was blind or unreflective adherence to the acceptances of ones tribe (and subordination of ones capacity for self-determination to the will of dead ancestors and the dictates of authority figures) to higher stages in which there was thoughtful and even self-critical reflection aimed at giving every person their rightful due with reference to impartial and objective standards of freedom, justice

and equality. All this they summarized in the preeminent principle of respect for persons and their self-determination or autonomy.

The Liberal Progressive Vision: From the Academy to the Invasion of Iraq

Echoes of this type of liberal progressive vision of social intelligence can be readily found not only throughout the academy in North America and Europe but also in contemporary public policy forums. Consider for example this resonant formulation by former United States President George W. Bush, which he voiced in his first “State of the Union Address to Congress and the Nation” after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. “America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere. No nation owns these aspirations and no nation is exempt from them. We have no intention of imposing our culture, but America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity, the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women, private property, free speech, equal justice and religious tolerance.” Those were weighty and portentous words expressing the foreign policy doctrine that American wealth and power should be used to make the world a better place by upholding what many American activists and interventionists (both on the internationalist “left” and on the jingoistic “right”) view as an incontestable universal framework for promoting the development of social understanding on a global scale.

And yet it remains a fact of life that there are some things about which even the Gods disagree. To pick a not so random example, one I have written about at some length but cannot discuss in any detail here, the peoples of the

world are quite divided in their social norms concerning the potential modification of the genitals of children and youth, both males and females.¹⁰ The typical customary European pattern where neither boys nor girls modify their genitals and where both male and female genital modifications for children are viewed with opprobrium by most members of dominant European ethnic groups (as among ethnic Swedes, Danes, Germans and Italians) is not an empirical cultural universal. Despite the heightened media attention to campaigns against female genital modifications in East and West Africa (and the associated moral panic over the imagined occurrence of the practice among African immigrant populations in Europe and North America) there are no ethnic groups anywhere in the world where only girls modify their genitals. But there are many where both boys and girls do, and even more where genital modification is exclusively a male prerogative, such as in the United States, Israel, South Korea, the Philippines, most of the West Asian Muslim world, and many ethnic groups in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Cultural anthropologists of course spend much of their time documenting variability in social understandings and social norms across historical ethnic communities (where one often finds that even the Gods disagree), but those are just descriptive facts; they are not necessarily normative truths. When critiquing theories of social development it is surely important for cultural anthropologists to acknowledge the naturalistic fallacy and recognize that

¹⁰ See for example, Shweder, R.A. (2002). ["What about female genital mutilation?" and why understanding culture matters in the first place."](#) In "Engaging cultural differences: the multicultural challenge in liberal democracies", R. Shweder, M. Minow, & H. Markus (Eds.), New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press; Shweder, R.A. (2009). ["Shouting at the Hebrews: Imperial Liberalism v Liberal Pluralism and the Practice of Male Circumcision."](#) *Law, Culture and the Humanities*. 5: 247-265

“is” does not imply “ought” and that the normative implications of their descriptive ethnographic research on diversity are far from clear.

How does one go about answering the following crucial question: with respect to the normative requirements of the one true and objective moral charter which of those societies has got it right (for example, with regard to genital modifications, or marriage customs, or food taboos or the sexual division of labor, etc.)? At best the descriptive anthropology is just the beginning of a conversation about the progressive development of social norms, precisely because when “red state” evangelical Christians condemn gay marriage and “blue state” secular liberals condone it the provocative difference in their judgments might merely be a sign of a developmental deficiency or fault in the social understandings of one or the other of the parties to the disagreement.

