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ALTERITY, RECOGNITION AND THE DIALOGICAL PRINCIPLE

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Abstract

The author presents the dialogical principle *I am constituted through Thou* as a tool to understand the double edge concept of identity, as sketched by Zygmunt Bauman whom he considers an enlightened sceptic. He pays special attention to the concept of recognition or acknowledgment, as a meeting point of the universal and the unique, for the building of relational and dynamic identities in post-modern societies. Contemporary authors such as Kierkegaard and Rosenzweig, or Church Fathers such as Saint Augustine and St John Climacus, and other traditions, consider the I and Thou relationship as the fundamental standpoint for man's existence; as such, we may follow their ideas as a reference for intercultural and interreligious dialogue in a globalized world.

Keywords: dialogical principle, relationship, recognition, postmodernity

Résumé

L'auteur présente le principe dialogique (Je constitué à travers Tu) comme un outil pour comprendre le concept à double tranchant de l'identité, tel qu'ébauché par Zygmunt Bauman qu'il considère comme un sceptique éclairé. Il porte une attention particulière au concept de reconnaissance ou de reconnaissance, comme point de rencontre de l'universel et de l'unique, pour la construction d'identités relationnelles et dynamiques dans les sociétés post-modernes. Des auteurs contemporains tels que Kierkegaard et Rosenzweig, ou des Pères de l'Église tels que saint Augustin et saint Jean Climaque, et d'autres traditions, considèrent la relation Je et Tu comme le point de vue fondamental de l'existence de l'homme ; à ce titre, nous pouvons suivre leurs idées comme référence pour le dialogue interculturel et interreligieux dans un monde globalisé.

Mots-clés: dialogique, relation, reconnaissance, postmodernité

Rezumat

Autorul prezintă principiul dialogic (Eu constituit prin Tu) ca un instrument de înțelegere a conceptului de identitate cu două margini, așa cum l-a schițat Zygmunt Bauman, pe care îl consideră un sceptic luminat. El acordă o atenție deosebită conceptului de recunoaștere sau de recunoaștere ca punct de întâlnire al universalului cu unicul pentru construirea de identități relaționale și dinamice în societățile post-moderne. Autorii contemporani precum Kierkegaard și Rosenzweig, sau Părinți ai Bisericii precum Sfântul Augustin și Sfântul Ioan Climacus și alte tradiții, consideră relația Eu și Tu ca punct de vedere fundamental al existenței omului; Ca atare, putem urma ideile lor ca referință pentru dialogul intercultural și interreligios într-o lume globalizată.

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Cuvinte cheie: dialogic, relație recunoaștere, postmodernitate.

1. Introduction

The emphasis in interreligious dialogue is often about similarities between religions, as if the differences were superficial and trivial. This is not the case however in times of conflict. Then, what looks like minor variations takes on immense significance, dividing neighbourhoods and turning old friends into enemies. Freud called this *the narcissism of small differences*. Everything may be turned, under pressure, into a marker of identity and, therefore, of mutual estrangement. Thus, we need not only a philosophy of commonality but also a philosophy of difference: both those who are not like us and ourselves are waiting from acknowledgment, but no group has a right to impose itself on others by force. The dialogical principle - *I am constituted through Thou* - may be an answer to this conundrum.

In a liquid society we oscillate between the negation of truth and the paradigm that as we seek truth, we progress from the particular to the universal; thus, particularities are imperfections, errors, parochialisms, and prejudices. The truth, in this vision, should be abstract, timeless, universal, the same everywhere for everyone. Particularities would breed war; universal truth would generate peace, because when everyone understands it, conflict dissolves. Some say *there is no alternative* and it could it be no other way. Is not tribalism but another name for particularity? And is not tribalism the source of conflict through the ages? Both in secular and religious thought this is a mistaken and profoundly dangerous idea

There is something seductive about this vision. Franz Rosenzweig wrote in 1921 that it had a long life in the West, *from Jonia to Jena*, from the pre-Socratics until Hegel (Rosenzweig, 2005). In the same epoch, A. N. Whitehead wrote that Western philosophy was *a series of footnotes to Plato*. We can add that not just philosophy, but Christendom was haunted by Plato's ghost. The result was inevitable and tragic. If all kinds of truth - both religious and scientific - are always the same for everyone, then if my group is right, yours is wrong. Caring about the truth would be the same as to convert the other to my point of view; if the other refuses to be converted, he should be aware: in the end, he will be persecuted. From this flowed some of the great wars and persecutions whenever Western civilization adopted universalist paradigms in Greece, Rome, Christendom, and Modern Enlightenment.

