

# **WIDER WORKING PAPERS**

**Internal Criticism and Indian  
Rationalist Traditions**

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## 1. Introduction

This paper has two closely related aims. The first is to diagnose some problems of emphasis and interpretation that have arisen in attempts to describe the values of a particular society, namely India. The second is to investigate some general methodological and philosophical issues that are raised by any attempt to describe and assess the values of a traditional society. Both projects were originally motivated by the desire to find a philosophical and conceptual framework within which to discuss some urgent problems that arise in the course of "development," especially economic development. It was originally prepared for a project at the World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER) that was concerned with analysing the relationship among value, technology, and development. The project was based on the important recognition that values cannot be treated, as they often are in the literature on "economic development", as purely instrumental objects in promoting development. Indeed, the very idea of "development" -- whether seen from within a culture or in the stylized impersonal context of development economics -- is inevitably based on a particular class of values, in terms of which progress is judged and development is measured.

There are two distinct issues involved in recognizing the importance of the "value-relativity" of the concept of development. The first is the elementary but far-reaching fact that without some idea of ends that are themselves external to the development process and in terms of which the process may be assessed, we cannot begin to say what changes are to count as "development". In judging development in the context of a culture, the values that are supported and are sustainable in that culture provide an essential point of reference. The need for internal criticism and rational assessment of the values of a culture - to be discussed presently (section 4) - does not undermine the essentiality of the cultural reference, nor eliminate the fact of the value-relativity of the concept of development.

The second issue concerns the possible undermining of traditional values that may result from the process of change. The WIDER project has been particularly concerned with the impact of imported technology on traditional values, but the problem is, of course, relevant in many other contexts as well. This "undermining" may take two rather different forms, which have to be distinguished. It could be the case that the objects of valuation that a particular traditional value system treasures - such as a particular life style - may become more difficult to obtain and sustain as a result of material change. The other way that the values may be "undermined" is a weakening of the hold of those values themselves on the subjects.

To illustrate the difference, the use of modern technology may make it hard to lead a life of free, unroutined work, and this would, in one sense, "undermine" a traditional value that attaches importance to spontaneity of the kind rejected by the use of the new technology. The other sense of "undermining" the value in question is to make people turn against valuing that type of spontaneity altogether. The two processes, which we may respectively call "object failure" and "value rejection", are undoubtedly related to each other (for one thing, "sour grapes" are common enough<sup>1</sup>), but they raise rather different evaluative problems neither of which can subsume the other.

When values are unchanged but the objects valued (such as staes of affairs, activities, etc.) become unachievable (i.e., when there is "object failure"), there is a clear and palpable loss within the unchanging frame of reference. The importance that is attached to that loss cannot be independent of the assessment of that value, but there is no denial of the immediacy

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<sup>1</sup> See Jon Elster, Sour Grapes, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1983).

of the loss. In the case, on the other hand, of "value rejection", the frame of reference itself ceases to be stationary, and whether there is any loss in this or not cannot be ascertained automatically on the basis of either the subsequent or the antecedent values. The process of rejection is important here. Was the rejection based on, or would it be supported by, a reasoned and involved internal critique? A reasoned critical rejection of old values on the basis of, say, new facts or new knowledge or new understanding of old facts, must command respect. Indeed, such value rejection may often show the power and reach of an appropriate internal critique (on this see sections 4 and 5 later).

Aside from the conceptual and evaluative complications involved in this problem, there are also difficult substantive issues in characterising the values of a culture. The identification of values may itself be difficult, and there is, in addition, the further problem of determining what values are to be regarded as central. The lives of human beings are guided by a variety of valuational presumptions and attitudes, and some things are valued more fundamentally than others. Indeed, some values are basically instrumental to achieving other valuable things, and this instrumentality may be either immediately seen, or be ascertainable on the basis of probing and deliberative analysis.<sup>2</sup> The undermining of some values subscribed to in a community may be a matter of great moment in a way the undermining of some other - more instrumental or less deeply held - values need not be.

The problem of identification of values and diagnosis of central values is further compounded by the diversity that may well exist within a community. Various divergent traditions may survive side by side within the same country and indeed even in

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<sup>2</sup> On this see Amartya Sen, Collective Choice and Social Welfare (San Francisco: Holden-Day, 1970; republished Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1979) chapter 5.

the same locality. Determining what the "basic" traditional values are (the undermining of which, especially through object failure, would involve a loss) may not be a trivial, or even a simple, question. Since no culture is fully static, there is also the problem of valuational dynamics and evolution, and the issue of centrality is not independent of that problem either.

The substantive issue with which this paper is concerned relates to certain standard diagnoses of the fundamental nature of Indian culture, and the identification of the central values in that tradition, the undermining of which is particularly feared by cultural conservationists (section 2). The paper will examine some biases in the common reading of Indian traditions and cultures in this context (section 3), arguing, in particular, that there has been an over-emphasis on the mystical and religious aspects of Indian society and a relative neglect of the more "rationalistic" and "analytical" features.

Much of the paper, however, is concerned with methodological rather than substantive issues (sections 4-5). Understanding a culture and its central values is a hard exercise, raising difficult problems of observation and evidence, on the one hand, and of interpretation and assessment, on the other. Indeed, the paper's substantive propositions regarding the nature of Indian culture and its misdescriptions are put forward here with some hesitation and tentativeness, in recognition of difficulty of these methodological problems. We shall say little here about problems of evidence and description, which are plain enough from the paper's substantive sections. But we shall describe an approach to rational critical assessment, one that has Aristotelian roots; and we shall examine its power and reach.

## 2. Religion, Mysticism, and the Non-rational

The importance of religion in Indian society can scarcely be denied. Religious values and practices differ between groups. Furthermore, given the nature of Hinduism, the majority religion

in India, the religious beliefs are frequently of a kind that can be described as being more mystical than corresponding religious beliefs in many other cultures, though the ranking of mysticism is an inherently ambiguous exercise.

In understanding the values of a culture, it is tempting to take a rapid jump from one aspect of the lives that many people lead to a characterization of the "essence" of that culture. What may be called the "more mystical than thou" interpretation of the nature of Indian culture undoubtedly draws part of its strength from such an exercise. The interpretation is, however, also much assisted by a particular reading of the intellectual contributions of India to the world of thought, imagination and creativity. The sheer volume of religious literature in India far exceeds that of all other countries, perhaps even all of them put together. Given the religious interpretation of Indian philosophy (on which more presently), the massive contribution of philosophical ideas coming from India is also typically seen in a very special light, emphasizing their non-analytical aspects.