In other words let us not forget that the premise that there are no faultless moral disagreements is an essential one for cognitive developmental theorists; at least not if the disagreement is a genuine one concerning the demands of the objective moral charter or the requirements of some posited universal moral truth. Recall Sidgwick’s point that an expression of *moral* disapproval is “inseparably bound up with the conviction, implicit or explicit, that the conduct approved is ‘objectively’ right - i.e., that it cannot, without error, be disapproved by any other mind.” From the perspective of cognitive developmental theorists the driving or motivating force behind the evolution of social intelligence is the force of self-critical reason to eliminate error, ignorance and confusion from ones own picture of the world and to feel justified in ones social understandings. So when the Gods disagree in

their moral judgments what are we to say: that some of them are in a state of error, ignorance or confusion about the terms of the objective moral charter; that they don't possess enough local knowledge to allow them to correctly apply the terms of the objective moral charter to specific cases or local contexts; that their disagreements are not really moral disagreements at all but rather about issues that are non-moral in character; that there is no objective moral charter after all? Those are the types of questions that promote self-reflection and the development of social intelligence in a multicultural world.

Thinking Your Way Through Fast Cognitions and Visceral Responses in the Face of Apparent Barbarisms

One fascinating model for how to move from a descriptive to a normative mode in understanding exotic others while de-centering and getting beyond the dark side of ethnocentrism can be found in the famous and influential 16th century essay by Michel de Montaigne titled "On the Cannibals". In that essay Montaigne, who was an early ethnographer of sorts, tries to come to terms with the then recently discovered cultural practices of the native Carib peoples of Brazil. He describes and morally evaluates the beliefs, values and customs of a people who believed that hosting a captive of war and then killing, roasting and making a common meal of him, and "sending chunks of his flesh to absent friends" was right and good.

That particular practice, although customary and locally viewed as honorable and legitimate by both the natives and their captives ("...you cannot find one [prisoner of war] who does not prefer to be killed and eaten

than merely to ask to be spared”, Montaigne recounts) seemed shocking, repulsive and backward to Portuguese and French moral and culinary sensibilities in the 16th century, just as many customary practices of peoples in the Southern and Eastern worlds (practices such as dowry, or female circumcision, or physical punishment or sex selective abortion or arranged marriages or animal sacrifice) seem barbaric, odious and detestable to many peoples of the Northern and Western worlds today. Nevertheless, Montaigne dared to offer a critical (and ironical) response to the Portuguese and French opprobrium directed at the so-called under-developed cannibals of Brazil.

It is noteworthy that early in his essay Montaigne cautions the reader to step back and be reflective about his or her own aversive gut reactions to stories about Carib practices. It is also noteworthy that throughout there are many references to the universal virtues that are recognizable in their folkways and social norms but only if one makes the effort to be informed about the particular details of the Carib way of life: ...”their whole ethical science contains only these two articles: resoluteness in war and affection for their wives” which he also describes as “valor against the enemy and love for their wives.” Writing as an ironist, a skeptic and a detached observer of human behavior Montaigne was prepared to morally complicate the European colonial encounter with alien societies. He was not inclined to let the righteous elite moralists of the metropolises of the Western World make the world safe for condescension and for an imperial European rule justified under the banner of cultural superiority.

On the one hand, by means of various cultural comparisons he invited his readers to see the dark side of their own way of life. He writes: “But there

never was any opinion so disordered as to excuse treachery, disloyalty, tyranny and cruelty, which are our ordinary vices. So we may well call these people barbarians, in respect to the rules of reason, but not in respect to ourselves, who surpass them in every kind of barbarity. Their warfare is wholly noble and generous, and as excusable and beautiful as this human disease can be; its only basis among them is their rivalry in valor. They are not fighting for the conquest of new lands...they have no wish to enlarge their boundaries.”

Commenting on the customary practice of polygamy by the Carib he remarks favorably on the lack of jealousy among the women of the society and notes “Being more concerned for their husbands’ honor than for anything else, they strive and scheme to have as many companions as they can, since that is a sign of their husbands’ valor.” And, perhaps most remarkably, he goes on to rebut the anticipated counter-claims (which are still commonplace today) that “...all this is done through a simple and servile bondage to usage and through the pressure of the authority of their ancient customs, without reasoning or judgment, and because their minds are so stupid that they cannot take any other course...” In other words for Montaigne the “cannibals” did not lack either agency or virtue, and by his lights their exercise of their agency was quite compatible with their embrace of the beliefs, values and skills privileged and transmitted by and through their cultural tradition. He foresaw the objection of later liberal progressive thinkers (for example, John Stuart Mill) that tradition is a form of enslavement of the living by the dead, and he rejected it.

