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# Practical Rationality in Political Contexts
## Facing Diversity in Contemporary Multicultural Europe

edited by

**Gabriele De Anna and Riccardo Martinelli**

# Table of contents

# Europe, Philosophy and Cultural Diversity: An Introduction

GABRIELE DE ANNA AND RICCARDO MARTINELLI

We live in communities where people from very different geographical, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds must coexist. This constitutes a challenge for our institutions, for individual members of our communities, for intermediate bodies, such as families, schools, businesses, professional associations, and so on. People from different backgrounds have differences in expectations and sensitivities. These differences tend to be greater than those existing among people from the same background. These differences can make individual and collective choices difficult, they can make understanding of others' intentions problematic, and they can jeopardize our ability to foresee the actions and the reactions of others. This condition puts our practical reasons under considerable stress and we need to face this question: how can we best deploy our cognitive and volitional capacities, in order to overcome the challenges that we need to face?

A dominant way of answering this question contends that, in our practical deliberations, we should bracket all aspects of reality and all considerations that are individual and pertain only to the deliberating subject. By 'bracket' we do not mean "completely ignore", we just mean that we are called to give priority to what is universal and can be accepted and recognised by everyone. This conviction depends on a conception of practical rationality which postulates that

the good is wholly subjective, i.e. relative to either individuals or societies (Rawls 1971/1998; Habermas 1981). This leading framework of practical rationality hopes to show that, by assuming a subjectivist view of rationality, clashes between the diverse positions upheld in complex contemporary societies may be prevented. Discussions about policy-making and public decisions in multicultural societies normally start from the assumption of this notion of rationality (Kymlicka 1996, 2007). This perspective, however, proves to be deficient from the point of view of fostering convergence of identities into unified and harmonious communities. It leads namely to fragmented communities, instead of providing the conditions where people may gradually converge on a shared view of what is worth achieving as a community. One might suppose that the defect of this conception depends on the assumption of an anti-realist view of reason, including practical reason, which is now widely criticised. The view also overlooks the fact that empirical sciences (evolutionary psychology, ethology, etc.) suggest that some moral capacities are deeply rooted in our biological nature (Boniolo and De Anna 2006; De Waal 1998; Illies 2006; Hösle and Illies 2005).

The limitations of the mentioned, dominant conception of practical reason, and the relevance of current debates on realism and on the biological roots of ethics for overcoming those limitations were discussed as part of a project entitled "Moral realism and political decisions: a new framework of practical rationality for contemporary multicultural Europe". The project was funded by the *Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst* (DAAD) in the scheme "Hochschuldialog mit Südeuropa 2013" and was carried out in 2013-2014 by a group of scholars from the Universities of Bamberg (Germany), Trieste (Italy) and Udine (Italy). The results of the research work were published in a volume of collected essays entitled *Moral Realism and Political Decisions. Practical Rationality in Contemporary Public Contexts* (De Anna and Martinelli 2015).

The essays in *Moral Realism and Political Decisions* aimed at outlining a framework of practical rationality for public discussions and political decisions, capable of bringing together the diverse perspectives coexisting in current multicultural societies, especially in Europe, and at helping to develop shared solutions, values, and institutions. The main idea was grounded on achievements attained in two current debates in philosophy: the debate on "new realism" and the debate on the ethical relevance of recent achievements in biological sciences.

Debates on "new realism" ensue from the work of contemporary philosophers such as Hilary Putnam (1999), John McDowell (1998, 2004), Thomas Nagel (1986), etc. Unlike the old, naïve versions of realism, "new realism" rejects the possibility of an absolute perspective on reality, while maintaining that our cognitive efforts are at least partly constrained by objective reality. The moral upshot is that the good is not merely a subjective or social construction, but

it is the result of typically human responses to the demands of a reality that is structured in a certain way, and, due to its structure, has built-in possibilities of perfection. There is no absolute conception of the good, but features of reality can still be criteria for practical rationality and for the aptness of human subjective responses in difficult decision-making situations (Putnam 2002, 2004; Nagel 1979; McDowell 1998). In Italy, these debates have recently taken an original direction, which is now contributing to the wider international scientific community (De Caro and Ferraris 2012; Ferraris 2012; Possenti and Lavazza 2013).

Discussions about the ethical relevance of recent findings in biological sciences suggest that there are many homologies between human and animal behaviour, to the extent that it can hardly be denied that morality is deeply grounded in our animal nature, contra many subjectivist claims. On the other hand, transcendental considerations suggest that human reasoning can justify the normativity of ethically guided action in humans. Again, this suggests a notion of ethics which is objectivistic and anti-absolutistic at the same time (Illies 2003, 2006; Nagel 1986, 2012).

The political upshots of these converging revolutions in epistemology and in ethics are still the object of discussion. Most importantly, the recognition that human practical rationality is ruled by what agents conceive as good has important implications on the notions of political authority and consent. On the one hand, against subjectivist views of the good, the new framework purports that arguments about what is good can have a justificatory and legitimating role in the practices of political decision-making and in the formation of consent. On the other hand, against old-style realist views, the new framework denies that there is an absolute conception of the good, and is thereby sensitive to the subjective positions of those who have to consent to political authority: this sets limits to political authority. Breaking those limits would constitute a violation of the humanity of those subject to authority, would progressively undermine their consent, and hence destroy the both the very strength of authority in question, as well as the community itself (De Anna 2012a, 2012b; Besussi 2012, 2013). This outlook also implies a critical reassessment of many post-Enlightenment assumptions that characterise European identity, and of the diverse modalities with which the encounter between different cultures was dealt with in the long history of Europe. The Enlightenment helped to overcome theological arguments for the objective nature of the good and to recognize the legitimacy of different cultures within a wider anthropological, rather than metaphysical perspective. Yet, this ended by fostering idealistic (i.e. strongly anti-realistic) world-views (Martinelli 2004, 2010). Nevertheless, it can be argued that cultural pluralism does not necessarily imply idealism and that realism does not necessarily deny the legitimacy of cultural diversity.

The essays in *Moral Realism and Political Decisions* contributed to this debate, by focusing on the consequences of the realist outlook of practical rationality in the arrangements and methods of public and political discussions in contemporary multicultural societies. The ensuing framework of practical rationality can be summarised as follows. Firstly, practical rationality does not necessarily involve general moral statements, or metaphysical statements about the underpinnings of morality, but it does necessarily involve reasons for action which an agent can recognise as compelling in a practical situation. Secondly, metaphysical considerations might be relevant in a practical context when one tries to justify an action or to make a choice, even if they are not a necessary prerequisite of practical rationality. Thirdly, knowledge about states of affairs subsistent in reality might be practically relevant, since such states of affairs can become propositional contents of reasons for action. Fourthly, practical rationality is limited by the epistemic standpoint of the agent, but also by his/her defects in reasoning and in habits. Fifthly, practical rationality is shaped also by pragmatic conditions: moral language and institutions built by the linguistic community contribute to our practical agency. Sixthly, the upshot of the above considerations concerning practical rationality is that practical argumentation in multicultural settings is a fallible but reliable possibility when parties try to explain each other the states of affairs that constitute their reasons for action. Argumentation is possible and reliable, since reasons for action have an objective content (point 3) and practical rationality is not about underlying world-views (point 1), but it is fallible since practical rationality is limited by the shortcomings of individual agents (point 4) or groups (point 5). When different groups within the same society attempt to share their purposes, it is also possible that a theoretical agreement is found by rational means (point 2).

This summary attempts to draw a common denominator among the different voices which found expression in *Moral Realism and Political Decisions*. Although the voices maintained their individuality, discussions and attempts to reach shared solutions led to a convergence, which the proposed summary attempts to capture.

*Moral Realism and Political Decisions* is not an isolated case: the practical consequences and the public significance of a moderately realist conception of the good have recently become a common topic of discussion. The American philosopher Melissa Lane, for example, has recently argued that we cannot face global challenges, such as the environmental crisis, unless we recognize that there are goods which humans can recognize and share (Lane 2011). The French philosopher Jean-Marc Ferry has also contended that contemporary multicultural Europe faces challenges which require a re-evaluation of the leading paradigms and of their subjectivist assumptions about freedom, action and normativity (Ferry 2011, 2012a, 2012b).

The framework proposed by *Moral Realism and Political Decisions*, hence offers timely and original contributions to a growing current debate.

Encouraged by these considerations, the editors of that volume decided to continue the investigation in a new project aimed at considering how the framework of practical rationality outlined in *Moral Realism and Political Decisions* could be applied in current practical quarrels among diverse traditions facing each other in European communities. Hence, they (together with Professor Salvatore Lavecchia, of the University of Udine) applied for and obtained a new grant from DAAD in the scheme "Hochschuldialog mit Südeuropa 2014-2015". The project was entitled "Practical rationality in political contexts: facing diversity in contemporary multicultural Europe", and included the researchers involved in the previous project, with the addition of some new entries. The research work culminated in a workshop which took place at the University of Trieste, 18-21st December 2014. The essays here collected contain the result of that work. This is not a collection of conference contributions, but a collection of original essays which were written after the workshop, as a consequence of the discussions held at that occasion.

The essays focus on various sorts of cultural diversities concerning Europe: diversities within Europe (among different European traditions, among European heritage and the heritages of new inhabitants of Europe) and diversities concerning the relation between Europe and other regions of the world. How can the conclusions about practical rationality in the public sphere arrived at in *Moral Realism and Political Decisions* change our traditional ways of approaching those diversities? This question was addressed by paying attention to the anthropological and pragmatic presuppositions of attempts to seek practical agreement across different cultures, by reflecting on the pragmatic role of institutions in fostering the deliberative processes required for addressing issues related to cultural diversity, and by considering cases of clashes among diversities, both within Europe and in the relations among different world regions.

In "Some Critical Questions about Critical Questions", Thomas Becker discusses one of the main problems of argumentation theory: the evaluation of arguments in practical contexts. Unlike theoretical contexts, in which the mere appeal to hidden premises can be sufficient to highlight the validity or invalidity of arguments, practical contexts require that the efficacy of an argument also be measured in terms of the appeal that the premises, both explicit and implicit, may have on the addressee(s). In his paper, Becker argues that the Critical Questions analysis of argumentation by Walton, Reed and Macagno is a valuable tool with which to access an argumentation in a practical context. He also contends that the practical relevance that the critical questions might have calls for differentiation among different kinds of critical questions and different roles that they can

play in the evaluation of the practical efficacy of an argumentation. The present article is a draft that Professor Becker had already completed by the end of August 2014, in view of the workshop, which was meant to take place in Trieste in September 2014, and which was subsequently rescheduled in December of that year. His sudden and tragic decease did not allow him to complete his work and to present and discuss it at the workshop. The draft had nonetheless already a complete and conclusive structure. Furthermore, it takes on and develops some of the topics that Professor Becker had already discussed with the other members of the research group in the workshop of the previous year. These reasons fully justified the inclusion of the draft in this collection. The draft has been edited by Sebastian Krebs, who was Professor Becker's assistant at Bamberg University.

Sebastian Krebs, in "Does Truth Really Matter? On the Irrelevance of Truth", acknowledges a huge gap between traditional inconclusive theorizing about truth and the need for solutions to fundamental practical challenges, which seems to require a commitment to truth. Krebs tries to overcome the gap by appealing to Thomas Becker's position on truth, a position that Krebs calls *relevantism*. The point is that philosophical truth is not the concept that we appeal to in addressing our practical concerns: we *de facto* prefer a relevant sentence to a true sentence. Krebs addresses the objection that relevantism entails relativism and offers some examples aimed at showing how Becker's relevantist program can be employed to address practical issues in multicultural contexts.

In his essay "On the Philosophical Significance of National Characters. Reflections from Hume and Kant", Riccardo Martinelli addresses the problem of how to cope with national differences *philosophically*. The topic is undoubtedly thorny, there being a number of reasons to distrust the notion of national character altogether. Talk about national characters, in fact, may appear to roam below the threshold of any respectable philosophical argumentation. What is worse, folk beliefs concerning national characters have been occasionally steered to foster hostility or prejudice against foreign nations. Nevertheless, Martinelli argues, the philosophical significance of national characters can be defended, in the wake of Hume and Kant. Interestingly, both great thinkers did not shy away from explaining what makes up a national character. Typically, they dealt with this topic within the context of a broader analysis of the concept of "character", which is a widely debated philosophical issue. Taking the existence of some general differences among collective entities (such as nations) for granted, and yet sticking to the moral principle of individual responsibility, Hume and Kant developed different philosophical explanations for national characters, illustrated and discussed by Martinelli.

The essay "Individual actions and shared actions: an interactional framework" by Marianna Ginocchietti deals with implications of multiculturalism for shared

actions. The essay discusses the notion of individual action and claims that an interactional framework is needed in order to understand both individual and shared actions. Ginocchietti contends that we need a notion of individual action which must be consistent with the agent's concrete exercise of her agency and with the ways which agents attribute agency to others. Such a notion must be non-reductive and can lead to an understating of shared action in terms of "joint commitment".

In the essay **"Rationality in linguistic interpretation: from charity to cooperativeness"**, Paolo Labinaz deals with two principles that have significant consequences on discussions about multiculturalism and the possibility of a universal reason: the principle of charity and the principle of cooperation. The Author criticizes the role that the many versions of the principle of charity accord to rationality and proposes an alternative view based on Paul Grice's cooperative principle and his argumentative conception of rationality. According to the principle of charity, assuming that people are rational is a necessary condition of the possibility of interpreting their linguistic behaviour successfully: we could not understand other people's utterances without assuming a certain degree of rationality on their part. By contrast, Labinaz rejects the principle of charity, since it cannot specify how much rationality speakers have to be granted. Following Grice, Labinaz claims that the rationality of speakers does not need to be conceived in terms of conformity to certain norms, but emerges from the linguistic practices as a concern for the justification of the speaker's own utterances.

Multiculturalism raises the problem of the extent to which cultures can differ if they have to coexist. Recently, some theorists (including Regina Schwartz and Jan Assmann) have contended that religious differences represent a serious danger for the coexistence of cultures. The essay "Nicholas of Cusa. Natural Law, Religions, and Peace: facing Diversity through Philosophy in Pre-Modern Europe", which is authored by Marko Fuchs, challenges that position. Fuchs shows that Cusa made room for the possibility of different religions peacefully coexisting, without having to give up their differences. In order to make his point, Fuchs discusses the notion of 'peace of faith' and offers an interpretation of the main arguments that Cusa set forth in his *De pace fidei*. Fuchs argues that Cusa's solution can be effectively employed against contemporary objections to religious pluralism.

The essay entitled "The challenge of multiculturalism: universalism and particularism in Alasdair MacIntyre's ethics", written by Ines Potzernheim, puts Alasdair MacIntyre's ethical theory, as laid down in *After Virtue*, towards a proof of the conditions of a multicultural society. Potzernheim examines the particularistic and universalistic aspects of MacIntyre's approach and analyses the implications that arise for multiculturalism. The essay argues that MacIntyre has

an implicit universal notion of virtue ethics, which includes certain universal ideas concerning the nature of human beings (especially those aspects related to human thinking and acting). However, the essay contends that, in relation to the challenges to ethical systems in a multicultural society, MacIntyre's cultural or historical particularism does not provide a satisfying perspective.

John Stopford, in his essay entitled "Reason, Recognition, and Diversity", starts from the recognition that liberal democracy is currently faulted – both by communitarians and by postmodernists – for ignoring indigenous cultures and postcolonial peoples while embracing schemes of economic development that disrupt traditional values and ways of life. In his view, liberals must respond to such challenges by re-examining the role of culture in liberal political theory. Traditionally, political economists could assume social and political institutions to be culturally homogenous, all diversities among citizens being reducible to matters of preferential rationality. The acknowledgement of current pluralism must be a new starting point for liberal political philosophy. Liberal democracy can recognize the objectivity of different beliefs about value and reject the use of political power to shape citizen's conceptions of the good, while also recognizing the need for political integration. Political integration, however, according to the author, is only possible if citizens also assume the burdens of reasonableness when the realization of public policies presupposes sustained public commitment over time. Citizens "must be prepared to assume these burdens if they are to play their role in sustaining and defending democratic institutions".

In "Politics and the Relevance of Cultures", Gabriele De Anna contends that an engagement in the study of cultural heritages and traditions is essential in constructing a shared future in current multicultural societies. De Anna highlights that traditional debates between liberals and communitarians have not solved the problem of the dichotomy between universalism and cultural-relativism of practical reason. Attempts to find practical solutions to the issue, such as traditional multi-culturalism based on liberal and individualist assumptions, also seem to misrepresent the nature of practical reason. The results of recent debates on practical reason, which were revised also in De Anna and Martinelli (2015), open new possibilities concerning the possibility of a transcultural employment of practical reason. On the basis of recent developments in the field, De Anna contends that the notion of a universal human nature is presupposed in the judgements of practical reason, although the features of human nature are always thought through from the point of view of a particular culture. De Anna concludes that the study of cultures is fundamental for learning how to recognise what is really universal in human nature, and, therefore, in coping with the challenges of multicultural societies.

Antonella Pocecco, in "The Everyday Multiculturalism: Individual Experience of Cultural Diversity", discusses current approaches to the problems arising

in our contemporary multicultural societies. She distinguishes two opposing approaches, which polarise current public debates: the ideology which sees multiculturalism as a good to seek and foster, and the ideology which proclaims the need to establish and defend individualities and cultural specificities. She argues that both extreme ideologies share a common misunderstanding on the notion of "culture": they assume a monolithic view of cultures, whereas each culture is manifold by its very nature. She identifies the visibility of multicultural features as the characteristic trait of our age, and she deals with the practical problems that the current situation raises, the issues of an everyday multiculturalism. The notion of a universal conception of reasons, through which all must become self-critical and open to receive the good, which may come from others, seems the only possible solution to current critical features of society.

