

Introduction

Though tackling culture-related issues can be uneasy, it is a task both intriguing and indispensable to a certain extent. A man who emerges out of culture is both its creator and expression, and feels morally obliged to share one's understanding and perception of culture with others.

Discourses on the universalism of culture and its traditions vary since in multiplicity a diversity can be found, whereas in diversity one can find fundamental cultural values. One such example is tradition, a component of culture with a vast store of values and behaviours, which lays foundations for the introduction of norms and regulations to societies.

Culture may be either an accomplished one, referred to from a historical perspective; or a constantly changing one, at present; or a future one, when one observes its transformations and draws conclusions about the consequences of certain cultural phenomena. Moreover, culture may be approached from sociological, pedagogical, psychological, or political perspectives etc. However, one thing is certain: any attempt to approach cultural phenomena in the multiplicity of their contexts would help men to get to know themselves. Although, gaining complete knowledge on a man is hardly possible, an attempt to understand oneself and the underlying reflection may allow a conscious creation of new qualities within the existential area of a human.

The publication *Universalism and Traditions in Culture: A Selection*, edited by academic teachers from the Department of Culture and Education of the University of Podlasie, constitutes a discussion forum for people willing to express their individual opinions on cultural phenomena and their transformations by reaching into the past, present, and future. Cooperation with students involved in cultural issues, representatives of the e-culture generation educated when an unbelievable progress of information technology is taking place, who can bring a fresh insight into our cultural reality, would be greatly appreciated. On our cyclically published pages one can try to engage in polemics with the already existing theories, their authors, and various other thinkers. Despite difficulties, we would like to unite the great diversity of constructive observations and attitudes in a scientific way. The multiplicity of approaches and a vast topic of the publication is to constitute inspiration for approaching the subject from various perspectives. As culture is no straightforward being. It is an abundance of conditions resulting from e.g. historical transformations, mentalities of generations based on different cultures, intrinsic development of civilisation, including the unification of cultures, economic influences, political changes, and tremendous progress in the digital technology.

One can say that culture is a living matter that undergoes transformations under various circumstances, and what is fascinating, it hardly ever takes on a final shape, which is why it entails so many definitions and attempts to account for it. One can certainly discuss the ready-made products of culture such as artistic, theatrical, film, or architectural creations;

however, the meaning of culture is elusive and hard to embrace comprehensively. The above mentioned are proofs of its power and the magic soul. When one analyses the development of the Polish culture, changes in the language, customs or attitudes to the sacred and profane can easily be spotted within the period of just one century.

Discovering the “novel” within culture or observing phenomena occurring in different cultures at the same time and describing them is a peculiar way of retaining a cultural memory of its processes. Referring or relating directly to universalism in the context of cultural relativism allows to refrain from the unequivocal assessment of the existence of other civilisations or cultures, treating them as valuable on their own, just because they are there. And it is not about unequivocal denial or putting on a pedestal but about polemics entailing a respect for the contexts of its creative transformations. Despite the fact that denial in the meaning of polemics is nothing wrong or it can even be recommended at times, it should be accompanied by all essential explanations and factual knowledge to justify one’s position. The necessity to judge cannot ever be completely abandoned, as inscribed in axiological deliberations. Only ranking cultures or a complete denial or rejection of a particular culture as a whole from the angle of its negative elements is strongly inadvisable. Discourses on culture in its various areas teach and show tolerance. Teaching tolerance does not involve a direct explanation of what tolerance is but rather a presentation of individual opinions of various writers.

Cultural universalism, though its definitions are ambiguous, can be examined as both a positive and negative one. The first one implies a unified reading of certain codes of tradition e.g. with the participation of a range of artistic fields such as the fine arts, dance, or musical arts, which bring in top-quality elements of general human values proving the greatness of human mind. Certain elements of culture are understood and admired by a variety of people, regardless of denomination, skin colour, origins, or even education. They are the proof of a world-wide legacy. Universalism in a pejorative sense can be found in neglecting one’s own native, regional, closest culture, and not cherishing the knowledge of historic events in a wide context. Moreover, it is looking up to the culture of Western societies, especially those in which freedom and cultural eclecticism along with the McDonaldisation and homogenisation of culture presumably reign.

Some places around the world can be very much alike e.g. famous brand shops or even chain stores, architecture, hotels, dress codes, or identical access to information when using Internet. Blind imitation can lead to the impoverishment of cultures with diverse strong traditions passed on from generation to generation, unique, deeply rooted, and accurately reconstructed. The following disquisition is not an acknowledgment of the superiority of native culture over others, traditional culture over contemporary one, written culture over media oriented, high culture over popular one. Instead, it should be a guidance on how to cherish and maintain balance and simultaneous existence of cultural diversity. The ability to preserve this abundance of cultural tones and colours not only reflects well on the man, who is a creator and recipient of culture, but also allows new generations to chose from this cultural legacy, both the spiritual and material one. Constant progress of civilisation requires certain solutions, including the area of culture. Some processes cannot be stopped e.g. growth of information technology, which is actually nothing negative on its own. However, misuse of Internet or mobile phones, for example, can be of more harm than benefit.

Contents of the book relate to various fields of culture and its representation. Issues are arranged from those regarding the widest spectra of culture at the beginning to specific and narrow topics discussing fragments of certain cultural realities placed at the end.

The publication is directed at all those who either professionally or just naturally deal with the problem of culture: teachers, students, culture studies specialists, creators and recipients of culture. No one should be denied participation in this discourse. All forms of involvement are welcomed. Hence, we would like to invite everyone to this intellectual flirt with universalism and tradition in culture.

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