Montaigne's essay was written between 1578 and 1580. It is noteworthy that his take-home messages later became standard recommendations for researchers in 20th century cultural anthropology. I would like to suggest those take home messages express a theory about how best to develop one's own social intelligence. The basic point is this one: participation (what anthropologists call "participant observation") in a thick cultural tradition is a necessary condition for recognizing the self-evident moral truths (Montaigne called them "the rules of reason") that must be made manifest in any way of life with respect for which some group of human beings can feel at home; and this is true not only for the individuals growing up and developing competencies in some cultural tradition different from one's own; it is also true for the outsiders (such as visiting anthropologists) trying to understand that cultural tradition. Even for individuals growing up in one's own cultural tradition it is a way of gaining insight into the social intelligence of alternative ways of life.

And Montaigne offers these cautions. When judging other cultures beware of the illusory air of moral superiority that so naturally arises as you invest the popular acceptances of your own society with strong sentiment and experience them not only as familiar but as self-evident truths. Rushing to judgment can be hazardous. Be slow to demonize the way of life of little known others. Distinguish facts from factoids. Try to see the world from the native point of view. Bracket your impulsive emotional reactions and visceral attachments. Have a closer look before arriving at strong moral conclusions.

Socrates, Moral Anthropology and the Piaget Society

I believe Montaigne's recommendations for a critical moral anthropology are quite compatible with the Socratic tradition that has been so central to the mission of the Piaget Society. Within the terms of the Socratic research tradition moral cultivation amounts to the preparation of an individual's mind to be receptive to the universally binding objective moral truths (the "rules of reason") that are part of the natural order of things. Accordingly, to grow and become more sophisticated or developed in one's moral and social attitudes is to increasingly think for oneself, which is done by distinguishing objective moral knowledge from attitudes that have their source merely in personal desire, and by also distinguishing objective moral knowledge from attitudes that have their source only or merely in the received opinions and routine acceptances of one's local group.

Indeed, according to the Socratic-Piagetian-Kohlbergian-Turielian tradition, it is only by becoming more and more able to draw such distinctions (between what is objective and what is subjective, between what is universal in scope and what ought to be restricted in its application to those who share a particular point of view) that a human mind can be in the position to feel at home in, and experience the legitimacy of, any deep tradition. It is only by appreciating (from both inside out and outside in) the manifestations of objective moral truths in one's own parochial patterns of behavior that one is able as a rational person to accept the authority of one's inherited way of life or defend its local or parochial requirements.

The aim of this type of social and moral development is to have one's personal desires aligned with (or at least compatible with) what is

objectively desirable, to have preferences that are truly preference-worthy and to live in a society where the customary practices of the group can be experienced as routine manifestations and habitual expressions of absolute moral truths or universally recognizable virtues. Understandably, it is a prerequisite for that type of striving and growth of social understanding that one is able to draw the distinctions (between personal preference/social preference/objective goods) that make such developments possible.

No doubt the relationship between the objective moral charter and received custom, between moral theory and traditional practice, between knowledge and habit is a complex one. It seems safe to say that no human beings live a fully examined life in which on the basis of pure reasoning and direct experience alone, and free of all external influences, they have become fully autonomous arbiters of what is true, good, and beautiful. It also seems safe to say that no human beings live a fully unexamined mindless life in which their spontaneous attitudes of approval (and disapproval) are never objects of self-conscious reflection and auto-critique. There are processes for the acquisition of automated behavior (for example, processes of imitation, identification and social referencing) by means of which one becomes fluent in and habitually respectful of a customary tradition. There are also processes of self-conscious reasoning for examining that received wisdom of the group, scrutinizing external authority and making use of the dictates of reason to evaluate the moral claims of each and every tradition, including ones own.