The essay "Facing differences and indifference in Mexico: suggestions concerning the discursive dynamics of morality in *2666* by Roberto Bolaño and "El principio del placer" and *Las batallas en el desierto* by José Emilio Pacheco", by Arndt Lainck, offer an interdisciplinary perspective on the issue of multiculturalism and practical reasoning. With the help of literary examples, Lainck suggests an insight into how discourses on morality shape our conceptualization of moral behaviour and have far-reaching pragmatic consequences. In search of a moral compass, literary examples presented in the essay pose questions from opposite ends of the spectrum. Bolaño's *2666* is characterized by the manifest absence of morality and is set in a post-apocalyptic landscape of a very contemporary modernity. In the short story "El principio del placer" and in the novel *Las batallas en el desierto* by Pacheco*,* on the other hand, the narrators try to establish self-developed points of reference against the daunting imposition of conflicting moral codes in the adult world. The antithetical examples used are meant to convey a sense of how difficult it is to arrive at moral criteria against the backdrop of societies which strongly antagonize moral deviance beyond established practices.

In the essay "The Moral Fable", Brunello Lotti raises some important issues concerning the way in which multiculturalism is interpreted by current political institutions, in particular in the European Union, under the assumption of an ideological understanding of human rights, which hides, rather than discloses, problems concerning the governance of complex societies. On the basis of some reflections about the development of liberal and democratic ideals in Europe, Lotti laments that the current lack of policies of integration in Europe, in spite of massive immigration trends, is due to the neglect of three basic truths, which were well known throughout the history of European multiculturalism. Firstly, multiculturalism cannot be stretched to the point of denying itself. Secondly, dialogue is impossible with those who are not open to it. Thirdly, a political institution loses its authority if it fails to protect the members of the community.

Only the recollection of these truths, according to Lotti, could lead to a politically efficacious form of multiculturalism, capable of securing the values that ground Europe and that make it so appealing to those who want to come and live in it from other regions.

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# Some Critical Questions about Critical Questions*

THOMAS BECKER

## 1. Introduction

One of the most popular theories of argumentation (e.g. Walton, Reed, and Macagno 2008) represents arguments by a set of argumentation schemes. These schemes each consist of a set of premises and inference rules, plus a set of Critical Questions (CQ). These CQ are possible counterarguments. This theory provides the structure of a single but important (micro-)argument that is only a part of the current debate in argumentation theory (see van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004). However, its way of representing argumentation is easy to grasp, easy to teach, and easy to handle in practice, therefore it is very useful. From a theoretical point of view, however, it is not fully satisfactory, because the set of Critical Questions is rather varied. Some CQ are general rules for rational discourse that need not to be stipulated in argumentation theory at all ("Clarify notions!"),

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others are general rules for any argumentation scheme that need not to be stipulated in a particular scheme ("Check the premises!"), and yet others are peculiar to a particular scheme ("How credible is the expert?"). This paper is an attempt to tidy up the set of CQs by sorting out those that are characteristic to a particular scheme from those that are not, and moving them all into a structured set of premises (explicit vs. implicit premises, context-dependent vs. context-independent, etc). The aim is to represent an argument as deductive by reconstructing the full set of implicit premises and qualifying the conclusion so that the task of the opponent would be a single one: "Check the premises!" The reconstruction of an argument as deductive by adding implicit premises appears to be the only reliable way of showing its soundness. On the other hand, such a reconstruction is of no use in argumentative praxis; this is the domain of schemes and CQs. But its applicability in practical contexts should shape the theory and should lead to answers about what a theory of schemes and CQs should look like.

In what follows, these questions will all be answered with "yes":

- Are some Critical Questions implicit premises in disguise?

- Are some Critical Questions general rules of linguistic discourse independent of argumentation?

- Can all Critical Questions be reduced in one of these two ways?

- Are Critical Questions useful for all that?


## 2. Argument Schemes and Critical Questions

In mathematics a valid argument has the following form: It begins with a statement of its premises, which have been derived by logically valid deductions from an ingeniously chosen set of axioms using an ingeniously chosen language that defines which deductions are valid. It continues with an ordered set of statements that are derived by logically valid and perspicuous deductions from the premises until the conclusion is reached. In everyday life an argument never looks exactly like this, yet the structure is similar.

When a speaker argues in everyday life, this will include making assertions that support assumptions relevant to the activity the interlocutors are engaged in. The form of support is hardly ever that of logical deduction. Stephen Toulmin (1958), one of the founders of "Informal Logic" or modern argumentation theory, calls these non-deductive, non-valid arguments "substantial arguments". However, it has not yet been shown that substantial arguments cannot be reconstructed as deductive arguments by demonstrating that there are further implicit premises hidden in the explicit argumentation**.** In everyday argumentation the

full set of premises is hardly ever stated, for the simple rhetorical reason that argumentation must be brief. The full set of premises is almost always irrelevant and would tire the addressee. This even holds for most mathematical proofs. These, however, can be reconstructed in a unique way, which is not possible in everyday argumentation; the reconstruction of an everyday argument is an interpretation and depends on the view of the interpreter. I daresay that applies to all pragmatic analyses of linguistic discourse.

Trying to convince a person of the truth of a proposition is an attempt to integrate that proposition into the subjective "web of belief" that this person holds. This "web of beliefs" is a system of propositions which support each other by relations of deductive inference or in a "substantial" way (cf. Becker 2012). If the proposition 'fits' into this web, it will be accepted as true. When one engages in argumentation, it is advisable to use premises that are already in the hearer's web; premises that are not in his web will not have the power to persuade them of the truth of the proposition in question and are therefore irrelevant; premises that are not in the asserter's web yield insincere assertions or arguments, yet they can be relevant all the same. By way of example let us consider an argument scheme taken from "Informal Logic" (cf. Walton, Reed, and Macagno 2008, 310):

Argument from Expert Opinion

*Major Premise*: Source $E$ is an expert in subject domain $S$ containing proposition $A$.
*Minor Premise*: $E$ asserts that proposition $A$ is true (false).
*Conclusion*: $A$ is true (false).

Critical Questions
CQ1: *Expertise Question*: How credible is $E$ as an expert source?
CQ2: *Field Question*: Is $E$ an expert in the field that $A$ is in?
CQ3: *Opinion Question*: What did $E$ assert that implies $A$?
CQ4: *Trustworthiness Question*: Is $E$ personally reliable as a source?
CQ5: *Consistency Question*: Is $A$ consistent with what other experts assert?
CQ6: *Backup Evidence Question*: Is $E$'s assertion based on evidence?

In an actual argumentative discourse, the well-prepared opponent will recognize the argument as an instance of the scheme "argument from expert opinion" and he will have the Critical Questions ready at hand to be used as possible counter-arguments.

The argument appears as a syllogism divided into major and minor premise, other examples by Walton, Reed, and Macagno (2008) have the form of *modus ponens*. Nevertheless, these arguments are not deductively valid as they all leave some parts of the argument implicit and their structure is somewhat arbitrary. For example, the major premise above could as well be left implicit and instead

play the role of a Critical Question. Moreover, most of the Critical Questions can be rephrased as implicit premises. Some of the Critical Questions can be better understood as very general rules of behaviour rather than premises specific to the type of argument in question. An example of these general rules of behaviour is the requirement of evaluating sources of information (CQ1, above), for example when you have several dictionaries and have to decide which one you trust most regarding the meaning of a specific phrase or when you have to judge the reliability of a witness.

The apparent sloppiness of the theory seems to make it unserviceable for the major purpose of argumentation theory, which is the evaluation of the argument's rationality. It is undisputed that a deductively valid argument whose premises are accepted leads to a conclusion that has to be accepted as well. However, it appears to be equally undisputed in "Informal Logic" or "Argumentation Theory" that most everyday arguments cannot be reconstructed in this way. The proof of this claim, however, is outstanding; its refutation, on the other hand has to overcome considerable difficulties. In what follows I will try to name some of the difficulties and to sketch possible ways of dealing with them, focussing on the role of Critical Questions.

## 3. Implicit Premises

Most Critical Questions can be rephrased as implicit premises, as Walton himself acknowledges (Walton, Reed, and Macagno 2008; Walton and Gordon 2011):

> Any particular interpretation of a list of premises and critical questions can be adequately characterized as a set of linked premises, many of which may be left implicit in an actual text. (Walton, Reed, and Macagno 2008, 17)

An argument can be shown to be rational if one can reconstruct a set of premises that are acceptable and that entail the conclusion. Even a mathematical proof normally leaves some premises implicit, yet these implicit premises can be reconstructed in a unique way. In everyday argumentation, this is not the case; the number of possible reconstructions may be indefinite, perhaps infinite; moreover, such a reconstruction is always an interpretation that can be rejected: the reconstruction itself is open to discussion. The task, of course, is not simply to add premises that yield the argument valid, e.g. you can always add the premise "if the expert says so, it is true", which will be false in most cases. The task is rather to find *acceptable* premises, which is certainly problem number one of argumentation in general. The major task of the opponent in an argument is always to check the premises; this is the reason why Critical Questions can and should be asked.

A minor problem, almost negligible, is the need of trivial premises that are necessary to make the entailment work, such as "$p\&q$, therefore $p$". The argument from expert opinion, for example, requires a premise like "If a reliable source of information yields $p$, then $p$ is reliable". These "theoretical", context-independent, premises are of little interest and are generally not open to discussion because they are simply the basic semantic rules required by any reasonable conversation; they make the reconstruction so awkward that you would never use them in an actual dispute. However, the reconstruction of an argument is not meant to be a move in an actual dispute but rather part of a post-hoc analysis in an academic context where awkwardness is pervasive anyway.

Another important issue to consider is the following: The need to qualify the conclusion is - although often neglected - not a minor problem in the reconstruction of an argument. In Toulmin's model (1958, 97; cf. Fig. 1) "data", "warrant", "backing" and "rebuttal" are premises (for the most part implicit), whereas the conclusion ("claim") is qualified ("qualifier").

The conclusion has to be qualified in *any* argument; no argument whatsoever can establish objective truth, whatever that term should mean. The conclusion of an argument always includes some presumption.
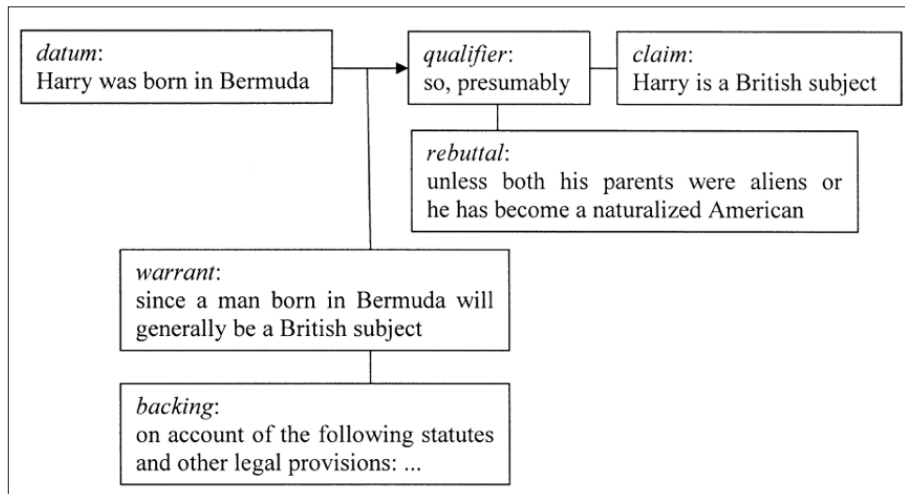


**Figure 1 – Toulmin's model**

## 4. The Qualification of the Conclusion

Not even mathematical truths are "objective" truths – they depend on axioms that are chosen and can be chosen in a different way. Not even the utterly self-evident parallel postulate of Euclid was safe from revisions, let alone what we argue for or against in everyday life. Everyday-life argumentation never establishes anything like infallible truth, which is impossible, as we are taught by the history of science. The conclusions of our arguments – just as their premises – are presumptions (Walton 1996; Rescher 2006). In Toulmin's model (1958, 97; cf. Fig. 1) this qualification is precisely expressed: "presumably". What is a presumption? A presumption is an assumption that is based on common sense or life experience in the absence of corroborated evidence; rational agents base their activities on these assumptions until they obtain evidence to the contrary. Presumptions are also called 'defaults' or 'default assumptions'. Examined in the cold light of day, all truths, scientific truths included, involve presumptions, corroborated or not by (refutable) evidence.

Presumption originally is a term of (post-classical) Roman law:

> A presumption occurs when a fact is deemed proved although it is not directly proved and its existence is only logically [sic] inferred from another fact established through evidence. […] In later (Justinian's) law there were some presumptions legally imposed to the effect that a fact had to be considered proved in court as long as no counter-proof was offered (praesumptio iuris). (Berger 1953, 646)

Most likely it was Leibniz who generalized the notion from a legal term to an epistemological one: "presumption is what should be considered true until the contrary is proven" ("praesumptio est, quod pro vero habetur donec contrarium probetur", 1676/1980, 631). He also correlated presumption with a shift in the burden of proof (1696/1890, 521): "presumption, that is, when and how, one has the power to transfer the [burden of] proof from himself to someone else ("*praesumption* das ist, wenn und wie, einer den Beweis von sich auff einen andern zu legen macht habe")".

Later, Whateley distinguished it from a "probable assumption" (1841, 120):

> According to the most correct use of the term, a 'Presumption' in favour of any supposition, means, not (as has been sometimes erroneously imagined) a preponderance of probability in its favour, but, such a preoccupation of the ground, as implies that it must stand good till some sufficient reason is adduced against it; in short, that the Burden of proof lies on the side of him who would dispute it.

Although most presumptions are more probable than their contradictions, there are other reasons for choosing presumptions. The "presumption of innocence", e.g., saying that a defendant at the bar is to be assumed innocent until his guilt is proven, is made on ethical considerations, although this presumption is not more probable than its contradiction. Ullmann-Margalit (1983, 162) explicitly pointed out the pragmatic factor: "The procedural consideration has to do with the question of what presumption will be the most useful to adopt as an initial step in the process of deliberation." If your neighbour accuses you of driving a car without a licence, the burden of proof is on his side, but the matter is settled more easily if you just show him your licence card.

Every-day argumentation does not establish truth. If the addressee accepts the conclusion, it will serve him as orientation, and if it is "true", it will turn the addressee's practical tendencies towards the "right" path. I personally doubt that truth can be more than this.

Argumentation is hardly ever purely academic but embedded in the practice of the agents in question. The qualification of the conclusion of an argument has to be related to that practice, that is, the reliability of the presumed conclusion has to match the risk taken with a false decision on which future practise is to be based. The qualifier "presumably" or "contradictory evidence lacking" contextually implies that the risk of error involved in the decision corresponds to the probability of the conclusion. The reliability of the conclusion in Toulmin's example would not be enough for issuing a passport but enough for choosing a topic of small talk. When reconstructing an argument, one has always to add a premise like "The reliability of the conclusion is sufficient for taking it as a basis for future action", which has to be specified properly according to the speech situation. Such a premise is strong enough to turn an inductive argument into a deductive one, but, of course, it is open to attack. In the same way, an abductive argument can be made deductive by adding the premise "This is the best explanation; at present there is no better one at hand". An argument from analogy can be made deductive by ingeniously inventing a rule that all "good" cases of analogy satisfy and counter-analogies do not (cf. Hümmer 2014). A deductive reconstruction of the argument in this way is the proper basis for the evaluation of its soundness. One has to find the appropriate premises and to judge their acceptability. The validity of the inference can be shown by logical or semantic methods; any weakness of the argument becomes visible as an explicit weak premise. An argument can be attacked by showing unacceptable premises, but it can still be defended by finding a better reconstruction. The theory of schemes and Critical Questions is not the best choice to serve this purpose; nevertheless, as I have noted, it is suited to other purposes.

## 5. The Role of Argument Schemes and Critical Questions

The deductive reconstruction of arguments merges all argument schemes into one: a complex *modus ponens*. Does that mean that these schemes are unimportant? By no means: Their importance lies in the *praxis* of argumentation, both in acting as an arguer and in evaluating an argument in a face-to-face situation. A reconstruction as has been sketched in §3 and §4 would be far too complex and time consuming. Argumentative practice requires a different representation of arguments.

Argument schemes are types of arguments in actual usage arranged according to

- which premises are normally made explicit by arguers
- how these premises normally are arranged
- which premises are normally left implicit (being regarded as irrelevant, being assumed as common ground, or hidden by a sophistic arguer) yet open to the attack by the opponent.

The classification of argument schemes yields types of arguments that can be recognized, that can be given a name and that can be memorized. The implicit premises, which are the possible targets of attack, need not be reconstructed each time by the arguer or analyzer, rather they can be memorized as Critical Questions. The well prepared arguer recognizes an argument scheme in the middle of the debate and has the corresponding critical questions ready at hand, and so he can use them immediately without the need to carry out a time consuming reconstruction.

Argument schemes are not entities in the outside world that can be discovered and described correctly or incorrectly, but they are rather man-made constructions for specific purposes; they should be constructed in a way such that they best serve their purposes.

This view of Argument Schemes suggests answers to some important questions (cf. Blair 2001):

- Their typology is descriptive; however, it is prescriptive in so far as it is advisable to argue in a normal way.
- The completeness of the set of Critical Questions can be checked against a number of rational reconstructions as sketched in §3 and §4 above.
- The proper way of classifying argument schemes optimizes the typology to a level of abstraction such that the schemes are optimally recognizable and memorable. The schemes should be abstract enough such that there are not too many of them; on the other hand, they should not be so abstract and

specific that they cease to be useful (60 is too many, 3 too few). The adequate number of types to be taught to experts is higher than that for high school students. An ingeniously constructed hierarchy of types and subtypes increases the number of memorable types.

