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## PHILOSOPHICAL RELATIVISM AND EXPERIENCE OF THE SECOND PERSON\*

### INTRODUCTION

In this article, I am going to look back at my internship in Zambia and elaborate on my experience of the second person in a different culture. I will be using my own experience and my own ideas and reflections, but in order to support my arguments, I will draw mainly from works of Wittgenstein as well as works of other thinkers, such as Maria Baghramian. It is important to mention that during my stay in Zambia I was working on my Bachelor thesis, which in turn revolved around the idea of relativism and the perspective of the second person, so I focused on these topics in my observation and research, which, sadly, I am not allowed to include here for legal reasons. But to better understand what is going to follow, first let me introduce the idea of relativism.

### 1. DEFINING RELATIVISM

The one difficult thing about defining relativism is that there is no consensus among those who have tried to characterize, yet alone define, relativism. In order to be as close to the truth as possible, one can state that relativism is a point of view that something being false and something being true, good, bad, standards of reasoning and the standards themselves are only

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products of a convention, and the procedures of stating if they are justified or unjustified are merely products of one specific convention. That is to say, if something in my opinion is wrong, it may be right in someone's else opinion, and neither of us would be "truly" correct. Let's take for example a famous picture of two people standing in front of each other, with a number written in the ground, separating them. This number, depending on the perspective, might be six, or it might be nine. According to the definition above, both of them are equally right and equally wrong. So how are we supposed to know which answer is "really" true? Only the person who has written this number on the ground could tell us what he was thinking and which answer is true. But this, of course, is impossible. Another thing: it is much easier to talk about physical things, even if they exist purely in our imagination, like a number written on the ground. The matter becomes much more complex when it comes to judging ideas, manners, thoughts, events, etc. One of the reasons might be that, when it comes to physical things, for example, either a number written on the ground or one displayed on a computer screen, mistakenly taken by someone to be a small TV screen, we usually have the option to ask the creator of this number. If it is a computer screen (which is more likely nowadays), this will be the customer service of the shop where we bought it. Then someone will say that this is not a TV screen but merely a computer screen that so much resembles a TV that we fall into the trap of believing it is a TV. But the point is there was someone who would say, "You made a mistake. The thing which you took for 'B' is really a thing called 'A', and I know this because I have created it with the idea of it being a thing 'A', not thing 'B'." And this is a thing that everyone must agree on, because it is the objective truth. Someone has created it as a computer monitor, so it does not matter if I think that this is a TV screen, because the objective truth is that it is a monitor. But the matter is very different when we enter the world of ideas. Let's take as an example an event of hitting someone when we found out that he lied. A group of people called 'A' says that this is very wrong, we should not hurt anyone because of their mistakes, but group called 'B' will say that it is right, he earned it by failing their trust, and next time he will not do it out of fear of being hit again. And now, what should we do to judge which group is right? We have two groups of people with different beliefs, and the main difference between this situation and the mistaking TV screen for a computer screen is that now we have no one to say "This is right, keep it up" or "This is wrong, stop doing that"—at least **objectively**. I want to stress the word 'objectively', because subjectively both groups A

and B are equally right and equally wrong. It all depends on the perspective, or rather what convention we believe in at given time. For the sake of the argument, let's agree that group A are members of a pacifist religion, where harming someone is prohibited, and that everyone in that group is a believer. In the eyes of this group, they are right, and the other group is wrong. Now let's think that group B are members of a very strict religion with draconian laws, where every sin is physically punished, and that everyone in that group is a believer. In the eyes of this group, they are right and the other group is wrong. So now we have two groups with different beliefs and moral codes, and our number on the ground has been changed for a person who has been hit, with no one to say if this is right or wrong. Of course, there might be some other person watching it from the distance, not being a member of either group; but even then this person would not be able to objectively state the true moral correctness of this action, because this person has the moral point of view of its own, which may differ from the perspectives of the two groups, but thinking relativistically, this point of view is no less true and no less false than the points of view mentioned above.

Relativistic ideas accompanied me through the whole journey, but it would be both unprofessional and unfair not to mention "the second-person perspective" that was another area which I have greatly emphasised. I have mentioned Wittgenstein, and on his ideas I have based my arguments when it comes to the perspective of the second person, which I will elaborate on a little bit more.

Even though we did touch on the idea of relativisation of truth and non-existence of universal truths and one correct point of view, what has not been touched yet is the second person, in particular their perspective. The subject is indeed of great importance, because whenever there is a discussion, there is another person with their own, unique perspective. In order to have an argument you also need another person with another point of view. Even the whole philosophical ideas were based on the points of view, and a lot of them were created because individual opposed one point of view with his own, which was radically different. But what should we understand by the phrase "second-person perspective"? There is much more to it than one might think. At first glance this may seem easy to grasp, because since the arguments of relativism have been explored in the previous paragraph this may give a broader view in dealing with different perspective, but it is more complex when you contemplate it.

