

UNIVERSAL CLAIMS

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Abstract. Claims are universal when they are not dependent on when and where they are made. Mathematics and the natural sciences are the typical disciplines that allow such claims to be made. Is the striving for universal claims in other disciplines justified? Those who attempt to answer this question in the affirmative often argue that it is justified when mathematics and the natural sciences are taken as the model for other disciplines. In this paper I challenge this position and analyze the issue by looking at it from a new angle, a perspective that involves two key concepts: violence and loyalty. The result of this analysis throws light on the broader question concerning what the search for truth might mean in a pluralistic world.

Universal claims are true always and everywhere. In mathematics they are the main ingredient, but in other disciplines, especially in disciplines that are distant from natural science and its methods, their presence is often heavily criticized in various ways. In this paper, the focus of attention will not be on universal claims as such, but on how we strive to attain them. The basic question will be: If we are not doing mathematics or theoretical science, is the striving for universal judgements a senseless quest?

This question borders on major areas of inquiry, areas that are not only philosophical but also theological.¹ Consider, for instance, St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12 v.4: 'there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit'. St Paul is here discussing the differences of gifts (*diaréseis de charismatôn*), recalling how such differences should not be seen as a fragmentation of community but as the expressions of one and

¹ This paper was written for the 2007 International Jesuit Philosophers Meeting in Frankfurt. To be relevant for the various interests and competences represented in such a meeting, I made an effort to include references to both philosophical and theological sources.

the same Spirit. What I hope to do in this paper is similar to what St. Paul was doing when writing this text. In today's global village, the variety of philosophies is an undeniable fact. This multiplicity seems to entail a progressive fragmentation. We often try to avoid this by suggesting that all the diverse philosophical traditions are complementary expressions of one and the same Truth. Are we deceiving ourselves here? For Paul, the variety of gifts is all somehow focused on the practical. The gifts are all pulling roughly in the same direction. It seems natural for him therefore to bunch these gifts all together. The problem I want to deal with in this paper is more challenging, because the variety of philosophical traditions is very heterogeneous. In the course of history, philosophical traditions have not been just budding forth innocently one next to the other, like wild flowers in the open field. On the contrary, they have been erupting violently. They are born charged with parental hatred, negating the most fundamental axioms of their parent philosophical traditions, and surviving only by waging an eternal war with their parents and with all neighbouring systems. If Aristotle is right, Plato isn't. If Kant is right, Aquinas isn't. If Hegel is right, Kant isn't. And so it goes, on and on. The very idea of Universal Reason therefore caves in, with devastating consequences, especially in academic disciplines that depend on a consistent background of reasoned argument.

Where this situation hurts most is in the area of moral philosophy. Cultural pluralism seems to be a knock-down argument against moral knowledge. Since every discourse is situated within a particular context, and cannot be otherwise, the striving for ethical objectivity is, at best, a misguided waste of time, or, at worst, a fossil of colonialism, deeply infested with arrogance. Context-dependence seems to characterize every claim we make. Even clear claims like 'killing the innocent is wrong', which seem to enjoy an absolute status, are somehow dependent on the various possible ways of formulating them. And even within one particular tradition, moral judgements can never enjoy the same kind of precision enjoyed by mathematics and natural science. Take, for instance, the Catholic Tradition. Here we often assume there is an absolute theological core behind the language used to express this core – as we often do when talking of inculturation. But there's a worry always present: removing one layer after another of, say, Hellenistic philosophy from the Nicene Creed will probably result in no core at all; there will be no extra-linguistic, absolute essence of revelation to be relocated elsewhere. If all this happens even within one tradition, what can one say about the entire world? Such reflections converge onto one point: claims are all and always relative

to their context. The very effort of *striving to attain* objectivity starts looking useless. The variety of philosophical systems and traditions seems to eat away the motivation anyone might have to seek convergence of judgement.

What I want to do in this paper is to block this worry. I will not argue for the objectivity of any one particular judgment. My argument is more general. What I want to present is an argument in favour of the *striving* for objectivity or universality. I will argue that, even though agreement on specific issues may look difficult or impossible, the striving for objectivity or universality is not to be abandoned.

