

THE IDEALS, PLURALISTIC CULTURE AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

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Abstract

This paper will contend that social progress should always be determined by noble goals and ideals (truth, goodness, beauty, holiness). That means, social progress is achieved first by human search for these noble ideals, and then by human continuous effort to realize them in a concrete form, to cultivate them and make them flourish. A society makes real progress only when it is trying to take "a step forward" closer to the ideals of truth, goodness, beauty, and holiness. Traditional values are conceived of, first, as the ideals of a society, and after a long history of being tested by their life-worlds, "passed on" (traditio) to the next generations. Traditional values are the real testaments of social progress. We argue further that, since traditional values represent the ideals of a certain society, and since we are always orienting towards these ideals, then a step closer to traditional values means social progress also. Precisely in this context that we may say that progress means both "a step forward" and "a step backward."

Progress and Social Progress

Progress, in its etymological sense of "progredire," is understood as "a step forward."¹ The question now is, can a simple step forward make progress? Surely not! One may make many steps forward but if they lead nowhere, then they are either futile, or regressive. Therefore, the question is not a step forward, but "forward to what?" It is, then, the goal that determines progress. And, of course, a step forward of negative character, like destruction, sickness, death, and the like, can be hardly hailed as progress.

In this context, progress made in technology could not be esteemed as progress if it leads to human self termination, even if it would be undisputedly an invention or a discovery. The "technical breakthrough" of mass murder is not progress but social regress. We know, Nazi scientists and scientists working in the service of the war machine, the inventors of mass-destructive weapons (gas-chambers, rockets, etc.), the "fathers" of atomic bombs, did not contribute anything to social progress, since their goal is, in contrast, the destruction of a certain society, a certain race. Despite their claim of being the "defenders of peace by means of violence," they have indirectly participated into the hideous unpardonable extinction of million of innocents. How can they cleanse their hands tainted with the blood of their victims? Their claimed progress, if there is any, then is "a step forward" to the destruction of humanity. Scientists would contribute nothing to social progress, if the purpose of their scientific invention (or discovery) is either fully alien or hostile to human life. In contrast, only the invention (of technique or the new idea) serving mankind, warranting world peace, reducing human sufferings, prolonging human life, and bettering society would be hailed as real contribution to social progress.

From the above considerations, progress should only be understood as both a step away from terror and destruction, and a step towards the noble goals of safe-guarding, developing human life and human happiness. Progress makes sense only if it satisfies this double function. Now the point we want to argue further is, a step forward closer to noble goals is in a way, a step backward, since these noble goals are not the property of the future. They are "immanent" to human life, and thus are timeless. And they are certainly not identified with our ordinary goals of being better, smarter, richer, happier, and the likes.

As a step backward, the constant striving forward to noble goals - truth (*veritas*), goodness (*bonitas*), beauty (*pulchritudo*) and holiness (*sanctitas*)² would be the real factors deciding progress, since the first aspect of progress, i.e. "go away from" or a step forward *far from* the evil (*malum*) is actually a necessary condition to progress. And, interestingly, precisely this factor was and still is the dynamic force behind human construction of different sets (or systems) of values. Are not Asian values (Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Indonesian, Thai, Philippines, Malaysian, etc.) the products of this permanent construction

of means and purposes for these ultimate ends (noble ideals)? Are not the Western values based on them as well? Are not the African values and the human values in general judged by the yardstick of the truth, the good, the beauty and the holy?

In this context, my paper argues that social progress should always be determined by noble goals (truth, goodness, beauty, holiness) which are ardently desired, zealously searched for, and constantly applied into our society.³ That means, social progress is made first by human invention of these noble ideals, and then by the continuous effort to realize them in a concrete form, to cultivate them and make them flourish. A society makes real progress only when it is trying to take "a step forward" closer to the ideals of truth, goodness, beauty, and holiness. As the forms, which are already tested and accepted by a certain society, traditional values are conceived of, first, as the ideals of a society, or of a certain nation, or more universally, of human kind. Then, after a long history of being tested by their life-worlds, these ideals take the forms of values, which are "passed on" (*treditio*) to the next generations. As such, traditional values do not exist *a priori* (since they are not innate), but are worked out, tested, used and reused by generations of people. In a word, as both the witness and the soul of history, traditional values are the real testaments of social progress. And since traditional values represent the ideals of a certain society, and since we are always orienting towards these ideals, then a step closer to traditional values also means social progress. Precisely, in this context, we may say that progress means both "a step forward" and "a step backward."