So, let's ask a simple question: what is the second person? The simplest answer would be: you. We can take grammar to prove that. Most English speakers know personal pronouns, since it is the basic knowledge of the language, and the first personal pronoun is 'I', and now we come across the first obstacle, because in this moment emerges a very bizarre question: Who is 'I' for you? The answer may appear so simple that someone might think that this question should not be asked. Only I can be 'I', there is no possibility in which someone or something else is me. And this answer is right, because there is no way that you are not you. But immediately a change of form can be seen. In the previous sentence "And this answer is right, because there is no way that you are not you" the personal pronoun 'I' has been changed to 'you', which is the second-person pronoun, representing the second person. So now it is proven that grammatically 'you' is the second person. But how did it happen, since just a moment ago it was stated that you cannot be the second person because no one else can be 'I' but me? It is the matter of perspective.

When the example of the first-person pronoun 'I' is used, the most probable answer for the person reading this for the question of "Who is 'I' for you?" was 'me'. And this is a correct answer in its own way. The reader is the 'I' for *himself*, it is him who reads, thinks, talks and communicates with another person. But one must notice that in order to communicate you need to have someone to communicate to. And for that 'someone', the first person is himself, while the second person, 'you', is the person that sends the message. In order to make it simpler, let's use the example. Person A (later labelled only as A) communicates a message to the person B (later labelled only as B). So A, in his own understanding, is 'I', because he thinks of himself using the first personal pronouns, and the B, in the understanding of A, is the second person 'you', because he uses the second-person pronouns in order to communicate with B. So, in that case A takes the role of 'I' and B takes the role of 'you'. But in the perspective of B, he is the 'I' for the same reason, and A is 'you' also for exactly the same reason. Therefore, now B takes the mantle of 'I', and A of 'you', and now it can be seen that both A and B are simultaneously 'I' and 'you', depending on who is communicating a message and who is the recipient of such a message.

The example of sending a message was provided for a reason, too. There is a correlation between 'I' and 'you', so we will use the example of A and B further. For A to send a message to B, and since it is established that for A person B is 'you' because person A uses second-person pronouns to address

him, person B must not only exist, but be in interaction with A, since if person B were not in the interaction with A, person A would have to refer to person B using third-person pronouns. So, there must be an interaction between A and B in order to even think about the second person.

But the interaction itself also can be a subject of dispute. Hence during the process of communication, messages are sent, these messages might bear the image of radically different world views. Although, if the world views of people were different in every aspect, we would not be able to communicate with them, so there must be something that we have in common, something that makes all people able to communicate, compare their opinions, discuss them, make them known for each other. This is the question of the commensurability and incommensurability of different world views in the context of the second-person perspective. As a matter of fact, the topic of the second-person perspective is explored very actively in contemporary philosophy, for example, by authors and thinkers like Raymond Tallis, who during his lecture in IRC Conference in 2013 focused mainly on the problem of pointing, but also explored the topics like interdependence of first-, second-, and third-person perspectives, the complexities in them and the relations between the said perspectives.<sup>1</sup> Anna Wierzbicka explored the idea of second person, the messages and emotions through the scope of human face, its expressions, asking questions like “Is human face a mirror of human emotions or only the tool to send the message?”, and the messages the human face can transmit.<sup>2</sup> The one of the most recent works concerning the idea of the second-person perspective is the *European Journal of Philosophy*, first published on July 28, 2021. A collective work by several authors, it covers a great variety of contemporary problems in terms of second-person perspective, elaborating on subjects like second-perspective approach to ethics, the comments on the theories made before, the limits of the perspective of second person, Hegelian theories of recognition and many more.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Hey, You! Some Reflections on Pointing and Second-Person Being,” talk by Raymond Tallis at IRC Conference, 2013, YouTube, August 10, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdWHUbSXdck>.

<sup>2</sup> Anna WIERZBICKA, *Emotions across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> *European Journal of Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (2021): 541–42.

## 2. EXPERIENCES DURING INTERNSHIP

I was allowed to travel with my friend, Natalia, to work in one of the schools in Kasama, which is a small city in Zambia. Zambia is a country in southern Africa. The whole project was organized by our university, the John Paul Catholic University of Lublin. This internship lasted three months, from 7 February to 2 May, 2022. During this time, all financial support that we received was provided by the University, including the fare and refunds of the insurance and medical examinations. This internship proved a challenge not only in terms of work, but also when it comes to the experience of the second person, both of which we had known before, like my friend from university and co-worker Natalia, but also those which I had not known before—almost every native African. We departed from Chopin Airport on February 5, 2022, and after six hours we landed at Hamad International Airport in Doha, Qatar. After three hours of waiting for the next flight and a seven-hour flight we landed in Lusaka, which is the capital of Zambia. From there, we travelled to the Northern Province and in there we spent most of our three months of internship.