The construction of the hierarchy of types has been and will be an important issue in the theory of argumentation. I will not broach this topic but will look briefly at a similar topic that has been neglected so far: The distribution of Critical Questions or implicit premises over a hierarchy of theories.

## 6. Argumentation Theory in the Hierarchy of Theories

It is noteworthy that some of the Critical Questions in Walton, Reed and Macagno (2008, chapter 9) are not specific to a particular argument scheme but pertain to several or even all schemes, some are even very general rules of any theory of linguistic discourse or any theory of action. This is made clearer when we consider that one can view an argument on different levels of abstraction:

1) As an action,
2) as a communicative act (verbal or non-verbal)
3) as an argument in general,
4) as an instance of a specific argument scheme

Argumentation theory "inherits" or specifies the principles of the higher levels:

Ad 1): "A 'good' action is an action that progresses towards the intended goal of the activity." This definition is specified in the following way: "A 'good' argument is an argument that progresses towards the resolution of the difference of opinion between the arguers." Another rule of Critical Thinking and, beyond it, a rule of rational action is "Check the reliability of information sources!" This rule turns up in several argumentation schemes:

Position to Know (Walton, Reed, and Macagno 2008, 309):
CQ2: Is $a$ an honest (trustworthy, reliable) source?

Witness Testimony (Walton, Reed, and Macagno 2008, 310):
CQ2: Is what the witness said consistent with the known facts of the case […]?
CQ3: Is what the witness said consistent with what other witnesses have (independently) testified?

The notion of 'presumption' is of general use, but it turns up as a Critical Question in the following scheme:

Popular Opinion (Walton, Reed, and Macagno 2008, 311):
CQ2: Even if A is generally accepted as true, are there any good reasons for doubting that it is true?

Ad 2): "Clarify vague expressions!" is a rule pertinent to any linguistic discourse; e.g. the meaning of 'expert' should be made clear in any rational discussion, yet it turns up as a Critical Question several times, particularly in the following:

Expert Opinion (Walton, Reed, and Macagno 2008, 310):
CQ2: Field Question: Is E an expert in the field in which A is?
CQ5: Consistency Question: Is A consistent with what other experts assert?
CQ6: Backup Evidence Question: Is E's assertion based on evidence?

Ad 3): "Check the premises!" is a rule pertinent to any argument scheme, yet it is repeated in several schemes:

Position to Know (Walton, Reed, and Macagno 2008, 309):
CQ3: Did *a* assert that A is true (false)?

Argument from Example (Walton, Reed, and Macagno 2008, 314):
CQ1: Is the proposition claimed in the premise in fact true?

Tidying up the sets of Critical Questions could reduce their number considerably and relieve the memory of trained arguers.


## 7. Conclusion

Any theory serves a particular purpose and its design should be determined by that purpose. In order to evaluate the soundness of a particular (micro-) argument it should be reconstructed as a derivational inference by explicitly adding the necessary premises that normally remain implicit. The evaluation of an argument is the more fallible the more it leaves implicit thereby burdening the common sense of the evaluator. On the other hand, such a theory is of little use in practical argumentation. Although the schemes-and-CQ-theory is not the optimal choice for the purpose of evaluating the soundness of an argument, it is a very useful toolkit for arguers in practice.

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# Does Truth Really Matter?
# On the Irrelevance of Truth[*]

SEBASTIAN KREBS

## 1. Introduction

"What is Truth?" Pilate asked Jesus after he declared that he came into the world to testify to the truth. Philosophers ever since (and naturally also before and independently from this Christian background) have pursued different approaches to answer this question — some of them trying to give a conceptional analysis of truth, others focussing on the term's extension, some looking for an universal, 'objective' truth independent of human minds, others claiming that truth is never independent of the beholder and defending subjective or intersubjective concepts of truth according to which truth is context-dependent, negotiable, constructed or even relative. And of course, there is also a long sceptical

tradition claiming that there is no truth at all and philosophy's search for truth is in vain.

If there is one true sentence about truth, then it is true that philosophers over the last 5,000 years or so have not come to any mutual agreement on the nature, the meaning or the extension of truth and the outlook for the future does not precisely give us any hope that this might change.

However, there are innumerable political, social, cultural, intercultural and multicultural conflicts and challenges that the world, reluctantly or not, has had to deal with in recent years, and will continue to have to deal with in the near future[1], and if the philosophical community wants to contribute its analytical skills and methodological impartiality to the cause of coping with these conflicts and challenges, the aforementioned philosophical perspective on truth does not really hit its target. In other words: There is a huge reality gap between philosophical theory of truth and the requirement of finding relevant solutions for our fundamental practical challenges.

This is the intellectual context under which the recent paper by Thomas Becker "Is Truth Relevant? On the Relevance of Relevance" (2014) has to be read. Being a linguist by profession (and a philosopher by heart), he claims that philosophical truth does not matter — neither in our daily life nor in social political and academic discourse, and not even in scientific theories. Instead we are striving for relevance — which has to be understood as a technical term in linguist theory, first introduced in H.P. Grice's cooperative principle (1975) and elaborated further by Sperber & Wilson's Relevance Theory (2002, 2004, 2012), which I will briefly introduce in section two of my paper. Becker uses his own interpretation of this linguistic term in order to create a philosophical program one might well call *Relevantism*[2] — which is based on the simple idea that we *de facto* prefer a relevant sentence over a true sentence. I will introduce this issue in section three of my paper, and in section four, I want to address two major concerns with Relevantism.

Finally, I want to give a few examples of how to apply Becker's Relevantism to actual conflicts in cultural, intercultural and multicultural contexts — even though my intention is not to give concrete instructions concerning how to cope

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[1]     I neither say nor think that the world population in earlier ages did not have to cope with similar or equally important issues nor do I see current challenges as somehow unique or special among the big challenges of mankind.

[2]     Becker never used the label 'relevantism' himself and I doubt that he would have liked it. He rather understood his approach as a renewed version of philosophical pragmatism (which was the second important intellectual source for his research), but nevertheless I think the term gives a fair characterisation of Becker's rather unique theoretical approach to truth. However, my usage of 'relevantism' does not involve any connection to relevance logic (where 'relevantism' sometimes is used to describe a position rejecting classical logic), which Becker was well aware of but never referred to in his actual research.

with real problems, but rather to illustrate how the theoretic apparatus of Relevantism can help us to analyse, understand and illuminate our understanding of such conflicts (this last section deserves a much more detailed investigation than this paper allows for).

## 2. The Linguistic Theory behind Relevantism:
## Cooperative Principle and Relevance Theory

The Fregean idea that formal logic offers a fully reductive calculus for natural language (cf. Frege 1879) has fallen out of favour today, but was very influential for logicians and philosophers of language until the 1970s. For those influenced by the pragmatic concerns of Ordinary Language Philosophers such as J.L. Austin and Gilbert Ryle in the 1940s, including (the later) Wittgenstein (1991), however, this view was put in question. C. I. Lewis had already struggled with the Fregean analysis of material implication in 1918 and thereby he paved the way for modal logic as an axiomatic calculus that is not compatible with the attempt to reduce natural language to logic (cf. Lewis 1918 and Lewis/Langford 1959). I do not think that it is only a temporal coincidence that the soundness and completeness of modal logic became widely acknowledged within logic at around the same time that H. P. Grice (1975, 1989), among others, established pragmatics as an independent research area within the philosophy of language and linguistics, especially since Grice was very concerned about the classical logician's interpretation of material implication, which does not at all represent our natural language intuitions about conditionals. I want to illustrate this with an example by Becker:

> A and B share an apartment and both are lazy when it comes to housework. One night, A says to B: "If you do the dishes tonight, I will give you 100 Euros". B intuitively understands: "If I do not do the dishes tonight, A won't give me 100 Euros" — even though A has never claimed this.[3]

If one interprets a conditional by the material implication of classical logic, then the conditional is false if and only if its antecedent is true and its consequent is false. If A does not want to be a liar, she only needs to make sure that B receives 100 Euros after doing the dishes. However, she is free to do with her money whatever she wants if B does not do the dishes — that means that she can as well give it to B anyway. The material implication is true, if the antecedent is false — period.

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[3]    Becker used variants of this example in several lectures and seminars, for example in his inaugural lecture at the University of Bamberg: https://www.uni-bamberg.de/kommunikation/news/wissenschaft/artikel/mit-scharf/ (Nov 24, 2015), to illustrate pragmatic concerns about material implication. For similar concerns about the logical disjunction and the modal operator in formal logic, cf. Becker 2002.

Whether the consequent is true or false does not matter. So, does B have any reason to believe that he won't receive the 100 Euros if he does not do the dishes? If B strictly interprets *what is said* according to the rules of material implication, B does not.[4]

That is the story classical logic tells us and many students in introductory logic classes today are highly puzzled about this *reality gap* between propositional logic and natural language since obviously, in an everyday situation there is not much wrong with B's intuitive understanding.

In order to explain such reality gaps, which we often find in our formal analysis of natural language, Grice introduced his well-known co-operative principle:

> Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (Grice 1975, 307)

He also listed nine maxims in four categories (mirroring the four Kantian categories) that are entailed by the co-operative principle:

Quality
1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Quantity
1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Relation
Be Relevant.

Manner
1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

It is a common misconception of Grice's theory to understand this principle and these maxims as normative. Even though these maxims may well function in a

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[4]    Or at least, B still has a 50-50 chance that he will receive the money anyway since nothing is said about the case that he does not do the dishes, and B could apply practical reasoning and calculate probabilities, benefits and costs, but that is another part of the story that would lead us astray here.

guidebook for undergraduate essay writing, Grice does not want to tell us how we *should* speak, instead, he accounts for how communication *actually* works and what a reasonable hearer is not only entitled to infer from a statement, but also does infer from a certain statement under normal conditions.[5] Inferences are at the core of Grice's theory, and given the aforementioned dissatisfaction with the inference rules of classical logic in many practical situations, Grice's intention behind the co-operative principle was to close the reality gap between logical reasoning and our reasoning in everyday situations.

In the example above, B (assuming both A and B are reasonable speakers of English) is entitled to expect that A follows the given maxims when offering her the money for doing the dishes. So, if she *meant* "If you do the dishes, I will give you 100 Euros, and if you do not do the dishes, I will give you 100 Euros as well" she would have withheld information (and thereby violated the first Maxim of Quantity) — or even more drastic: There was no relevance (violation of the Maxim of Relation) for A for offering the deal, since she could have given B the money without this obscure way of expressing her generosity, which is a violation of the first Maxim of Manner. So, if B assumes that A is a co-operative speaker (and if he did not assume that, then why would he even bother considering her offer?), he can well infer that his dish-washing is not only sufficient, but also necessary for him in order to receive the money. *What is meant* by A's statement is "If you do the dishes, I will give you 100 Euros, and if you do not, I will not" since as a co-operative speaker, A would not violate any of the maxims which are inherent in reasonable communication.[6]

In order to distinguish these '*what is meant* inferences' in the realm of pragmatics from the *implications* of '*what is said*' in the realm of classical logic (or semantics), Grice calls them *implicatures*. So, it is an implicature, but not an implication of A's statement, that it is necessary for B to do the dishes in order to receive the money, and we can infer to this implicature by reference to the cooperative principle and its maxims which I listed above.

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[5]   'Normal conditions' for example exclude irony, fictional talk, sleeptalking etc.: Assuming that A and B are actors and A's offer is part of a theatre play, B certainly would not infer that he actually would receive the 100 Euros for washing the dishes, but one might be inclined to say that B's character would infer that A's character makes him this generous offer. Also, if it is obvious that A makes a sarcastic joke (maybe hinting at B's laziness) or A is only sleeptalking, B is neither entitled nor will he actually infer that he will receive any money for doing the dishes. I personally would not say that the cooperation principle does not apply in such situations, but rather that cooperative behaviour in such contexts means something else than under normal conditions, but this would be a separate question which I will not address in this paper.

[6]   I won't speak about *flouting the maxims* here, even though this is always an option for a reasonable speaker, already pointed out by Grice (cf. Huang 2007, 27-31).

Even though Grice's theory of implicature is widely accepted both in linguistics and the philosophy of language, there have been numerous modifications and improvements in the recent decades, most of them regarding the number and nature of maxims (e.g. Harnish 1976; Horn 1984, 2004; Kasher 1976; Levinson 1983, 2000). The most influential modifications have been made by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1986, 1993, 2004) whose 'relevance theory' reduces Grice's nine maxims to one: "Be relevant", but also includes a full cognitive theory explaining how language users proceed through pragmatic inferences.[7]

Sperber and Wilson agree with Grice's implicature theory that human communication is based on pragmatic inferences such as the one in the dish-washing example. However, they do not only criticise Grice's maxims, but Sperber and Wilson also attack the cooperative principle in general and want to substitute it for a cognitive and a communicative principle of relevance (2004, 610):

Cognitive Principle of Relevance:
Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance.

Communicative Principle of Relevance:
Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

Even though Becker appreciated Sperber and Wilson's "most drastic cut" (2014, 606), namely their reduction of the Gricean maxims to the relevance maxim, he criticises them for their further deviation from their theoretical heritage:

Unfortunately, Wilson and Sperber threw the baby out with the bathwater and abandoned both the cooperative principle and the relation of cooperation and practice. Furthermore, they revised the everyday meaning of the term relevance and transformed it into a technical term. I regard these departures from Grice unnecessary if not detrimental. (Becker 2014, 606)

For this reason, Becker was not particularly happy about the recent developments in relevance theory (especially because these developments narrowed the theory down to a cognitive linguistic theory), and based his approach on a more Gricean background. For him, the cooperative principle is fundamental for all human interactions (deeply intertwined with human nature, see section three), which allowed him to leave the realm of pure linguistics and transform his 'relevantism'

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[7]  There are different readings and versions of 'relevance theory', especially since Sperber and Wilson's position changed drastically over the recent years from a Neo-Gricean theory to an independent cognitive theory which more and more denies (and even criticises) its Gricean heritage even though it is, in my opinion, still obvious. I can't go into detail here, but Huang (2007, 182-208) gives a good summary of these recent developments towards a cognitive theory, which Becker (2014, 607-614) criticises.

into an alternative approach toward a philosophical theory of truth — which I want to shed light on in the next section of this paper.


## 3. The Philosophical Impetus of Relevantism: Not quite a Theory of Truth

Becker justifies his claim that cooperation is the basis for all human interaction by reference to recent discovering in evolutionary biology, quoting Tomasello 2014:

> Tomasello 2014 presents a detailed description of the evolution of cooperativity in human beings. Cooperativity is "wired" in social insects and also in mammals like wolves and apes, which can be observed in their cooperative hunting behavior. Tomasello describes the qualitative leap in the development of human cooperativity: "Humans but not apes engage in cooperative communication in which they provide one another with information that they judge to be useful for the recipient" (2014, 36). The critical difference between cooperativity with humans and with other mammals is the human ability to represent the perspective of others (2014, 56, 137f.), thus they are able to judge what is relevant for the partner playing his role in the cooperative activity. Apes do not have this ability. (Becker 2014, 610)

This allows Becker to give Grice's cooperative principle a certain reading not all linguists would agree with, but which does justice to the more universal character of Grice's implicature theory:

> Social animals like us are geared to expect cooperative behavior from their neighbor; his expectation is innate and corroborated (and qualified) by experience. Cooperativity of our fellow human beings is the default assumption that can, of course, be overridden by negative evidence. However, the question is raised: on what grounds can we reduce the Gricean quantity maxims to the relevance maxim?[8]

Again, the problem here can best be illustrated by an example, here from Becker 2014:

> If somebody, let's say from India, asked me "Where did you grow up?" I could think of at least three possible answers:
> a) In Haar.
> b) In a suburb, 500 yards outside the city limits of Munich.
> c) In Munich.

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[8]    I think it is quite obvious that the maxims of quantity and modality can be reduced to a renewed relevance maxim: If somebody gives too much information, this extra information is not relevant; if somebody gives not enough information, the given information is not relevant neither; and if somebody presents information in such an obscure way that it cannot be understood by a reasonable speaker, such an obscure statement could not be relevant. Thus the crucial maxim which needs further clarification is the quality maxim, and that is the reason why I leave quantity and modality aside here.