2. Liquidity and recognition

We live in what Zygmunt Bauman aptly describes in his books as a liquid society: a society that killed universalism and has no substitute for it, entangled as it is in a morass of particularities (Zygmunt, 2005; 2000). On the other hand, as a *liquid society* is not driven by a set of ideas, but by a series of institutions, such as markets, media, multinational and digital corporations, everything that is local,

special, and particular, is also threatened. The individual is threatened top down and down top. In its present liquid post-modern phase, mass culture is tailored to individual freedom of choice. As culture serves freedom it ensures that choice is inevitable. Responsibility, the companion of freedom of choice, is forced upon the shoulders of the individual; in liquid modernity, the individual becomes the sole manager of his life.

As befits a consumer society, and a show society, contemporary culture is mainly established through offers, not norms. As stated by Pierre Bourdieu, Western culture lives through seduction, not through normative regulation; public relations, not policing; publicity, not doctrine; it is all about creating new needs, desires, needs and whims, not coercion neither sanction. In a globalized and post-modern society we are mainly consumers as production is increasingly developed by machines, robots and artificial intelligence. Without a dialogical horizon, we see and experience the world as consumers.

With globalization, culture became a warehouse of consumer products – each competing for variation, and shifting the attention of potential consumers, in the hope of attracting and maintaining them. Abandon rigid standards; adapt to all tastes without privileging any; encourage deregulation and flexibility; all of these factors combine to build globalization.

What is missing most in a liquid society is a concept of truth that balances universalism and particularities, identity and difference. Zygmunt Bauman discusses the changes that modernity and post-modernity brought to the notion of identity. In liquid existence, identity has become ambiguous, a contested idea that becomes a battlefield: a concept that instead of uniting, divides and excludes in such a way that what formerly served as a banner for emancipation, turns out into a covert form of oppression.

On the other hand, we live in a time where we are experiencing a paradigm shift in scientific understanding. The complexities of the genome, the emergence of the first multicellular life forms, the origins of Homo sapiens and our prodigiously enlarged brain: all these and more discoveries are too subtle to be accounted for by reductive science. Such an evolution in scientific research led science to abandon any kind of universalistic pretence and now presents discoveries as new hypotheses.

Globalization has reached a point of no return and each one of us depends upon the other; we can choose between mutually deepening our vulnerabilities or mutually guarantee our shared security: between swimming together or sinking together. As sometimes happens in history, self-interest and ethical principles of mutual care, point in the same direction and demand the same strategy. Far from being a curse, globalization can still be turned into a blessing; humanity has a new chance with the new science and new technologies! Whether the crisis becomes opportunity, it depends very much on my view, on the adoption of the dialogical principle in postmodern society.

I am constituted through Thou. The dialogical principle has a religious version since the Apostolic Church Fathers, particularly Saint Augustine and

Saint John Climacus. It emerged in a philosophical version in the 20th century through Martin Buber and Emmanuel Lévinas, and, chiefly, Franz Rosenzweig's book *The Star of Redemption* (Henriques, 2016a; Henriques, 2018a). This major work directly inspired celebrated authors such as E. Lévinas, P. Ricoeur, M. Henry, J. L. Marion, Eric Fromm, Walter Benjamin, Gersom Scholem; other trends of dialogical thought are to be found in Mikhail Bakhtin, Karl Polanyi, Paul Ricoeur and Bruno Latour (Bakhtin, 1968). Outside the Western tradition the African *Ubuntu* (*humanity*) philosophy splendidly underlines how *a person is a person through another person*. In Zulu language ubuntu is expressed by the proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Eze, 2017).

The Star was written in the Balkans front in World War I and was published in 1921. It begins with an introduction about anguish in the face of death, an existential shock comparable to our present Anthropocene and COVID-19 woes. *The Star* has a fiend to shoot at: universalism or totality, *the way of the philosophers from Jonia to Jena*; and it has a secret weapon, too: revelation in consciousness differentiates the whole of reality into man, world, and God (Rosenzweig, 2000). There is no totality, no omniscient father-figure, no authoritarian heaven as god is love and relationship, a poet that engages our freedom and not a boss that generates norms. Identity and difference are articulated in man's response. In a world bereft of God, the primary reality is 'Me', myself and I. Other people are not as real to me as I am to myself. Hence all the problems that philosophers have wrestled with for two and a half thousand years *from Jonia to Jena*. How do I know other minds exist? Why should I be moral? Why should I be concerned about the welfare of others to whom I am not related? Why should I limit the exercise of my freedom so that others can enjoy theirs? In a world in which God is held as existent, the primordial fact is relationship. There is God, there are other people, there is me, and there is the relationship between us, for my identity is built not by myself but through the other. Without the other, we stay trapped within the prison of the self and our identity loses its differentiation