During this internship, I was working in the Laura Centre Secondary School, which is all female school, mainly as a teacher of English and Computer Science, but also as a librarian. This provided me with a lot of interesting experience when it comes to interacting with another person—not only because I was teaching them, but being in all female school, ran by Salesian Sisters, meant obeying some rules and codes. As this type of schools is uncommon in Poland, this was a very new experience for me and it required adaptation. Because of the characteristic of my work, I had a lot of interaction between me and my students, teachers, and workers. It allowed me to spot and experience several things.

### 2.1 OTHERNESS: A WHITE EUROPEAN IN ZAMBIA

The first one is the experience of being a white person in Africa. It was visible in everyday life and during the conversations with people. At the beginning of my work, the pupils of the school were very excited to see us since we were the first volunteers after the start of the pandemic. If being excited is not a bad thing in itself, it was very unpleasant for me, since the pupils took it to the extreme, touching our hair and our skin. In western cultures, there is a big emphasis on the idea of personal space, which was noto-

riously violated by them, of course not in a bad way. This was the first thing I have observed not only during the interactions, but also in everyday life of Zambian people. The people of Zambia are very active in terms of expressiveness. They talk very loudly and gesture energetically, even on the street, which is something very different from what Poles might be accustomed to. Very often I mistook someone just talking to me for being angry with me. Very often they mistook my silence, and lack of gesturing as being sad, meanwhile it was just the way I am, as a European.

I mention my “European background” very often, but I believe there are important reasons for that. One is that it was really visible, not because I tried to emphasize that to the people, but in the way they were treating me and talking to me. While I have very few bad memories of the locals and unpleasant situations were less and less common with every passing day, it could be felt that I am “white”, mainly in confrontations with the second person, not to mention that they were not hesitant to call us per ‘white’. There were many situations where pupils, but not only pupils, were asking us for money or presents, or teachers were asking us for our electronic devices such as smartphones, watches, or laptops, saying “You can leave it here, and when you come back you will buy yourself a new one.” The belief that we arrived in Zambia with a huge amount of cash were present in children and adults alike, and when confronted with the reality of us not being rich people, a lot of my interlocutors would not believe me, with words like “We know you have money.”

There might be several causes for such assumptions. After conversations with “white” people that worked in Zambia for a very long time, there is one thesis that I have heard very often as an explanation for this phenomenon. Their theory is that since a lot of people from Zambia have never seen, or see white people very rarely, and most of the information they have of the “culture of the whites” is from the internet, and while a lot of smartphone applications show only rich people, they tend to assume that all white people are like that, which is of course far from the truth. What they fail to realize is that the colour of our skin does not make us the same and putting every white person into the “white” category is a huge overgeneralization, because there are white people in Western Europe, the East, South and North America, Asia, Australia, and people from these regions will differ among themselves. Even in those regions you may come across different cultures but sharing some similarities. That is also the reason why from the very beginning of this section (also during my private conversations with people) I try very

hard not to use the term ‘Africa’ when I talk about people of Zambia. I do it specifically to avoid this generalization, since I am aware that inhabitants of Africa are very diverse when it comes to culture, and people of Zambia are very different from the people of Nigeria, a country in western Africa. As I was only in Zambia and had seen their way of living, the only logical and fair thing to do would be to talk about culture of Zambia, since talking about any other, knowing very well that I did not see any other culture, assuming that they are the same as Zambians would be a great generalization.

The second reason why I bring up my “European background” and my “whiteness” is not because I want to show that we are different and there is no common ground between us, but rather because I am aware of me being European and the consequences of my European heritage. That means that I have a full awareness of this European “imprint”. Wittgenstein says, “I do not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true or false.”<sup>4</sup> This means we automatically and unknowingly accept the code of the culture we were born into. But I believe there is more to that. Since we are taught to act accordingly to our culture code, learn the language, customs, etc., from the day we are born, we are subject to something that is called “cultural indoctrination”: “The process of inculcating ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and cognitive strategies during the transfer of cultural traditions from one generation to the next with the expectation that such traditions will not be questioned but practiced in the future.”<sup>5</sup> It prevents our thinking outside the boxes of our culture and language.

I am not able to think fully outside the box of my European mind. No matter how hard I try to look at the phenomenon in an objective way, I will never be able to, because from the first days I was able to perceive the world around me, I have been raised as an European—being European is a very essence of my being, no matter if I like it or not. Nor can I renounce it. While, of course, being from Europe is not a bad thing at all, as we should not make judgements based on the place of birth, it has its pros and cons.