Option a) would be true but obscure (as nobody in India will have heard of that sub-urb) and therefore irrelevant. Option b) would be true but unnecessarily prolix and therefore less relevant. Option c) would be literally false but it would still be relevant as it triggers true inferences as 'He grew up in an urban environment, is familiar with Bavarian culture etc.' I would use the false answer c) and not even consider the true alternatives. (Becker 2014, 613)

This example shows why a true answer often does not play any role for cooperative behaviour in everyday situations. However, such a simple example certainly cannot be enough to declare that all philosophical attempts to find truth are irrelevant. For this, a more theoretical answer is needed and Becker finds inspiration for such an answer in Jorge Luis Borges's *Library of Babel* (Borges 1999, 2007): This library "holds an infinite set of books, each of them finite, containing all combinations of letters (22 letters plus space, period, and comma). It contains every text possible in every language that can be transliterated by the set of those 22 letters […] Hence, the library contains a detailed and true history of our future, an infinite number of false ones, the 'Persae' of Aeschylus (and his 'Egyptians'), the exact number of times that the waters of Ganges have reflected the flight of a falcon, and so forth" (Becker 2014, 602). But this library would not really be useful since it would be hard to find the relatively few true sentences among its inventory — especially if we do not have any criterion for truth. One might be inclined to say that we would need instead something like Becker's *Library of Baghdad* — an adaption of Borge's *Library of Babel*:

The Library of Baghdad is different: its books contain only true sentences (not a single false one) in impeccable English, without a single misprint. It contains, just like the Library of Babel, an infinite set of true sentences derived logically or by other recursive definitions from a basis of true and known sentences compiled by a large committee of scholars. All the sentences differ from each other, not a single sentence is recorded twice, and all sentences are of finite length. (Becker 2014, 602)

Becker claims that this library would be as useless as the *Library of Babel* due to the recursive nature of natural languages like English and other ways of adding 'infinity'. This means that the library would not only include "1 is less than 2", but also "1 is less than 3", "1 is less than 4" etc., and it would include an infinite number of disjunctions with one true disjunct like "Human beings have 11 fingers and human beings have 12 fingers, or (!) Paris is the capital of France." Becker writes:

The library would even be less useful if it contained the true sentences whose truth has not been established by experts so far (e.g. the distance between the first and the second occurrence of the letter 'e' in this paper), as almost all of these truths contained in the library of Baghdad do not matter at all; what matters are the very few sen-

tences that happen to be relevant. Therefore, the point of assertion is to pick out the most relevant proposition of an infinite number of true, known and justifiable ones. Relevance is both as relevant and as easy to overlook as the air we breathe because our cognition rejects almost all of the irrelevant information in our environment. (Becker 2014, 603)

The Baghdad Library thought experiment allows Becker to disregard truth in many cases as irrelevant, since even a list of all true sentences would be useless — since our time on earth is limited and only the few relevant sentences among all the true sentences matter for us. This is what I would sum up under the label 'Relevantism' — the theoretical position that relevance is more relevant than truth and our cognitive apparatus strives for relevant rather than for true answers. Becker would not have agreed with the message in the provocative title of my paper, nor with this definition hinting at that truth is irrelevant. Instead, he sketches a picture of a philosophical theory of truth mostly influenced by the German philosopher Harald Wohlrapp (2014) and borrows the "web of belief" metaphor from Quine and Ullian (1978) Wohlrapp's theory more or less resembles: "[T]he truth both of a descriptive sentence and of a normative sentence is derived from its 'practical relevance'" (Becker 2014, 595, cf. 614-616). Becker was highly interested in such a pragmatic interpretation of truth, and in this sense, truth was not irrelevant for him. However, the more substantial interpretations of truth were indeed irrelevant for him:

> Objective truth can be hoped for but will never be reached by human research, which is harmless as long as our practice is successful. (Becker 2014, 615)

However, there is undoubtedly a certain circularity involved when claiming that truth is only relevant because truth is derived from practical relevance — and it is not clear whether this is to the benefit of the theory or not. In my opinion, Becker's Relevantism offers a strong instrument for analysing actual conflicts, disagreements and misunderstandings because relevance is a neutral term with regard to a philosophical theory of truth. For claiming that we only strive for relevant answers, it does not play any role whether truth is philosophically defined in a universal, ultimate, objective, intersubjective, relative or any other imaginable way — and there is nothing wrong with philosophers trying to find *really true* sentences — as long as they are aware that *real truth* can be established in practice only if it is practically relevant.

## 4. Two Concerns with Relevantism:
## What is relevance and why is it not self-contradictory?

There are two major concerns about Relevantism I want to shed light on. The first one has to do with the definition of 'relevance', the second one is a concern many philosophers have with relativist or pragmatic approaches to truth: How does Relevantism deal with the criticism that it is self-contradictory, since the relevantist's central claim that truth does not matter in itself requires a certain level of truth in order to be an acceptable claim both within and outside of academia. But first things first.

What is relevance? A theory claiming that human beings strive for relevance seems to have an explanatory problem when it cannot account for its central term: relevance. However, Grice's usage of the term 'relevance' is not exactly clear, and the way Becker uses it leaves room for different interpretations. Becker leans on Sperber and Wilson's *Relevance Theory* which brought 'relevance' as a technical term into theoretical linguistics and philosophy of language, but also criticises the Sperber and Wilson's 'overtheoreticalisation' of a very intuitive term with a clear meaning in everyday language (cf. Becker 2014, 606).

For Becker, relevance is self-explanatory since it is both innate in human cognitive apparatus, and is in general a principle of nature which lead him even so far as to explain evolutionary theory in terms of relevance: *The survival of the fittest* meant for him *The survival of the most relevant* and it was one of his last, and unfinished, research projects to support this idea with substantial evidence from the natural and cognitive sciences.[9]

According to Becker, the meaning of relevance is easier to grasp by an example than by a precise definition: If you want to assemble an IKEA Billy Bookcase, you do not ask for a thumb-thick instruction book explaining all the different possible ways of putting wooden boards together and an overview over several hundred different types of screws and screwdrivers and whether you might or might not use them for this job. Instead, you simply want a new home for your books, do not want to waste too much time on its assembly and — if possible — you do not want to lose a finger by misapplying a dangerous tool which is complicated to use and which you first have to find in your messy tool collection somewhere in the cellar. That is the reason why IKEA furniture only comes with brief instructions with self-explanatory drawings and with all the required screws, nuts and easy-to-use tools.

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[9]   I only know about this project from personal conversations, but have never seen anything in writing. His intellectual inheritance still has to be reviewed. Therefore, I cannot provide any further references here. However, his understanding of 'relevance' as an inherent principle of nature is so crucial for his theory that I think it is necessary to mention it here even without appropriate reference.

But then one might want to ask how to find out whether a solution or a theory is relevant. And the answer is: It is relevant if and only if it leads to successful practice. Furniture assembly instructions are relevant if and only if they are a real help towards assembling the furniture in the intended way, and an ethical theory is relevant if and only if it helps us to understand, analyse or even solve a practical problem. One unfortunate aspect of this understanding is that relevance only manifests itself in retrospect: I only know with certainty whether some instructions are relevant if I follow them through and my bookcase does not fall apart immediately. However, there are certain indicators that help us to predict the relevance of a certain *theory*[10] — and those indicators can be mostly determined by practical reasoning, education, life experience, expert opinions etc. A big difference between relevance and truth is that relevance always applies to something or someone. *For me,* a tourist map is in most cases relevant if and only if it helps me get directions to the city's main attractions, but somebody else might have different expectations — for example, a tourist map must include all seafood restaurants, ice cream places or barber shops in order to be relevant *for him or her.* Expectations also change in various situations: If I, for some reason, urgently need a new haircut in a foreign city, a map including all the barber shops would be more relevant for me than a map including only tourist attractions.

Yet there seems to be a problem in claiming that truth is irrelevant in the aforementioned way — a problem many relativists and sceptics fail to handle: Claiming that there is no objective truth presupposes that the claim "there is no objective truth" is objectively true, otherwise it would be pointless to make.[11] How does Relevantism deal with this objection? Even though it does not claim that there is no truth (see section three), Relevanitsm means that *real truth* is irrelevant (or, at least, it is less relevant than relevance) and by applying its own standards, Relevantism therefore also claims that it is irrelevant whether Relevantism is *really true* or not. Instead, the benchmark for Relevantism is whether it is relevant or not, and as we have seen above, relevance can only be established in retrospect (I only know whether the 'emergency barber shop map' was actually relevant after I found a place and got my new haircut there) and depends on the situations and persons involved. But how can it not be relevant to think about relevance? As Becker points out in his analysis of Grice's theory of implicature, "it takes quite some intellectual effort not to behave according to Grice's rules" (Becker 2014, 611) — and it takes even more intellectual effort not to think

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[10]  I use the term 'theory' here in a very broad sense, according to which also very practical things like building instructions, street maps and train schedules are theories if they serve "a particular purpose and its design should be determined by that purpose" (Becker 2017, 28; cf. Becker 2014 and Wohlrapp 2014)

[11]  There are varieties of sceptical and relativistic positions and I do not want to adjudicate on all of them here, but the serious variants all offer a strategy against this objection.

according to Grice's rules. Relevantism, in this sense, is a very practice-oriented position — and the idea that relevance is more important than truth can itself orient people in many situations in which they might be blinded by their otherwise hopeless search for an ultimately and *really true* answer. In this sense, Relevantism is relevant.

## 5. Relevantism and its application to a modified trolley problem

In this last section, I want to illustrate the mechanism behind Relevantism by applying it to the well-known trolley problem (cf. Foot 1978) in a modified version:

> A tram is running towards a dead-end which causes the train to jump off the track. The tram driver will inevitably die if this happens (there are no other passengers on the tram). His only option to survive is to steer the tram on to another track, where his pregnant wife is standing and will inevitably be killed by the train if the driver decides to choose this option. Even though he is fully aware of this horrible consequence, he decides to change the path of the tram in order to save his own life over the life of his pregnant wife.

I think that the vast majority of people (including myself) would intuitively agree that the tram driver's decision was not a very noble thing to do, most people would also say that is was not a moral decision and many people would even go as far to say that it was immoral.[12]

However, there might be cases in which the tram driver's decision was the most relevant decision — even from an external perspective. Imagine the situation that his pregnant wife suffers from an incurable disease, having only a few weeks left to live and also giving the unborn child only a minimum chance of survival. Imagine also that the couple has four more children at home who would have to grow up as complete orphans if their father was killed in this tram accident. Under such circumstances, the driver chose (in my opinion) the most relevant option for his family. Even though it might not look like the most moral decision at first glance, the driver chose the best outcome not only for himself, but also for his children — as tragic its consequences may be.

One might argue that I changed the whole ethical dilemma by including this exceptional additional scenario afterwards — and therefore it seems unfair to crit-

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[12] There are huge numbers of discussions about ethical dilemmas in the literature comparable to the one given. I want to distinguish between "not doing the moral thing" and "doing something immoral" since in such an extreme situation, there is no free choice: saving your own life is a natural thing to do and should not be morally condemned. It certainly is noble (and maybe also moral) to sacrifice your life for another person's life, but it is hard to see a moral imperative here.

icise those who formulated their moral opinion before they knew about the tram driver's specific family background. But this, again, is the *reality gap* which I referred to at the beginning of my paper which the theory of Relevantism might help to overcome. 'Textbook philosophy' can never account for all specific ethical problems in reality, but can only account for more generalised ethical dilemmas and provide normative guidelines which might give relevant orientation in many cases, but certainly do not yield an ultimate moral solution in every single situation.

Ethical, cultural and multicultural conflicts are too complex to be grasped in every detail by philosophical theory. That is why such conflicts cannot and should not be accounted for without taking the most relevant outcome into consideration.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed Thomas Becker's central idea that 'relevance' is more relevant than truth. His approach — which I introduced under the label 'Relevantism' — is grounded in the Cooperative Principle introduced by H.P. Grice and on Sperber and Wilson's reduction of Grice's nine maxims to the maxim of relevance — but also on the central ideas of philosophical pragmatism, especially those of William James (cf. Becker unpublished).

Relevantism closes the reality gap between philosophical theory and practical life which a theoretical analysis can never fully grasp in every detail and in which a relevant solution often — if not always — is preferable over a true solution.

This especially applies to ethical, cultural and multicultural conflicts and challenges which often are so complex and intertwined that there is not a single 'true solution' (or at least that there is no hope to find a true solution within the constraints of time). There are, however, often many relevant ways to handle those situations.

Even though "the notion of practical relevance or practical rationality has not been made sufficiently precise yet" (Becker unpublished), there are certain indicators pointing us in the relevant direction as I pointed out in section four. Most of those indicators based on the life experience and education of the humans involved — and a general access to education might therefore be the most relevant imperative in order to cope with challenges and conflicts in our practical life.

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# On the Philosophical Significance of National Characters. Reflections from Hume and Kant

RICCARDO MARTINELLI

## 1. Are there National Characters?

It is widely agreed that human action and the associated responsibilities are determined by the individual in question. At the same time, most people believe that human behaviour may also be affected by phenomena that are collective, such as family idiosyncrasies or national characters. The idea that the Germans, the French, the Italians, etc. tend to act in a certain way – in short, that there is something like a national character, is commonplace. Certain non-essential aspects of human agency can be thought of in this respect. Principally eschewing the sphere of juridical or moral responsibility, national characters are invoked to explain everyday habits, minor peculiarities, general trends and attitudes. Arguments concerning national characters, accordingly, are usually confined to witty conversation. Unfortunately, history also provides a number of examples of politically biased use of such arguments, aimed at raising hostile sentiments toward a certain nation, people, or group. Despite its apparent innocence, folk belief concerning the characteristics of different peoples may occasionally be steered to foster prejudice and even justify persecution or warfare.

The aim of this paper, however, is not to address the historical misuse of the idea of national character. Taking a politically neutral and peaceful use for grant-

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ed, I rather discuss the question of whether, and in what sense, national characters may have philosophical relevance. At first sight, any consideration concerning national characters seem to roam far below the threshold of philosophically respectable arguments. On the other hand, one strikingly finds the theme dealt with by authors no less than Hume, Kant, and many others. Curiosity may well arise as to the readiness of these outstanding figures to embark on alleged unphilosophical gossip concerning national idiosyncrasies. What did Hume and Kant argue in relation to national characters? Is their treatment of the topic confined to the philosophical debate of the Eighteenth century, or do their arguments still retain relevance? Can we learn something from these arguments about how to consider national diversities?

In this paper, I mainly consider two texts: David Hume's essay "On National Characters" and Immanuel Kant's *Pragmatic Anthropology.* Refraining from anecdotal detail, I concentrate upon the core arguments put forward by these philosophers when it comes to characterising peoples. Hume and Kant, as it emerges, clearly defend two different, somehow opposite views of national characters and their causes. A cursory investigation into the general concept of "character" will be the first step of this analysis. I shall then proceed to examine the accounts of Hume and Kant and finally offer a comparative analysis of these accounts.

## 2. What is Character?

Like its almost identical cognates in other modern languages, the English term *character* covers a wide semantic range. Most generally, one can consider character as a disposition, or the tendency to act in a certain way. In its typically dense language, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* defines the character of a certain thing as the "law of its causality, without which it would not be a cause at all" (Kant 1998, 536. KrV A539/B567). All of the effects of a given entity unfold according to a certain law, and this law is its character. In the previous quote, taken from the Transcendental Dialectics, Kant gives an abstractly metaphysical definition of character. Accordingly, even inanimate things possess a character, at least insofar as they cause whatever they effect. Yet Kant mainly dwells on the character of human beings, which is actually the most interesting topic.

A further glance at the history of the term is highly instructive. The Greek *charaktér* stems from a verb that refers to the activity of stamping, e.g. the stamping of a metal to make coins, etc. (Incidently, this also accounts for the modern typographic use of the term). Similarly, character is metaphorically understood as a pattern which is stamped, as it were, upon the human soul. With his *Ethical Characters*, Teophrastus of Eresus may have been the first to use the term system-

atically in reference to human beings (see below). Thus, *charaktér* does not totally coincide with *ēthos*, a term that – as already Aristotle notes – refers to a habit, or 'costume' (the Latin *mos,* whence *morals*), which indicates a likewise permanent, yet altogether less invariable quality of the soul. Remarkably, we are already presented here with a recurrent opposition between passively received and actively developed attitudes of one's personality. Although no drastic divide line exists here, *charaktér* evokes a quality superimposed upon the soul, like the impression of a seal; whereas *ēthos* conveys a set of customary practices (either individual or collective) that eventually fuse together in a new forged attitude.

What makes the concept of character interesting is just its ambiguity, resulting from the combination of passive and active factors. In any event, the modern term 'character' may render both *charaktér* and *ēthos*, frequently in association with a partially overlapping term such as temperament. Originally developed within the Hippocratic school of medicine, the doctrine of the four temperaments – sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric and melancholic – was later to be developed by Galen into a full-fledged and exceptionally long-lasting medical theory.[1] Unsurprisingly, as we shall see, modern philosophers often deal with character and temperament in the same context, together with other associate terms like talent or genius. Character is thereby frequently taken to be a most general and semantically flexible concept.

The renaissance of the concept of character begins with the early Modern Age. Rather than focussing on the general doctrine of virtue, individual psychology now highlights the importance of one's singularity and character. Within the flourishing literary genres of biography and autobiography, for instance, character becomes the unique and distinctive mark of the human subject (cf. Dilthey 1913). The Medieval (Augustinian) definition of character as the uniformed "seal" of the soul, marking its belonging to the Lord's army, began to shift into the background, while Ancient studies on character attract renewed interest. One of the most remarkable cases is that of Teophrastus' *Characters*, translated into French by La Bruyère in 1688. Teophrastus, who succeeded Aristotle as the head of the Lyceum, wrote a scathing overview of human types, caught in their typical attitudes: the sycophant, the insolent or ironic person, etc. With this sketchy and occasionally grotesque parade, Teophrastus portraits real persons rather than idealised types[2]. Following the same general thread, La Bruyère's own book *Les Characters* enjoyed an enduring legacy and exerted a wide influence over the literary and philosophical culture in Europe (La Bruyère 1975).

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[1]   On the history of this concept cf. Pongratz 1971.

[2]   Cf. the modern edition: Teophrastus 2004.

Before we consider the next significant steps in the history of the concept of character, represented by Hume and Kant's elaborations, some further remarks are perhaps appropriate. In fact, people frequently speak of the character of a certain people (the case under discussion), of young or old people, of genders, and even – as Kant did – of the human species as a whole. Applying character to groups, however, brings in some further ambiguity, and may lead to confusion. On the one hand, an allegedly identical (or at least similar) character should inhere in many individuals at once: for instance, in every French *as* French, in every old person *as* old person, in every woman *as* woman. On the other hand, many characters simultaneously dwell within a single person – think, for instance, of an aged French gentlewoman. As to this interwoven multiplicity, no preliminary theorising seems possible: observation presents itself as the only reasonable way to cope with it. For this reason, anthropology rather than ethics tends to become the most appropriate systematic place for a treatment of character, as clearly emerges from Kant's (and later Hegel's) work.

Far from aiming at a thoroughgoing historical reconstruction, these remarks merely serve to shed some light on the peculiarities of this notion. It is not just the concept of national character that is problematic, but the concept of character is in itself intrinsically problematic. It points at the manifold differences among human beings and among human groups. These differences stem from the complex interlacement of biological and cultural differences, which are conjoined in a unique manner in each case. In the face of experience, denying any regularity of national character could be a viable strategy, yet not the one adopted by Hume and Kant.