The Dialectic of Progress: A Step Forward and a Step Backward

Progress, as we have mentioned, is often characterized in spatial terms by its "advance", or in ordinary language, "a step forward." "Forward" means "going farther" than the *hic*, i.e. the present position. "Forward" means also "later" in terms of temporality: going further than the *nunc*, i.e. the present time (moment). "Looking forward" bears at the same time a temporal and spatial dimension. But, as we will see, the "temporal forward," often understood as the future, does not clearly point to progress, because

our existence is limited by our own insurmountable end. To go farther than the present (the *hic*) means also to approach our own end, i.e. death. Hegel's analysis of human *Dasein*, just as Heidegger's analysis of temporality (Temporalität) both point to the tragic destiny of human existence: existence is limited by the death. There is no more paradoxical and tragic than the reality of human existence: it is defined by the non-existence.⁴ Man is born in order to die. This is a truth which no one denies but nobody would *happily* accept. Such a bleak future is, of course, not the goal that human beings are seeking. Our burning desire for a bright future, i.e. an *unlimited* future, and our "march forward" toward it means also our effort to prolong our end. Progress in biological sciences would be measured by human effort to prolong our own end. Therefore, progress now means a step forward closer to longevity - the ideal sought by all of us; it is a cardinal virtue for Chinese, i.e. closer to the unlimited, the absolute, i.e. an *aeternitas*, or, in religious expression, to a "never ended now time" (*infinitus hic et nunc*).⁵ Hegel's attempt to overcome this fateful end with his search for the absolute, the infinite i.e. the absolute *Geist* must therefore be understood as a progressive approach.⁶

Similarly to the dialectic of life, a step forward closer to the good means also a step far from the evil, a step closer to the beauty a step far from the ugly, and a step closer to the holy a step far from the unholy. As we will argue in the next section, the search for noble ideals of truth (*veritas*), goodness (*bonitas*), the beauty (*pulchritudo*) and the holy (*sanctitas*) has always been the most urgent task. It takes a double and dialectical course, the first is the *via negativa* while the second the *via positiva*. The first demands us to take a step far from the evil, the untruth, the ugly and the unholy while the second one a step closer to the truth, the beauty, the good and the holy. Consequently, human construction of values must be guided by these two approaches. However, in bottom, they must be based on the second ones, namely on the ideals of truth, goodness, beauty and holiness. In this sense, it is clear that noble ideals serve both as our ultimate goals and the metaphysical foundation of all values so far.

The Paradox of Progress as a Step Forward

There is no doubt that, the future is always *prior to* and *posterior from* our present moment. In different expression, our future existence will come later than our present existence; tomorrow comes after today, and so on. However, there is no warrant for the ideal that what comes later would be any closer to our ideals, and consequently, would constitute progress. Our future achievements constitutes "progress" only in comparison with the achievements of our present existence, just as our claimed progress is verified by the present success in comparing with that of the past. That means it is the "what" and not the temporal dimension that counts here. Hence, future understood as a "temporal forward" would lose its sense if it is restricted to the mere measure of time.

Let us begin first with the ordinary understanding of progress as "a step forward," and a step forward as the future. If progress is defined by its temporal advance, then this "advance logic" determines progress. Such a logic forces us to bite into the premise of "no advance, no progress." It is usual to find the belief that the progress of human history is striving forward to a certain future. Such tacit understanding of progress leads us to a conclusion that the future must be the real objective of human search. It is human ultimate end.

Of course, such a conclusion is fully consistent with the advance logic. The point we have mentioned above is, it is not the temporal dimension but the content of our existence, i.e. the "what" that counts; and consequently, our question is whether the advance logic would be appropriate for any understanding of progress at all. As we see, progress or regress is measured by the different quality or quantity between the content of the present moment and that of the future. The difference of quality or quantity of the content would be the sole criteria determining progress or regress. And this is tacitly accepted by mankind as reflected in the motto of *altius, fortius et longius* once laid down by the Romans in the Olympic games: the better or the best are those who are stronger, who spring higher and jump farther. That is, those who achieve better results in terms of quantity and quality are the ones who progress.