There are, of course, many scholarly studies of other aspects of the Indian civilization, and there is no dearth of expertise on other areas on Indian culture and thought, but as a broad generalization of how India is widely viewed in terms of its alleged values and culture, there is much truth in this "more mystical" imaging. Aside from the role of this image in the assessment of Indian culture, it also has a clear bearing on the alarm with which the "undermining" of "traditional" Indian values is often viewed in the context of economic development. Modern technology and science tend to be hostile to mysticism, and to that extent, it might well be thought that something exceptionally valuable is being threatened by the expansion of modern technology and science occurring in India. The issue, thus, relates directly to the central question in the WIDER research project on technology and values.<sup>3</sup>

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 See Stephen A. Marglin and Frédérique Apffel Marglin, "Project Guidelines: Development and Technological Transformation in Traditional Societies, Alternative Approaches", WIDER, Helsinki, 1986.

The special imaging of India is not new. In the last few centuries, with so-called "expansion of Europe", the common Western perception of India has been, to a great extent, based on looking for contrasts, and differences, rather than similarities, have tended to be emphasized in the Western "discovery of India". This has gone hand in hand with recognizing certain very elementary points of similarity on basic and gross matters (rather than those involving sophistication of emotions or thought). For example, Rudyard Kipling could unhesitatingly assert, "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," and in the same verse go on to say, "But there is neither East nor West, nor Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of earth!" (The Ballad of East and West). The "macho" values may, thus, be shared between the "East" and the "West", which for Kipling did not really differ much from India and Britain respectively, but on less elementary matters Kipling would not accept any diminution of the East-West gulf.

The image of the "mystical East", and specifically India, is not a matter only of popular conception, but has a good deal of following in the typical Indologist's summary view of Indian intellectual history. In this respect, there is also no real gulf between the things that the Western scholars have typically tended to emphasize in Indian culture and what Indian Indologists have themselves most often highlighted. This close correspondence may not, however, be particularly remarkable, since approaches to "cultural summarizing" are generally quite "infectious", and no less importantly, modern Indian scholarship is greatly derivative on the West. There is nothing odd in the fact that this dependence extends even to the understanding of the "essence" of Indian culture itself. It is nevertheless a matter of some descriptive importance to recognise that the "more mystical" over-all view of Indian traditions is largely shared in Western and Indian professional perceptions.



In their eminently useful "sourcebook" of Indian philosophy, Radhakrishnan and Moore give expression to the standard view of Indian philosophy when they say, "the chief mark of Indian philosophy in general is its concentration upon the spiritual".<sup>4</sup> This is not based on ignoring non-spiritual parts of Indian thinking altogether (indeed Radhakrishnan and Moore include in their sourcebook extensive excerpts from the atheistic and materialistic "Cārvāka" school).<sup>5</sup> It is based, rather on seeing these departures as aberrations, which are "relatively minor".<sup>6</sup>

This simple view of the nature of Indian philosophy is rather rarely challenged. Bimal Matilal, one of the few major challengers, puts the problem thus, in answer to the criticism that he has been "leaning over backwards" to "show the analytic nature of Indian philosophy": "Too often the term Indian philosophy is identified with a subject that is presented as mystical and non-argumentative, that is at best poetic and at worst dogmatic. A corrective to this view is long overdue."<sup>7</sup>

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 4 S. Radhakrishnan and S.A. Moore, eds., A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. xxiii. Among the other characteristics that Radhakrishnan and Moore identify are: "the intimate relationship of philosophy and life"; "the introspective attitude to reality"; the alleged feature that "most Indian philosophy is idealistic in one form or another"; that "intuition is accepted as the only method through which the ultimate can be known"; "acceptance of authority": and a "synthetic approach" (pp. xxiii-xxviii)

5 Radhakrishnan and Moore, pp. 227-249.

6 Radhakrishnan and Moore, p. xxiii.

7 B.K. Matilal, Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 4-5. Among the earlier disputations, there are the Marxist critiques by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, Lokāyata: A Study of Ancient Indian Materialism (New Delhi: Peoples's Publishing House, 1959), and Indian Atheism: A Marxist Analysis (Calcutta: Manisha, 1959).

In fact, the origins of the dominant view of Indian philosophy go back many centuries. For example, already in 1690, John Locke felt rather superior on this score, in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding:

Had the poor Indian Philosopher (who imagined that the earth also wanted something to bear it up) but thought of this word substance he needed not to have been at the trouble to find an elephant to support it, and a tortoise to support his elephant; the word substance would have done it effectively.

... the Indian before mentioned who, saying that the world was supported by a great elephant, was asked what the elephant rested on; to which his answer was, a great tortoise; but being again pressed to know what gave support to the broad-backed tortoise, replied, something he knows not what.

The parable does, of course, come from an old religious myth in India. but as Matilal notes, "it would be impossible to find a text in classical Indian philosophy where the elephant-tortoise device is put forward as a philosophical explanation of the support of the earth."<sup>10</sup>

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 8 John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), Book II, Chapter XIII, 19.

9 Locke, Book II, Chapter XXIII, 2.

10 Matilal, p. 4.

### 3. Pluralities and Divisions

There is, in fact, a peculiar contrast between the enormous variety in traditional Indian culture and the simple concentration on mysticism and non-rationality in the typical image of India. The contrast is not, however, one of non-intersecting contrariness. The mystical and the non-rational do, in fact, exist plentifully in Indian intellectual history and social practice. The problem relates not to the inclusion of these elements in the conventional image of India, but to the almost total exclusion of all other elements which also belong to the Indian traditions.<sup>11</sup>

It is arguable that the systematic bias in the reading of Indian culture relates to ignoring - or downplaying the importance of - some of the urban and urbane parts of the Indian heritage. The intellectual activities coming from these parts of the society have historically included many critical features that simply do not fit into the mystical image.

Matilal has emphasized the importance of controversies on the theory of knowledge in classical Indian philosophy flourishing between 100 AD and 1400 AD, and has distinguished between the "sceptical", "phenomenalist" and "realist" positions<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> The specifically "Hindu" form of much of the interpretation of Indian culture is itself a very serious limitation, both because of the size and importance of other religious communities - especially Islam - in undivided India (and indeed even in India after the partition), and also because of the influence of Islamic civilization and values on Hindu culture. The latter has been extensively discussed in Kshiti Mohan Sen's Hindu O Mushalmāner Jukto Shādhonā (in Bengali; Calcutta: 1950). See also his Hinduism (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960), especially the chapters on "Medieval Mysticism in India" and "The Bāuls of Bengal".

These and many other contributions in philosophy and logic belong at least as much to Indian intellectual history as do popular myths about the earth, the elephant, and the tortoise.