Some Distinguished Distinctions: Genuine Moral Intuitions Versus Socialized Opinions

Henry Sidgwick, the great 19th century British moral philosopher mentioned earlier, gives voice in The Methods of Ethics to a conception of genuine moral development as a process of drawing relevant distinctions and putting them to work (1884:340): He writes, “...most persons are liable to confound intuitions, on the one hand with mere impressions and impulses, which to careful observation do not present themselves as claiming objective validity; and on the other hand, with mere opinions, to which the familiarity that comes from frequent hearing and repetition often gives an illusory air of self-evidence which attentive reflection disperses.”

In order to understand Sidgwick’s distinctions between impressions, mere opinions and what he calls “intuitions” (which have objective validity and an essential feature of which is their undeniable truth) it is essential to note that for Sidgwick and other British moralists of his era moral “intuitions” were included within the domain of human reason. Moral intuitions were definitely not equated with feeling, affect, impulse, emotion or desire. Intuition referred to the direct, effortless, spontaneous human grasp of self-evident objective truths – undeniably true propositions about the world that required no further justification or deliberation. Moral intuitions were often likened by British moral philosophers in Sidgwick’s era (and earlier) to rapidly grasped intuitions of a mathematical sort (for example, that two parallel lines cannot enclose any space or that a whole is greater than any of its parts). There was nothing dumb (or, for that matter, emotional) about them, except in the sense that to argue about their validity was both pointless and senseless. To the extent there was a kind of silence associated with a genuine moral intuition it was due to the absence of any credible spoken denial and the lack of any

necessity for verbal justification. Once a moral “intuition” had been identified or pointed out its validity was simply undeniable.

The category of rational (and hence genuine) moral intuitions (Montaigne’s “rules of reason”) was contrasted with learned habits, popular acceptances and impulsive or affect-laden snap judgments that possessed an “illusory air of self-evidence.” For those British moral philosophers a short list of stand-alone rational moral intuitions might include the following: One ought to speak the truth (veracity); one ought to give every person their due (justice); one ought to treat like cases alike and different cases differently; one ought to impartially apply rules of general applicability; one ought to requite benefits received as gifts or patronage (reciprocity); one ought to protect those who are vulnerable and in one’s charge (beneficence); one ought to respond to the urgent needs of others if the sacrifice or cost to oneself is slight; one ought to pursue the more certain of two equal goods; one ought to select a greater good in the future over a lesser good now (if both are equally certain); one ought to never pursue a lesser good over a greater good (prudence).¹¹

In that intuitionist tradition of moral philosophy the rules of reason and human rationality were not equated with slow and self-conscious mental processing; and fast processing was not equated with affect-laden or impulsive thinking. Unfortunately those are the misleading and confusing equations that have become increasingly popular in some areas of contemporary moral

¹¹ Of course these moral intuitions might conflict with one another in particular moral decision contexts, raising questions about whether they are reducible to more general intuitions or should just be viewed as a base set of heterogeneous moral truths.

psychology. In the discourse of contemporary moral psychology the very notion of a moral intuition has come to be used as a descriptor for mindless affect-laden visceral reactions of approval or disapproval. The moral intuition concept is thus theoretically employed in the contemporary moral psychology to contrast fast v slow cognitive processing and to equate a moral intuition with affect (versus thought) or with initial fast spontaneous non-rational reactions of approval or disapproval detached from reflective judgments or later moral self-justification (which are now interpreted as *mere* rationalization).