In this sense, the advance logic based on temporal dimension would yield no meaning, since future is a vague concept, lacking of any concrete content. And as such, it is "unreal" even if it is "true" in theory. The future can at best point to an unknown, not yet happening event, not yet existing

life and not yet coming world. That means, the content of the future is void so long we still do not reach it. As a consequence, one encounters a very dubious and paradoxical reality, best expressed by Samuel Beckett in his *Waiting for Godot*: future life is certainly coming (true in advance logic), but it never exists for us. We are uncertain of our future life despite its unquestionable reality. Sticking to the advance logic, protagonists of the view of progress as an advance toward future brush aside this paradox. And to convince themselves of its "truth", they must "imagine", and "design" a future which they force themselves to believe in it. To them, this future must advance farther than the present in terms of quantity and quality. Charles Darwin is certainly not the sole defender of this view, though he is unquestionably the best one.

Now, the question is, what they "regard" as "real" and "true" is rather a product of our imagination and our, perhaps, arbitrary design. If future does not yet exist, and if the real is what already existed, then such an imagination remains a pure product of phantasma. Could we judge progress or regress by comparing the existing to the non-existing? That means, by taking the future as the goal of progress, and by conceiving of "a step forward" closer to the future as the sign of progress, one is obliged to either accept the non existence as our ultimate goal. As such, we are either facing the bleak prospects of "abyss" (Heidegger), "nihilism" (Nietzsche), or "absurdity" (Sartre), or we must embrace a certain utopia (the sort of a terrestrial paradise, or the total triumph of the proletariat) as the ultimate goal of history.⁷ The fact that, we can never arrive at it, simply because future is unreal (even if it is true), and its content is void. Future is a true idea, but a void concept. This dilemma forces us to renounce the thesis of progress in terms of advance logic: such progress seems to reflect the portrait of Nietzsche's madman, or the visions of despair painted by such modern western artists as Renoir and Van Gogh.

This consideration forces us to go a step further in arguing that not the logic of temporal advance, i.e. not the future but the ideals and our effort to realize them that decides progress or regress. By rejecting the thesis of temporal advance as progress, and by arguing that the real content, i.e. the "what" of the present cannot be measured or compared by the yardstick of (the contents of) the future, here we conjecture that a step forward closer to the ideals is the real sign of progress. That means, not

any step forward means progress, but only "a step forward" closer to a certain goal of ideal character may be taken as the sign of progress. In the case of evolution and transformation, one may apply the same argument *pro* and *contra*: not evolution *in se* is the sign of progress, but an evolution to a certain higher (in quality), better goal that may be called progress. A blind evolution as a kind of natural law, can hardly be praised as progress at all.

Progress as a Step towards the Ideal Goals

This thesis demands a further investigation into human goals, as well as in the qualitative difference among human goals. We will argue further that, although progress can be judged by the degree of success, i.e. by the closeness to the goal, social progress is possible only if the goal set by us is noble in character. Let us return to the Darwinian view. If the goal of human race is simply a continuous self-transformation, and if the course of self-transformation is natural then any claim of progress seems to be meaningless. We know, such a goal is implanted in all living beings, and is not set by us; and because we have nothing to do with it. Or better say, we are fully impotent in dealing with it. Can we praise the fact of a baby being born, growing up, getting old, and finally dying as human progress? By any generous standard can one hardly take this natural fact as progress. Growing old confirms human course determined by natural law, but growing old is not our goal, just as death is certainly not our goal, even if it is fully natural, marking the end of life. Hence, one can say, simple natural transformation or evolution is not the goal of human life, and much less of human society. Consequently, if future is marked (or better, predicted) by what we are transforming to, then such a future is rather a repetition of time, and our life is only a repetition of the same, thought in different forms.