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<sup>4</sup> Piotr SZALEK, *Wittgenstein and the Second-Person Perspective*, manuscript, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Bryan CHRISTIANSEN (Global Research Society, LLC, USA) and Ekaterina TURKINA (HEC Montreal, Canada), *Applied Psycholinguistics and Multilingual Cognition in Human Creativity* (Information Science Reference, 2018).



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## 2.2 THE OPPORTUNITIES OF EUROPEAN BACKGROUND

The good thing is that I am only able to write this work and have these reflections due to education I have received, first in English during my time at school, and later at my university, where I learnt about a variety of thinkers and their doctrines. One of the effects of this education is this work. Being raised in the way I was raised created a strong foundation for my intellectual growth, and my highly developed European education gave me the tools to expand my horizons, which allow me to have these thoughts about my European roots. Without this, especially without university studies, it is highly probable that I would not know about the idea of relativism and the second-person perspective. Although, there is also another side to this coin: this “imprint” that I have inherited and that these fifteen years of European education left in me. As I am not able to be fully free to think outside my cultural point of view, I am also not able to communicate with the second person as something else than fundamentally a European, and while it may be a common basis on which I can understand the second person, especially when this person is also a European, but it does not help, in that sense that my European way of thinking may not be able to comprehend the way of thinking of a Zambian person.

Having provided such examples, I do think that this is the best moment to introduce the ideas of both “commensurability” and “incommensurability” of different world views, a thing so important when it comes to understanding the second person. The world view of ‘I’, or the first person, and the world view of ‘you’, so the second person. As stated above, in order for such perspectives to exist there must be interaction between those persons, and when there is interaction, there is a possibility that parties will have different world views, and this can mean two things. The first is that points of view of both sides have something in common, so they can be compared, so they are “commensurable”. The other option is that they have nothing in common, making them incomparable, therefore they are “incommensurable”. But to proceed, the definition on incommensurability must be provided.

In the book *Relativism*, Maria Baghramian and Annalisa Coliva give the following explanation of ‘incommensurability’: “the impossibility of comparison by a common measure”.<sup>6</sup> This implies that to be able to compare the different ideas there must be something in common, therefore absence of this

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<sup>6</sup> Maria BAGHRAMIAN and Annalisa COLIVA, *Relativism* (Abington: Routledge, 2020), 153.

thing results in the inability to make such comparisons. The main idea derives from field of ancient Greek mathematics, where it was first used for describing that there is no common measure between magnitudes. As an example, one may say that there is no common way of measuring the lengths of the side and the diagonal of a square.<sup>7</sup>

This is commonly used in discussions about the relativization of scientific theories, in this case, mathematics, but the first field that is going to be explored here is language, the incommensurability and the hardships of comparing the ideas and world views through the language people use, which is the conceptual scheme strongly favoured by thinkers such as Wittgenstein. While he did not consider himself a relativist, his works are highly significant when it comes to expanding the idea of conceptual relativism.

In his way of explaining the incommensurability of the world views, Wittgenstein redefined terms which were already existing, such as ‘grammar’, and created new ones, like ‘language game’. In Wittgenstein’s understanding of the word, grammar is not “rules of a language governing the sounds, words, sentences, and other elements, as well as their combination and interpretation”<sup>8</sup>—at least it is not only one of the interpretations of such a word. For Wittgenstein, the term also meant more than just common notion, it also bears much deeper meaning, which include things like logic, syntax, rules that help to define which things make sense to say. For him, it contributed to the way we describe, to our method of representation of reality, and since the rules of a grammar, just like grammar itself, might be subject to change, it is logical to accept the possibility of different conceptual schemes or world views, especially among people using different grammar.<sup>9</sup>

The second term created by a Wittgenstein in order to support his claims is the notion of “language game”, which has been mentioned in the text above. In fact, these words represent different cognitive systems or conceptual schemes. What is worth mentioning here is the fact that Wittgenstein believed that the language is made from such “language games”, and this can be proven. Everyone, well, almost everyone, who is able to speak in any given country speaks its official language, but if one could “break” or “di-

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<sup>7</sup> Eric OBERHEIM and Paul HOYNINGEN-HUENE, “The Incommensurability of Scientific Theories,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/incommensurability>.

<sup>8</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica* (February 3, 2020), s.v. “grammar,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/grammar>.

