

## **POLS 588, 10 March 2005**

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### **Are people the same wherever you go?**

The question whether people are the same wherever one goes has to be answered with a clear “no”. Even though it would be safe to quote Thomas Jefferson’s statement that “all men are created equal”, the equality among humans stops at the moment of birth.

For me there is no argument that people are different, and the more complete statement, to quote Mr. Jefferson again, that “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” already shows that indeed, equality stops very soon. Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, would smile upon Mr. Jefferson’s statement in sheer bewilderment, as in Buddhism the world is viewed objectively and every kind of creator spirit gets dismissed as illusory.

And there are not only Buddhists and Christians inhabiting today’s world, which we share with numerous other beliefs and their embedded value systems. For some, the forces of good and evil constantly wage war against each other, for others, there is Yin and Yang, but these two are interdependent and complementary facets of existence and by no means antagonistic.

As people of diverse origin and different cultural backgrounds get socialized differently, the same world which all humans share is quite a different one for all of them. People might have, with some exceptions, two arms, two legs and a head wherever we go, but in one part of the world, people, Eskimos for example, describe, perceive and communicate their world with a large number of different terms for “snow”, a word someone who has never experienced winter conditions, let’s take an average Tanzanian, does not really have a single convincing concept of. Based on his non-knowledge, the Tanzanian would probably state that “all snow is created equal”, but could not be further from the truth.

One could argue that all humans from all imaginable backgrounds share at least a common set of basic rules or assumptions about human life, but even this seems questionable. It cannot be denied that the message of the ten commandments is somewhat similar to the Sila (the ethical conduct in Buddhism) or Yen (the concept of human kindness), as these three examples, probably like most other religions or world-orders one could find over the course of human history, try to set rules by which a society can be peacefully organized. On the other hand, there seems to be a growing minority that accepts or even proclaims a world view and justice system under which it is acceptable to state that “You love life and we love death” during a crusade against the value-system the majority of the world believes in, but wrongfully tries to export to the rest of the globe. Frankly speaking, how could one state that humans are the same all over the planet when chances are reasonably good that one would become part of a gruesome beheading just on the basis of one’s outward appearance during a stroll through contemporary Baghdad?

Without going into any more detail I would think that the few examples given in this text are enough to convince the reader that humans are indeed different wherever one goes. It is surely possible to order people into certain general schemes, even though people from New Zealand’s North and South island or Bavaria and Ostfriesland in Germany like to think about themselves as different, but in the end there would still be a confusing multitude of these general schemes, which would oftentimes make it impossible to think in terms of sameness even in a broader sense.