My original inspiration is drawn from some hints in the Bible. The way wisdom is described in the Bible is not only poetically rich but also philosophically significant. For instance, in the Letter of St. James (3:17) we find this very interesting line: ‘the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy’. The author uses six adjectives. One of them is of special significance for us here: ‘willing to yield’. The Greek word is *eupethēs* and the Latin Vulgate translation is *suadibilis*. Many shades of meaning are present. The word can be translated as: ‘ready to be convinced’, or ‘compliant’, or ‘open to reason’. Here we see, therefore, divine wisdom being described as favouring debate and discussion without fear. Divine wisdom is the opposite of being intransigent, uncompromising, inflexible, narrow-minded, cynical, non-committed or sceptical. I take this as the crucial point. It constitutes the fertile ground in which the striving for objectivity can thrive.

The overall argument in this paper will proceed in four steps. The first section will explore how mathematics and the natural sciences can help in suggesting the way forward. The second section will examine how the application of the mathematical and scientific model can result in cultural violence with undesirable consequences. The very nature of cultural violence is further explored in the third section, where I analyze the often neglected concept of loyalty. The final section then consists of an evaluation and conclusion.

I. THE MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES AND OBJECTIVITY

Are the mathematical sciences a good model for philosophy as a whole? This is a very general question; and an old one as well. Take, for instance, Plato’s attitude. In his book *Meno*, Plato presents Socrates struggling with

the question of how to teach virtue. Surprisingly, Plato's attitude, evident in his other works, is that, in order to help people become virtuous, we need to start with mathematics. This discipline determines everything with certainty. It wastes no time with personal opinion. Students of mathematics gain the passion for truth, in the objective or universal sense, independent of all context or tradition. They imbibe, as Plato puts it, a craving for 'what always is, not [for] what comes into being and passes away' (*Republic* VII, 527b). It would be a pedagogical mistake to expose beginners to difficult subjects where argument and counter-argument both seem plausible. Plato is afraid that, if students are thus exposed from the start, they will end up thinking that knowledge is impossible, and that everything is opinion. They will think that philosophy is nothing more than 'dragging and tearing those around them with their arguments' (539b). Mathematics is the remedy for this. As I understand Plato here, mathematics is crucial because it makes students surrender to the facts, discovering or receiving rather than producing or imposing their own views. In this way, they learn how to avoid self-deception and vanity. Only when the basic attitudes towards truth and falsity are well entrenched can the student move on to more demanding environments, like moral philosophy.

What I have said so far indicates a distinction between two kinds of inquiry: clear and precise on the one hand, ambiguous and vague on the other. For Plato, mathematics is at one end, the rest of philosophy on the other. For us today, we need to add natural science to the first kind of inquiry. The idea is the same. The clear and precise kind of inquiry is like the shallow end of a swimming pool. The ambiguous and vague kind of inquiry is like the deep end. Plato is basically telling us, 'Start learning how to swim at the shallow end; and then, when you're reasonably confident there, you can venture towards the deep end.' The shallow end corresponds to a kind of inquiry that can be described, perhaps, as clean and precise, where one definite answer is available. The variables are few, chosen deliberately in function of what can be handled by mathematics. The deep end of the swimming pool is different. It corresponds to a more open kind of inquiry, where we are aware of the fact that the number of variables is impossibly huge, and where the convenient true-false distinction has to give way to the uncomfortable idea of grades of plausibility.

When confronted with this variety of types of inquiry, we can proceed in various ways. Let me mention the three most obvious ones. The first involves the temptation to remain at the shallow end, even though we realise that there is a lot happening at the other end. This option corresponds to those who limit their intellectual life to the hard sciences. They are trained

in these sciences and never attempt to go further. They are satisfied by the rigour and effectiveness of this kind of inquiry, and they never meddle with the rest. For them, non-scientific inquiry is just too messy. This first way of dealing with the complexity of our task has its exact opposite. It involves the opposite temptation, namely to dive into the deep end of the swimming pool without first having the right kind of passion for truth. Such people deal directly with the less precise areas of inquiry, like moral philosophy, without having had a thorough grounding in rigorous thinking. Such people often look with scorn at the proposal that logic should be the starting point for philosophical education. They tend to lose sight of the distinction between truth and opinion. They often end up producing not philosophy but poetry.