Rosenzweig's positive dialogic would not be possible without the negative dialogic previously expressed by Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche; they all broke with Hegelian idealism, that is, with modernity (Rosenzweig, 2005, about Kierkegaard, pp.7-8; Schopenhauer pp. 8-9; Nietzsche, pp. 9-10). Kierkegaard showed how the impersonal spirit has no right to take possession of the individual soul. His devices of fictional names and heteronyms are a tool to break this veil of universalistic illusion. Schopenhauer was, perhaps, the first to clearly understand the role of subjectivity in which *the philosopher is the form [or system] of philosophy*. Nietzsche turns out to speak to God face to face; not only denying his existence but cursing it, an initiatory atheism that unveils the abyss of divine freedom.

Despite being a metaphysical treatise, *The Star* is emancipated from idealistic tradition, and thus from modernity. It is post-modern much in consonance with the Expressionist Art of the 1920's. The majestic awakening of

human I by the divine Thou is followed by mankind's call to redeem the world. Each of the primordial entities is built through relationships with the others. God becomes God by expressing his nature and freedom in the world of creation, and by receiving human recognition. The world becomes what it is by receiving its origin from divine creation and reaching its particularities through human redemption. Human being becomes what it is, awakening to freedom through revelation, and extending his freedom to the world.

3. Difference and Recognition

We may now explore the value of the dialogical approach on the issue of identity and how such postmodern categories as singularity, alterity, relation, narrative and temporality introduce the issue of recognition.

A large part of our daily life takes place on an intersubjective level as we talk and work together. But recognition is not the same as intersubjectivity. Let us consider a smile. Its meaning is conveyed through a combination of movements of lips, eyes, and facial muscles. We don't smile at everyone; if we did, we would be misinterpreted. Also, we do not learn to smile; it results from a reflex structure. Smiling is an intersubjective act, presenting a wide range of feelings: it can express gratitude, acceptance, friendship, love, joy, charm, satisfaction, fun; it can be sarcastic, enigmatic, tired, resigned. I walk into a room and see someone: if he smiles, so maybe do I; if he or she frowns, I get apprehensive. A smile can be authentic or simulated. A murderer can smile at the person he is going to kill; a liar may laugh at a naive person. A smile does not refer to objects neither guarantees a relationship.

Recognition is not about smiling or frowning but about the being that is behind intersubjectivity. It occurs between subjects, yes, but subjects who mutually constitute themselves. As we are surprised by others - be it nature, man or God - we enter into a process of acknowledgment. Arts, ethics, and religion disclose the scores that lie behind the evanescent sounds we were listening to. Knowledge is about objects. Recognition is between beings. Following Franz Rosenzweig's suggestions, Martin Buber wrote about the duality we experience in the I-it relationship and the I-thou relationship (Buber, 1971; 2001). Common sense, science and technology are between a subject and an object with a torrent of data in between. Recognition involves the whole person and brings out the reciprocity between consciousness and being. Each one of us wants to know as a subject and to be recognized as a being.

Recognition aims at the mutual appropriation of self and other (Chystyakova, 2017). It is not me or my desires and feelings that determine what I recognize. Rather, I am constituted by what I recognize in other beings. It is an appropriation that begins with a passionate identification with another being; it turns into a responsibility about what to do; a testimony about whom or what there is; intelligence about what is meant; and attention to what we experience (Lonergan, 1999).

While the path of knowledge begins with a trial-and-error research, the path of recognition is open to the other. *You must expect the unexpected*, wrote Heraclitus. Recognition is the realm of difference, where the universal meets the particular: it happens in a specific time and space, through a body and a face, encounter and community, word, and work. We respond to the presence of others by welcoming their dignity, not by exchanging information and desires.

Recognition happens in a specific moment; in a meeting that may be casual and unplanned or, on the contrary, a celebration. Occurring in a concrete emplacement, it creates a territory that, by becoming ours, is more than a space. Our meeting-point is not another one's meeting-point. Our home is not just another house; it is where we display our identities, where we wish to return; it is what a migrant, an exile, or a refugee do not have. When we receive friends, the house becomes crowded. When someone leaves or dies, the house is emptier. Home is a place of origin and destination, longed for after an exuberant day or after a long vacation. *It is good to come home!* Thus concludes Ernst Bloch's *The Principle Hope*.