Similarly, the achievements of Indian mathematics - neither particularly spiritual nor especially mystical - were substantial enough to rival Indian contributions to the world of religion and spirituality.<sup>13</sup> In particular, the development of the decimal system (and the related numerical representation) in India had a major impact on the flourishing Arab civilisation in the middle ages, and through the Arabs reached Europe early in this millennium. By around 1400 AD they began, what Alexander Murray describes as, "an effective conquest of all literal culture".<sup>14</sup>

Other areas of major achievements include inter alia such subjects as political analysis and statecraft (including some of the earliest discussions of economics, by Kautilya in particular), linguistic and grammatical studies (including the pioneering contributions of Panini), and medicine (including the classic Suśruta-saṁhitā).

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<sup>12</sup> Matilal, Perception; see also B.K. Matilal and J.L. Shaw, eds., Analytical Philosophy in Comparative Perspective: Exploratory Essays in Current Theories and Classical Indian Theories of Meaning and Reference (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> As a matter of some interest, as far as influence abroad is concerned, the two main religions that India helped in spreading abroad were Buddhism (through Aśoka's efforts and later ones), and Islam, which went to the South-East Asian countries (such as Indonesia) not from the Arab world, but from India (in particular Gujarat).

<sup>14</sup> A. Murray, Reason and Society in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, revised edition, 1985), p. 168. Murray's own analysis is concerned with showing that "the pattern of the numerals adoption will reflect, not any foreign technological bombardment, but native aspirations and pressures" (p. 168). It is arguable that this perspective may be relevant not merely in understanding the impact of Eastern technology on the West, but also the converse. See also section 5.

Similarly, the pursuit of pleasure and fulfilment in sexual activities (including the Kāma-sutra and Anangaranga), the teaching of practical wisdom and shrewdness through the literary medium of fables (including Hitopadēsa and Pancatantra), invention and analysis of various games of skill and chance (including the chess), development of sampling procedures for personal and business calculations (discussed in the epic Mahābhārata, among other places), and other such "practical" activities, obviously cannot be fitted easily into the mystical mould. The groups of people who were led to these activities clearly had a great deal of "earthly" concerns, which influenced their values and living styles, and which they pursued in straightforwardly "rational" ways.<sup>15</sup>

The nature of Indian literary contributions also point towards a deep-seated plurality of concerns. Whether we look at the epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (especially the latter), or at fiction or poetry, it will be hard to take the view that mystical concerns and spirituality have been the dominant influences. Some of the ancient plays are straightforwardly social (e.g. Mrcchakatikam, which also happens to be deeply skeptical of religious pretensions), while others are more mixed, but altogether the insight that they give about the lives of the people involved can scarcely be seen as one of unrelieved spirituality.

If these substantial and powerful parts of Indian traditions are simply ignored, the view that we would get of Indian culture and thought will be extremely biased and distorted. The volume and variety of Indian contributions to religious thinking, impressive as they are, cannot obliterate

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 15 Ian Hacking relates the development of sampling and probability theory in India to the presence of "an advanced merchant system"; see The Emergence of Probability (Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.8.

these other features in Indian history. As it happens, even in religious discussions, not everything went in the direction of non-rationality and mysticism. In fact, the most important religious leader produced in India, viz., Gautama Buddha, not only preached an agnostic religion, but also gave rationalistic reasons as to why this is the only acceptable position.<sup>16</sup>

Straightforwardly atheistic positions were taken by the Cārvāka school and the Lokāyata, producing some highly anti-spiritual and anti-mystical - and incidentally rather hedonistic - philosophical arguments in the field of religion. Radhakrishnan and Moore may describe these latter schools as "relatively minor", but they have been traditionally viewed as important enough to figure as a major part of Indian philosophical tradition. For example, in Sarvadarśanasamgraha (literally, "the collection of all philosophies"), produced by Mādhava Ācārya in the 14th century, the Cārvāka school was sympathetically described in the first chapter, which consisted in fact only of this presentation.<sup>17</sup> In the light of the nature and force of such evidence a non-pluralistic interpretation of the basic Indian traditions would be hard to sustain.

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16 Buddha's critical views of "personal identity" have also received some serious philosophical analysis and support recently; see Derek Parfit, Reasons and Persons (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), Chapter 12 and 13, and Appendix J.

17 See Madhava Acharya, The Sarva-Darsana Samgraha Or Review of Different Systems of Hindu Philosophy, translated by R.B. Cowell and A.E. Gough (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1976). Radhakrishnan and Moore also provide partial translations of some other documents related to this tradition, in particular Sarvasiddhāntasamgraha by Śaṅkara, the seventh century treatise Tattvopaplavasīmhā (highly polemical "against all of the other schools of Indian Philosophy") and the ancient play Prabodha-candrodaya (literally translated, "the moonrise of intellect") with characters expounding the materialist views.

It is, of course, possible to close one's eyes to the totality of all this - and similar - evidence, and take a view of "true India" that is separated from these intellectual and sophisticated concerns, e.g., to base one's view of the "real" Indian philosophy on studying popular myths rather than philosophical writings. This would be something like an opposite prejudice to one that has tended to dominate much of the writing of social and economic history in India, concentrating almost exclusively on the upper classes and the elite.<sup>18</sup> It would amount to viewing Indian culture and tradition in more compartmentalized terms than can be reasonably defended. The transmission of knowledge, literature, life style, etc., from one part of the society to another is too general a phenomenon to be left out in trying to understand any part of the society in depth. As it happens, various features that we firmly associate with traditional Western civilisation had also been, for long stretches of time, confined to certain limited parts of the society. Indeed, the issue of "elitist bias", in the interpretation of Western cultures, going all the way back to understanding ancient Greece, is far from trivial, and the problem can scarcely be resolved in the Indian case by insisting on the opposite "non-elite bias", excluding from the reckoning of Indian culture the achievements and concerns of the intellectual elite. A clearer recognition of variety in Indian traditions, with active links as well as deep divisions, can help us to get a more balanced view of the nature of Indian culture.

#### 4. Cultural Values and Rational Criticism

In order to attempt a proper reappraisal of Indian culture and values, we have to draw on evidence of many types and we have to pay serious attention to the methodological problems involved in such appraisal. We have only begun to confront these problems.

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<sup>18</sup> On this see Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of Historiography of Colonial India", in R. Guha, ed., Subaltern Studies 1 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982).

But in speaking of the need to do justice to the culture's own capacity for internal criticism and evaluative reflection, we have arrived at a deep philosophical problem. Indeed, it is one of the most complex and urgent problems faced by any study of development and technological transformation in traditional societies. Scientific and technological change can modify and even undermine tradition. But it is difficult not to feel that some of these changes are beneficial to the societies that undergo them. In fact, the very concept of "development", as it is most often used in the discourse that surrounds it, has an evaluative dimension. A change that is not thought to be in some way beneficial would not usually be described as a part of "development". But then in order to know which changes count as development, that is, as beneficial alterations, we need to have not only a description of the practices and the values of a culture, but also some sort of evaluation of those practices and values: which ones are, in fact the most valuable? Which are central -- the ones that it would be especially unwise to undermine? Which accepted values and practices, on the other hand, might well be modified, and on what grounds?