## 3. Hume on National Characters

Hume gives no exact definition of character in his work. This failure has occasioned a number of controversies among scholars as to the meaning of this notion.[3] While most commentators agree about the centrality of character for Hume's moral doctrine, profound differences subsist as to the correct interpretation of what character is – or should be – from a Humean perspective. Provided that moral actions follow from one's character (as Hume says, they are its "signs"),[4] how is character to be understood? A realist metaphysical theory pictures character as a sort of morally relevant 'substance', inhabiting the subject

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[3]    For an introduction to this debate, see McIntyre 1990. Against McIntyre, Costelloe (2004) advocates a "practical" (vs. "metaphysical") view of character. See also Beier (2008).

[4]    Hume 2007, 367 (SB 575): "If any *action* be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character".

and directing action (and inaction) from inside. However, this is manifestly at odds with Hume's view of the self as a 'bundle' of perceptions. On other hand, a soft explanation of character as a sort of loosely applicable general tendency falls short of the pivotal role of character within Hume's moral philosophy. Let us for the moment leave this question unanswered. To my knowledge, at least, no attempt has been made to consider this critical issue together with that of *national* character, which is possibly even thornier: for what kind of "substance" could inhere in all (or most) individuals belonging to a certain people, which might be labelled as character, and how did these individuals come to share this "substance"? Assessing what national character is could shed some light on the problems of individual character.

First and foremost, in his "On National Characters" Hume aims at undermining the so-called climate theory. Famously held by Montesquieu, the climate theory attributes the origin of national characters to differences of climate and, more generally, to geographical rather than cultural factors.[5] Basically, the climate theory was a renewed version of the ancient Hippocratic tenet that some distinguishing marks (e.g. courage and martial virtue) of a population depend on the qualities of the inhabited soil: climate, air, and water. The modern version insists that one should consider national differences seriously and embrace a latitudinary view of politics. Good civil Constitutions fit national characters and support or balance their specificity.

Hume tackles the climate theory quite explicitly. He highlights its inconsistency by showing that the character of a nation stems from the political regime ruling it over time. Capsizing the main argument of the climate theorists, Hume argues that national characters are forged by the different forms of political power: accordingly, the purpose of adapting the Constitution to the alleged national character simply does not make any sense. At any rate, this move forces Hume to admit – not without cautious qualifications – that something like national characters do exist.

"On National Characters" opens with the following remarks:

> The vulgar are apt to carry all *national characters* to extremes; and, having once established it as a principle, that any people are knavish, or cowardly, or ignorant, they will admit of no exception, but comprehend every individual under the same censure. Men of sense condemn these undistinguishing judgments: Though at the same time, they allow, that each nation has a peculiar set of manners, and that some particular qualities are more frequently to be met with among one people than among their neighbours. (NC, 202)

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[5]    On Montesquieu and national character, see Romani (2002, 19-63), who notes that the contrast between France and England is already sketched by Montesquieu in the context of a criticism of the costumes of the French (Romani 2002, 24).

Hume prudently refers to the probability that some quality occur among individuals of a certain nation. Allowance for specific "set of manners", peculiar to different nations, should not efface that remarkable exceptions may always exist. Wit and gaiety – Hume uses as examples – belong to the French much more than to the Spaniards, but a giant of humour like Miguel de Cervantes was born in Spain.

As to the reason of such general regularities, Hume definitely hints at *moral* causes rather than at *physical* ones. Moral causes are, for instance, "the nature of the government, the revolutions of public affairs, the plenty or penury in which the people live, the situation of the nation with regard to its neighbours, and such like circumstances". Hume explains:

> As poverty and hard labour debase the minds of the common people, and render them unfit for any science and ingenious profession, so, where any government becomes very oppressive to all its subjects, it must have a proportional effect on their temper and genius, and must banish all the liberal arts from among them. (NC, 203)

But how do moral causes come to forge national characters? The human mind – Hume claims – is intrinsically imitative, so that it is impossible for anybody to live in a certain country without absorbing the dominating attitude of compatriots, expressed by the manner of managing some important business such as defence, commerce, and government. As a consequence, though nature originally provides a full variety of characters, their proportion changes with time.

> Now though nature produces all kinds of temper and understanding in great abundance, it does not follow, that she always produces them in like proportions, and that in every society the ingredients of industry and indolence, valour and cowardice, humanity and brutality, wisdom and folly, will be mixed after the same manner. (NC, 208)

Hume provides several examples: "If we run over the globe, or revolve the annals of history, we shall discover everywhere signs of a sympathy or contagion of manners, none of the influence of air or climate" (NC, 209). The Chinese have the most uniform character, following on the permanent effect of an exceptionally long-lasting Empire.

Another remarkable case is that of England. Since the government is a mixture of "monarchy, aristocracy and democracy"; and all "religious sects are to be found"; since the ruling class is made up of both "gentry and merchants" and finally, since men enjoy a "great liberty and independency", it follows that "the English, of any people in the universe, have the least of a national character; unless this very singularity may pass for such" (NC, 212).

The apparently paradoxical non-character of Englishmen should not mislead us. It is not necessarily a specific fault of theirs, because Hume considers character

an altogether paradoxical notion. In the first *Enquiry* he states "that the characters of men are, to a certain degree, inconstant and irregular. This is, in a manner, the constant character of human nature […]". Besides individual character and national character, Hume considers an altogether human character as well. Hume does consider human nature as governed by general rules and widely predictable, like the "winds, clouds, and other variations of the weather are supposed to be governed by steady principles; though not easily discoverable by human sagacity and enquiry" (Hume 2000, 67). Necessity, rather than freedom rules human actions: he who "at noon leaves his pursue full of gold on the pavement at Charing Cross, may as well expect that it fly away like a feather, as that he will find it untouched an hour after". Despite the witty nature of this example, Hume concludes, "[a]bove one half of the human reasoning contains inferences of a similar nature" (Hume 2000, 69-70).

In my view, Hume's remarks about national character and human character should be taken into account when it comes to defining the debated notion of individual character. Though an exhaustive discussion must be deferred to another occasion, it is clear that they make a "metaphysical" interpretation of Hume's notion of character untenable.


## 4. Character in Kant's Anthropology

As noted previously, Kant defines character as the "law" ruling the effects of a certain thing. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* he also draws a famous distinction between *empirical* and *intelligible* character. With this distinction, Kant aims at harmonising the universality of natural laws with the existence of human freedom. The empirical character refers to the human being taken as an appearance, who obeys natural laws. At the same time, Kant argues, human beings possess an intelligible character that refers to the realm of things in themselves. Freedom and nature, thus, can be "both found in the same actions, simultaneously and without any contradiction, according to whether one compares them with their intelligible or sensible cause" (Kant 1998, 536). Like any other thing-in-itself, intelligible character is totally unknown. Clues as to its presence and quality can be only deduced from the empirical character, which acts as a sign of the intelligible one. Accordingly, Kant deals with (empirical) character in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. The second part of the work, the Anthropological characteristic, is an empirical semiotics of character, consisting of an analysis of the character of the person, the sexes, the peoples, the races and finally the human species. In his definition, Kant now defines character into three elements, rather than into two. He distinguishes the "natural aptitude" (*Naturell*), the "tempera-

ment or sensibility", and "character purely and simply"(AP, 185). Natural dispositions and temper play a role within the development one's character, yet the purely "moral" character depends solely on the determination of the will. The person of character who assumes morality as a permanent rule brings about a sort of sudden "explosion", which resembles of a second birth.

Notwithstanding Kant's efforts, one may suspect that empirical and moral elements hardly blend into a consistent notion of character. How long will the complex of natural dispositions and sensible temperament stand in effortless agreement with the rock-like determinateness of behaving in accordance with the commandments of the moral law? A harmonisation may be taken into account as an exception, but is nevertheless unlikely to set a rule within an empirical or pragmatic anthropology. In other words: why did Kant put empirical and moral elements together within a spurious anthropological notion of character, given that their coexistence is scarcely to be expected – especially within Kant's fundamentally pessimistic picture of human nature, which he famously compared with a "crooked timber"?

Kant tries to avoid this potential inconsistency in his anthropological notion of character with a bipartite notion of "nature". Whenever we think of nature as the totality of mechanical causes and effects, a complete discontinuity between empirical and moral character is the unavoidable conclusion. By contrast, positing the account of nature given by Kant in the *Critique of the Faculty of Judgement* (and elsewhere in his writings on the philosophy of history), allows a different picture to emerge. Accordingly, nature can be legitimately thought of as teleologically oriented to achieve a certain set of goals. Strictly speaking we don't have any knowledge of nature in this latter sense. Yet we are allowed to take as a regulative principle that nature operates in this way, and say that "nature" aims at the full development of human reason, that is, at the achievement of a future state characterised by a full deployment of knowledge and virtue.

This move allows Kant to think of the *natural dispositions* of the human being in teleological terms as well. Accordingly, the contrast between instincts and morality begins to fade. In its higher wisdom, nature endowed the human species with a set of attitudes that, on the whole, points in the right direction.

In Kant's view, for instance, *human* sexuality is not merely a biologic fact. Mere preservation of the species could be easily guaranteed otherwise: without sexuality, or by a merely animal approach to it. Yet by establishing a different *character* for men and women nature gains a twofold goal: the preservation of the species and the progressive cultivation and refinement of society. Kant suggests we consider "not what we make our end, but what *nature's end* was" and insists that the principle presiding over the character of the sexes "does not depend on our choice but on a higher purpose for the human race", that is, "the preservation

of the species" and "the cultivation of society and its refinement by womankind" (AP, 207). Under the supervision of nature's wisdom, the physically weaker gender dominates over the stronger one: woman is made "man's ruler through her modesty and eloquence in speech and expression". Scorning brutality as a mean of obtaining sexual satisfaction, men are led "if not to morality itself, to that which is its cloak, moral decency, which is the preparation for morality and its recommendation" (AP, 207). After this digression, we can go back to the concept of national character. Kant clearly attempts a somewhat systematic treatment of national characters. To begin with, he singles out the culturally most developed nations. Echoing a long tradition, Kant considers England and France the "two most civilised peoples on earth" and deals with them separately (AP, 214). In a footnote, it is added that Germany is excluded because of the self-modesty of the author, who takes care of avoiding any possibility of indirectly praising himself by praising the Germans. Be that as it may, "England and France are perhaps the only peoples to which one can assign a definite and – as long as they do not become mixed by the violence of war – unchangeable character". As to the remaining nations, Kant believes that:

> [N]ational peculiarity is derivable not so much from their different types of culture – as is for the most part so in the preceding two cases [England and France, R.M.] – as from the predispositions of their nature, which results from the mixture of their originally different tribes. (AP, 218)

Needless to say, Hume's tenet that national character stems from the prolonged effect of the forms of government is rejected. Though Kant agrees with the rebuttal of the climate theory, he outrightly charges Hume – not directly mentioned, yet clearly referred to – of circularity:

> To claim that the kind of character a people will have depends entirely on its form of government is an ungrounded assertion that explains nothing; for from where does the government itself get its particular character? (AP, 215)

Kant does not provide a precise explanation of the origin of national characters. He speaks of the "innate character, of which the acquired and artificial character is only the result" (AP, 214). Once more, as for the character of the individual, he presents a twofold structure, made up of an original, natural element, and of an acquired or artificial one. However, one may ask, where does the former, "innate" element come from, if neither from climate, nor from government? Kant suggests that the existing evidence does not allow us to pronounce the last word. As to England and France, for instance, he confesses that "what they actually have at present, and its formation by means of language, this must be derived

from the innate character of the original people of their ancestry; but the documents for this are lacking". Kant dares some further hypothesis concerning the development of the English nation: the invasion of England by German and French peoples obliterated the original stem of the Britons, "as their mixed language proves". Together with the circumstance of the geographic insulation, this fact had remarkable consequences. Modern Englishmen "have a character that they have acquired for themselves when they actually have none by nature. Accordingly, the character of the Englishman cannot signify anything other than the principle learned from early teaching and example, that he must make a character for himself, that is, affect to have one" (AP, 216). The resulting character strikingly contrasts with that of the French:

> That this character is more directly opposed to that of the French people than to any other is evident from the fact that it renounces all amiability toward others, and indeed even among the English people, whereas amiability is the most prominent social quality of the French. The Englishman claims only respect, and by the way, each wants only to live as he pleases. (AP, 216)

Kant indulges in contrasting these two "most civilised" peoples against each other. Seemingly, he tends to treat them as a dichotomy, thereby gaining a general rule for the treatment of national character. It would be perhaps exaggerated to say that England and France roughly correspond to male and female. Yet Kant's insistence that the differences between the two above named peoples are polar oppositions than nevertheless complement each other, formally resembles of his analysis of the character of the sexes, given in the previous chapter of *Anthropology*.

A further group of nations is made up by Spain, Italy and Germany. Kant sketches the characters of these peoples starting from disparate considerations. He speaks of a mixture of "European with Arabian blood" in the case of Spain, (AP, 218) considers the Italian character as a mixture of French vivacity and Spanish seriousness, and finally invokes the doctrine of temperaments to deal with the Germans, who have "phlegm combined with understanding" (AP, 219). The nations of this group are culturally developed, yet they still bear heavy influences of natural aspects in their character – much more than England and France.

A third group of nations falls short of a true character, because of a failure in the development of "what is necessary for a definite concept of natural predispositions which lie ready in it". In other terms, these nations don't have yet – or anymore – a definite character. For different reasons in each case, Kant includes Russia, Poland, Turkey and modern Greece within this group. However, caution is highly recommended in this description, since "the question here is about innate, natural character which, so to speak, lies in the blood mixture of

the human being, not characteristics of nations that are acquired and artificial (or spoiled by too much artifice)".


## 5. Concluding remarks

In sum, Kant refuses Hume's claim that political regime determines character and rather insists on the process by means of which an unknown natural disposition (typical of each different ancient "tribe") develops into a well-defined national character proper – a process influenced by a multiplicity of factors. However, Kant assigns little importance to the investigation of this ancestral natural attitude: in "an anthropology from a pragmatic point of view", he contends, "the only thing that matters to us is to present the character" of peoples "as they are now, in some examples, and, as far as possible, systematically; which makes it possible to judge what each can expect from the other and how each could use the other to his own advantage" (AP, 214).

   In the writings of Hume and Kant, national character is not a mere misunderstanding devoid of philosophical legitimacy. They do not simply collect humorous platitudes or worn-out stereotypes on European nations. They start from the plain fact that national differences of character subsist, although with obvious limitations, and discuss them philosophically. Both reject the climate theory: Hume counts national characters among the effects of politics; Kant allows for a natural disposition, but contends that its identification is neither possible nor necessary, given that one should start from observation and "pragmatically" try to turn differences – including faults and deviations – into advantages.

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# Individual Actions and Shared Actions: An Interactional Framework

MARIANNA GINOCCHIETTI

## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to investigate the notion of individual action and claims that an interactional framework is needed in order to understand both individual and shared action. As far as individual actions are concerned, standard causal theories tend to offer a strong, stable account of action that can be sketched as follows: an agent's doing something is an agent's action if and only if it is caused by the *right* mental event (or state), in the *right* way. This approach identifies the (event of) action with the (event of) bodily movement, and it inevitably entails a reduction of the notion of action to a physical gesture rightly caused and explained. With regard to shared actions, contemporary philosophical literature[1] has focussed on what is shared by single participants of a certain shared action, and the debate is

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[1]    Scientific literature on shared actions is heterogeneous. There are psychological analyses oriented towards understanding which mechanisms make it possible to engage in different sorts of shared actions (Vesper et al. 2010). There are studies focussed on knowing when joint actions emerge, what they presuppose and what abilities are required to engage in them (Moll and Tomasello 2007; Huge and Leekam 2004). There are also formal accounts of how practical reasoning for joint action differs from individual practical reasoning (Gold and Sudgen 2007). For an overview of the different scientific trends and goals see Butterfill (2011, 23-24).

oriented towards understanding "what aspect of the inner life of the parties distinguishes two or more people who act together from others, behaving in similar ways, who are not acting together" (Gilbert 2010, 69).

In this paper, it will be argued that:

i.   accounts which claim that individual action corresponds to the bodily movement (rightly caused and explained) leave out many of the meaningful doings that are ordinarily considered as actions;

ii.  we need a notion of individual action consistent with the agent's concrete exercise of her agency and with the ways through which agents understand and attribute agency to other agents. Such a notion of individual action is a non-reductive one;

iii. a non-reductive notion of individual action is compatible with a notion of shared action understood in terms of "joint commitment".

This paper is structured as follows: in the next section, I place the notion of individual action within the claims of standard causal theories (2). Then, following part of Jennifer Hornsby's challenge to standard causal theories, I show that these theories are not sufficiently able to account for individual actions: the reductive notion of action they propose does not help us to understand: *i*) the agent's concrete exercise of her agency, and *ii*) the ways through which we, as agents, conceive and attribute agency to other agents (2.1). In the third section, I argue for the need for an alternative, non-reductive notion of action conceived within an interactional framework (3). In the fourth section, I frame the issue of shared action (4) and sketch out the three main approaches to it (4.1), subsequently I highlight their key common limitation (4.2). I go on to introduce the joint commitment approach to shared action, and explain why it is the most useful account to adopt if we are to understand shared actions in relation to the previous analysis of individual action (4.3).

In the concluding remarks I recap the main steps of the previous sections (5). I will not provide an account of shared action in this paper, rather my claim is that the non-reductive notion of individual action I propose is consistent with a notion of shared action understood in terms of joint commitment. Indeed, the joint commitment approach, although not free from difficulties, guarantees the interactional framework needed in order to understand both individual and shared actions.