More tragically, would we be willing to accept death as a sign of "progress"? One may say, we are conscious of our fateful end, but we object to the idea of death as human ultimate goal. Death is the concluding moment of life, but it is not our goal. Similarly, future is not our goal, even if we are passively moving forward to future. One might argue against us

by appealing to the Darwinian logic of evolution (and transformation), and Freud's analysis of unconsciousness. In this case, natural instinct is always oriented towards a certain goal, either conscious or unconscious. In the case of suffering and dying, then one may say, ironically, that any step closer to them is natural, and as such they can be legitimately considered as human "goal." The goal conceived by the defenders of this view is certainly not different from the goal implicit in nature. Nature is blind, but like a bat in the darkness. So, they would conclude, any step forward towards this goal can be regarded as "progress."

Of course, such an argument is absurd. Closer to death is not progress but regress. Even if death is deliberately chosen as the goal, then this goal is certainly not ideal. Suicide reveals only a state of hopelessness and not the reverse, i.e. hope. Hope is not the symptom of illness but the expression of a better life, better work, better chance, etc. In other words, hope reflects an ideal. Death is regarded as an evil. So conversely we can therefore call progress a certain recovery from illness, an escape from death. We see this when a biologist makes progress in discovering a bacteria or viruses to aid in the prevention or cure of disease, or when politicians makes progress in reducing the death rate of their people.

If progress is understood as a step forward closer to our ideals and to a certain future, then the point here is, is the ideal set by us lying in the future, or already immanent in our society, or in our own existence. I would opt for the second view, arguing that our noble goals are neither a *priori* existing nor a *posteriori* lying in the future. They are immanent in our existence and our society. Immanent here is understood in the sense that they were constructed by human beings in a long process, and remained inseparable from our own existence, even if we are unconscious of them. They were constructed not to satisfy our present moment, but for a lasting history, i.e. for a long lasting existence. As such, our ideals are not to be found only in the distant future, but also in the past and in the presence. Our future life-world means not a life after the present moment, but an encompassing and multi-dimensional life. Consequently, searching for the ideals needs not to look forward to the future, but perhaps, better, to be found in our own life-worlds, the ones in the past and the present.

German idealists like Georg F. Hegel and Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling have discovered this truth long ago. Nostalgic of the Homeric

spirit and the Renaissance vitality, they have taken *Fortschritt* (literally, a step forward) as the logic of the world (and nature). To them, *Fortschritt* carries a double function: striving forward and receding back to the most substantial values. History in their eyes must obey the law of progress, i.e. has to walk towards the end required by reason. As such, *Fortschritt* here does not mean a step forward to the future in the Darwinian sense, but a step for-and-backward, in the sense of a step closer to the "end," i.e. the absolute, i.e. human ultimate goal. Actually, Hegel still conceived of the absolute as what Homer dreamed, as what Plato searched, and as what the protagonists of the Renaissance attempted to revive: ultimate harmony as the goal (the end) of history. This ultimate end is immanent in history, but it is not placed *at the end* of history, i.e. in a future, or in the final day of judgement. It poses itself as the beginning and the end. To use messianic language, it is the *alpha* and the *omega* of human destiny. Walter Benjamin, a writer famous for his kabbalistic melancholy and mysticism, has blended messianic flavour with his repugnant surrendering to the (Heideggerian) "abyss." He "foresaw" the ultimate end of history immanent in our now-time (Jetztzeit).⁸ He thus took the stand against an optimistic Marx who, still clinging to a certain kind of messianism, predicted its forthcoming in the form of a proletariat society.

Understood in this sense, progress reveals the right course of history. Whenever history approaches the final end, then it has made a certain progress. And in this logic, history is conceived of by Hegel as history only due to its quality of progress, and progress can be judged only in its *Fortschritt* towards the ultimate goal of history. *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) wants to demonstrate such logic. In this logic, the world history is a dialectical accumulation of periods (*Zeitsgeist*) and a dialectical synthesis of the diversity of people minds and habits (*Volksgeist*) in accordance with the logic of reason of which its essence is progress. In other words, if spirit is the universal form of history, and if reason is its law that forces all phenomena to orient, or to go toward this universal form, then a step further, close to this universal is called *Fortschritt*, i.e. progress.⁹