<sup>9</sup> BAGHRAMIAN and COLIVA, *Relativism*, 111.

vide” the society of this country into smaller groups, one would observe that the way they talk among themselves is like their official language, but slightly changed to better fit who they are or what they do, which is their own “language game”, and they are only able to fully understand themselves because they know and are aware of the **rules** of their own “language game”, or their own jargon. This means that every group, let it be people that share the same profession, for example construction workers, surgeons or probably any other profession that exists, and people sharing the same status e.g. students. The people in such groups tend to develop their own way of using the language, which people from the other “language game” may not understand. Even though the main core, which is official language, is the same, the people from other “language game” might have trouble in understanding and using different “language game”, because the usage is very much dependent on the context and knowledge of such context, so the **rules** that were mentioned above.

For Wittgenstein, the life was like one big “language game”, which consists of much smaller ones, where everyone is being part of it due to the knowledge of the rules and the context of those, where the things that are done and words that are said only make sense in relevance to that “game” that is currently being played. That is why student will understand another student, Christian will understand Christian, doctor will understand another doctor etc. But as seen on example provided by me, sometimes the “language game” must be swapped into another, more suitable one. This is because the main core, the actual language, remains the same, so the swap is easy.

Nevertheless, as has been stated at the beginning, the grammar and the language can change, and with it, the “language game” itself. So, what may happen when two people, who are using different languages, therefore playing different “games” and having no common ground or easy way of switching into “language game” they both know the rules and the context of? This is also a question explored by Wittgenstein. In his work *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, he offers an example in which he creates a possibility that there is a society that has a different way of measuring timber and its price, considering the area that this timber occupies instead of its actual weight:

How could I show them that – as I should say – you don’t really buy more wood if you buy a pile covering a bigger area? I should, for instance, take a pile which was small by their ideas and, by laying the logs around, change it into a “big” one. This might convince them – but perhaps they would say: “Yes, now it’s a lot

of wood and it costs more” – and that would be the end of the matter. – We should presumably say in this case: they simply do not mean the same by “a lot of wood” and “a little wood” as we do; and they have a quite different system of payment from us.”<sup>10</sup>

While Wittgenstein does not actually compare language games different than our own, he rather asks the reader to imagine that such exist, we cannot deny that such community might exist, or rather that there is a possibility of such community existing.

While at first glance his example might seem to be somewhat more pertinent to mathematics rather than linguistics, Wittgenstein guides the reader to further explore the notions of “a lot of” and “little”. By asking the reader to imagine that different communities are imagined with different customs, such as the way of how they measure the value of timber, and how it may be different from our understanding, he shows that, if we write the equation between the meaning and use, then by the consequence of such action, the concepts corresponding to those words would be different.<sup>11</sup>

This clash of worldviews was visible during my conversations with people, in which I came across several difficulties. First and foremost, as I have written, I had a strong feeling of being an “outsider”. Then, the language. Zambia used to be a colony of Great Britain, hence an official language of Zambia is English, but the majority of Zambian society is also divided into tribes. So, while it was possible to speak in English, I met a lot of people who did not understand English, only they own tribal language. It is important to notice that even the languages of those tribes may be different from each other, so one Zambian might not understand the other Zambian, and since there are about seventy-three tribes in Zambia, everyone with their own language history, culture and kings, such situations occurred from time to time.

The people of Zambia were very aware of their own tribal background, although from the research I did it seems that people of older generations are more aware of their tribal identity and pay more attention to it, while the younger generation does not care about their tribal background as much as their parents do. On the other hand, what was very intriguing for me was that even though they did not hide their tribality and for them belonging to a

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<sup>10</sup> Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN ET AL., *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, 3rd ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 1981), § 150.

<sup>11</sup> BAGHRAMIAN and COLIVA, *Relativism*, 112.

tribe was a normal thing, they also thought that I, in Poland, also belonged to a tribe, and they were very shocked when they heard that in my country I do not have any tribes, and the closest thing to it would be voivodeship, but we do not apply so much weight to our background as they do. But my point is not that—it is that even that belonging to a tribe was something normal for them, you could not call someone a “tribalist”, because it was considered an insult, there was a situation where whole tribes considered enemies of one another because one thought that the people of the other tribe are tribalists, and vice versa.

Coming back to my main idea, although the official language in Zambia is English, yet not everyone can speak it fluently, and sometimes I met people that mixed English with their own tribal language. Talking with those people was not extremely difficult, but there were problems nonetheless, since even if they spoke English fluently, I had trouble understanding their pronunciation and accent, so different from what I was used to. While I had had the experience of talking to people from Africa before, since in my university and in my own studies there are many of people from Africa, yet we should not generalize, and, as I found out, the way Zambians speak is also very different from what I have experienced in Europe. The real challenge began when I was confronted with someone with whom I was not able to communicate in English, since his knowledge of the language was insufficient. On the other hand, even now I have little to no knowledge of the Bemba language, which is the language of the main tribe in the area where I spent most of my internship, and at the moment of the confrontation, and for few more that happened in the future, I had none at all. On some occasions, I was in the presence of the person who knew their language and was kind enough to provide me assistance, translating the words of these people. However, sometimes I did not have this luxury.