Now I come to the third option. This is to insist on staying at the shallow end of the swimming pool, and then to try to convince oneself and others that the deep end doesn't exist. Logic, mathematics and science are fine. Nothing else is allowed. This last temptation corresponds to the so-called 'naturalising tendency'. The basic idea is that philosophy in all its departments needs to become like her own daughter, natural science. Philosophy needs to relinquish her old ways and adopt the youthful style of observation, experimentation and prediction. The suggestion is that, just as the ancient notion of *scientia* has now been naturalised and re-baptised as natural science, so also *philosophia* as a whole should now become naturalised. A project based on this suggestion was inaugurated in a special way in Vienna in the early 1920s, and the effects of this project are still with us today in various forms. The Harvard philosopher Willard van Orman Quine, for instance, insists that natural science and philosophy should form a single continuous discipline, the core of which is given by physics. He introduced therefore a hierarchy of explanations. The most fundamental kind of explanation is that of physics; the less fundamental kinds of explanation are to be considered local generalisations that depend on physics. Hence, for instance, epistemology and ethics have nothing more fundamental to add to what we learn from physics. Physics dictates, and epistemology and ethics must adjust themselves accordingly.

What is the upshot of these three possible ways of proceeding? The first one has no serious repercussions on global philosophical inquiry. The second one favours relativism. It undermines the explicit striving for universality because it highlights the ubiquity of opinion. Philosophy, however, in this option seems to shrink away into nothingness: instead of *philo-sophia*, love of wisdom, we end up with *philo-doxa*, love of opinion – a completely different thing. The third way of proceeding is a clear

research programme. The necessity of mathematical physics is brought to bear on all areas of philosophy, on all cultures and traditions. The basic point is: once the truth is available, you have to accept it. This third option, therefore, looks arrogant. It looks aggressive. It wants to impose its results onto others. Opinion is crushed in the name of objectivity. The differences between national world-views and traditions are not riches to be valued but embarrassing problems to be resolved. Lack of uniformity is considered a handicap. Deviance from the norm is levelled down, because reality allegedly allows only one description. Once we arrive at this description, we can safely tell others about it, even impose it onto their culture for their own benefit.

I will concentrate on this third option. It gives a prominent place to the striving for universality, which is my main concern. This option involves taking the mathematical sciences as the model for truth-seeking in all branches of intellectual activity. The term for it, as a philosophical position, is naturalism. Protagonists of this position hold that, if in some areas the mathematical sciences cannot give a satisfactory answer today, they will give one tomorrow. This is their basic strategy. Does this approach lead to a good way how to justify the striving for universality and combat the kind of radical relativism that undermines even the crucial notions of meaning and truth?

II. CULTURAL VIOLENCE

One objection that readily comes to mind involves the idea of violence. When a local culture or tradition is exposed to the demand for change in the name of objectivity or universality, there is a clash. One culture clashes against another, and the clash is analogous to physical violence. The local philosophical outlook, the local literature and wisdom are overshadowed, wounded and sometimes even annihilated altogether. To gain further insight into what is happening here, Aristotle can help us. In his book *Physics*, he says that all things have a natural movement; any deviation from this natural movement he calls violence (230a30—230b5). This indeed is a very good way of spelling out what is taken for granted by many people. Aristotle is talking in very general terms. Violence in his sense covers not only physical violence, like when one causes bodily harm to another. It covers also abrupt changes in the natural growth of organisms or cultures. Each culture grows in its own way. It grows locally. Beliefs and practices of all kinds form an intricate network that respects the way

generation after generation of individuals have struggled to make sense of the world and of human society. Grass that grows on rocky ground mirrors the possibilities at ground-level. So also with local cultures: they mirror the interests, desires, longings, and hopes carved out in one particular place in the course of a long history. It is understandable, therefore, why a foreign system imposing itself on a local culture in the name of scientific objectivity is often described as violent. It wounds the natural stability of the local culture.

We find a recent philosophical assessment of this cultural violence in the work of Jean-François Lyotard.² In strong language, he describes in alarming detail how technocrats think in terms of a system. In a technocratic system, knowledge-claims are legitimated by how well they function. If some claims work, they are true. This depends, of course, on what kind of work we value. Lyotard highlights moreover the excessive arrogance that a technocratic system often embodies: 'the technocrats declare that they cannot trust what society designates as its needs; they "know" that society cannot know its own needs' (p. 63). I am taking his views on technocrats to be essentially equivalent to the naturalism-offensive I described above. The cultural violence that can result from such an attitude does not need much explanation. The mathematical sciences constitute a system that seeks the most extensive performative unity possible. Any local deviation from this unity is seen as a threat to be neutralised according to the principle of homeostasis. So naturalism is indeed a kind of striving for universality; but it reaches out towards local cultures, towards philosophies and traditions with arrogance. It tells them: 'Join my project, or else you'll be ignored and isolated.' For this, Lyotard uses the word terrorism. He explains: 'by terror I mean the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him' (p. 63).