The first step towards answering these questions is, as we have already indicated, to get a rich, broad, and deep description of the culture in question, one that is not limited -- as many studies in development economics tend to be -- to a narrow sphere of "economic" values, But once we have done this -- and especially, once we have noticed tensions and oppositions among the values and practices of the culture itself -- we shall need to do some further evaluative reflection, if our description is to have any practical value. We could try to avoid the appearance of evaluation by adopting some trivial or mechanical evaluative criterion: for example, by saying that the values to be preserved at all costs are the ones that are shared by the greatest number of the society's people. But this procedure does not really avoid evaluation and ranking; it simply does the job in a particularly mindless and insensitive way. Such a way out would be especially inappropriate for a heterogeneous society like India.



On the other hand, overall evaluations of a particular tradition are nearly always full of peril -- especially when they involve (as they can hardly help doing, given the conflicting and plural nature of the values involved) going against some group's deeply held beliefs. It is frequently felt that any modification of tradition, especially through scientific and/or urban rational criticism, must be an unacceptable external imposition upon traditional culture. This feeling is nourished by the belief that rational criticism is always detached and external - that the only vantage point from which statements like the ones we have quoted from the guidelines can be made is that of a detached observer. In fact, such a person, because of his or her detachment, is bound to be insufficiently respectful of cultural integrity.

This problem is a deep one, and it lies at the heart of a lot of the most interesting recent work in ethical and political theory. There is not much hope that we can solve it to anyone's satisfaction here. Nonetheless, we can at least get started on the problem by sketching a method for the evaluation and criticism of tradition that responds both (a) to the need for criticism, and (b) to the worries about external imposition. This method has to satisfy various criteria of appropriateness. It must be internal, using resources inside the culture itself in order to criticize certain aspects of the culture. Second, it must be immersed rather than detached (i.e., its norm of objectivity should not be one that involves the detachment of the judging subject from the practices, the perceptions, even the emotions, of the culture), stressing instead, that objective value judgments can be made from the point of view of experienced immersion in the way of life of a culture. And yet, third, it will have to be genuinely critical, subjecting traditional beliefs and practices to critical examination. At this point we shall again turn to ancient Greece - in this case, to Aristotle, whose account of how to proceed seems to us an especially suggestive and promising one.

Aristotle's highly critical works on ethics were intended to have a practical and not just theoretical value.<sup>19</sup> Like the WIDER project, they were supposed to have a bearing on social and political choice; and like the project they were openly critical of approaches to social planning that isolated economic values from a deeper and fuller description of the values of a society. He holds that any good account of development must be rooted in this sort of deep description, and in a dialectical evaluation of the traditions described. Aristotle's search is for an account of value that will be genuinely rooted in the experience of the people and genuinely practical, and yet also be evaluative in such a way as to help leaders structure things for the best, enabling people to live as good and flourishing a life as possible.

He describes his method in the following way:

Here, as in all other cases, we must set down the appearances and, first working through the puzzles, in this way go on to show, if possible, the truth of all the traditional beliefs about these experiences; and, if this is not possible, then truth of the greatest number and the most basic. For if the difficulties are resolved and the traditional beliefs are left in place, we will have done enough showing.<sup>20</sup>

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 19 See Nussbaum, "Therapeutic Arguments: Epicurus and Aristotle", in The Norms of Nature, ed. M. Schofield and G. Striker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); also "Nature, Function, and Capability: Aristotle on the Basis of Political Distribution", read to the Oberlin Philosophy Colloquium, April 1986, and to be published in the proceedings of the 12th Symposium Aristotelicum (1987), and Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, 1988.

20 On this passage (Nicomachean Ethics, 1145 b 1 ff.) and Aristotle's method in both science and ethics, see Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) Chapter 8 (which is much the same as her "Saving Aristotle's Appearances", in Language and Logos, ed. M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

This all requires comment. But we shall approach that job indirectly. There is no better way to get an idea of what Aristotle is offering us here than to understand the view it opposes. This view is Plato's. When Aristotle says that a critical study of values (a recommendation of the best values for a culture) should limit itself to a sifting of "appearances", a word that he uses to designate traditional opinions about values<sup>21</sup>, he is making positive use of a term that Plato had used pejoratively, opposing it to "truth" and to "what really is so". For Plato, the opinions of finite and imperfect people, as embodied in their traditions, are hardly a sufficient basis for an account of what is really good, even good for those very same people. People stop short with traditional opinion only "out of laziness", says Glaucon to Socrates in Book 6 of the Republic. Socrates replies: "Laziness, however, is a quality that the guardian of a city and of laws can do without." A good inquiry into what the good life is should not, in this view, allow itself to be distorted by the antecedent beliefs and values of the interested parties. It should be a dispassionate search for truth, conducted as a mathematician, say, would conduct an inquiry as to whether a certain conjecture was true or not true. The mathematician must not allow his wish that the conjecture should turn out true, or false, to influence his enquiry into its status, or his choice of methods of proof. Just so, for the enquirer whose aim is to recommend certain values as best for the development and flourishing of a people. It must resolutely exclude, in this view, any influence from the beliefs of those people as to what lives are best to live, or wishes as to the sort of live they want to live.

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21 See Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness, Chapter 8, and G.E.L. Owen, "Tithenai ta Phainomena" in Owen, Logic, Science, and Dialectic: Collected Essays on Greek Philosophy (London, 1986).