Recognition involves the body. Our movements, gestures and postures speak for us. What touches and moves us, what make us hold our breath or sigh, requires our action. Tenderness moves our hearts. Caresses take the self to the other and bring a unity of purpose. On the other side, there are words, gestures and acts of violence, contempt, and anger, with which we harass the other or are hassled to the point of becoming mutually unbearable.

We are tested by the faces of others, suggesting answers and conveys attitudes. I decode words, silences, smiles, surprises, and changes in someone else's face. Anxiety, boredom and restlessness slip into our lives, as routine tires us as much as work. Whom I recognize as a Thou transforms me, as Saint Augustine says in *The Master*, as he is in search for a greater truth. Emmanuel Lévinas wrote amazing pages about the importance of the face as the crucible of recognition. Lévinas will state eloquently in this work, his opus magnum, that the Star of Rosenzweig is much too present alongside his book to be cited (Lévinas, 1961, p. 14).

Recognition requires encounter. It is not a contract, but a covenant, a promise. In a contract I give to receive. This is the world of commerce, exchange, ceremonial, diplomacy, and etiquette, which means minor ethics. As with varnish and polish, it is easy to create and easy to break. Berthold Brecht wrote that *hypocrisy is the homage that the cynic pays to virtue*. Recognition confronts me truly with the other. Instead of a conventional thank you, I really feel indebted and thankful if I am truly identified and recognized. Such responses can transform a life. Interpreting Emmanuel Lévinas says Nazaré Barros that "The other gives himself as different and as something that challenges, challenges and summons us. The relationship with the other does not take place as knowledge, but as authority, as difference and mystery" (Nazaré, 2017).

In *The Promise of Politics*, I sustained there is radical difference between a contract and a promise (Henriques, 2018b). A contract is a social transaction,

whereas a promise is a relationship. A contract establishes mutual interests, whereas a promise engages a mutual transformation. In a political promise, the community engages in a mutual respect and shares a bond of trust; their members promise to do together what neither could achieve alone; the union makes the force. It is more than a union of interests, as it involves sharing their lives, and pledging mutual faithfulness. Thou and Me come together to form a We. Unlike contracts, which are entered into for the sake of advantage, the dialogical principle promotes promises, that is, commitments sustained by loyalty and fidelity.

Recognition creates a language of its own. *Language is the home of being*, exclaimed Heidegger. *My homeland is the Portuguese language*, said Fernando Pessoa. Through language, we exist. We use language but it is language that keeps us in being. Language finds ways to express what, otherwise, we would not be able to say. It can create words as powerful as life-changing actions. In our entertainment culture, we pay to be distracted. The poetic word has the altogether different task of directing our attention and take noise away. The poet, who has the gift of speech is the one who knows what matters and who matters. He offers us verses that become the dwelling place of the conversation between consciousness and being.

4. When things go sour

The refusal of recognition is a cause of alienation. Turning our backs on people is the beginning of demotion, of social death. We disfigure the other when we do not accept his presence. Failures of recognition create conflicts. The silencing of the other is the first step towards eliminating him from public existence. *Watch and punish*, as Michel Foucault wrote. Conflict sets in and exclusion leads to deliberate violence. This is the struggle to the death between masters and slaves, the rapist and the raped, murderers and victims, both at individual and collective levels.

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel created a narrative about the dialectics of master and slave, an amazing piece of negative dialogic (Honneth, 1996). It is a story about how consciousness struggles for recognition. The slave possesses nothing but his own work. The master possesses everything except the slave's acknowledgment. The day will come when they face each other, eye to eye. As the master does not see the slave as submissive, the slave rebels. Through obstacles and adventures, the slave will reverse positions. By mastering his destiny, he breaks the chains and frees himself for a dignified existence, and the way in which he frees himself will decide his future.

Hegel's *dialectics of master and slave* influenced Karl Marx's doctrine of class struggle and Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas about the abyss between the morals of masters and slaves. Simone de Beauvoir examined conflicting gender relations in *The Second Sex*. Frantz Fanon scrutinised colonial relations in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In *Brave New World*, 1931, Aldous Huxley created the character of the

director, who practices genetic engineering, sexual selection, and biological experimentation with no ethical limits.

The late Jonathan Sacks – who won the 2016 Templeton Prize - called attention to how some scientists seem to take perverse pleasure in declaring that our life is meaningless. Stephen Hawking specified that “mankind is just a chemical scum on a moderate-size planet, orbiting round a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a billion galaxies. John Gray declared that human life has no more meaning than that of slime mould” (Sacks, 2001, p. 35). In his 2016 book *Homo Deus*, Yuval Harari concludes that, “looking back, humanity will turn out to be just a ripple within the cosmic data flow. You may not agree, he writes, with the idea that organisms are algorithms, and that giraffes, tomatoes, and human beings are just different methods for processing data. But you should know that this is current scientific dogma, and that it is changing our world beyond recognition” (Harari, 2016, p. 395).