It is not our concern about Hegel's identification of spirit with the reason itself, but rather with his understanding of progress as its "characteristic." We may have here two quite contradictory views: the one *contra* and the other *pro* Hegel. The *contra* argument goes to the direct

consequence of Hegel's logic: if progress is the characteristic of reason and if reason is absolute then progress means a step close to absolute. However, if absolute is unreachable, or simply a void concept (as embraced by nihilists and Marxists), then progress means ironically (or paradoxically) a step either to nowhere, or a step to nihilism, i.e. self-destruction (as seen in the prediction of Marx about the doom day of capitalism). In this logic, progress remains either an impracticable utopia or a dangerous illusion. Not only the pessimist existentialists like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre but also post-modernists would heartily welcome this Nietzschean prophecy; not only writers like Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka but also some historians would enthusiastically embrace it as the unavoidable consequence of Hegelian logic in the reverse. Oswald Spengler was certainly neither the first nor the last historian,¹⁰ just as David Bell and Francis Fukuyama were surely not the single voices in the "desert." These voices are repeated in a polyphonic post-modern chorus loudly sung by people like Derrida and Lyotard.¹¹ The second view pro Hegel begins where Hegel left: progress means a step closer to the absolute, but absolute here reflects rather an ideal which is reachable only in its temporality and historicity. That means, ideal is a concept that appears in history and makes history. Since history is proceeding to the absolute, ideal reveals a part of the absolute indeed. Progress in this sense means the process of realization of the ideal in history, as Loewith describes: "As a spirit which continuously surrenders and recollects, it is per se historical, even though the dialectic of becoming does not proceed in a straight line toward infinity, but rather goes in a circle, so that the end is the consummation of the beginning."¹²

The Ideals and Traditional Values

So far, we have pointed out the close relationship between social progress and the noble goals, i.e. human ideals. This part goes a step further to identify human noble goals with human values, and to show that traditional values were constructed so to attain human noble goals.

As we have argued above, progress means "a step forward" far from destructive force, and a "step forward" closer to the noble goals, i.e. our ideals. Actually, these two steps are the two sides of the same coin.

They bear the imprint of the same essence. To live longer means to keep a distance farther from death, just as to live better means to reduce misery, and so on. In this sense, to be closer to the ideals is tantamount to be far from the undesired reality. Hence, one may adopt two different tactics for the same goal. The first approach is to change the unfavourable conditions, to dismiss the obstacles, or to reduce the factors which may hinder, endanger or destroy our life; while the second one would be a positive approach, to discover and take the means which help us to attain these noble goals. Progress could be seen from these two aspects, or judged by the success of these two different approaches. Now, keeping us far from the factors (conditions, milieu) which may endanger us, and reaching to the ideals which benefit us make sense only if one knows exactly what these ideals are. In a word, noble ideals are what one conceives of as the best goals serving as principle guiding our life, and as the same time, on which one constructs methods to attain them.¹³ In the manner of Giambattista Vico who, in his now becoming classic *La scienza nuova*, rightly elevates sex (marriage), death (funeral) and religion to the rank of the "trinity" of the social sciences,¹⁴ we can also categorically claim that truth, goodness, beauty and holiness have been, still are and will always be the most noble goals human beings are seeking. They become the "quattronity" of human life.

These most noble and highest ideals are not lying in the future; they are not a product of the past either. More importantly, they are not the products of a particular people, or a particular nation. They are neither single-handedly constructed nor invented by a genius, nor are they randomly or arbitrarily imposed by some one on us. Great philosophers did not invent them, but attempt to defend them, and to work out various methods in order to attain them. So, Socrates did not invent truth, just as Plato did not discover beauty. Similarly, Buddha did not create goodness, and certainly Confucius had not worked out the ideal world based on moral tenets. We know, the reason of Socrates' attack against the Sophists is certainly not a vulgar vanity showing his superiority over them, but his defence of (the ideal of) truth. He considered truth as a noble goal not because it may produce the best effect, but simply because of its eternal and universal rightness. Simply speaking, truth is identified with justice. Kant has brilliantly defended the Socrates' position when he repeatedly

argued for its eternal rightness: even if all men are lying, that does not change the eternal truth, and consequently, the command of "you should not lie" must be always valid.¹⁵ To Socrates, Kant and philosophers like them, truth is the most desired goal. It is the ideal and remains ideal even if no one can attain it.