To illustrate, I can write about such experience when I had to use an unconventional, say nonverbal, way of communication due to linguistic inability to communicate and absence of a person who could translate for me the words of my interlocutor. It was during one of our visits to Katongo, a small village about thirty minutes' drive from my place. We would go there almost every weekend in order to take care of the children who lived there, but because of lack of education and material status of the village, by that I mean that the village could not afford to build a school, the children did not understand English, and as I have stated, my knowledge of Bemba language was very poor at best. Not everyone of those I arrived with knew the language,

and those who knew were occupied with their duties, so could not help me with translations. At some point, I have been approached by a young boy with a soccer ball, who kicked it in my direction. I understood it as a sign that this boy wants to play with me, so naturally I kicked it back. Seeing that, more boys approached us, showing me, with their hands pointed in their direction, to kick this ball to them. After some time, more and more children came, joining our game, until our group reached about ten people, including myself. When it was time to end, I already knew that these boys were keen on football, and there is a high probability of them knowing the gestures linked to this sport discipline, so I used the sign commonly used to show the end of the match, which is one hand, in horizontal position placed on the other hand, in vertical position. The boys understood what I meant and gave me the ball back, and after bidding ourselves farewell, I came back to my apartment.

In this example, me, as a first person, and them as a second person, although in a collective sense, did not share the same culture and the same language, so our “language games” shared very little in common, but they did, nonetheless. The knowledge of football, and the gestures associated with this sport, is this middle ground in which we could find an understanding of each other, which allowed us to start playing together, without using a single word. Looking back at this experience, I can say that the sport is a common measure in many societies, since we can see people playing sports all over the world, and according to the official FIFA ranking there is about 211 of national representation teams, from countries all over the world.

Another problem I faced was a language problem, not with translation of the words, since in communication both parties usually used English. Rather, we linked different meanings to the same word, which sometimes led to misunderstanding. For example, I would use the word ‘lemon’. For Poles, it is linked with the yellow, sour fruit, but for Zambians, ‘lemon’ is associated with a different fruit, which is lime, a green cousin of the lemon. The reason is that “our lemons” do not grow in their climate, but lime trees grow there very nicely. It may appear as trivial, but such trivialities might trigger bigger misunderstandings, potentially dangerous for communication.

The last (and for me the biggest) problem I faced is the culture and worldview of the Zambian people. As I have written in this part it would be very difficult for me to look at the culture of Zambian people objectively, due to my European “imprint” always present in my mindset. The way that Africa is being presented in Western Media is also not very helpful. Usually, when someone sees how Africa is portrayed, they think of Africa as a de-

stroyed continent where everyone needs help. It is to some extent true, and to some extent not. There are a lot of really poor people that definitely require attention, but a large number of Zambian people are managing, and living their life as best as they could in the circumstances they have to live in. To avoid thinking and imagining Zambia through this scope created by media, I tried not to imagine Zambia at all.

### 3. PHILOSOPHICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

When I arrived, one of the biggest hardships (but also one of the biggest opportunities), was being an “alien” in a society that has very little in common with the society where I come from. Being this “alien” is the crucial experience, and one must understand the second person if this person comes from another culture. Since I have never travelled anywhere outside Europe, I have never truly felt this feeling of being someone from outside. I did travel to different countries in Europe, sometimes for holidays and sometimes to work, but it was always a setting that I more or less knew, since cultures across Europe share a lot, so even if I was from another country, I was still European. Another thing is that, in the era we live in, it is very easy to find information about European cultures. Internet, becoming somewhat a major factor in the transfer of information and communication, allows one to quickly check the information needed, and easy accessibility to almost every mean of transport in existence makes it possible to travel from one point to another in very short time, even between countries, especially in Europe, where borders for members of an European Union are open, allowing easy travel between countries.

But when it comes to Zambia, I had no information. No Internet to check things; I knew no languages besides English, I did not know what I should expect from the people, how they would act when they saw me for the first time. I was afraid of being hurt and that someone might steal my things, I had no one, besides my friend Natalia, and she was as distressed as I at that moment. I realized how it is to go to another culture and how it feels to be really “alone”, despite so many people around me. This feeling waned with every passing day, but for me, this feeling is exactly what it takes to understand the perspective of the second person. Other than this, I could always imagine what this person might go through, but these thoughts would not always be complete or true, since, without this experience that I got, how

possibly would I be able to know what is this person feeling? This situation gave me this rare opportunity of actually being able to step into the boots of an “alien”.