There is nothing in science – be it cosmology, neuroscience and molecular biology – to suggest that the cosmos has no of meaning, nor could there be, since the search for meaning is not a scientific task. Human being is disfigured, not acknowledged, when reduced to physical, chemical, biological, psychological, or societal elements, supposedly more real than the whole person herself. Without recognition, human being is disintegrated into fragments; these are left to move helplessly in an anabatic or down top fragmentation, that robs each person of his or her identity; or the fragments are forcefully integrated by major entities that disfigure him in a down top or katabatic fragmentation, such as in totalitarian regimes.

A penetrating diagnosis of manipulation of personality – which is a kind of anabatic fragmentation of identity – is made by La Rochefoucauld, a seventeenth-century French moralist and a creator of maxims and epigrams of profound pessimism. In his *Reflections or Moral Sentences and Maxims*, 1664, he attributes to self-love a preponderant role in motivating human actions. Many of the so-called virtues are driven by selfishness. False sociability is a self-destructive manipulation of others: *We are so used to disguise ourselves that we end up disguising ourselves as ourselves*. There are many distortions of consciousness at the intellectual level. According to Francis Bacon, our conscience is trapped by all kinds of idols: of the self, of the public, of fashion, of species. Lonergan called *scotosis* the deliberate obfuscation of who we are. Nietzsche speaks of a fundamental will that excludes everything that contradicts it. Voegelin claims that our self builds *second realities* to satisfy himself. A lot of internet games for kids and adults such as *Second Life*, explore these delusional constructions.

The distortion of freedom and personal identity may also come through sadism and masochism, analysed by Jean Paul Sartre (1972, p. 378). A sadist wants to appropriate the freedom of whom he abuses; the more he persists in violating the other, the more the freedom of the other escapes him. The sadist discovers his blunder as the victim keeps looking at him, that is, as he experiences the absolute alienation of his self in the freedom of the other. The fierce look of the victim

who does not let the torturers take him down comes again and again in the classical literature of Dante, Victor Hugo, Hemingway, William Faulkner. As the sadist gives up when his will to power fails, the masochist wants to see his self destroyed by others; this abdication is his gloomy expression of freedom. He intends to let himself be dominated. The more he feels dominated, the more he enjoys his abdication. Like sadism, this is an admission of guilt. He is guilty by becoming an object, and he is guilty because he consents to alienation.

Recognition is never guaranteed. The character Gollum in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* desires so forcefully the ring – *my precious, my precious* – that he transforms a good thing into an evil one, a possible liberation into an instrument of slavery. His impulse to be recognized becomes destructive and leads to selfishness. The exaggerated affirmation of himself destroys the relationship with the other.

Another ambivalence of our modern liquid age is that interpersonal relationships - love, commitments, rights and duties mutually recognized - are both objects of attraction and of apprehension; of desire and fear; of duplicity and hesitation, examination of conscience and anxiety. As Bauman suggests in *Liquid Love*, following Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, the liquid *modern man without ties*, is frequently ambivalent as regards *living without chains*, and having relationships *without commitments*. We covet and we fear relationships at the same time. We do not know what to do to with the relationships we want and, worse still, we are not sure what kind of relationships we want ...

As regards top down or catabatic fragmentation we may start by noticing that in the 20th century, totalitarian policies violated classes and peoples. Societies were violated to serve values of race, nation, and class. Nazis and Soviets caused the death of dozens of millions of people. The politics of identity, or fundamentalism from above, absolutizes race, class, state, nation, religion. The Russian Eugene Zamyatin wrote *Us* in 1920, a dystopian novel. At the beginning of the narrative, the hero called D503, the builder of a project called *the Integral*, totally identifies himself with the state. Getting in touch with the *barbarians* and through his love with I-330 – a *number woman* – D503 begins to develop as a human being. George Orwell brought this issue in the better known *1984*. Big Brother dominates the members of the Ingsoc Party, and each human being is a slave. His perfect society is maintained through lie, illusion, and strength. The hero Winston Smith wants to protect himself from the illusory world created by the totalitarian state. The negative outcome of *1984* means that Winston and his beloved Julia will return to the world where lie is truth, war is peace and recognition is impossible.