Similarly, Aristotle and almost all great philosophers have found in the goodness (happiness) the ideal. Various moral systems have been based on goodness, and still on it. Of course, all of them are fully aware of the fact that there is no clear-cut definition of happiness, just as there is hardly a complete set, or a perfect system of truth, holiness and beauty. This seemingly paradox is found in the essence of human beings: their ideals are remaining human and surpassing human limit at the same time. That means, even if the ideals are constructed by human beings, they transcend the limit of human experiences. Here is what we mean by saying that the ideals are constructed by generations of human kind, but are lying immanently and transcendently in us. More interestingly, they existed already in the future as the goals we are striving for.

Since the purpose of this paper is to prove the dialectical relation between progress and traditional values, I will not go into details the process of construction of ideals, and be content to say that without these noble ideals, our system of values would not be stable, and since these ideals are internal, the values based on them are always valid. As such, one may find in traditional values the ones based on these ideals. They are eternally valid. Here is the reason and the values of our inquiry into traditional values. Here is also the *raison d'etre of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy* and of our gathering here.

Before moving to the next section discussing the relationship between progress, the ideals and traditional values, I would reiterate our thesis, namely, progress is achieved only when we are approaching the noble purposes - truth, goodness, beauty and holiness. These ideals serve as both the foundation and the goals of our activities. These ideals serve also as the conditions and criteria of any system of values, if values are understood as those which satisfy human most basic needs, most intimate aspiration; as those which fulfill our expected or planned future; and in a word, as those which give life, fulfill our life and make our life flourishing.

Progress as a Step Forward to Ideals and Backward to Traditional Values

Traditional values, as we understand, may consist of two sets of values, the one based on the ideals, and the other on temporal needs and deeds.

In the first set of values based on the ideals, one finds similar characteristics between the ideals and traditional values: they all are essential (necessary) and long lasting (universal). They serve as foundation of all values. Without them, the idea of values would become as vague as confused. Hence, they are necessary. Since the ideals were not a product fabricated by a certain age, they are eternal, and since they were certainly neither a property of the Greek nor a possession of the Chinese or the Hindu, they must be the common property of human beings. Furthermore, since they are neither the products of a *creatio ex nihilo* nor that of pure experiences, they must be transcendently known (or recognized) by us in the course of life. Based on the ideals, and sharing the same essences, the first set of traditional values is not the product of a certain period, a certain history or a certain group. And, to be sure, they are not the property of a certain genre, or a certain culture as "cultural imperialists" would claim. To be more concrete, traditional values, say of Chinese, like benevolence (Jen), fidelity (Chung), filial piety (Hsiao), rightness (Yi), etc. . . . are, of course, based on the ideals of goodness and truthfulness (sincerity).¹⁶ Traditional values (virtues) like happiness, justice, etc. laid down by Aristotle are no doubt founded on the ideals of goodness and truth, and perhaps, even on the ideals of beauty and holiness. Of course, we may recite a horde of values (virtues) which, by any means, we cannot deny as groundless.

The second set of values may be constructed to suit the temporal tastes, to solve temporal needs, to satisfy the sudden emerging desires, needs and so on.¹⁷ The values of democracy, autocracy, or monarchy in politics are, doubtless, not traditional values based on the ideals of truth or absolute goodness and rightness. They are nonetheless guided by some ideals of lesser values (in the sense that these values are not universal and necessary) like the ones of temporal and spatial urgency (stability, power

