CHAPTER 4

Fusion of Horizons

4.1 Introduction

We demonstrated in Chapter 2 how concepts of human rights differ substantially between and across space and time. This difference is viewed as positive and insightful in understanding the meaning and the application of human rights globally. In this chapter, we offer a conceptualization of human rights based on the fusion of horizons. It is essential, in this approach, to recognize different traditions, with regard to human rights conceptualization, in a manner that could transcend the dichotomies inherent in the Universalist–Relativist debate and legitimize the endeavor of human rights education. In addition, we also seek to account for the importance of the approach. In this chapter, we emphasize the importance of recognizing a human rights conceptualization in relation to the moral system from which the notion emerges. Also an equal emphasis should be placed on granting all traditions across cultures an equal standing in “fusion of horizon,” a process that cultivates a constructive dialogue on human rights education.

4.2 Fusion of Horizons

Fusion of horizons is a process in which multiple perspectives on human rights, which arise from different cultural traditions, are compared, contrasted, and understood in relation to the horizon in which they belong. This process is based on respect,
which ultimately generates a cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is the reflective process of the construction and affirmation of an overlapping human rights consensus from within the horizons of various comprehensive doctrines that constitutes a freestanding universal scope of human rights. Vessey (2009) emphasizes the urgent need to interact in a dialogue that doesn’t require an agreement to be successful, but “still presents a version of agreement for the right reasons as ideal” (p. 535). He explains that a dialogue could lead to sympathy of each other’s views, even if these views differ from one interlocutor to another. A dialogue could occur locally, within one’s own horizon, or it could occur globally, across cultures.

The emphasis in this process is placed on learning from different horizons, which validates the importance of the same values that exist within one’s horizon. This process provides contexts for understanding the meaning of human rights, among others. Learning from a different horizon “extends [the] meaning from what is directly given to the whole context in which it is given, including a sense of a world. Consequently, it draws us away from what is immediately given toward the greater context that provides the meaning” (Vessey, 2009, p. 530). Fusion of horizons is perceived as a search for cosmopolitan agreements on values that are perceived and manifested differently across cultures. It is a search for an “overlapping consensus” on human rights values.

Gadamer (1989) explained that “the historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us” (p. 304). Gadamer believes the meaning of any experience is never monopolized by one single interpretation or understanding, rather it is a continual search for new interpretations. Moreover, the movement, in space and