In the Phaedrus, Plato's Socrates creates a moving image to express this idea. The philosopher's soul walks out to the rim of the heavens, apart from all traditions, all concrete ways of life, "whole and unblemished ... in the pure light". And there the soul, looking with the pure eye of reason, understands the truth of value as it really is in itself: "It sees justice itself, it sees moderation, it sees knowledge - not that knowledge that changes, and varies with the various objects that we now call beings - but the genuine knowledge seated in that which truly is". In other words, the truth about the best life might turn out any way at all, so far as we and our lives are concerned. The best life and values (the best account of the ends of development) are what they are, and our thoughts and wishes cannot make them be otherwise. The best life might turn out to be a life that no one in our community could even attain. Or again, it might turn out to be a life that is so out of line with the traditions of the community, and the values of the people in it, that these people would find it repugnant, or base, or so impoverished that they would die rather than live it. Such results would indeed be unlucky for that community; but they would not constitute any reason to call the inquiry itself, or its methods, into question. Plato stresses, furthermore, that the relationship between our cognitive processes and the true good is contingent. It happens that we have faculties such that we (or some of us) are able to grasp the good, and having grasped it, live by it. But we might have been otherwise. (Some of us are otherwise.) And the true values would still have been just the same.<sup>22</sup>

This is one very powerful and deeply rooted picture of ethical inquiry and ethical truth. It has played a big part in the Western scientific tradition, and it is certainly one view

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<sup>22</sup> This contrast is developed at greater length in Nussbaum, The Therapy of Desire (The Martin Classical Lectures, 1986), forthcoming. For the account of Plato, see also The Fragility of Goodness, Chapter 5.

that people frequently have in mind when they speak (well or ill) of "Western rationality". As it happens, it is prominent in Indian philosophy as well, where it has been both defended and challenged, as Bimal Matilal has shown in his recent book Perception.<sup>23</sup> It is this picture that Aristotle wants to undermine. Ethical inquiry, he insists, must be what we might call "value-relative". That is, they are not "pure" inquiries conducted in a void; they are questions about living asked by communities of human beings who are actually engaged in living and valuing. What will count as an appropriate, and even a true, outcome of such inquiry is constrained, and appropriately constrained, by what human beings antecedently value and need. He develops the point by using an analogy between ethics and medical science. We will develop the point here as analogy; but we can also understand it literally at the same time, since medical values are a part of our concern.

The point seems to be as follows. Think of medical inquiry conducted on the rim of heaven, by pure souls without any knowledge of the feelings, the needs, the pleasures and pains of actual living creatures. Think of these heavenly doctors trying to come up with an account of health and the healthy life, and with procedures to bring about health, apart from a detailed and "inside" understanding of the creatures whom they are going to treat. These doctors would probably turn out to be very poor doctors indeed. Heavenly mathematics is one thing; but medicine seems paradigmatic of an art that is immersed, engaged, working in a pragmatic partnership with those whom it treats. It must take very seriously their pains and pleasures, their own sense of where health and flourishing lie. Its aim is to help; and that aim can never be completely separated from a concern for the patient's own sense of the better and the worse. Suppose the

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<sup>23</sup> Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

heavenly doctor comes down from the rim of heaven and announces, "See this condition of body which you, poor old women, find intolerably painful and crippling? Well, that's what health is, as I have discovered by consulting the sort of knowledge that resides in true being. You children here: you say that you are hungry; you cry. But this too is health; and you will be making cognitive progress if you learn to see things this way." Our first reaction may be that this "doctor" is sadistic and callous. But the important point here is that he cannot be right.

Health does not have an existence in heaven, apart from people and their lives. It is not a being apart from becoming. People can indeed go wrong about their health, in many ways. They can think they are doing well when they are not. They can also think they are doing badly when they are really well. But the sense of that claim is that the scientist or doctor could show them something about their condition which, were they to listen and eventually to understand, would convince them - in terms of a general idea of health and human activity about which they both agree - that their initial judgment had been wrong. Perhaps not all actual individuals will be convinced by the medical truth; but for it to be be medical truth it seems to be necessary, at the least, that individuals who are in some way representative, attentive, who have scrutinized the alternatives in the right way, should be convinced. This does not, of course, mean that the therapist cannot alter people's ideas concerning what health is, at the level of more concrete specification. One of her main tasks will frequently be to produce a concrete specification of this vague end, telling us its elements: and this specification may well clash with the patient's pre-reflective specification. But the challenge of medicine always it to come back to people's desires and needs and sense of value. It must deliver to them a life that will in the end be accepted as a flourishing existence, or else nothing has been accomplished.

So much, Aristotle claims, is true of ethical value. We do not inquire in a vacuum. Our conditions and ways of life, and the hopes, pleasures, pains, and evaluations that are a part of

these, cannot be left out of the inquiry without making it pointless and incoherent. We do not stand on the rim of heaven and look "out there" for truth; and if we did we would not find the right thing. Ethical truth is in and of human life; it can be seen only from the point of view of immersion. He illustrates the point with an example. Some people have suggested that the good life comes to human beings simply by luck or by nature; our own voluntary striving and activity contribute nothing. But, says Aristotle, if we hold this view up against the deepest values and beliefs of the people with whom we are concerned, we are entitled to reject it - and to reject it as false, on the grounds that its acceptance would clash so deeply with these values that we would consider such a life to be not worth the living. Here, as in the medical case, we want to say not only that we would be pragmatically justified in rejecting the dismal proposal. We want to say that it must be false as a view of value for these people - just as the view must be false that an intolerable crippling condition of body is what human health is. The ethical good, like health, is a notion whose meaning cannot be understood except in relation to the creature in question, and in relation to the nature of their antecedent values and ways of life.<sup>22</sup>

Are we, then, entitled to speak of "truth" here? John Rawls, developing a somewhat similar account of ethical inquiry,<sup>23</sup> has concluded that we are not. We ought to jettison the notion of truth, once we see that the search for the best account in ethics has these pragmatic elements. Aristotle does, however, speak of truth, and for good reason. Rawls is deeply impressed by a contrast between the human sciences and the natural sciences; and he refers sympathetically to a view like Plato's about truth in the natural sciences. Aristotle holds that

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 Again, this argument is developed with full textual references, in Nussbaum, The Therapy of Desire.

<sup>23</sup> J. Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Ethical Theory: Dewey Lectures 1980", Journal of Philosophy 77 (September 1980). See also his A Theory of Justice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971) pp. 46-53.

all truth is in some sense internal and value-laden. And recent work in the philosophy of sciences has given support to his position. Detachment, in any area, yields not objectivity but incoherence. All truth is seen from somewhere; if we try to see from outside of human life, we see nothing at all. Supporting this position, Hilary Putnam has recently argued that once we have the correct understanding of scientific truth, we will see that there is just as much, and the same sort of, truth and objectivity in ethics as in science. And he argues, with Aristotle, that this really is truth, and an "internal realism", not a collapse into idealism or subjectivism.<sup>24</sup>

Aristotle has further arguments defending the claim that an internal inquiry can yield truth and objectivity. He gives us an account of the practical achievements of an internal inquiry that show us how it can in fact achieve a degree of clarity, ordering, and societal consensus that entitle us to claim that we have moved beyond the superficial desires of the participants to a deeper and more objective level. That movement, he holds, is what truth in ethics is all about. He does not dispute Plato's claim that many desires that people feel are bad guides to ethical truth - because they can be deformed by conditions of injustice and deprivation, because they frequently express superficial interests that are at odds even with a deeper level of need and value in that same person. But he thinks that the way to circumnavigate these obstacles is not Plato's way of disregarding the people's values altogether; it is to conduct a reflective dialectical examination that will take the people's views very seriously, and then move them towards the recognition and the