Modern nation-building played a primordial role in integrating individuals as the state legitimized their subordination. State and nation were two sides of the same coin ... The State sought the obedience of its citizens by setting himself as the culmination of the destiny of the nation. On the other hand, a nation without a state would feel insecure of its past, indecisive in its uncertain present, and condemned to a precarious existence as regards the future. It was a task of

the state to define and select the set of local traditions and laws thus becoming a necessary condition for the nation to exist. We could adopt the formula of the Augsburg Confession, *cuius regio, eius natio*.

National identity was from the beginning an agonistic notion and a battle cry. A national community which coincides with a set of citizens, was destined to remain unfinished and precarious. It was a project that requires continuous vigilance, and the application of force to ensure obedience. Ernest Renan spoke about nation-state *as a daily plebiscite*, and yet he lived in France, a state known for its exceptional centralism.

Social class once claimed the rank of meta-identity as it was based on equality: such rank of supra-identity was supposed to give meaning to all other identities and reduce them to a secondary role. As social class no longer offers a secure hub for identity in post-modern societies, it was dissolved into numerous claims of groups or categories, in search of a social anchor of their own. The most effective contemporary collective identities are gender, race, creed, generation. Each of them wages a struggle to emulate the integrating power of social class; each of them is suspicious or outright hostile towards the demands of similar exclusivity from the others.

The effect of these conflictual claims is fragmentation and social dissent expressed in a multitude of intergroup confrontations and proliferation of battlefields, of recognition wars. We are almost back to Thomas Hobbes' nightmare of the *struggle of all against all*. The most recent war of recognition emerged in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemics; the great majority acknowledges that vaccines save lives; a vociferous minority of negationists invokes the principles of individual freedom against health safety provided by the state.

Politics, which has seen a rise in populism, is always about division and confrontation. It is about dividing a nation into "us" and "them." It is about dividing nations through fear and allocation of blame. It is about anger and a sense of betrayal. It is oppositional. It proposes handing power to a strong leader who assures his or her followers that, in return for their loyalty, he or she will fight their battles for them. Can we do something about the politics of "us" against "them"?

Can we have politics of *all of us together*? Can we recover the promise of politics, as upheld by Hanna Arendt, a work for the common good? Promise is about what we have in common despite our differences. It speaks about collective responsibility. Being part of a community requires offering and accepting. A community demands that altruism is recognized. Not only each person, but each society is irreplaceable and precious. Without recognition, the subject disintegrates into fragments, which are left to move helplessly within. Can you re-glue these pieces together? If I get lost in impasses and if I distort my feelings, my ideas and my freedom, can I be a person again? Is there redemption? Just as alienation is the loss of self through loss of the other, does reconciliation allow us

to regain relationship with others? How can we ask someone to help us, to understand us, to guide us, to make us ascend the ladder of life?

5. Coming back home

All my methods are rational, says Captain Ahab in the novel *Moby Dick* about his pursuit of the white whale that represents evil. *Only my goals are crazy!* Unlike Captain Ahab, if we were as rational about goals as about means, would mankind's problems be solved? This is the challenge to which Aristotle invites us in *Nicomachean Ethics*. If there were rules for good and evil applicable to all places and times, would conflicts end, and universal recognition be achieved? We face again the problem of universalism, now at the ethical level. It is a waste of time to decide whether moral norms are absolute or relative. They are relative insofar as they emanate from consciousness. On the other hand, given our nature and the laws of the physical world, we must respect values.

We cannot prove that life is better than death, and that God exists. But neither can we prove that love is better than hate, altruism than selfishness, forgiveness than the desire for revenge, as Jonathan Sacks puts it (Sacks, 2001, p. 37). We cannot prove that hope is truer to experience than the tragic sense of life. We can only find a way to them through the dialogical principle, *I am constituted by Thou*. Almost none of the truths by which we live are demonstrable, and the yearning to prove them is based on an equivocal between explanation and interpretation. Explanations can be proved, interpretations cannot. Science is about explanation. Meaning is always a matter of interpretation. It fits to the same territory as ethics, aesthetics, and noetics. In none of these disciplines can anything of importance be demonstrated, but that does not make them irrelevant; they embody the greatest sources of human wisdom.

Let me elaborate this issue. A sophisticated anthropologist as Melville J. Herskovits in *The Science of Cultural Anthropology*, argues that values are derived from the culture to which we belong; ethics is the dominant moral; aesthetics is the current standard of taste; politics is only power management. However, for a society to progress, it needs criteria of excellence. Extreme relativism, the belief that all values are equivalent, may have supporters like the infamous Marquis de Sade; yet, mankind learned the hard way that slavery, paedophilia, trafficking human organs or the rape of women are wrong. The conviction that women would by nature be inferior to man was attacked by Plato in *The Republic* some 2400 years ago. Yet, only in the mid-nineteenth century and after John Stuart Mill's essay *The Subjugation of Women*, did liberal nations began to accept that a society that deals with women as equals is superior to a society where women remain inferior. Recognition worked and gave a better understanding of what mankind is and how it can redeem wrongs.