The upshot of these considerations should now be clear. The objector to my proposal is essentially saying, 'Just have a look at what happens when people strive for universality on the model of the sciences! Cultural violence is what you end up with! We are surely better off without any striving for universality.' Perhaps someone might be tempted to block this objection in a blunt way. One might just say that the cultural violence and terror we are talking about here happens only when people are stubborn, narrow-minded and inflexible. It happens only when the receivers don't

² Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. from the French by G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

want to yield. If they yield peacefully, there is no trouble. The striving for universality could then continue smoothly.

III. LOYALTY

This blunt way of justifying cultural expansionism is not entirely convincing. People raised up in a given culture do not want to yield. It is as simple as that. And they are very often justified in this. The basic virtue here is loyalty. These individuals are loyal to their tradition, to their culture, to their literature and to their philosophy. Gandhi, in his various writings on the doctrine of *ahimsa*, non-violence, considers this point of utmost importance. He effectively says, 'you may let the invading power take your country, let it even take over your own home, but let it never take over your soul: this is where your dignity lies.'³ Loyalty is a key idea here. Unfortunately, very few philosophers have studied loyalty as such. The best study ever carried out is probably the book *The Philosophy of Loyalty* by Josiah Royce, published a hundred years ago.⁴ According to Royce, our basic understanding of loyalty is this: 'the willing and practical and thoroughgoing devotion of a person to a cause' (pp. 16-17). He considers loyalty the most important characteristic of civilization. Loyalty reflects a particular hierarchy within the individual's set of duties. The cause to which a person is committed is often directly linked to his or her family, and to his or her geographic and cultural position. We are first of all loyal to our family, then to our friends, and then to our country and also to our country's traditions and culture. Being loyal to a tradition is not something eccentric or unworthy of a rational being. There are some very good reasons to support the idea that we all depend on tradition whether we like it or not.

³ The most stunning version of Gandhi's *ahimsa* doctrine is found in his 'Appeal to every Briton' (6 July, 1940): 'I want you to fight Nazism without arms [...] you will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of your beautiful island, with your many beautiful buildings. You will give all these but neither your souls, nor your minds. If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourselves man, woman and child, to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them.' R. Duncan (ed.), *The Writings of Gandhi* (Oxford: Fontana/Collins, 1971), p. 91.

⁴ Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (New York: MacMillan, 1908, reprinted 1920); more recent studies include: A. MacIntyre, *Is Patriotism a Virtue?* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1984); P. Pettit, "The Paradox of Loyalty," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25/2 (1988), pp. 163-171; G. Fletcher, *Loyalty: an Essay on the Morality of Relationships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Recall, for instance, Edmund Burke's famous criticism of 1790 against the French Revolution. His argument is convincing. He says: the store in each person's mind is very limited. Hence, people are not only entitled but even obliged to avail themselves of 'the general bank and capital of nations and ages.'⁵ Loyalty to a tradition means accepting the enormous benefits of accumulated truth in the course of a long history. Through loyalty, a person is appreciating the hidden wisdom embedded within traditions, a wisdom that acts like an 'invisible hand' directing partakers of that tradition even though the individuals, taken one by one, are blind to the overall order they're contributing to by their actions.⁶

The bottom line, therefore, is that there is nothing wrong with people being loyal to their tradition. Does this square with the proposal I want to defend? Does it square with the striving for universality? It seems not. The striving for universality, by its very nature, causes a clash of cultures. Those who claim access to objectivity impose their views on others. The culture that is challenged feels threatened. Loyalty is an important part of this story. When a culture or tradition feels threatened, it cannot just yield in the name of the dubious principle of peace at any price. People in that culture are loyal to their literature, to their philosophy, to their religion. This is their basic right. Why should they yield? It is understandable why peoples of India are attached to their Indian heritage: they are loyal. It is understandable why peoples of Africa are attached to their African heritage: they are loyal. It is understandable why certain Catholics are attached to Aquinas and Aristotle: they are loyal. And loyalty is a fundamental virtue. There is no doubt about that.⁷ Hence we cannot just assume that the

⁵ E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London, Dent, 1967), p. 84, quoted in: A. O'Hear, "Tradition and traditionalism," in: E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 1998); retrieved 09/07/2007, from <http://0-www.rep.routledge.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk:80/article/S063>.