Nevertheless, that said, it is certainly true of the Socratic-Piagetian-Kohlbergian-Turielian conception of the moral domain that genuine moral cultivation requires a certain degree of attentive self-reflection as to the source of, and authority behind, ones fast and spontaneous (and sometimes affect-laden) attitudes of approval and disapproval. According to that conception of the moral domain the judgment (whether made hastily or slowly) that something is of value, good or bad, right or wrong, ought to be done or ought not to be done, is more than just a subjective declaration of value. The expressed attitude of approval (or disapproval) implies knowledge of something (the moral truth expressed in the judgment of approval or disapproval) and thus always invites the post-hoc interrogation of the substance and validity of that knowledge. In other words, it is precisely because a spontaneous moral judgment expresses an attitude of approval that it is inherently normative in character and hence subject to scrutiny and potential criticism. The Socratic tradition in moral philosophy wants to know whether the expression of approval is in fact *moral* approval (in contrast for

example to mere personal liking) and if it is, whether the moral approval (or disapproval) is justified by some rule of reason or not?

Sidgwick again gives us a roadmap. In this case he gives us a map for thinking about moral development as a process of self-reflection wherein and whereby our attitudes of approval (or disapproval) get scrutinized. That process of assessment and justification is presumably undertaken in anticipation of (or in response to) criticism. And the development or growth of social understanding occurs when and if certain fundamental distinctions get drawn and put in place. For example, the distinction between those of one's own attitudes of approval that are grounded in the objective moral charter versus those attitudes of approval that merely possess the semblance (the "illusory air") of a rational moral intuition but have no objective authority at all.

Sidgwick begins the road trip drawing our attention to attitudes of approval based on nothing other than personal passions and affections. (1884: 340-341): He writes, "For, on the one hand, it cannot be denied that any strong sentiment, however purely subjective, is apt to transform itself into the semblance of an intuition; and it requires careful contemplation to detect the illusion. Whatever we desire we are apt to pronounce desirable; and we are strongly tempted to approve of whatever conduct gives us keen pleasure."

He then directs our attention to attitudes of approval based in such external authority as positive law or the legal code of a society. He writes: "...among the rules of conduct to which we customarily conform, there are many which reflection shows to be really derived from some external authority: so that

even if their obligation be unquestionable, it cannot be intuitively ascertained. This is of course the case with the Positive Law of the community to which we belong. There is no doubt that we ought, - at least generally speaking, - to obey this [the law]: but what it [the law] is we cannot of course ascertain by any process of abstract reflection, but only by consulting Reports and Statutes. Here, however, the sources of knowledge are so definite and conspicuous, that we are in no danger of confounding the knowledge gained from studying them with the results of abstract contemplation.”

Finally Sidgwick has the following to say about attitudes of approval grounded in customary and traditional codes for behavior. “The case is somewhat different with the traditional and customary rules of behavior which exist in every society, supplementing the regular operation of Law proper: here it is much more difficult to distinguish the rules which a moral man is called upon to define for himself, by the application of intuitively known principles, from those as to which some authority external to the individual is recognized as the final arbiter.”

So far in this essay I have tried to imagine some ways in which cultural anthropologists and developmental psychologists might need each other to fully understand what I take to be a general fact of life in human societies: namely, that most people much of the time feel at home in and affirmed by the many particularities of their distinctive way of life. If true, this is a remarkable fact of life. It calls out for explanation. If it is true, I wish to suggest that the received customs and social duties of any long-standing cultural tradition are generally in the service of some conception of natural moral law and manifestations (if understood from the “native point of view”)

of intuitive rules of reason of the sort mentioned earlier (e.g., treat like cases alike and different cases differently). The “I feel at home” acceptance of those customs and social norms is not *merely* an example of social conformity motivated by embarrassment, fear or reward - and if that was *all* there was to it one would not feel at home in that tradition. For most people much of the time their received customs are experienced by those who feel at home with them as manifestations of “rules which a moral man is called upon to define for himself.” It is not simply a matter (sometimes dubbed “conventional” or a product of conditioning) in which that which we find familiar and to which we have become accustomed is automatically judged acceptable. Indeed, I want to go further and suggest that participation in a thick cultural tradition may actually be a necessary condition or “affordance” for recognizing the self-evident moral truths that must be made manifest in any way of life with respect for which some group of human beings can feel at home.