This lack of knowledge of the other culture, on the other hand, might be the cause of misunderstanding when it comes to the customs of the people we are talking with. One such custom I could not understand was the usage of time by Zambians. In Europe, the track of time is always kept, so people must be punctual, and meetings are short. In Zambia, it is the other way around. Time flow is not so rigorously followed, and there were several situations where a meeting that was supposed to start on the already set hour, started thirty minutes or even one hour late, because no one was present, and people took their time coming to the place of meeting. This caused a lot of mixed feelings in me, since as an European I try not to be late for anything.

If I were to evaluate my stay in Zambia, though, I would say that it was truly a great experience, even when it seems that so far, I was only listing the difficulties that I experienced during my internship. But with every difficulty that occurred, there had to be a solution. Usually, what I had to do is simply to be patient with these people. Misunderstandings occurred on a daily basis due to cultural differences, but every error could be explained and translated if one had enough patience to go through this process. I had to be patient since the nature of my work also required me to be patient. I was teaching almost one hundred of pupils, divided into two classes, and it is not an easy task to keep the whole class attentive during the lessons. Another very important attribute that no doubt helped during the conversations with another person was “willingness”. Both parties wanted to reach an understanding, so me and the other party talked until such an understanding was achieved. I had to be eager to act and go with the flow in order to start interactions, so their idea of me would be somewhat more friendly. In order to support such a statement, I will use my own experience from my internship that I did in Africa, Zambia. When I was going to help the children from Katongo, which was one of many villages hidden in the bush and hardly accessible, I faced a significant language barrier. Since it was the beginning of my internship, I was not able to understand Bemba, which is the language of the dominant tribe in the territory where I was staying, and the children did not have sufficient education and were not able to understand English, so I could not use my linguistic knowledge to communicate with them, and vice versa. So, one of the biggest, most effective factors of communication between me (the first person) and the children (the second person, although in



its collective sense) could not have been used in this instance. The task was even harder as we had no translator who could help in during the process of communication. The signs also could not have been used, due to the lack of knowledge if the signs used in Europe mean the same as those in Zambia. So, our interaction was entirely based on our mutual willingness to understand and communicate with another person. Eventually, we were somehow able to communicate, and we understood our intentions without use of language, although it was hard. This is why I believe the willingness to communicate and curiosity of another person are major factors, and understanding them without language is possible, although much more difficult.

There is one thing, however, that helps people to understand others and does not require a knowledge of the language nor context or the customs of the other person. It is the human face. Seeing the human face is very important in communication. We can see and, in most cases, understand what the second person is feeling during the conversation only by looking at the persons face.

As stated by Paul Ekman, “the same facial expressions are associated with the same emotions, regardless of culture or language.... There are some facial expressions of emotion which are universally characteristic of the human species.”<sup>12</sup> But even now, here arises a very interesting topic, explored by Anna Wierzbicka’s *Emotions across Languages and Cultures*, mainly: Is the human face a tool of expression, or rather is it a mirror of what the person is currently feeling? It is extremely important in order to properly read the human faces, henceforth to understand the second person and important in how we see them. Since there are two options which we can go with, mainly that the second person’s face is the “mirror” of what the person is feeling, which is their involuntarily action of expression, or the second option, that human face is just a tool that is used for expressing one’s emotions, therefore might not actually correspond to what the person is truly feeling at the moment.<sup>13</sup>

In her work, we can see explanations for both points of view. First, the face being a “mirror” of emotions, communicates that emotions shown are genuine, but people may suppress their true emotions or even they may be putting false expressions if a social interest requires them to. The other theory suggests that facial expressions should not be distinguished between them

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<sup>12</sup> Paul EKMAN, *Universals and Cultural Differences in Facial Expressions of Emotions* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 137.

<sup>13</sup> WIERZBICKA, *Emotions across Languages and Cultures*, 172.

being “authentic” or “false”, but all expressions are, in fact, social. According to this standpoint, facial expressions are not readouts of the emotional state of the person, but rather messages, and even if we are alone and talk to ourselves, we tend to act as though someone was present.

But what was crucial is not to be overactive. By this I mean that it was a very important skill to learn to keep yourself from interfering into their own culture. From my own experience, I can say that there were several phenomena that in their culture were acceptable, that in Europe would not take place. For example, the most common way of introducing discipline in class is physical violence; even in this Catholic school, ran by Salesian Sisters, there were cases of such violence against pupils who were accused of misbehaviour. Even though almost every teacher did this, the headteacher, who is an equivalent of headmaster in the Zambian education system, pretended that nothing like this had happened when confronted by us. After research, we learned that it is their own cultural way of raising their children, so even that we were displeased with that and we never did such a thing to the pupils, we could not do anything about it other than talking and confronting these children, who seemed not to care so much about it, taking such things as normal, to the point that they were surprised when during my first days as a teacher I told them that I do not use violence and I am strongly against it, so no violence will be used in my classroom.