⁶ The idea here comes from Adam Smith's notion of the 'invisible hand' that guarantees economic equilibrium in spite of the fact that no one individual acts in the interest of the entire group as a whole (see his *Wealth of Nations*, 1776). Smith, a religious believer, saw the 'invisible hand' as the mechanism by which God governs the world.

⁷ It is useful to recall here that, in spite of the renowned loyalty of the Society of Jesus towards Scholasticism, we find official documents as early as 1593 accepting not only the possibility of variety in teaching but also its possible positive use. For instance Decree 56 of the 5th General Congregation, held in 1593, says: 'Ours should consider Saint Thomas as their special teacher [...] Nevertheless, Ours are not to be understood as being so bound to Saint Thomas that they may not deviate from him in any respect. For those very ones who most strongly profess themselves to be Thomists differ from him at times. And it is not fitting that Ours be more tightly bound to Saint Thomas than are the Thomists themselves.' This shows that for Jesuits loyalty cannot be equated with being confined within one pre-

striving for universality is justified. On the contrary, as things stand now in our inquiry, it seems that working with the model of the mathematical sciences backfires. If in ethics, say, we try to adopt the same attitude as in the mathematical sciences, presenting our results as objective and universally valid, we will simply have no space left where to accommodate the idea of loyalty of people in cultures and paradigms that differ from our own. In fact, if we adopt this attitude to the full, loyalty will not only be rendered useless but will also be desecrated – changed from a virtue to a vice. Loyalty of others will start looking like stubbornness, or intransigence.⁸

IV. EVALUATION

There is some truth in these arguments. Overall, however, they do not undermine the striving for universality. The sting of these arguments can in fact be rendered harmless by a deeper analysis of two key-ideas: the idea of loyalty already introduced, and the idea of tradition. Let's take one idea at a time. As regards loyalty, we need to recall an additional fact. Differences in loyalty can give rise to clashes. It is precisely in the name of loyalty that people often clash and sometimes end up even killing each other. To understand what is happening in such cases, I refer back to Royce. In the course of his analysis, he comes to realise that the really fundamental virtue should not be just loyalty to a cause, but loyalty to loyalty itself. At the most fundamental level, what I should be loyal to is not my family, or my friends, or my country or my tradition. I should be loyal to an overarching cause, namely the cause of ensuring that all others can be loyal in the full sense of the word. Royce writes: 'In so far as it lies in your power, so choose your cause and so serve it, that, by reason of your choice and of your service, there shall be more loyalty in the world rather than less'.⁹ Through this move our horizon opens up. This is evident also in the Bible. The Old Testament's overall attitude supports loyalty understood locally:

established horizon. See: J. W. Padberg, S.J., M. D. O'Keefe, S.J., and J. L. McCarthy, S.J., (eds), *For Matters of Greater Moment: the first thirty Jesuit general congregations* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1994), p. 207.

⁸ The careful reader will notice that I am working with the assumption that loyalty is a trans-cultural value. This can be defended in line with Aristotle's approach. For a recent discussion, see: M. Nussbaum, "Non-relative virtues: an Aristotelian approach", in: A. Sen (ed.), *The Quality of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 242-269.

⁹ Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, p. 121; notice how Royce is doing something similar to what E. Kant did when discussing the categorical imperative.

family first, then come friends, and then the Jewish people in general. Jesus, however, famously challenged this kind of thinking: ‘Who is my mother and who are my brothers and sisters? [...] whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is, my brother, and sister, and mother’ (Mt 12:48-49). His attitude supports the view that genuinely loyal persons must always strive to adjust the cause of their loyalty so as to enlarge their horizon.

I move on now to the idea of tradition. Tradition is not something reserved for cultural studies. The idea of tradition is important even in philosophy of science. As Imre Lakatos has shown, scientists are genuinely attached to their research programme or their tradition, and will defend its core theories even in the face of direct, contrary evidence. In general, tradition can be understood as a set of beliefs and practices that are transmitted from generation to generation, and that are considered authoritative precisely because they are so transmitted. This simple account however can be misleading. It gives the wrong impression of tradition. It makes tradition look like a pool of water, out of which individuals have been drawing out water throughout history, a pool of water that is always there – somewhat stagnant. A more realistic account of tradition has to include the element of change: either growth or decay. We may draw some insight here from John Henry Newman’s distinction between the development and the corruption of ideas.¹⁰ According to him, there are a number of tests that distinguish between these two movements. I will mention just three of his tests. First, a tradition shows genuine growth when the new ideas appearing within it preserve what was contained in the essential core of the original ‘seed’. Second, a tradition shows genuine growth when there is continuity of principles, somewhat like what happens when new sentences are composed in a given language: they must respect the grammar even though they had never been composed before. Third, a tradition shows genuine growth when the change increases its capacity to assimilate other ideas and graft them successfully onto itself. It is clear even from this brief exposition, that, basically, what Newman is urging is that a living tradition should be understood on the model of a biological organism – a thing whose identity remains the same even though its shape and size and even its material constituents are continuously changing.