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24 See H. Putnam, Reason, Truth, and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and especially The Many Faces of Realism: the Carus Lectures 1985, forthcoming. For a more detailed development of some aspects of Aristotle's position, see Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: an Aristotelian Approach", a WIDER Working Paper, and forthcoming in Midwest Studies in Philosophy, 1988.



clarification of what actually are, for them, the most central values. Most of the time we talk carelessly and somewhat "randomly" about our values. And yet it may sometimes be very important to us (as it is in connection with many of our practical purposes) to get clearer about our values and also to reach some sort of societal agreement about them. Aristotle insists that these two goals - individual clarification and communal attunement - can be achieved together, by a cooperative critical discourse that insists upon the philosophical virtues of orderliness, deliberateness, and precision:

Concerning all these things we must try to seek conviction through arguments, using the traditional beliefs as our witnesses and standards. For it would be best of all if all human beings could come into an evident communal agreement with what we shall say, but, if not, that all should agree in some way. And this they will do if they are led carefully until they shift their position. For everyone has something of his own to contribute to the truth, and it is from these that we go on to give a sort of demonstration about these things. For from what is said truly but not clearly, as we advance we will also get clarity, always moving from what is usually said in a jumbled fashion to more perspicuous view. There is a difference in every inquiry between arguments that are said in a philosophical way and those that are not. Hence we must not think that it is superfluous for the political person to engage in the sort of reflection that makes perspicuous not only the 'that' but also the 'why': for<sup>25</sup> this is the contribution of the philosopher in each area.

Here again Aristotle insists, against the Platonist approach, on the fundamental internality of the reflective process that assesses values: the "witnesses" and "standards" of the process are the "appearances", or the shared beliefs, and each participant has something to contribute to the truth. And yet the process does not give us back a simple repetition of what each

<sup>25</sup>-----  
Eudemian Ethics, 1216a 26-39; see Nussbaum, "Therapeutic Arguments".

person thought at the start. This is so because when we scrutinize what we think, we will notice inconsistencies and unclarities that we do not notice when we simply talk and act without reflecting. When the deliberative process confronts the reflecting participant with all of the alternative views on a topic, leads him or her through a thorough imaginative exploration of each, and shows how each choice bears on many others that this person wishes to make in a consistent way - then many unconsidered positions may be modified. And yet this modification, if it takes place, will take place not as imposition from without, but as a discovery about which, among that person's own values, are the deepest and the most central. This is self-discovery and discovery of one's own traditions.

Aristotle believes that agreement among people will be enhanced by this self-clarifying procedure. For much disagreement results from ambiguous and vague statement of positions, and much more from a pressing of one idea to the neglect of other related considerations. The effort to develop a position that is consistent over many issues frequently leads to the dropping of immoderate claims on a single issue. But his method also relies upon the fact that the parties engaged in the procedure identify themselves as social beings (not as isolated units) - beings connected to one another by a network of relations, political, cognitive, emotional (and the political relation is best understood, he believes, as having emotional dimensions). Thus they conceive of the goal of the reflective process as the finding of a view according to which they can live together in community - a shared and sharable view of value. And so they are frequently willing to move away from a personal claim, even when narrow consistency does not force them to do so, in order to bring themselves into harmony with the views and claims of others - achieving the larger sort of self-consistency that is the internal harmony of the political and relational self.

This process is viewed not in any simple way as the transcending or sacrificing of self; it is a further part of the

discovery of self, since the self is understood in its very nature to be a relational entity, and its own ends are understood as shared ends. We emphasize this, since it seems clear that to conceive of the person as fundamentally relational does transform the way in which numerous familiar problems of social and political choice will be stated. And it offers a promising way of reformulating the goals and precedures of the reflective process - one that will also harmonize well with conceptions of selfhood, individuality and community that are in fact held by many people in developing nations. In the Western society they are less widely held; and it has been forcefully argued that they are held by women far more frequently than by men.<sup>36</sup> So we are saying that the most promising account of the reflective assessment of values may be one that departs from some traditional norms of "Western rationality" (though this departure is suggested by Aristotle's criticisms of Plato, therefore by an internal criticism of this tradition by other aspects of itself).

In three other important ways the Aristotelian process departs from norms that are frequently defended in contemporary ethical and social theory. This is not the place to go into these in detail, but they need to be mentioned, or the relationship of our process to its political aim will be misunderstood.<sup>27</sup>

(1) Non-commensurability: The procedure insists on treating each of the values involved as a qualitatively distinct item, not reducible to any other item, not conceivable as simply a certain quantity of something else. This commitment to the qualitative integrity of each value is one of the greatest advantages of this

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 26 See for example Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

27 All these points are given a detailed discussion in Nussbaum, "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Morality", in Proceedings of Boston Area Collouium in Ancient Philosophy (1985), pp. 151-201.

procedure over other approaches that might be used (e.g., in some of the literature on development economics) in assessing traditional cultures.<sup>28</sup>

(2) Essentiality of the particular: This procedure insists that evaluate choices cannot be well made unless we confront contexts of choice, and the items in them, as particulars (in this connection, one of us has spoken of "the priority of the particular")<sup>29</sup>. Universal rules and other ethical generalizations have worth only insofar as they correctly summarize particulars; they are rules of thumb, and cannot, in general, take precedence over concrete perceptions. Correct choice is understood not as the application of rules that have independent validity to cases, but as an improvisatory perceiving, guided by rules but responsible above all to what is newly seen. This seems to us, again, to have considerable importance for the issues involved in the WIDER project. For if reflection and choice are understood in this way, it becomes vastly more difficult to overlook the complex and individual history of a culture and its people. These historical idiosyncrasies become of high ethical relevance, and must be confronted. And they will best be confronted, the procedure tells us, by a person who is experienced in that culture, immersed and not detached. For only that sort of person

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28 See Nussbaum, "The Discernment of Perception"; and also "Plato on Commensurability and Desire", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume, 84 (1984), pp. 55-80; and Amartya Sen, "Plural Utility", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 80 (1980).

29 Nussbaum, "The Discernment of Perception", and The Fragility of Goodness, Chapter 10. Also her "Perceptive Equilibrium: Literary Theory and Ethical Theory", forthcoming in Critical Projections, ed. R. Cohen (London: Mentuen, 1987); and also "Moral Attention and the Moral Task of Literature", in Philosophy and the Question of Literature, ed. A. Cascardi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); a shorter version of the latter was previously published as "'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible': Moral Attention and the Moral Task of Literature", Journal of Philosophy 82 (1985) 516-29.

will be in a position to see all the particular factors that bear upon choice in a complex and historically rich context.