Montaigne Redux: “If it were not for the British, India would still be a land of barbarians.”

Permit me to conclude with a brief consideration of the provocative case of sex selective abortions in India. With such a case, as Montaigne anticipated in his 16th century essay on European reactions to the alien customs of the Carib people of Brazil, the task of social understanding activates visceral and affect-laden responses which challenge our ability to de-center. The development of our own social intelligence, however, requires that we face that type of challenge, even if it is a risky thing to do.

Using sex selective abortion as an example I will try to illustrate one possible answer the question I have been addressing throughout the essay: what manner of thinking, feeling and valuing makes it possible to feel at home with and acknowledge the tradition-bound nature of one's own social attitudes, moral judgments and self-defining emotional reactions while doing so without assuming that one's own cultural tradition is the only real or single best cultural home in the world. One takes comfort in knowing that members of the Piaget Society are dedicated to the ways of reason and to the study of reasoning at different stages of life and in different locations in the world. At the very least an examination of sex selective abortions in India should make for some lively conversation. So here goes.

Ever since the initial reports of a monstrous gang rape of a young woman in New Delhi the global media has been relentless in its disparagement of gender relations on the Indian sub-continent, a place where I have conducted research on and off for over four decades (including work on gender issues in collaboration with the anthropologist Usha Menon). Much of the media coverage has interpreted the brutal criminal act as a symbol of South Asian cultural misogyny. Journalists, bloggers and letter writers have managed to revive a type of cultural developmental discourse stunningly expressed by a senior Indian government official who said to me when I was last in New Delhi: "If it were not for the British, India would still be a land of barbarians." This is a view shared by many members of the English speaking elite in India. It is a view shared by many of my American friends who read the news reports from New Delhi and for whom the crime has become Indian culture.

One of the barbarisms one hears much about is sex selective abortion. We have been encouraged to imagine India as a patriarchal society where violence against women runs so deep that even the womb of Indian mothers is a dangerous place for a female fetus. According to this depiction, South Asian parents don't like girls and seek to get rid of them by means of prenatal gender detection devices and subsequent elective abortion, which is a source of "missing girls" in the Indian population and a measure of the backwardness of that ancient civilization when it comes to the protection of women.

There is one problem with this particular horror inducing picture of the hazards of the womb for girls in India. It does not stand up well to reflective critical analysis of the sort recommended by Montaigne. Consider this Question: In which country is a female fetus at greater risk for her life due to an elective abortion – India or the United States? Here is the Answer: Mother India does a better job than Uncle Sam at keeping the womb safe for girls? At least with respect to the risk of becoming a missing person due to an elective abortion the womb is a safer place for female fetuses in India than in most countries of the world, including the United States. How can this be so?

The short answer is that elective abortions in India are relatively rare compared to the United States, even if strongly sex selective under the rather special circumstances associated with their occurrence. The elective abortion rate in India is approximately 3%. This is low compared to most countries. By way of contrast the elective abortion rate in the United States is approximately 22%. (The average global rate is 26% and there are countries in the world where over 50% of pregnancies are voluntary terminated). Consequently, despite differential fertility rates (they are higher in India) and

a massive difference in population size (India's is four times greater) there are twice as many abortions annually in the United States (approximately 1,200,000 per year) than in India (approximately 600,000 per year).

Demographers who study population dynamics talk about “missing girls” in the Indian population due to elective abortions. Whether intended or not, this type of morally suggestive language invites us to think about the Indian fetus as a person in jeopardy of a particular type of harm, namely the denial of its rights to representation in the general population as defined and surveyed by demographers. A recent study published in *The Lancet* (<http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2811%2960649-1/abstract>) suggests that 4,500,000 is a cautious estimate of the total number of Indian females who are missing from the general population due to elective abortion over the first decade of the 21st century (2001-2011).