Let me give another example of recognition: mankind's struggle against slavery. The acknowledgment that there are no slaves by nature was a slow-motion conquest of Christianity that took centuries to be established. The apostle Paul became the most vigorous promoter of the vision love of in Jesus as he said:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; because you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28). Such vision of universal equality had precedents in the Stoic notion of natural law, and yet it took almost two thousand years to become a reality. Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine viewed slavery as a lamentable but inevitable result of sin. Basil of Caesarea considered it beneficial to the slave as a remedy for his own sins, a tragic echo of the Aristotelian idea that there are servile people. Or, as Ambrose thought, only the body is enslaved, not the soul.

It was the task of a Cappadocian Father to denounce slavery as intrinsically evil, namely Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 - c. 395) the younger brother of Basil of Caesarea and a cognate of Gregory of Nazianzus. He was influenced by Origen, Justin the Martyr, and Clement of Alexandria in emphasizing that not only Christianity was compatible with philosophy, but its ultimate expression. A member of a family in which five of nine children were considered saints, Gregory of Nyssa made a difference in the writings on Trinity and his radical condemnation of slavery (Holland, 2019, pp. 106-107). His grandmother Macrina the Elder, was also considered a saint and the maternal grandfather was executed in the persecution of emperor Maximinus II. His sister Macrina was dedicated to caring for the sick and poor. In a world where infanticide was rife, she rummaged through the buckets for new-borns she brought home to raise. When she died, Gregory of Nyssa praised her likened her to Christ, and was not his brother, the celebrated bishop of Caesarea.

Too many centuries would pass before Christians adopted the charitable practices proposed by Gregory of Nyssa and Macrina and, later, by Martin of Tours and Pauline of Nola; to help the vulnerable because they recognize Christ in them. Patronage (*patrocinium*) has always existed, as the Latin term recalls. But the gifts of the rich and powerful to the poor were held as a reflexion of glory. Recognizing others as equals, reflecting the divine, was a bizarre and even repulsive idea in Antiquity. The fact that is normal and attractive today shows the power of the dialogical principle.

The claims of the dialogic principle are simple and profound. We must respect the other, a challenge as strong as seeking the truth. We must deal with each person as irreplaceable and indispensable beings. Now, to respect the other means we must give something of ourselves. If I want to give, I must lose something. If I want to receive, I must empty myself. If I want to unite, I must stop being the centre of the world. Only acts of recognition lead us into a genuine relationship.

The psychiatrist R.D. Laing relates how a nurse, when delivering a cup of tea to a chronically psychotic patient, heard the following thanks: *It was the first time in my life that someone gave me a cup of tea...* Many cups of tea had passed through her hands, but none had ever been offered to her in that gentle way. Giving, offering, is the simplest and most difficult thing in the world: you only offer something when you offer a part of yourself, not just in appearance, but in truth.

Accepting is not easy, either. Nan-in, a Japanese Zen master, once received a teacher who wanted to learn Zen. As he served tea, Nan-in filled his illustrious visitor's cup until it spilled. The teacher watched the tea spilling over and couldn't contain himself: *It's already full*. Nan-in replied: "Like this cup, you too are full of opinions and speculations! How can I teach you Zen without first emptying your cup?" (Purcell, 1996).

6. God as an intimate other

Can we carry the dialogical ascent to the point of recognition of God without falling into a universalist fallacy? Can we understand that mankind has no upper part to be freed by human or divine transcendence but that each person is a whole in body and spirit? That is the goal of dialogical authors. For Franz Rosenzweig, identity is not constituted through the self, but through the other: heteronomy is better than autonomy. He emphasizes this priority by quoting the question *Where are Thou?* addressed in *Genesis*. From his hiding place, *Adam-man* answers: *Am I responsible?* Rosenzweig's reading underlines that a human being becomes a self when awakened through a dialogue with the divine Thou; the moral subject arises not through protests of innocence but admitting his responsibility. Subjectivity is responsibility. We discover ourselves by being seen by others; we recognize ourselves in the presence of the other and, thus, we need more than the universal to be ourselves; we need the uniqueness of the other.