(3) Essential role of emotions and imagination: The procedure is immersed in another way: it insists that intellect cannot work well apart from the emotions and the imagination. Many conceptions of rationality, including Plato's, regard these elements of the personality as intrusions and not aids in the valuational process. This means, among other things, that it is vastly easier for them to commend a reflection that is detached and lacking in concrete experience of the culture being evaluated. The Aristotelian insists that a correct "perception" of value cannot be reached at all by the intellect acting alone - and, therefore, not without the kind of experienced connectedness that would enable the person to feel and respond to, as well as intellectually apprehend, the values with which he or she is confronted. Their meaning can be seen only through and in such responses. The emotions are cognitive; they indicate us where importance is to be found.

We want to put the problem of rational assessment of the values of a culture in this general perspective. In understanding what types of problems are involved in assessing various effects of economic development and in appraising different kinds of social change, we cannot simply assume that there are given lists of "good" changes and "bad" ones, as is often taken for granted (e.g., "modernising" is good, or - alternatively - "preserving tradition" is desirable). We have to see the nature of that identification as itself a dynamic process requiring internal and immersed critical appraisal, and involving emotional and imaginative responses to the challenges involved.

Given the nature of this evaluative process, it might look as if such critical work can never come from people who do not belong to that culture. This is not quite correct, but it is important for an outsider to get enough understanding of the culture in question to be able to satisfy the requirement that

the critique be internal and immersed in the ways discussed earlier. The problem of understanding can be a serious one even for members of that culture itself, since even they may not have direct experience of all the relevant alternatives. The Aristotelian procedure would recommend various ways of closing this gap as a part of the critical exercise. There are, of course, very many different means of acquiring knowledge and understanding of a traditional culture. It is particularly important in this context to emphasize the relevance of turning to history, and also to literature, including stories - formal and informal. In stories a traditional culture tells about itself. By studying them the "critical subject" not merely discovers the values that are cherished in that culture, but is also initiated into an activity of imagination and emotion that can enable her to see these values.<sup>30</sup> The discussion in the two preceding sections has pointed to some of the issues involved in this inquiry, and to some types of literature that might be particularly relevant. The important addition point to emphasize here is that a valid procedure calls for the use of literature not so much for detached intellectual judgment, but primarily for involved and responsive understanding and evaluation.

The critical process discussed here, though internal, can frequently lead to criticism of traditional values, and indeed to the rejection of some of them. There are contradictory beliefs entertained, and reflection may lead to reassertion of some and rejection of others. There is also recognition of the beliefs held by others, and understanding of their values, aims and predicaments. Deeper reflection may lead to the rejection of many things people superficially believe and say. Even an internal critique - not just an external one - can go against and practices that may give the appearance of uncompromising conviction.

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30 See Nussbaum, "Moral Attention and the Moral Task of Literature".

Many different types of unsustainable values can be illustrated. To take just one example, consider the following example from Aristotle himself. He records - accurately enough - that in traditional Greek thought such great importance is attached to honour and to the avoidance of shame that people frequently say, and at some level think they believe, that honour is the main end in human life. He argues very persuasively that a deeper and broader survey of beliefs will reveal that honour actually is not valuable apart from excellent action: that honour won by bad deeds or by erroneous attribution of good deeds is not prized at all, and that when honour is prized it is so as the fitting cultural sign that an excellent action has been performed. This seems to be, in fact, a perceptive and deep reading of tradition - more correct as description than many ancient (and modern) descriptions of Greek values. In a certain sense, however, it is also a genuine criticism of tradition, in that people really did say these things, and did act on them in social life. This is the way in which an inquiry that is descriptive - but reflectively descriptive - can also have real critical force.

##### 5. Limits and Reach

There are some special features of the outlined view of a valuational procedure that should be noted as being potentially problematic. In this section two of them are taken up. First, human beings are seen in a particular way in this approach. They are seen essentially social creatures whose deep aim is to live in a community with others and to share with others a conception of value. This belief plays a regulative role in the entire process and is clearly at a different level from the values that are assessed by the process described (using the regulative value). Another regulative value is the commitment to a tradition of rational argumentation - especially to standards of consistency and clarity. These are, in fact, among the deepest held traditional values in ancient Athenian culture. But they need not be always accepted. (The latter requirement is, for

example, not so clearly accepted even in all parts of ancient Greek culture, for example in Sparta, though the Athenian endorsement was largely shared by some others, say, Ionians).

Those who see the Indian tradition as geared to unreasoned mysticism and uncritical synthesizing (a view that is commonly held, but was challenged in earlier sections of this paper) would possibly see in the role of these regulative values - especially in the assumption of a rational tradition - a proof of the inappropriateness of the Aristotelian procedure for Indian use. But the tradition of rational argument is, in fact, one part of the Indian heritage also, and has a long history of strong endorsement (see section 3). The difficulty that might have to be faced concerns the existence of some traditions within the plurality of Indian culture which would seem to have no such commitment. But even in those cases, it is not obvious that a reasoned defence can be sustained any more than a reasoned criticism can be made. Indeed, as Aristotle has argued elsewhere, a good case can be made for considering a commitment to non-contradiction to be constitutive at a very basic level of all human thought and speech.<sup>31</sup> The absence of this commitment in the culture would be problematic not merely for the procedure discussed here, but for any kind of critical procedure - except a purely "external" one in which the values of that culture are rejected or endorsed by critical ("rational") commentators from outside. The regulative values are, thus, rather crucial for the entire exercise of internal assesment, to which the motivation underlying the WIDER project in question is committed (no less than we are).

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<sup>31</sup> See Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness, Chapter 8 (= "Saving Aristotle's Appearances"); and also H. Putnam, "There Is At Least One a priori Truth", Erkenntnis, 13, (1978), pp. 153-70, reprinted in Putnam, Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers, Vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 98-114.



Second, we have a very important set of issues to face about the boundaries of the cultural unit that is to be described in each case. We have spoken of a rational criticism of culture that proceeds by utilizing material internal to the culture itself. But what, after all, is "a culture"? Does all of India have a single culture, and, if so, in what sense? (Does all of the United States?) It is quite easy to see why a member of a certain part of a culture could feel resentful of a criticism that comes from another part - from, for example, another religious tradition with different ethical beliefs. Members of two subgroups may well not agree on what are the deepest values. Won't a procedure that decides in favour of one or another set of values seem arbitrary and unfair? We all know in our own political lives the sense of indignation that comes when one discovers that the values of a group whose entire way of life seems completely alien to us have been imposed upon all by a procedure that pretends to fairness. It takes extreme goodwill and long traditions of respect for the deliberative procedures involved not to refuse the result directly. Won't India raise comparable and far greater problems? The Aristotelian procedure says nothing about the value of toleration, or about protection of the right to diverse choices of good. These values need to be incorporated into the procedure as regulative; and it will take a lot of thought to decide exactly how and where to do this.