What would the results be if we tried to estimate the number of missing girls in the United States over that same period of time, relying on readily available demographic facts concerning elective abortions? Here one starts with the assumption that for the most part elective terminations of a pregnancy in the United States are sex blind and equal opportunity occasions governed by norms of gender indifference.¹² Consequently it seems reasonable to assume that in nearly fifty percent of the cases it is a female fetus whose life will be

¹² This is not entirely true with regard to American decisions about conception, where parents have available to them strategies and high tech procedures for sperm sorting that are designed and motivated by gender preferences of one sort or another. Nevertheless, I will put the ethics of sperm sorting to the side for the moment.

terminated. Six million is a cautious estimate of the total number of female fetuses who were aborted between 2001 and 2011 in the United States.

Those quantitative results invite two qualitative conclusions. First, if you allow yourself to adopt the perspective of a female fetus (a potential missing girl) the overall risk of having your life terminated by an elective abortion is far greater in the United States than in India. Secondly, if you really believe that aborting a female fetus is a form of violence against women then there is far more of that type of violence in the United States than in India. In that regard the customs of in India provide better protection to girls than do the customs of Unites States. I hope you can see traces of Montaignean irony in this type of comparison.

Such conclusions of course are provocative. I imagine most readers will grant that abortions in general are more common in the United States than India. And, upon a moment's reflection, it will be evident that as consequence of the discrepancy between a 22% abortion rate (of which almost 50% of aborted fetuses are female) and a 3% abortion rate (of which most are female) females are at greater risk of having their life voluntarily ended in the United States than in India.¹³ Nevertheless, the global moral map of gender relations publicized by the media ever since the dreadful crime in New Delhi has not featured Mother India as a patron Goddess protecting female fetuses from harm. Why not?

¹³ I hope it goes without saying that male fetuses too are at greater risk in the United States than in India, even more so.

Given the now popular image of Indian women as victims of cultural misogyny I imagine the reader might be inclined to offer the following type of retort: While it is instructive to learn that abortions are relatively rare events in India, the principle of gender indifference is a self-evident moral truth (a genuine moral intuition and objective rule of reason) that ought to be universally binding when deciding which particular pregnancy to terminate (although I do wonder if the reader would invoke the same imagined universal moral truth when discussing whether American couples should be allowed to exercise gender selection at the point of conception?) Even if only 3% of pregnant Indian females engage in sex selective abortion, those who do so are engaging in vicious gender discrimination expressive of a pervasive cultural hatred of women, which subservient Indian women themselves have been culturally conditioned or brainwashed to perpetuate. They are not autonomous agents thinking for themselves but rather slaves to an immoral tradition.

Taking a closer look what are the special circumstances associated with sex selective abortions in India? Who are the 3%? What are they thinking? Why do they do it? What precisely is the native point of view? Some thick description of the local scene can be informative, even when we are in search of universal truths.

Unlike India, the vast majority of elective abortions in the United States result from choices made by unmarried women. They chose to abort their pregnancy because they do not want to disrupt the pattern of their personal lives (including their commitments to work and school); or because they feel they can't afford to have a child; or simply because want to delay family formation.

The circumstances are quite different in India and special in their own way. The 3% of pregnant women who elect to terminate their pregnancy are typically married mothers who are deeply embedded in family life and who already have one or two daughters. It is a highly significant fact that abortions in India, relatively infrequent as they are, are NOT sex selective for first born children? And if that first born child is a male there is no sex selection for the second born child or for the third born child, either. Indian abortions are not motivated by a general hatred of women. Getting rid of girls is not a cultural custom, any more than getting rid of children is a cultural custom in the United States with its 22% gender indifferent abortion rate. Indeed females are worshiped, honored and empowered in many contexts in Indian society.