The dialogical principle admits the universal with a difference. *Redemption begins when the I says Thou to a him*. The work of human singularity prepares the community and anticipates the kingdom of God. Eternity is not an absolute that absorbs the individual, but the penetration of world through love, and the constitution of the *I-thou relationship* as a "we". *The fact that each moment can be the last makes it eternal*. Death is possible in every moment, but love is as strong as death. Instead of an imagined and delusional eternity as extension of time, we are in touch with the eternity that is future. Love manifests itself as a commandment, an imperative par excellence, making the human being responsible for redemption. The revelation of love awaits a redeeming human response: to dedicate oneself to one's neighbour. To love others is to redeem the world and prepare the Kingdom. Redemption is the work of a singular and mortal being, who participates in eternity.

Søren Kierkegaard brilliantly grasped that Platonism, Hegelianism, and Christendom (institutional Christianity as distinct from evangelical Christianity) are united in the promotion of universalism and transcendentalism. Schopenhauer called Christendom *Platonism for the people* for this reason. Plato defends that man is both mortal and immortal as he desires to detach himself from the finite. Christendom oscillates between conquering the world and abandoning it to be united with God. Hegel envisions God as the absolute Spirit and integrates (*aufhebt*) man into it. In each case, the universal absorbs the unique.

Kierkegaard's passionate struggle against transcendentalism is based on his vision of man as a synthesis of finite and infinite. Despair, paradox, anguish, and anxiety are marks of that division. As we experience suffering and anxiety we engage in the task of being human; authenticity is not brought by transcending the local and particular, the unique and the individual, but by relating to a divided being, by loving the other.

Kierkegaard/Climacus writes in *Philosophical Crumbs* that sin is a most radical inwardness, when existence as interiorization is cut off from eternal and transcendent truth; for the sinner there is no other, no caring about what happens anywhere else in the world. On the other hand, there is no such thing as "original sin", an absurd theological construct; sin cannot be innate because intimacy is not a fact, but an action to be carried out in existence. Kierkegaard/Climacus remains faithful to his project of thought: everything refers to existence.

Theologians may debate in what way Kierkegaard is a voice for the awakening of authentic Christianity. Philosophy does not have to arbitrate this issue as Kierkegaard is undoubtedly a Christian. For us, the issue is to evaluate the Christian meaning of existence that defines man as the image of God. Man may be corrupted, but he is not destroyed by sin, as he is able to regain God. An exclusively infinite God cannot assume man's redemption; but a *homodeus*, that is, a God both infinite and finite as manifest in Jesus Christ can do it. According to the Danish author, the *homodeus* is not like a Greek god who accidentally assumes a human form. He enters existence through suffering. The only difference between Him and man is that He is not a sinner. He remains eternal God and, therefore, is not disconnected from the eternal, which is the definition of a sinner.

7. Conclusions

Most of our principles involve long chains of reasons, where each step is a means to the next aim, until the goal is reached. The Californian multimillionaires Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk desperately want to send mankind to space, starting with Mars; for that goal they must improve the technology of space travel. Then, we will learn more about life on Mars. This will improve what we know about life on earth. The more we know, the more health problems we will solve. If that happens, we will help humanity to survive, either in Mars or on Earth. We finally come to a question: why should humanity survive?

As it began to dawn on each of us that philosophy has no wisdom to answer this, we become aware of the limitations of universality and its dual corollaries of totalitarianism and fragmentation. Universality requires propositions that are true in all places, at all times but meaning must be expressed in particularities. There is no universal meaning. Thus we recognize that what is unique in humankind - our imagination, our ability to conceptualize worlds, our capacity to communicate with others, to bridge distances and

orchestrate our differences, what makes mankind different - is born through the dialogic principle *I am constituted through Thou*.

We do not have an answer to the question *why should humanity survive?* The cosmos does not care if humanity survives. Only a God cares for His creation and Martin Heidegger wrote *that only a God can save us*. Inside the Christian tradition, we could write *only an homodeus, Christ, can redeem us*. The importance of intercultural and interreligious dialogue is that, beyond Christianity, this solution is philosophically valid. An authentic religion overcomes abstract transcendentalism as it makes the eternal present here and now through recognition. In a world threatened by civilizational clashes this is decisive. It suggests that, at the heart of each religion, unity is worshipped in diversity. “To keep my identity does not mean to live in rigidity regarding relationships with other people, other Churches and other nations. A dialogue, firstly, puts people on an equal footing” (Dura, 2020). The glory of the created world is its amazing multiplicity: the thousands of languages spoken by humanity, the proliferation of cultures, the variety of imaginative expressions of the human spirit; if we listen carefully, we will hear the voice of wisdom. That is how Identity comes with a difference².

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