## 2. Standard Causal Theories of Action

Expressions such as "the standard story" or "the standard view" refer to the standard event-causal theory of action.[2] Theories of this kind are made up of two parts: the first one regards the nature of action, the second one concerns the reason explanation. To simplify matters, we can follow Schlosser's schematization:

> Causal theory of the nature of action: An agent-involving event is an action just in case it is caused by the right agent-involving mental states and events in the right way. Causal theory of reason explanation: Reason explanations of actions are explanations in terms of the agent's mental states and events that rationalize and causally explain her performance. In particular, a reason explanation of an action in terms of the agent's mental states and events is true only if those states and events causally explain the action. (Schlosser 2011, 14)

Understanding which are the *right* kind of mental events (or states) and what the *right* way of causing (the event that is) the action is, is what different versions of event-causal theory differ over. Nevertheless, it is not wrong to say that in all these versions the right mental event is some mental attitude (such as intention, desire, belief) that rationalizes and causally explains the performance of an action, and that the right way of causation is a kind of causation that avoids *deviant chains*. A deviant chain is one in which causation does not provide a reason explanation for the effects achieved by the agent: suppose a man whose intention is to kill his uncle is so agitated by this thought that he drives too fast and accidentally kills a pedestrian who happens to be his uncle. Even if the man's intention was to kill his uncle, the killing of his uncle was not achieved by the man's intention to kill him (see Chisholm 1966).[3] The right kind of causation, hence, seems to be one that succeeds in guaranteeing the agent's control over her action and over the effects of her action (Bratman 2001; Mele 1995, 2003): An agent exercises control in this way only if her action and its effects are properly caused by the mental

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[2]    On causal views of action, the notion of (a) "cause" can be used with two different purposes: *i*) it can be used to explain the relation between events and, in this case, actions are basically understood as bodily movements properly caused and explained. This is the notion of «cause» used by proponents of the so-called standard story or standard view; or ii) the notion of cause can be used in order to qualify the agent's role in respect to her action; in this case the agent directly *causes something*. The main difficulty lies in understanding what kind of thing the agent causes: An event? Her action *itself*? A state of affairs? This is the notion of cause used by proponents of the so called "agent causal approach" according to which only a cause that *directly* applies between the agent and her action can guarantee the kind of control required for free will (Clarke 2003; O'Connor 2003). In this paper, I exclusively consider the standard view where the notion of cause applies to events.

[3]    Two kinds of causal deviance can be distinguished: a primary deviance that occurs between the mental event and the initial bodily movement, and a secondary deviance that breaks the causal path from initial bodily movement to later consequences (Davidson 2001, 78-79).

states and events that rationalize them. This point is extremely relevant; indeed many sophisticated strategies have been developed to try to understand the matter of the *right kind of causation*. Starting from the classic Davidsonian desire-belief model – in which only the pairing of a belief and a desire (or pro-attitude) causes and rationally explains an action – much work has been done in order to find the right kind of mental event able to provide strong control over the action and its effects over time. The notion of *intention* has been developed such that it is understood as guiding and controlling the *whole* execution of physical gestures; physical gestures which the action is identified with (Brand 1984; Bratman 1987; Mele 1992).

Things such as climbing a mountain, writing a book, and cooking dinner are things people do by moving their bodies. If, for instance, Giorgio *intentionally* opened the door by moving his body thus and so, then – according to the standard causal approach – "Giorgio's opening the door" identifies a bodily movement by referring to an effect it had.[4] But how do standard causal theories explain the fact that effects of certain bodily movements are ordinarily attributed to a person? Why do we ordinarily say "Giorgio opened the door" if Giorgio's action *actually* is – according to the standard view – his physical gesture (Giorgio's moving his body thus and so)?

In his paper, "Agency", Donald Davidson refers to this feature of the language we use when we talk about actions with the expression "accordion effect" (Davidson 2001, 53).[5] This expression was originally used by Joel Feinberg. In Feinberg's analysis, the accordion effect is a feature of our language "whereby a man's action can be described as narrowly or broadly as we please" (Feinberg 1970, 134): When an agent A did the action X with the consequence Y, we can individuate the agent's action by means of the narrower description "A did X" (in this way we relegate Y to consequence), or we can incorporate Y into a broader description saying "A did Y".

In Davidson's view, the accordion effect is a mark of agency because it allows us to attribute the effects of an event to a person only if *such an* event is an action: "It is a way of enquiring whether an event is a case of agency to ask whether we can attribute its effect to a person" (Davidson 2001, 54).[6] The event that is

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[4]    This is the so called "identity thesis" of action individuation. Philosophers have argued for or against this thesis attributed both to Donald Davidson and G. E. M. Anscombe (1963). According to the identity thesis, with one identical bodily movement an agent can produce different effects, nevertheless *the* agent's action is only one, and the different descriptions in terms of effects of bodily movements refer to the *same* action.

[5]    For a more recent discussion of the accordion effect within the standard causal framework see Bratman (2006) and Aguilar (2007).

[6]    Davidson's understanding of the accordion effect differs from Feinberg's. Davidson uses the accordion effect within the standard causal framework, where actions are conceived as events (bodily movements). Davidson is looking for a criterion in order to distinguish a simple event (a happening) from an event that is an action.

the agent's action can be described in terms of any of its causal effects, such as: "Giorgio's pulling the handle", or "Giorgio's opening the door", or "Giorgio's scaring his sister". What needs to be noted is that in Davidson's view and thus in event-causal approaches, there is only *one* single action performed by Giorgio (the basic action of moving his hand), with different descriptions based on its effects or on the circumstances surrounding its execution. If Giorgio moves his hand in such a way as to produce the opening of the door and thus the opening of the door causes the scaring of his sister, the accordion effect applies; indeed, it is possible to say both that Giorgio opened the door and that he scared his sister. The accordion effect does not reveal in what respect the single action performed by Giorgio is intentional: It is possible he did not intend to move his hand so as to produce the door's opening, nor to scare his sister, but for the accordion effect to be applied an intention is always required (Davidson 2001, 54).

To summarize, according to the standard event-causal theories of action:

1. an agent's doing something is an agent's action if and only if it is caused by the *right* mental event (or state), in the *right* way;

2. the agent's action is identified with the agent's basic bodily movement (rightly caused and explained);

3. thanks to the accordion effect, it is possible to extend (or contract) the descriptions of single actions so as to include (or to exclude) effects and consequences of bodily movements. What we extend or contract by means of the accordion effect are descriptions of single actions: We cannot extend or contract the action, the action is always one and *always* a bodily movement.

## 2.1 Against a Reductive Notion of Action

We can imagine many cases in which we intentionally do something without performing any bodily movement: Mary decides not to take a piece of cake and refrains from moving her arm on the table; Stewie does not want to be disturbed by phone calls and allows the phone to carry on ringing; Phil is too angry with his friend and stops talking to him.

In all the above cases nobody moves their body, so according to the standard causal theories there is no event, no action. As Jennifer Hornsby (2004) points

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By contrast, in Feinberg's analysis, the importance of the accordion effect lies in the fact that "we can usually replace any ascription to a person of causal responsibility by an ascription of agency or authorship" (Feinberg 1970, 134). Feinberg develops and deepens Hart's classical view according to which the primary function of action sentence is to ascribe responsibility (Hart 1949). In Feinberg's view, hence, the main function of the accordion effect lies in the possibility of ascribing different kinds of responsibility to a person for what she did.

out, the standard story treats bodily movements as spatio-temporal particulars, and in any of its versions finds actions among such particulars (among events). This is the reason why the standard story fails to explain cases in which there is no event and therefore no action in its own sense. The fact there is no action in standard story sense does not show there is *actually* no action, but simply shows that the notion of action, in this view, is used in a technical and artificial sense. Moreover, Hornsby argues that the standard story general conception of agency derives from a model of reason explanation. As we have seen, to explain actions, standard story uses the following kind of causal statement: "Her wanting.... and her believing... caused and rationalized her bodily movement", in Davidsonian terms or, in contemporary terms: "her intention... caused and guided her bodily movements". To simplify matters, we can say that the standard story's causal statement is of the following style: "Her desire/her intentions.... caused [an event which was] her bodily movement". Proponents of standard story "not only take the occurrence of a particular to be causally explained when an action explanation is given, they also assume items in a realm of particulars are what do the explaining" (Hornsby 2004, 6).

Nevertheless, when we ask someone *why* she did something we do not always care whether or not there was a positive performance on her part. I can ask Mary why she did not take the cake, or Stewie why he let the phone carry on ringing. I can also ask Phil why he started to ignore his friend.

Suppose Stewie wants to provoke his sister, and to spoil her party: it does not matter whether, for example, Stewie avoids to clean the kitchen, even if it is his turn to do it (in this case there is no event that is Stewie's spoiling the party – he makes no bodily movement) or he plays the guitar loudly in his room (so that his spoiling the party is an event, namely, Stewie's playing loudly in his room). Either way, we say that Stewie spoiled the party because he wanted to provoke his sister and we can construct a statement such as "His wanting to provoke… caused [an event which was whatever bodily movement was] his Φ-ing" (Hornsby 2004, 7).

Hornsby remarks that: "a causal explanation of why someone did something could not always be the explanation of an event's occurrence", and that "an action explanation doesn't ever seem to be focussed on saying why an event occurred" (Hornsby 2004, 7).

Once these points are acknowledged – Hornsby concludes – the habit of thinking that action explanations must mention items which combine with one another in the production of an event starts to be undermined (Hornsby 2004, 9).[7]

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[7]    Hornsby argues for a causal explanation of action (see also Hornsby 1997, 129-155), however we may use her main challenge to the standard view without endorsing the claim that action explanations are causal explanations.

## 3. A Non-Reductive Notion of Action

Event-causal approaches treat bodily movements as spatio-temporal particulars and they find actions among such particulars. These approaches provide a strong stable account of action understood as a *physical action*: Such an account is what is needed to provide an understanding of actions and agency as part of a natural causal order.

Nevertheless, event-causal accounts leave out *i*) all our doings that – even without a positive performance – can be considered our actions in an ordinary sense, and *ii*) some basic understanding of human beings as agents and of the way in which they relate to the effects and the consequences of their physical gestures. For these reasons, we need 1) a non-reductive notion of action able to account also for doings as Mary's or Phil's: Doings that, although without a positive performance, achieve significant effects, and 2) an alternative perspective from which to look at human actions, a perspective able to include the ordinary, practical and interpersonal capacities of human beings (such as capacities to achieve effects and consequences by means of our behaviour, capacities to distinguish meaningful doings from irrelevant ones, and more generally capacities to be agents, and to be agents with other agents).

In order to provide an alternative non-reductive notion of individual action, I will focus attention on: *i*) the relation between bodily movements and their effects (the opening of the door), or consequences (the scaring of my sister); and on *ii*) things we do not physically do, but which are ascribed to us with their consequences, as much as our bodily movements are.

As far as the relation between bodily movements and their effects or consequences is concerned, if we focus on our ordinary practices of attribution of agency, we note that we do not refer to what people do by mentioning bodily movements, rather we refer to what people do by individuating *salient* effects or consequences of their physical gestures: We do not generally say "you moved your mouth", we say "you said I'm stupid", or "you offended me!", or "you ruined my day!".[8] Indeed, the adjective "salient" has to be understood in terms of what is or might be relevant for the agent, and for the other agents who are in different ways affected by the effects or consequences of the agent's bodily

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[8]   For a pluralist view about actions we do with words (speech acts) see Sbisà (2013). The idea defended by Sbisà is that an utterance token can carry out more than one speech act, or, more precisely, that "there are cases in which one and the same utterance token is the vehicle of more than one illocutionary act" (Sbisà 2013, 233). Sbisà moves from a pragmatic theme in the philosophy of language – namely speech act – to the philosophy of action: She argues that Austin's distinction of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts already presupposes speech act pluralism (Sbisà 2013, 230-233), and shows that all views admitting of speech act pluralism require an ascription-centred conception of action, such as that outlined by Austin in his papers in the philosophy of action (Sbisà 2013, 242-243).

movements. Our doings – among which we pick out actions – are individuated in terms of significant effects or consequences of bodily movements, namely effects and consequences that are relevant to our living together. The fact that we define our actions in terms of the effects and consequences of physical gestures clearly emerges in our ordinary ascriptions of agency: We generally refer to our bodily movements in order to contract our agency as in the case in which I ask my brother: "Did you wake Mom up?" and he answers: "I pushed the door handle!". And, at the same time, we attribute more agency by including more effects (or consequences) in the description we give to the action ("You did not push the door handle, you woke Mom up!").

Sometimes we do not perform any bodily movements at all, but the consequences of our not physically doing anything are ascribed to us as much as the effects (or consequences) of bodily movements actually performed. Suppose my flatmate is waiting for an important phone call for a new job, but he must go out for an hour and he asks me to answer the phone. He goes out, and when the phone rings I let it carry on ringing. I do not carry out any bodily movements at all, I do not perform any action in standard causal sense. And yet, the consequences of my not performing any bodily movement will be straightforwardly ascribed to me. My furious flatmate will certainly not say: "You did not perform any bodily movement!", rather he will say: "You let the phone carry on ringing" or, very probably: "You made me lose my job!". Once again, the point seems to lie in the relevance of the consequences of agent's performances (including negative performances) for other agents: Among the possible doing-descriptions, the one that identifies the agent's action is subject to criteria of appropriateness that are not established by the agent herself.

Acknowledging the fact that some consequences of not (physically) doing anything are to be treated in the same way as consequences of positive performances, and recalling the possibility that we have to refer to what a person does under different doing-descriptions (possibility also acknowledged by standard causal theories), and given that we do not accept the identification of the action with bodily movements, then the crucial question seems to be the following: Among the different descriptions in terms of effects or consequences of positive and negative performances[9], what is the most appropriate description that individuates[10]

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9    With the expression "positive performances" I refer to all cases of performance where the agent moves her body. With "negative performances" I refer to all cases where the agent can be said to do something without moving her body. In this paper I do not distinguish among the different kinds of negative performance such as tryings, refrainings, and omissions.

10    As Olle Blomberg pointed out to me, there are two senses of the term "individuation" here: a *cognitive* sense and a *metaphysical* sense. In the former sense, individuation refers to that which picks out some entity in thought, as in the case of a witness who may be said to have individuated a killer at an identity parade. As far as the metaphysical sense is concerned, individuation means a "mind-

the agent's action? The appropriateness of the description of an action is conceived in terms of the salience of what the agent is held responsible for. To be clear, the notion of responsibility I am referring to is not a moral one. This notion applies to agents' doings independently of their being valued as good or bad (see Sbisà 2007, 467). This is consistent with the fact that in our ascriptions of responsibility we identify the agent's relevant doings by selecting the more salient effects or consequences, and that these effects or consequences can also be valued as good or bad.

It is not a matter of indifference which effects or consequences we include in the description we give to the agent's action and which effects we relegate among the consequences of action: «She moved her finger» is not an appropriate description for the action of a woman who shot her partner in business to obtain money from insurance. On the other hand, «He killed his grandmother» is not the most appropriate description for the action of a grandson who, to surprise his old grandmother, caused such a great emotion that she suffered of a deadly heart-attack. The attribution of responsibility to the agent is what allows us to assess a certain agent's behaviour as *the* agent's action; moreover, by individuating the appropriateness of the attribution of responsibility to the agent as the inter-subjective criterion with which to identify the action, we do not ignore the agent's intentions and beliefs and the circumstances of her performance, rather, we take all these aspects in.[11] This criterion is consistent with an interactional framework within which to conceive of human actions and agency. Such a framework allows us to understand the attributions of personal agency as attributions of degrees of responsibility: Whenever we have the possibility of attributing a certain degree of responsibility to an agent, then there is agency. The more we attribute responsibility to a person, the more we acknowledge her as an agent. This framework also accounts for the agent's capacity to monitor the effects and consequences of her physical gestures, and for her capacity to be an agent in the ordinary sense.

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independent determination relation between entities" (Lowe 2010, 5). It is in this sense that a set is individuated by its members, its members determine which set it is, and in so doing they fix its identity. When philosophers are concerned with the ontology of action, the sense of "individuation" traditionally involved is the metaphysical one. On the contrary, I suggest that the cognitive-attentional sense of the term individuation is the most relevant one to approach the philosophical issue of action individuation.

[11]    As it has been pointed out by Knobe and Doris, when we attribute moral responsibility to other agents we use quite different criteria in different kinds of cases: "[…] the ordinary practice of responsibility attribution is pervasively variantist. People's ordinary responsibility judgments do not appear to follow from a single system of criteria that can be applied in all cases. Instead, it seems that people use different sorts of criteria depending on the case at hand" (Knobe and Doris 2010, 346). The attributed responsibility which I refer to as an identifying criterion of action is not necessary moral, however Knobe and Doris's studies can be equally useful in understanding ordinary practices of attribution of a more basic kind of responsibility.

### 4. Framing Shared Actions

In this section, I frame the issue of shared action (4) and sketch out the three main approaches to it: Tuomela and Miller's approach, Searle's, and Bratman's (4.1), I subsequently highlight their key common limitation (4.2). I later introduce the joint commitment approach, and explain why it is the most useful approach to adopt if we are to understand shared actions in relation to the previous analysis of individual action (4.3).

Different authors use different terminologies, speaking of shared actions, collective action or joint actions, and similarly, different authors variously use the terminology of 'shared agency', 'collective agency' or 'joint agency'. I use the expression "shared actions" as the most basic term to indicate cases in which two or more agents do something together by sharing some aspect of their action. Nevertheless, by using this expression I do not want to imply that it is unambiguous. In fact, "shared action" may refer to a situation in which a group of people act *qua* institution, as in the case in which the board approves the allocation of funds, or it may refer to a situation in which two or more agents jointly act to achieve a common goal, as in the case of musicians playing as a trio.