So where does this leave us? I was defending the idea that striving for universality is justified. Then I had to face the objection that such striving leads to cultural violence and to a blatant disregard of loyalty. Now,

¹⁰ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Penguin, 1974, first published 1845).

however, I have just argued that loyalty to a tradition is a more subtle business. Loyalty should be understood as ‘loyalty to loyalty’; it broadens our horizon, eventually opening us to the dimensions of the entire world. Moreover, tradition is not static; it should be understood as involving change and growth. Striving for universality, therefore, is not really undermined. It can still be defended, on condition that it be carried out in a manner that respects loyalty and tradition understood in the correct sense.

My arguments may not convince everyone. Some may still object by saying that the element of violence hasn’t been eliminated. And I think they are right. An element of violence, understood in the Aristotelian sense, is always present. It is essentially linked to the idea of striving for universality. The ever-present element of violence and pain I’m talking about here, however, is not the result of one group imposing its truths onto another in the name of objectivity. It is rather the pain that is involved in all kinds of learning, all kinds of growth. Let us recall Socrates. His dialectical method is described as a method that brings out, or delivers, ideas somewhat like a midwife delivers babies. This reminds us of the associated struggle and pain.¹¹ It reminds us that learning involves receiving new beliefs and new structures of thought. Learning therefore involves changing one’s previously established web of belief to accommodate new beliefs. If you don’t want any pain, stop learning. It is as simple as that. The pain of growth is an essential part of openness to reasoned debate. As I mentioned at the beginning, this point is evident also in some Biblical passages, like the Letter of St. James. When wisdom is described as *eupethēs*, ready to be convinced by being open to reasoned argument, we are meant to accept the possibility of having to change our position. And this involves the pain of growth.¹²

¹¹ See: Plato, *Theaetetus* §§ 148-149. Here Theaetetus finds it difficult to define knowledge, and Socrates replies: “These are the pangs of labour, my dear Theaetetus, you have something within you which you are bringing to birth.”

¹² For some people, even the mere possibility of novelty causes distress. It causes them to retreat back into their shell to avoid possible pain. It is understandable why, as the success of the natural sciences made headway through 18th and 19th century European Culture, many Catholic scholars used to consider any kind of new idea guilty until proved innocent. Although in this regard the Society of Jesus was no exception, some official documents show a certain degree of courage. Consider for instance this excerpt from Decrees 102-105 of the 27th General Congregation, held in 1922: ‘In general, careful and constant attention must be given to ensure that Ours are safeguarded against an intemperate love of novelties and a dangerously unbridled freedom to express their opinions [...] In no way, however, does the Society intend to lessen a just freedom in doubtful matters, and much less to disapprove the proper use of learning, criticism, and all the other most useful benefits that have

The main question in this paper was spelt out at the very beginning in the following words: Is the striving for universality a senseless quest? The various arguments presented give considerable support to a negative answer. Striving for universality can still be defended, even if universality is understood as reaching beyond mathematics and scientific explanation. To arrive at this conclusion, two major obstacles had to be faced, one dealing with cultural violence and the other with the disregard of the fundamental role of loyalty. I argued that these obstacles are only apparent. If loyalty is understood in a way that encourages the expansion of cognitive horizons, and if tradition is conceived of in a dynamic sense, then striving for universality remains a valid project. Each individual philosopher or theologian is situated. Each individual philosopher or theologian occupies a point in cultural space. This fact supplies that individual with particular styles, particular techniques. I have my treasures. Others have theirs. That's fine. But, as I have argued, we cannot stop there. Convergence is possible, and the basic requirement is simple: readiness to be convinced.

stemmed from the advance of scholarship. Those, indeed, deserve much praise who devote themselves to these disciplines and with strenuous labour strive to defend the ancient faith with new weaponry.' See: J. W. Padberg, S.J., M. D. O'Keefe, S.J., and J. L. McCarthy, S.J., (eds), *For Matters of Greater Moment: the first thirty Jesuit general congregations* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1994), pp. 547-548.