There is a similar problem at the other end. Suppose the culture under survey shows widespread agreement - traditionally and now - on certain value or values. Does this really suffice to make the value or values justified according to our procedure? Or are we entitled to appeal to a larger community - a plurality of related societies, say - for a rational criticism of that entire culture? This is often an urgent question, especially where issues of sexism, racism, and religious intolerance are concerned. We can identify many groups at many times in human history who have held beliefs about female inferiority. Sometimes these views are lightly held, so that they would not survive the process of reflective scrutiny. Frequently they are opposed by

other internal values, such as belief in the equal rights of each human individual. And frequently it is true that a richer and more imaginative (and correspondingly more involved or compassionate) look at women's lives will go far to alter perceptions and engender internal criticisms. But this need not invariably happen.<sup>32</sup>

However, the limits of internal criticism are not always easy to define. Any culture is a part of a bigger plurality to which it belongs. The values and traditions of the others may be known and discussed (or can be known and discussed), without making criticism based on that understanding in any sense "external". An internal critique cannot ignore internal facts, but does not preclude response to other societies and to an extended plurality of cultures. Values of one part of that plurality can, thus, enter in an integral way in an internal critique in another part, since the knowledge of culture A by culture B is as much a part of the internal reality of culture B - indeed more directly so - as it is of culture A.

It is this admissibility of cross-cultural reference that makes the scope of internal critiques a good deal wider than might be at first imagined. It also makes the phenomenon of "value rejection", which was discussed in the first section of this paper, have a more inclusive class of possible causal antecedents than responses to changes occurring primarily inside the economy or society in question. Sustainability of values in a world not cut up into self-contained bits is a more exacting critical test - within the general structure of internal criticism - than it is in a world within which information or influence does not travel. While it should not be taken for

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 32 Aristotle's infamous remarks concerning women and slaves are a case in point: Though their superficiality shows some evidence of lack of reflection.

granted, as Elster has rightly argued (in Sour Grapes), that subsequent values are necessarily more important than antecedent values, it is nevertheless difficult not to have respect for subsequent values that are arrived at on the basis of an internal critique in response to enhanced information and understanding (including inter alia those about the workings and achievements of other societies and cultures).

Cross-cultural linkages have importance in several different ways. The coverage of principles of justice and equality defended in a society can leave out some groups within that society, when it stands largely in isolation, but the same society may find that exclusion to be unviable when less exclusive formats in other societies are known and understood here. The exclusion of slaves in one society, untouchables in another, and women in still another, may be much harder to sustain when other societies show the way to different types of social arrangements. This genesis of value rejection can be seen to be a part of an internal process in which facts of knowledge, understanding and response play a crucial part.

Another respect in which cross-cultural links may be important is in the terms of the requirements of well-being of each person whose interests may command attention. It is possible to think of the well-being of a person as being a matter of his or her ability to do this or be that - what has been called the person's "capabilities".<sup>33</sup> It has been argued that there is some

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<sup>33</sup> The position is argued in Amartya Sen, "Equality of What?", in S. McMurrin, ed., Tanner Lectures on Human Values, vol. I (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1980), reprinted in his Choice, Welfare and Measurement (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), and in his "Well-being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984", Journal of Philosophy, 82 (1985).

basic similarity in the list of capabilities sought in different parts of the world, even when the commodity bundles associated with the same capabilities may differ (e.g., the ability to appear in public without shame, which may be valued in different cultures in much the same way, may nevertheless have quite different commodity or action requirements in one culture vis-a-vis another).<sup>34</sup> Intercultural linkages help, on the one hand, to identify and endorse the valuation of these basic - generally formulated - capabilities, and on the other they may also tend to reduce the differences of specific forms of commodities and actions needed for the realization of those capabilities in the respective culture.

Coming back to the question of the position of women, which is important both as an illustration and as a case on its own, the issue of linkages is important in several distinct respects. First, linkages make it hard for women to be excluded from consideration of justice and equality in one society, when they are not so excluded in others.<sup>35</sup> Second, in highlighting the congruence in valuing certain basic capabilities (e.g., the ability to be well-nourished, to be free from avoidable morbidity or premature mortality, to be free to occupy positions of power and influence), the more "open" perspective places certain parameters inescapably in the focus of attention, and they have to be taken into account in judging the position of women as well

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34 The point goes back to Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (1776). On this see Amartya Sen, Resources, Values and Development, Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), and in some form to Aristotle himself, on which (and for some further explorations of the Aristotelian perspective), see Martha Nussbaum, "Nature, Function and Capability: Aristotle on the Basis of Political Distribution".

35 One could certainly ask whether Aristotle's views on women could have survived critical reflection armed with the information and understanding of social arrangements that have emerged since his times.

(rather than judging their well-being or advantage in some specially limited way, such as by the test as to whether women are "happy" with the deal they have got).<sup>36</sup> Thirdly, as the forms of free actions of women in one society influence what is accepted in another, even the differences in the specific forms of free action may be revised.

These issues, which may be practically quite important, are not to be seen as matters of external critique, but as parts of an internal critique when the influences operate through internal response to things learned from elsewhere. For example, in criticising the position of women in, say, today's Iran, reference to freedom enjoyed by women elsewhere is no more "external" than reference to the position of women in Iran's own past, if the challenge to the present arrangements comes through criticisms from within, based on responding to conditions at another time or at another place.

The limits of an internal critique can be as wide as the varieties of information that affect the reflection and aspirations of members of the culture in question. The demand for internality of criticism insists that criticism cannot come from altogether outside; but it need not insist on a narrow or exclusive list of the influence that can "count" in the dynamics of a society's internal critique. Internal criticism can have a long reach.

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 36 On this see Amartya Sen Commodities and Capabilities (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1985); also his "Well-being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984" (1985).

## 6. Concluding Remarks

In this paper we have been concerned with both substantive and methodological issues. On substantive matters, our general conclusion regarding the often-voiced conversationist worries about the "undermining" of Indian culture due to the spread of modern science and technology is that they may well be, to a great extent, seriously misleading. It is arguable that these worries are based on drawing alarmist inferences from an overly narrow and biased view of the nature of Indian culture, and also on ignoring the legitimacy, power, and reach of possible internal criticism of parts of the old tradition in the light of new information and understanding. The descriptive and evaluative problems raised by the phenomenon of "value rejection" (as opposed to "object failure") call for a reexamination of the nature of Indian culture and of the requirements of internal criticism.

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