To simplify matters, we can assume that shared actions occur when two or more agents are *doing something together*, where the qualifier "together" is used to mark the fact that a shared action is at issue, rather than the fact that single agents are physically adjacent to one another (see Gilbert 2010, 67). Cases of shared actions in this sense include going for a walk together, protesting against the Prime Minister together, cheering a team together, investigating a crime together, and robbing a bank together.


4.1 Three Main Approaches to Shared Action

As in the case of individual actions, theorists have focussed their attention on the mental states of the individual participants involved in a certain shared action, investigating what aspect of their inner life distinguishes two or more people who act together from others, behaving in similar ways, who are not acting together. Three main approaches which take this line can be distinguished: Tuomela and Miller's, Searle's and Bratman's.

Tuomela and Miller propose that intentions distinguishing agents acting together are intentions shared by single agents. They understand these intentions as "[…] a species of other-regarding intentions […] relating to […] situations in which some agents act together, usually or often with the purpose of achieving some joint goal" (Tuomela and Miller 1988, 367). These "we-intentions" can be

analysed as sets of individual intentions together with sets of mutual beliefs about other agents' intentions and beliefs (see Pacherie 2011)[12]. Their analysis has been criticized by Searle, who claims that it is unable to grasp the cooperative dimension of joint actions (Searle 1990). In challenging Tuomela and Miller's account, Searle claims that the existence of a shared goal as well as mutual beliefs among single agents does not ensure the intention to cooperate mutually. According to Searle, we can grasp the cooperative dimension of shared actions and therefore account for collective actions only if we accept that the intentions attributable to the agents involved in them are different in type from the intentions attributable to those same agents when they engage in individual actions (Searle 1990, 404-406). For this reason, Searle proposes that, in addition to the personal intentions of agents expressible by sentences of the form "I personally intend to do such and such", there are intentions of agents that are not expressible in this way. Rather, they are expressible in sentences of the form "We intend to do such and such" (Searle 1990, 404). According to this approach, the inner element at the core of a collective action is the corresponding set of we-intentions, one for each agent. It is important to note that, according to Searle, all intentional states are states of individuals, thus, even we-intentions can only be entertained by individuals. The individual intentions of the participating agents are related to the we-intention as means to ends and this relation is simply part-whole. To recall Searle's example of two cooks preparing a hollandaise sauce together, the content of Cook1's we-intention would be something like: "That we make the sauce by means of me stirring", and the content of Cook2's we-intention could be rendered as "That we make the sauce by means of me pouring" (Searle 1990, 412-413).

On Bratman's view, the inner aspect of a shared action is a set of personal intentions of the individual participants, and the content of such intentions may be characterized as follows:

> We intend to J if and only if
> 1. (a) I intend that we J, and (b) you intend that we J,
> 2. I intend that we J in accordance with and because of 1a, 1b, and meshing sub-plans of 1a and 1b; you intend that we J in accordance with and because of 1a, 1b, and meshing sub-plans of 1a and 1b,
> 3. 1 and 2 are common knowledge between us.                (Bratman 1993, 106)

Bratman proposes a constructivist account of shared intentions that are construed in terms of personal intentions, the attitudes of the participants, and the interrelation of these. Indeed, shared intentions do three interrelated jobs: 1) They help

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12    See also Tuomela (2005). For the analysis of we-intention in connection with the I-mode/we-mode distinction see Tuomela (2006, 2007).

coordinate our intentional actions; 2) They help coordinate our planning; and 3) They structure relevant bargaining (Bratman 2009a, 2009b).

## 4.2 The Common Limitation

The common limitation that these three approaches share is the assumption that what is required for a shared action is a certain type of mental state shared in a certain way by single participants.

As far as Tuomela and Miller's account is concerned, the set of personal shared intentions has to be analyzed together with a set of mutual beliefs about the other agents' intentions and beliefs. Searle challenges their view by claiming that mutual beliefs among members are not sufficient to guarantee that their doing something together is a case of acting together, indeed, there can be mutual beliefs about members' respective intentions without any form of cooperation between them. According to Searle what ensures the cooperation required for a collective action is a set of we-intentions to cooperate mutually ('we-intend that').

Nevertheless, we can claim that the sense of a shared action is not *just* a matter of intentions ("we" or personal) or mutual beliefs in favour of the action in question. We need to know, indeed, whether there are conditions under which a given mutual belief (about other agents' beliefs), or a given intention ("we" or personal) are appropriate, and, if so, whether these conditions have to do with anyone other than the possessor of the mutual belief or the intention ("we" or personal) (see Gilbert 2010, 71). In preparing the sauce together, for instance, Cook1 and Cook2 are acting appropriately, each is acting, each is making an effort to be coordinated with the other. Suppose Cook1 suddenly stops stirring and starts to prepare goulash. Is Cook2 in a position to demand that Cook1 starts stirring again? If so, what precisely puts him in this position? Moreover, in respect to one's own we-intentions set (both in Tuomela and Miller's version and in Searle's), it is also not clear whether or not one agent is in a position to revoke her own we-intention without the concurrence of the other agents – as one is in a position to revoke a personal intention of one's own (Gilbert 2010, 71).

As far as Bratman's understanding of acting together is concerned, personal intentions properly shared coordinate single agents' intentional actions, guide planning, and structure their bargaining. An important limitation of his account lies in the fact that although it uses ordinary personal intentions, their assemblage is costly and requires agents that are more cognitively sophisticated than is necessary (Pacherie 2011, 180-181). Moreover, Bratman's interest lies in cases of small-scale shared intentional agency in the absence of asymmetric authority relations, where personal intentions are sufficient to provide a basic explanation

of the action. Nevertheless, it is not obvious that participants in a certain shared action are always involved in symmetric authority relations, as it is not obvious that the kind of coordination provided by the interrelations between agents' personal intentions accounts for *all* cases of acting together.


## 4.3 The Joint Commitment Approach

Margaret Gilbert's joint commitment account may be introduced by reference to the concept of a personal decision: By making a given decision, one imposes a kind of normative constraint upon oneself. If I have decided to go to Rome tomorrow, I am committed to going to Rome tomorrow, and if I do not go to Rome tomorrow I will not have acted appropriately. This is true also of personal intentions, although decisions and intentions differ in various ways. For instance, whereas an intention can simply disappear, a decision needs to be explicitly revoked, otherwise it stands (Gilbert 2010, 71). Gilbert proposes that people can be subjected to both personal commitments – by personally deciding and intending – and to joint commitments (Gilbert 2014, 38). One agent is not subjected to a joint commitment simply by having made a personal decision or formed a personal intention that corresponds in some way to the personal decision or intention of one or more other people. Rather, two or more people jointly commit with each other and they do so, "by mutually expressing to one another their readiness jointly to commit them all in a particular way, where these expressions are common knowledge" (Gilbert 2010, 72)[13].

A joint commitment cannot unilaterally be rescinded by any one party without some special background understanding: "The parties to any joint commitment owe each other conformity to the commitment in the pertinent sense of 'owe'" (Gilbert 2010, 68). That sense is closely linked with the standing to demand conformity. Indeed, "parties have a special standing to demand of one another appropriate actions", and they also have "the special standing to rebuke inappropriate actions" (Gilbert 2010, 68). The parties act together in the sense that they act as a plural subject. In Gilbert's view, indeed, there can be no joint commitments that are not the commitments of a plural subject and there can be no plural subjects without joint commitments.[14]

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[13] These mutual expressions may involve a variety of processes. One of them is the process of making an agreement. Although a prior agreement is not a necessary condition of all collective actions, such collective actions do often proceed on the basis of an agreement (Gilbert 2014, 49). In "Acting together", Gilbert specifies that there are also cases where joint actions get started with some other preliminary interchange, and cases that involve no such preliminary interchange (Gilbert 2014, 27; see also Gilbert 1990).

[14] The notion of a plural subject may sound ambiguous. It is not clear if we, independently from

Gilbert's account is the most useful account of those considered here if we are to understand shared actions in relation to the previous analysis of individual action. Gilbert's account of collective action, indeed, is grounded in an interactional framework as understood by our previous analysis of individual action. Such a framework is interactional to the extent that it acknowledges: [15]

1. that participants of a shared action are personally and jointly engaged in a sense that is not reducible to their owning and sharing a certain type of mental state;

2. that this sense in which agents are engaged lies in a contractual/legal mode: In order to participate in a shared action, indeed, the agents have to mutually express to one another their readiness jointly to commit themselves in a particular way;

3. that the participants have a special standing to demand of one another appropriate actions, and to rebuke inappropriate actions.

Gilbert's understanding of joint action accounts also for cases where agents are not in symmetric authority relations: The variety of processes through which agents express their joint commitments, indeed, concerns the specificity of their interpersonal relations. An elaboration of Gilbert's view would allow us to distinguish types of shared action exactly on the basis of the processes through which agents express their joint commitments.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

According to standard causal theories an agent's doing something is an agent's action if and only if it is caused by the *right* mental event in the *right* way. This approach identifies the (event of) action with the (event of) bodily movement, and it inevitably entails a reduction of the notion of action to a physical gesture rightly caused and explained. A reductive notion of individual action that identifies the action with bodily movement leaves out many of the doings that are ordinarily considered as actions. We need a notion of individual action consistent with the agent's concrete exercise of her agency and with the ways through which agents understand and attribute agency to other agents. Such a notion is

Gilbert, can reject the notion of plural subject and accept that of joint commitment. I consider this to remain an open question.

[15]  I am not claiming that Gilbert's account is free from difficulties. However, among the various accounts of shared action mentioned here, it is the one which provides an interactional framework within which we can place shared action.

a non-reductive one, and can include not only salient effects and consequences of the agent's bodily movements, but also salient effects and consequences of negative performances that are attributable to the agent. Given the possibility of referring to the agent's doings under different descriptions in terms of effects and consequences of her performances, we need a criterion to single out the most appropriate description that individuates *the* agent's action. Among the different doing-descriptions, the most appropriate one is the description that picks out the salient effects or consequences of the agent's performance. If the appropriateness is conceived in terms of salience of attribution of responsibility to the agent for the selected effect or consequence, then the agent's action is not identified with the agent's bodily movement, but is description-relative and can also include effects and consequences of the agent's (positive or negative) performance. This non-reductive notion of individual action is compatible with a notion of shared action understood in terms of joint commitment: Both a non-reductive notion of individual action and a notion of shared action understood in terms of joint commitment demand an interactional framework.

As in the case of standard causal theories, in respect to individual action, the three main approaches sketched out in (4.1) understand shared action as a matter of which aspect of the inner life of the parties distinguishes two or more people who act together from others who are not acting together. The common limitation these three approaches share is the assumption that what is required for a shared action is a certain type of intention shared in a certain way by single participants. By contrast, the joint commitment approach, by acknowledging that participants of a shared action are personally and jointly engaged in a sense that is not reducible to their owning and sharing a certain type of intention, allows us to shift reflection on the topic of shared action from an enquiry about the kind of mental event shared by participating agents to an enquiry about the conditions of appropriateness of each other's contribution to the shared action, where appropriateness is conceived in terms of the participants' special standing to demand of each other certain actions rather than others. Although not free from difficulties, the joint commitment approach seems to be the one which guarantees the interactional framework within which to conceive the phenomenon of acting together. As we have seen in the third section, the interactional framework is also what allows us to conceive the notion of individual action in non-reductive terms.

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# Rationality in Linguistic Interpretation: from Charity to Cooperativeness

PAOLO LABINAZ

## 1. Introduction

This paper deals with how human rationality is related to the practice of interpreting other people's linguistic behaviour. According to some well-known philosophers of language and mind, such as Willard V.O. Quine (1960), Donald Davidson (1984) and Daniel Dennett (1978, 1987), there is a necessary connection between our capacity to interpret other people's behaviour, be it linguistic or not, and our acknowledgement of their rationality. On these views, indeed, it would be very difficult (maybe impossible) to interpret other people's behaviour without also ascribing them a certain degree of rationality. Central to this claim is the Principle of Charity, according to which, roughly, maximizing agreement, or minimizing disagreement, with our interlocutors is a necessary condition of interpreting their linguistic behaviour successfully. That is, by assuming the speaker's rationality we can maximize agreement, or minimize disagreement, with her, making her linguistic behaviour understandable. However, if we put the Principle of Charity to work, some problems arise as to how this presumption of rationality is to be articulated. As I will try to argue, the Principle of Charity should be dismissed on the grounds that it makes difficult to determine what degree, if any, of rationality we have to attribute to our interlocutors in order to interpret their linguistic behaviour successfully.

A more promising way of accounting for the interpretation of other people's utterances may be found if we start from Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle, and his argumentative conception of rationality (Grice 1975/1989, 1991), as recently discussed by Marina Sbisà (2001, 2006). While according to the Principle of Charity, conformity to certain rational principles, whatever they are, must be ascribed *a priori* to our interlocutors, Grice's Cooperative Principle specifies what we should reasonably expect (*ceteris paribus*) from our interlocutors in conversation, insofar as we assume that they cooperate with us to reach a common goal, without imposing any specific rational principle to their linguistic behaviour. It is noteworthy that even when we believe that our interlocutors violate some of the expectations associated with the Cooperative Principle, we can still make sense of their linguistic behaviour insofar as we recognize that they have behaved in that way on the basis of some reasons, that is, in a rational way. On this view, rationality emerges from one's linguistic practices, particularly as a concern for the justification of one's own linguistic moves. I conclude by pointing out that studying rationality from the point of view of how we should interpret other people's speech sheds some light on how to conceive rationality itself. In particular, approaching rationality in this way gives us good grounds for moving from the received view that other people's rationality (as a conformity to norms) has to be assumed *a priori,* to an alternative view. This alternative view, which stands in need of further refinement, claims that rationality emerges in our concern to give reasons to support our behaviour, be it linguistic or of another nature.

## 2. Charity and rationality

Over the years, a wide debate has taken place concerning the nature of the Principle of Charity, and its application in linguistic interpretation. Roughly speaking, this principle states a general constraint on linguistic interpretation: to say that our interpretation of other people's linguistic behaviour must be charitable means that in order to interpret this linguistic behaviour successfully we must maximize agreement, or minimize disagreement, with them. As we will see, this requires in turn the assumption that the speaker being interpreted is, to a certain extent, rational, i.e. the interpreter ought to presume the speaker's rationality.

While the label "Principle of Charity" was coined by Neil L. Wilson (1959), the principle has been later reformulated and developed by several prominent philosophers, particularly Willard V.O. Quine and Donald Davidson.[1] Moreo-

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[1]    Philosophers who have discussed (in different forms and for various reasons) the Principle of Charity in their philosophical theorizing are, among others, David Lewis (1974), Paul Thagard and Richard Nisbett (1983), Hilary Putnam (1975, 272-279).

ver, another well-known philosopher, Daniel Dennett, has developed a theory which, while differing in some respects from those of Davidson and Quine, holds that when predicting or explaining the behaviour of intentional systems we have to adopt a charitable attitude towards them, that is, we have to consider them as perfectly rational, or nearly so.

## 2.1 Quine on radical translation

In *Word and Object* (1960, 26-79), in order to argue for the indeterminacy of translation Quine elaborates a thought experiment in which a linguist is supposed to interact with a native speaker of an unknown community in an attempt to translate the latter's exotic language into her home language. Since the linguist has no prior knowledge of this language and there is no third shared language available, the only evidence available to the linguist is the native speaker's observable linguistic behaviour. Quine refers to this situation as a case of radical translation. Following Quine (1960, 29-30), suppose that when a rabbit appears the native speaker utters "gavagai." If this happens more than once, the linguist might conjecture that the expression "gavagai" refers to the rabbit, that is, can be translated into English as "gavagai" (or something like "Look, there is a rabbit"). However, in uttering "gavagai," the native speaker might refer to a portion of reality other than the rabbit considered as a whole (we suppose this is the portion of reality to which the English word "rabbit" actually refers), such as "rabbit parts," "temporal stage of a rabbit" or "instantiation of rabbithood," etc. Insofar as the linguist has only the observable linguistic behaviour of the native speaker at her disposal, she has no basis to decide what the most appropriate translation is. Indeed, considering one and the same linguistic stimulus, several hypotheses may be made. In addition, there is another question that the linguist has to tackle in translating the unknown language, that is, how to translate logical connectives (such as "∧", "∨" and so on) into the native speaker's language (Quine 1960, 57-61). For example, suppose that a native speaker assents to certain compound sentences that correspond to the logical form "$p$ and not-$p$" (i.e., "the rabbit is on the grass and the rabbit is not on the grass"). Sentences with this form are absurd, or better contradictory, according to the semantic criteria of the linguist, as well as our own. But, as Quine points out, "[w]anton translation can make natives sound as queer as one pleases. Better translation imposes our logic upon them […]" (Quine 1960, 58). It is therefore suggested that the native speaker's utterance is not really contradictory and that the contradictory translation is a wrong translation.

In Quine's view, in the case of radical translation, since there may be an indefinite number of incompatible manuals of translation that are all consistent

with the same set of observable linguistic behaviour, the linguist must maximize her agreement with the native speaker. That is, only when the linguist assumes that there is a great deal of agreement between her and the native speaker, her task of translation can start. Agreement on the part of the linguist amounts to a charitable attitude towards the native speaker's observed linguistic behaviour. Quine proposes, among others, two methodological suggestions that have to be followed when translating sentences from an unknown language:

- "[…] fair translation preserves logical laws […]" (Quine 1960, 59);

- "[…] interlocutor's silliness, beyond a certain point, is less likely than bad translation – or, in the domestic case, linguistic divergence" (Quine 1960, 59), where silliness has to be evaluated from the linguist's perspective.