The most difficult thing in this situation is that I was aware of my inability to do anything more. Trying to change their way of living alone is an impossible task, because such changes require a lot of time, and I felt like I had no authority to tell them how to live, since their methods are right from their own perspective, and my view on such matters is right from my own, so I am not able to be a judge in this matter.

While I am mindful of the difficulties present during interactions with the second person in Zambia, the time I spent among those people really taught me a lot about how the other people perceive me and how *I* perceive other people. Even if I was afraid, initially, of interaction due to lack of knowledge, they came across as being very nice and very open people who made a very good environment for us not only to teach, but also to learn. My conversations with them and discussions about different subjects were highly educational and for me, and the pupils coming to spend some time with me after the lessons, to learn more from me and ask interesting questions about my background, comparing it to their own culture—the sole fact that they were willing to spend this time with me and discuss important subjects—

meant that I indeed found some common ground between our worldviews, and I was not perceived in such an alien way as before, showing that even when the other person is from an apparently completely different background, there is still something in common in which an understanding of another person can be achieved.

### CONCLUSION

I hope that this article was successful in showing what kind of difficulties young, inexperienced minds may face in contact with another person. While looking back at the experience of the Zambian world, I presented the notion of relativism as it was a very important aspect of my trip, for in which other way should one fight the conflicting views that might rise within one's mind, while being surrounded by the culture one does not yet understand?

I analysed the idea of "otherness", looking at the concepts "commensurability" and "incommensurability" too. I also described some of the cultural dissonances I had during my work in Zambia, such as my European heritage not letting me fully understand the way those people live. Interactions with others were also described, supported by the arguments taken from Wittgenstein. The distinction between the first person 'I' and the second person 'you' proved to be very important. I also mentioned some problems, such as language barriers, which would not prevent the interaction between me and others. This proves that if one is willing to try hard, communication will occur.

Finally, I reflected on my own experiences, backed by my own theories and memories. In this part, facial expressions and their importance were among the explored topics as a very good tool that can be used in communication with the second person.

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## PHILOSOPHICAL RELATIVISM AND EXPERIENCE OF THE SECOND PERSON

## Summary

The article is a retrospection of the internship, that me, as a young yet-to-be graduate of Applied Anthropology studies in John Paul's II Catholic University of Lublin undertook in Zambia. As a student, it always baffled, are there are ways to compare a world views, in order to evaluate which one is better? Is it even possible, in the world where so many people from so many cultures exist, to find some universal values on which everyone can agree? Why would one stand by his statement that a given thing is right, while so many things are just "encoded" to us whether we like it or not. That is when I have found out about the idea of "relativism", and amazed by it, decided to make it my main field of interest. Now, as a full-fledged graduate, I look back at my experience and contemplate the nature of the interaction with the second person. I reflect on the idea of relativism, while supporting myself with the works of Wittgenstein and Maria Baghramian. I also formulate my own ideas based on what I have experienced during my work in Africa as an foreigner in a territory I knew very little about.

**Keywords:** philosophical and cultural relativism; experience of the second person; Zambia

## RELATYWIZM FILOZOFICZNY I DOŚWIADCZENIE DRUGIEJ OSOBY

## Streszczenie

Prezentowany tekst jest retrospekcją dotyczącą stażu, który jako student kierunku Antropologii Stosowanej na Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim Jana Pawła II odbyłem w Zambii. Podczas studiów zastanawiałem się, czy istnieją sposoby na porównanie światopoglądów albo sposoby oceny, oraz który z nich jest lepszy. Czy w świecie, w którym żyje tak wielu ludzi z tak wielu kultur, możliwe jest w ogóle odnalezienie uniwersalnych wartości, które każdy mógłby zaakceptować? Dlaczego ktoś miałby obstawać, że dana rzecz jest słuszna, podczas gdy tak wiele rzeczy jest po prostu w nas „zakodowanych”, czy nam się to podoba, czy nie. Wtedy właśnie dowiedziałem się o idei „relatywizmu kulturowego” i zachwycony nią postanowiłem uczynić z niej główny obszar moich zainteresowań. Teraz, jako pełnoprawny absolwent antropologii stosowanej i student filozofii, spoglądam wstecz na swoje doświadczenia i rozmyślam nad charakterem interakcji z drugą osobą. Zastanawiam się nad ideą relatywizmu, opierając się na pracach Wittgensteina i Marii Baghramian. W tekście formułuję również własne pomysły na podstawie tego, czego doświadczyłem podczas mojej pracy w Afryce jako obcokrajowiec na terytorium, o którym wiedziałem bardzo niewiele.

**Słowa kluczowe:** filozoficzny i kulturowy relatywizm; doświadczanie drugiej osoby; Zambia