and the likes). Since they are of rather temporal and regional characters, Plato once rightfully argued that each of these lesser ideals would generate values only in a certain conditions; they may endanger human life (or society) if they step over their own limit. Similar to the Greek society, each society, each people would construct many sets of minor values depending on their temporal, spatial and racial ideals, and depending on their taste. The ideal beauty for black people would be for example someone with black skin, while the reverse is true for white people. The ideal food for a Chinese, in most case, is Chinese food, while it could not be the case of, say, an Indian or an African. These ideals could be changed or transformed once their social conditions, knowledge about them, and other factors are diminished, expanded or deformed. In a globalized world, many of them, especially of minor groups or races, are simply wiped out and replaced by others of stronger or bigger groups. The conquering of (American) fast food chains and beverage in every corner of the globe, just as the triumph of Western luxurious goods in the world is certainly not an isolated case. The slow and quiet death of many dialects of African tribes, just as the silence explosion of new (sometimes bad) tastes among young people everywhere are the most eloquent and tragic examples showing that the ideals of minor values cannot resist the change. However, one cannot, and has no right to claim that English (especially American english) is the new ideal language, or that the American CNN news channel is the best, and so on. The fact that they are "globalized" does not prove their universal and necessary characters, since they can never become our noble ideals. In contrast, we can make progress without CNN and fast foods, just as we may acquire knowledge without American language and universities. In some case, it could be the reverse that is true.¹⁸ To identify *Coca Cola*, *MacDonald's*, *Kentucky Fried Chicken* with American culture displays not only a naive and superficial understanding of Americans; it is a malicious insult to them. Americans, just as Chinese, Japanese, and others may have some kind of commercial culture, but they are not their essence. Their merit (values) is found in their strength, their strong will which are nourished by their ideals. The essence of American culture must be found in their ideals (respect for human rights, equality among human races, belief in God) which Abraham Lincoln brilliantly represented and defended. Similarly, the essence of Chinese (and Vietnamese, Koreans, Japanese) is

the ideals of harmony, benevolence, righteousness, etc., while that of the Thai people would be human peace and tranquillity. Of course, we can find similar essences in the culture of the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. There is no doubt that, we would contribute to a real social progress if we first possess these ideals. A strong sense of self-consciousness, a firm belief in our own faith, a self-confident in our own values, etc. have always been, and still are the ones for excellence.¹⁹

As seen in our above analysis, then traditional values are belonging to two set of values: the ones of a priori characteristics and the other of a posteriori characteristics. The first are constituted in our consciousness, and become what we may call "good conscience" (liang-chih in Chinese), or "good will" (Kant), or "divine will," while the latter are constructed by us in accordance with social and temporal conditions. They form what we may call "morals" (in the sense of customs), social values, national values, political values, and the like. It is important to make this distinction, since we have by no means to take all traditional values for granted, and put them on the same rank. When we insist on the essential relation between traditional values and progress, we have in mind the traditional values of noble ideals, and not those of lesser values, namely, those of the second set of values which are restricted by temporal and spatial as well as social conditions. Only the highest ideals would be at the same time the dynamic forces and the goals which attract us and force us to march forward, to search for the means to attain them. Precisely by these real factors that social progress is understood as a step forward closer to the ideals; and precisely because of their transcendental characteristics that social progress must also be a step backward closer to them.

ENDNOTES

¹ Note that *progress* is different from *development*. By development, I understand as a growth of quantitative character, while progress as step closer to perfection. In the Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, sect. 4, John-Paul II makes clear that *sviluppo* (development) surpasses a simple *crescita* (growth). Actually, the term *sviluppo* used by the Pope bears the same meaning of progress that I am discussing.

² Aristotle himself had elaborated a great deal of ideals like eudemonia (happiness, blessedness, prosperity), logos (kata ton orthon logon, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1138b25), phronesis, dike (justice, 1155a), episteme, etc.

³ It is interesting to note that the empirical researches on the structure of development (Jean Piaget) and moral development (Lawrence Kohlberg) both point to the fact that human development (progress) is dictated (or guided) by noble values. An inter-disciplinary research of a group of scholars in Taiwan (TARGTI Group) reach the same finding that the values among Taiwanese (Chinese) is oriented by most basic values and supreme values. See Louis Gutheinz, ed., *Quality of Life in The Bioregion of Taiwan* (Taipei: Faculty of Theology, Fujen University, 1994).

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik ?* (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1957); Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

⁵ The theme once explored by Plotinus, St. Augustine, Meister Eckhardt and most recently by Walter Benjamin and Emmanuel Levinas. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'exériorité* (1961).

⁶ See the interpretation of Alexandre Kojève in his *Introduction to the Lecture of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (English translation, 1971). It is well-known that contemporary philosophers, the prophets of the earlier existentialism, like Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida, Maurice Merleau-Ponty have been heavily influenced by Kojève's lecture.

⁷ The works of Daniel Bell, *The End of History* (New York, 1976), and Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free, 1992) may best depict the tragedy of an immanent "end of history."

⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*. Translated by John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1973). The concepts of *aura* and *Jetztzeit* were also developed by Benjamin in other works like *Illumination* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) and *Charles Beaudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1973).

⁹ George F. Hegel, *Phaenomenologie des Geistes* (1807). Karl Loewith observes brilliantly Hegel's view of history as a constant progress towards the absolute spirit as follows: "This pathway of the eternally present spirit through the previous nature of history is not a detour to be avoided, but the only practicable way to the consummation of knowledge. The absolute or spirit, not only has its external history, as a man has clothing, but is, in its deepest nature, as a movement

of self-development, an entity which exists only by becoming.” See Karl Loewith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche - The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Canada: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 32.

¹⁰ Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Hamburg, 1972).

¹¹ See Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne - Un rapport du savoir* (Paris, 1978); English translation of G. Bennington and B. Massumi, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, 1984).

¹² Loewith, op. cit., p. 32.

¹³ Note that in the Homeric tradition, the ideals are almost understood as virtues. *Arete* in its most original sense means “excellence,” “the best.” *Aretai* are regarded as the virtues in the Homeric times (such as courage, physical strength, goodness, and the likes). See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtues* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), sec. ed., p. 141 ff. Similarly in the Confucian tradition, the ideal man is a *chun-dzu* (gentleman, noble man, moral man), i.e. the one who possesses virtues like benevolence, loyalty, filial piety, etc.

¹⁴ Giambattista Vico, *La Scienza nuova*. English translation: *The New Sciences*, 332-333. In this work, Vico demands for a new understanding of science grounded on the three most basic factors (forces), i.e. marriage, funeral and religious rites.

¹⁵ Actually, Kant in his *Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Moral* (1785) had conceived of the ideals as something of *a priori* and absolute character. He conjectured that it is the good will, i.e. a will of unconditional and absolute good, the necessary condition of every case or form of goodness. It is in this context that Kant apportioned happiness, truth, etc. to the good will (which is tantamount to the *summum bonum* of Medieval philosophers).

¹⁶ See Tran Van Doan, “The Dialectic of Tradition and Modernity” in *Philosophical Review*, No. (Also: Tran Van Doan, “What can be called Tradition?” in George F. McLean, ed. (Washington, D.C.: CRVP, 2002), and Tu Wei-ming, *Modern Spirit and Confucian Tradition* (Hsian-dai Ching-shen yu Ru-chia Chwan-tung) (Taipei: Linking, 1995).

¹⁷ Actually Aristotle had constructed his ethical principles in accordance with the Greek tastes. His attempt to construct an ethics that can be demonstrated in the geometrical way is certainly motivated by the Greek’s aesthetic cultivation of harmony and proportionality. His conception of goodness in terms of *not* deficient, not bad, not excessive is clearly the result of the Greek view of beauty. We know, in the Homeric tradition of heroes, honour is also a taste. And as such, it was declared to be an *arete* (virtue). Similarly, following Plato, even political ideals, in Aristotle’s view, must conform to these tastes. In the books Seven and Eight of *Politeia*, his ideal of a state is neither too large nor too small, and the number of citizens must not exceed. Only an ideal taste can provide to its citizens a leisured life, an enjoyable luxury: Thus, the main aim of the city is not a “mere wealth,” but a pleasurable life: “importing her needs and exporting her surplus.” *Politeia*, 1325 b 33 - 1326 b 24.

¹⁸ The report of *Hongkong Bureau of Education* in 1999 has issued a warning to responsible educators and politicians about the deterioration of Hongkong students and residents on many subjects, especially in language and morals. It is stated that Hongkong students are “so good” in language so they speak English “like” Chinese and Chinese “like” English, that is, they are speaking the so-called “Chinglish,” a corrupted English mixed with a bad Chinese.

¹⁹ The success of the first and second generations of Asians in the United States is a strong case in point to back this view. The most successful Asians (Nobel laureates, the millionaires, etc.) in the United States, etc. are those who are mastering their own natal (mother) languages and fluent in English, fully conscious of their values, and nourished by their ideals. Recent study on the third generation of Asian immigrants (2000) has revealed a not very bright prospect: they are less successful, less motivated and lacking of moral values. Furthermore, they are unable to express their own thought in their mother tongue. Many of them feel “alienated” from their own American society.