It is true that in general Indian women would prefer to have at least one son. In that respect they are just like many men and women in Europe and the United States. Unlike most women in Europe and the United States those few women in India who do abort a fetus are trying to have some control over that outcome for the sake of the well-being of the entire family (its females and males). In that respect India woman tend to be far more corporate or collective in their aspirations, and primarily concerned about the welfare of the patrimony of which they are a part and in which they play a crucial part.

For a married Indian woman who is embedded in a thick family life and has already giving birth to one or two daughters the aggregate welfare effects of having at least one son can be substantial. There are effects on ones financial ability to arrange a suitable and status preserving marriage for the girls in the family. There are effects on ones ability to be an ancestral guardian and perpetuator of the kinship group and family line. There are potential effects

on the mother herself, who, given the nature and details of residence, kinship affiliation and group formation in India is somewhat more likely to be dependent on her sons rather than her daughters for care, protection and shelter in old age. Indeed the unmarried daughters in the family will themselves prefer to have at least one younger brother so that they will not have the psychological burden of worrying about the fate of their parents after they themselves have married and shifted their kinship allegiance and their residence and moved into the social world of her husband and her mother-in-law.

And who are the 3%? Unlike the United States where there is a tendency for abortions to be more common among those who are poor, in India women who terminate a pregnancy tend to be relatively well-educated, financially well-off urbanites who have embraced the cosmopolitan values of family planning and population control. They have accepted the message of the ubiquitous Indian family planning posters, which idealize a four person nuclear family consisting of a mother, a father, a daughter and a son. In other words, the 3% who elect to terminate a pregnancy in India are members of the emerging urban middle class who feel empowered by pro-choice and family privacy values to make use of modern technologies to exercise parental control over their reproductive life.

There may be wisdom in Montaigne's advice not only for contemporary cultural anthropologists but also for global feminist organizations. Drawing moral maps of the cultures of the world and seeking to be a light unto all others is a risky business. If the mirror on the wall tells you "you are the best or most highly developed of them all" insist on a waiting period before

arriving at strong and emotion-laden moral judgments about the gender relations of others. Many feminists in the United States insist that the fetus is not a person, whether female or male. Ever since the United States Supreme Court decision in *Roe v Wade* a fetus in the United States, whether female or male, does not have either an individual right or a gender-based group right to representation in the general population.

Most feminist organizations are advocates of family privacy, doctor-client confidentiality and freedom of choice with regard to terminating a pregnancy, as am I, and would reject the idea that an abortion is a form of violence against the fetus, whether female or male. Indeed it is noteworthy that pro-choice feminist organizations and the Obama White House in fact worked hard to oppose a statute in the United States House of Representative that would have criminalized sex selective abortions in the USA. Presumably those pro-choice organizations would reject as well any sweeping disparagement of American culture which interpreted the 22% abortion rate with its norm of gender indifference as expressive of an American cultural hatred of children.

All that changes when the feminist gaze turns its attention to the Indian womb. All of a sudden the fetus (or at least the female fetus) becomes a person and feminist organizations embrace a pro-life policy agenda demonizing and criminalizing the activities of doctors who are prepared to assist pregnant Indian women who wish to exercise freedom of choice in the service of the welfare of their families. In the eyes of some Indian women and their doctors that appearance of inconsistency seems quite real.

Precisely how should a fully developed social intelligence in a multicultural world judge such a case? Perhaps it is time to re-read James Madison's Federalist 10. Or perhaps to recall the wonderful pluralistic maxim for the promotion of social understanding written by Thomas Jefferson in a note of thanks to a Jewish Rabbi, written just after the consecration of a synagogue in Savannah, Georgia in 1820 (it was only the second Jewish synagogue in the country). Describing his idealized vision of the national temper with respect to the freedoms of religion and culture Jefferson did not sing that happy tune "George Washington liked good roast beef, Haym Solomon liked fish. When Uncle Sam served liberty they both enjoyed the dish." Instead he put it this way: "Divided We Stand!"