Put another way, Quine (1960, 58-59) suggests that the linguist has to normally consider an apparently nonsensical translation as the result of a mistake of the translator rather than irrationality or illogicality on the part of the native speaker. Charity requires that the linguist has to avoid translating the native speaker's utterances as contradictory or absurd. According to Quine, as seen previously, to avoid contradictory or absurd translation she has to "project" (in Quine's terms, "impose") her logic onto the native speaker.[2] However, this move can be understood in at least two different ways. While the first interpretation requires assuming that the native speaker's linguistic behaviour is logically consistent, regardless of whether she actually possesses a logical competence, the second one, which is a stronger assumption, requires the linguist to assume that the native speaker possesses a "real" logical competence including a certain amount of rules of first-order logic. Regardless of how one answers this question, which will be approached in Section 3, Quine claims that by adopting a charitable attitude towards the native speaker, the linguist should be able to carry over the truth from the sentences of the exotic language, be they occasion or compound, to her home language's sentences (Quine 1960, 60).

2.2 Davidson on radical interpretation

What Quine holds to be characteristic of genuine cases of radical translation, Davidson assumes that it also occurs in ordinary communication. According to him, what he calls "radical interpretation" is not limited to cases of translation but is concerned with interpreting utterances and ascribing propositional atti-

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[2]    It is clear here that Quine (1960, 58) refers to a specific logical system, that is, first-order logic.

tudes in ordinary communication (Davidson 1973/1984, 128-129). On the basis of his analysis of radical interpretation, Davidson argues that in order to develop a theory of meaning, that is, a theory that determines the meaning or meanings of the sentences of a certain object language, we ought to establish a Tarski-style theory of truth for that language (Davidson 1973/1984, 130-131). According to Davidson, indeed, a theory of meaning based on Tarski's definition of truth "[…] provides an effective method for determining what every sentence means (i.e. gives the conditions under which it is true)" (Davidson 1966/1984, 8).

Radical interpretation differs fundamentally from radical translation in that the former is symmetrical while the latter is not: in radical interpretation, since both interlocutors want to understand each other, they share the same intention to communicate. However, as in the case of radical translation, in order to reach this goal both interlocutors have to maximize agreement, or minimize disagreement, between each other. Here Davidson refers to the Principle of Charity, but argues for a stronger form of it, according to which it is a necessary condition of the possibility of interpreting someone's speech and behaviour to assume that she is by and large rational and most of her beliefs are true (Davidson 1974a/1984, 183-198). While Quine uses the Principle of Charity as a methodological principle in translation, Davidson considers it as an *a priori* principle governing the ascription of propositional attitudes and the interpretation of linguistic behaviour (Davidson 1974/1984, 197). He claims that "if we are intelligently to attribute attitudes and beliefs, or usefully to describe motions as behaviour, then we are committed to finding in the pattern of behaviour, belief, and desire a large degree of rationality and consistency" (Davidson 1974b/1980, 237). So, when assigning meanings to a speaker's utterances, and contents to her attitudes, we must construe her as (i) being largely rational (or logical) and as (ii) having more true beliefs than false ones.[3] According to Davidson, there is a strong connection between (i) and (ii): insofar as most of our beliefs are true and there is a large degree of logical (or rational) consistency among them, new beliefs generated from those already available will be more likely true than false. If these two constraints are satisfied, we can identify a large degree of consistency and truthfulness in our interlocutors' utterances and thoughts, making them interpretable and so understandable.

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[3]    In another work, Davidson adds a further interpretative constraint, which is not so relevant in the present context. This constraint requires the interpreter to assume that the speaker shares most of her own values, such as the desire "[…] to find warmth, love, security and success" (Davidson 1982/2004, 183).

2.3 Dennett on the intentional stance

According to Daniel Dennett, the assumption of rationality is a precondition of our ability to attribute intentionality to other beings (humans or not): "[t] he assumption that something is an intentional system is the assumption that it is rational" (Dennett 1971/1978, 10-11). In other words, according to Dennett, if something is taken to be an intentional system then she/he/it is must be assumed to be largely rational. Accordingly, in assuming that something thinks and acts rationally we adopt an "intentional stance" towards her/him/it (Dennett 1971/1978, 6-7). On the contrary, every time we depart from the assumption of rationality in trying to interpret other people's behaviour, we preclude ourselves from the possibility of explaining or predicting it. More specifically, when the intentional stance is adopted towards something

- an intentional attitude is first attributed to her/him/it,

- on the basis of the intentional attitude that has been attributed to her/him/it, it is possible then to predict her/his/its behaviour by determining what actions are rationally required in order that the intention be accomplished (Dennett 1971/1978, 6-9).

If she/he/it is assumed to be rational and consequently her/his/its propositional attitudes and their relationships to each other are taken to be so, we may be able to describe her/him/it in intentional terms. It is noteworthy that from Dennett's instrumentalist point of view the intentional stance is only a useful predictive tool, that is, relying on it helps us to predict what a rational individual will do given her goal(s) and cognitive situation, regardless of what actually happens in her mind. This means, in turn, that he understands intentional properties not to be real "mental" properties (see, e.g. Dennett 1971/1978, 16).

## 3. The presumption of rationality

The Principle of Charity has been a cornerstone in the debate concerning linguistic interpretation because, according to its supporters, "the position of the radical interpreter is the most fundamental position from which to investigate meaning and related matters, and it is needed to make sense of how the interpreter can see, on the basis of his evidence, another as a speaker" (Ludwig 2003, 17). However, there are still some relevant questions that need to be answered about the status of the Principle of Charity and its conditions of application. As to its status, the Principle of Charity can be interpreted in at least two different ways. On the one

hand, charity can be seen as a generalization of our best interpretative practices. On the other hand, it can be taken as a normative rule for interpretation. These two interpretations can be articulated in the following way respectively:

(Gen)    Successful interpretation of other people's linguistic behaviour is made according to the Principle of Charity.

(Nor)    Successful interpretation of other people's linguistic behaviour has to be made according to the Principle of Charity.


(Gen) is clearly a descriptive principle: it describes how successful interpretations take place, that is, what people actually do to interpret other people's linguistic behaviour successfully. On this view, the Principle of Charity is regarded as a heuristic device that allows us, most of the time, to interpret other people's linguistic behaviour successfully. While this interpretation of the principle may be attributed to a certain extent to Quine, according to Davidson the Principle of Charity plays a purely normative function, regardless of what people actually do in interpreting other people's linguistic behaviour. Indeed, since the correct interpretation always contrasts with many other interpretations that could have been made, there must exist "[…] an interpersonal standard of consistency and correspondence to the facts [that] applies to both the speaker and the speaker's interpreter, to their utterances and to their beliefs" (Davidson 1991/2001, 211). Davidson does not take a position on whether the Principle of Charity is actually valid in its particular applications, but considers it as a constitutive norm that governs any possible linguistic interpretation. On this view, (Nor) specifies what a successful interpretation of other people's linguistic behaviour amounts to. Since Davidson's interpretation of the Principle of Charity is central to the debate on linguistic interpretation in philosophy of language, in the remaining part of the paper we will refer to the Principe of Charity as (Nor). The next question, then, is: under what conditions does an interpreter comply with the Charity Principle in interpreting other people's linguistic behaviour?

As we have seen in the previous section, Quine, Davidson and Dennett agree that in interpreting other people's behaviour the most fundamental condition that must be respected is that of presuming their rationality. This condition is also known as "the presumption of rationality." According to some philosophers (and also some well-known neoclassical economists; see, e.g., Friedman 1953), the presumption of rationality is held to be so strongly entrenched in our ordinary life and not be, therefore, easily questionable (see, e.g., Rescher 1988, 191-194). In order to be able to understand your interlocutor, indeed, you have to assume that she will be on that occasion rational: no one would be able to understand a non-rational individual. As Donald Davidson (1991/2001, 211)

points out, "successful interpretation necessarily invests the person interpreted with basic rationality." That is, successful interpretations necessarily require that the speaker being interpreted is "imputed" with a certain degree of rationality. Since the presumption of rationality is an empty formula, we can make some suppositions as to what conditions it imposes on the interpreter (see also Thagard and Nisbett 1983, 251-252). Indeed, its injunction ("presume that…") may be interpreted according to different levels of stringency, such as the following:

(1) Presume that your interlocutors are sometimes rational.

(2) Presume that your interlocutors are usually rational.

(3) Presume that your interlocutors are always rational.

These requirements, which can be further decomposed into many others, show that the presumption of rationality can be applied with different levels of stringency. But what is the level of stringency adopted, either implicitly or explicitly, by Quine, Davidson and Dennett?

In the case of radical translation, the answer is not completely clear. On the one side, when Quine claims that "interlocutor's silliness, beyond a certain point, is less likely than bad translation," he seems to be committed to (2). By using the expression "beyond a certain point," Quine leaves open the possibility that in some specific circumstances we could prefer to assume the native speaker's illogicality or irrationality rather than trying to give sense to her utterances according to our logical criteria. On the other hand, in arguing for the projection of the linguist's logic onto the native speaker, Quine seems to assume a stronger presumption of rationality, which can be equated to (3). On this view, insofar we project our logic onto the native speaker, we can never translate her linguistic behaviour as contradictory, since she is assumed to be as logical (or rational) as we are. However, there is no real contradiction between these two positions: they can be taken to be two poles of a *continuum* with a number of intermediate positions that have to be determined contextually. When faced with a contradiction, supposing that the native speaker has assented to both a sentence and its negation, the linguist could either abandon her translation or decide that in consideration of the relevant evidence the native speaker's linguistic behaviour actually violates the principle of non-contradiction. If the latter case happens more than once, according to Quine (1960, 59) we are justified in concluding that the native speaker's language is untranslatable due to its non-logical structure. Since this type of case is very rare, as underlined by Rescorla (2013, 477), according to Quine it is enough for the linguist to not render the native speaker "[…] as denying obvious truths, whether those truths are logical, observational, or otherwise." However, obviousness is a very tricky concept that is usually as-

sociated with subjective or context-dependent standards. Therefore, in Quine's radical translation, the question of how stringent the presumption of rationality is remains underspecified.

In Davidson's theory of radical interpretation, the presumption of rationality is taken to be constitutive of the attribution of contents to utterances and thoughts. According to Davidson, indeed, we can attribute contents to the other person's utterances and thoughts only if we assume that they are interrelated in normatively appropriate ways, namely in rational ways. Therefore, the Principle of Charity, with its presumption of rationality, is not only a normative condition of interpretation, but also a constraint on any manifestation of rational behaviour. If we do not assume that a speaker's utterances and thoughts are interrelated in normatively appropriate ways, we cannot find rationality in her behaviour. On this view, the presumption of rationality supported by Davidson corresponds to (3), although, as he frequently underlines in his writings, local cases of irrationality are always possible (see, e.g., Davidson 1985/2004). What is fundamental for Davidson is that "[…] we cannot accept great or obvious deviations from rationality without threatening the intelligibility of our attributions" (Davidson 1980/2004, 156). This keeps open the question of what "great or obvious deviations from rationality" amount to and how such deviations are to be distinguished by minor or less obvious ones. In another passage, Davidson (1998/2005, 319) holds that "[c]harity is a matter of finding enough rationality in those we would understand to make sense of what they say and do, for unless we succeed in this, we cannot identify the contents of their words and thoughts." While Davidson continues to be vague about the degree of rationality required by charity (which is something to which we will come back in the next section), there seems to be also some sort of circularity in his reasoning. On the one hand, Davidson claims that insofar as we assume our interlocutors' rationality we can determine the contents of their utterances and thoughts. On the other hand, he argues that rationality can be attributed to people insofar as their utterances and thoughts are taken to be interrelated in normatively appropriate ways (Davidson 1980/2004, 156-157). But if we want to know whether utterances and thoughts are interrelated in normatively appropriate ways we have to know the contents of such utterances and thoughts, since the appropriateness of their relations depends also on their contents, not only on their linguistic or logical forms. Here Davidson seems to fall into a vicious cycle: linguistic interpretation requires attribution of rationality to the speaker being interpreted, but, at the same time, attribution of rationality presupposes some level of interpretation of the speaker's utterances and thoughts, since one needs to know whether they are interrelated in normatively appropriate ways, that is, whether they are rational. Can this vicious circle be broken? Davidson' general tendency seems to be that of considering the

presumption of rationality as the most basic precept we have in linguistic interpretation. In this sense, on his account, without attribution of rationality, we have no linguistic interpretation.

Dennett's way of conceiving the presumption of rationality is similar in many respects to that of Davidson. In this sense, they face similar challenges with respect to the presumption of rationality. As Dennett (1978, 11) points out, "[…] one gets nowhere with the assumption that entity $x$ has beliefs $p$, $q$, $r$, … unless one also supposes that $x$ believes what follow from $p$, $q$, $r$, …; otherwise there is no way of ruling out the prediction that $x$ will, in the face of its beliefs $p$, $q$, $r$, … do something utterly stupid […]." Here Dennett presupposes level (3) of stringency: assuming people's rationality underpins the possibility of explaining and predicting their intentional behaviour.

According to Davidson and Dennett, and to a certain interpretation of Quine's analysis, the Principle of Charity requires that the presumption of rationality must be applied with a strong level of stringency, that is, according to the level (3). On this view, to presume other people's rationality, conceived as a conformity to certain norms (whatever they may be), is a necessary condition of the possibility of interpreting their linguistic behaviour successfully.


## 4. Degrees and norms of rationality

In the previous section, we have assumed, following Davidson, that the Principle of Charity requires a normative reading and that such a normativity is constitutive of any linguistic interpretation. Moreover, we have argued that to presume the speaker's rationality is a necessary condition of interpreting her linguistic behaviour successfully. However, some clarifications are still needed as regards the normative function of the Principle of Charity and the validity of its application in specific circumstances. In particular, two main questions can be posed:

(i) what degree of rationality do we have to attribute to a speaker in order to make her linguistic utterances understandable?

(ii) what are the norms of rationality compliance which have to be attributed to the speaker?

With respect to (i), as underlined in the previous section, the question arises due to the lack of clarity in Davison's claims (but also in those of Quine and Dennett) about how the degree of rationality to be attributed to our interlocutors should be determined: Davidson speaks of "a large degree of rationality," "basic rationality" and "enough rationality" etc. How could an appropriate degree of rationality

be determined in the speaker in specific circumstances? This problem does not seem to affect the validity of Davidson's theory in any way: indeed, since according to him the Principle of Charity can be taken as a necessary constraint on all possible interpretation, its general validity cannot be questioned by its particular application in a given context (Davidson 1974/1984, 197). That is, one question is the general validity of Davidson's account, while another is its applicability in specific cases. Davidson claims to be interested in approaching only the former question, considering the latter to be irrelevant in his attempt to develop a general theory of meaning (see Section 2.1). Therefore, since the Principle of Charity is a general constraint on linguistic interpretation, we should not care whether it may be applied to specific situations or not. However, even if this can be accepted for the Principle of Charity, the same reasoning cannot be applied to the presumption of rationality which the Principle of Charity requires from interpreters. Since this presumption must have a specific content, it cannot be as general and abstract as the Principle of Charity is supposed to be. Indeed, any individual can be said to be more or less rational: people's rationality can be seen as a matter of degree. But which is the minimum degree of rationality to be attributed to the speaker in order to perform a successful interpretation of her linguistic utterance? This question leads us to (ii), the issue of what norms of rationality we should assume our interlocutors conform to.

As to (ii), the question is how to identify the appropriate norms of rationality that are to be imputed to our interlocutors (see also Lukes 1982, 263). Since it is a platitude that humans are not perfectly rational in ordinary life, one could ask what norms of rationality are actually supposed to guide our behaviour. Every day we experience our failures, as well as those of others, in reasoning activities because of prejudices, laziness, carelessness, lack of time, inattention etc. While failures of this kind are due to momentary lapses, there are many others that are deeply rooted in our cognition, and of which we are not always aware. As many experimental studies on reasoning and decision-making suggest, we frequently tend to deviate from classical norms of rationality due to our reliance on so-called heuristics and biases (see, e.g., Gilcovich *et al.* 2002). But how could the Principle of Charity and its presumption of rationality be led to cope with these facts that are apparent to anyone in ordinary situations, as well as in experimental labs? One could argue that it is not only wrong to present the Principle of Charity as a generalization of our interpretative practices, but also, as Davidson does, to justify it in normative terms, that is, as a normative constraint on interpretation. Davidson can reply to this objection by arguing that although people are locally irrational, they can be judged so on the assumption that they are usually rational: "irrationality is a failure within the house of reason" (Davidson 1982/2004, 169). As observed by Rescorla (2013, 478), according to Davidson examples of irra-

tionality can be seen as "[…] *deviations* from background conformity to rational norms." But what are such norms? In a reply to some commentators, Davidson (1998/2005, 319) claims that "[t]hese norms include norms of logical consistency, of action in reasonable accord with essential or basic interests, and the acceptance of views that are sensible in the light of evidence." If the Principle of Charity requires the presumption that our interlocutors have to be taken as having logically consistent beliefs and probably consistent probability assignments, behaving in order to maximize their basic interests, taking into account all relevant information in arriving at conclusions, many of Davidson's critics, such as Cristopher Cherniak, Alvin Goldman and Stephen Stich, are ready to reply that these requirements present a number of problems, such as the following:

- If the results of reasoning and decision making experiments are correct, it is not completely clear whether humans may be assumed to conform to these requirements as closely as Davidson claims.[4] As a matter of fact, people often make decisions by which they gain no benefit, contradicting the assumption that they behave in order to maximize their basic interests, and utter contradictory claims or fail to infer conclusions, which can be seen as a sign of their illogicality. According to Cherniak (1986), the kind of rationality that is applicable to creatures such as humans is a minimal rationality. Therefore, requirements, such as those posed by Davidson, cannot really be considered "normative" for rational beings as we are, since we are not able to respect them. In this sense, attributing this kind of "ideal" rationality to our interlocutors is not a good move in linguistic interpretation. In one of his examples, Cherniak (1986) refers to issues of checking one's beliefs for consistency, which is one of the requirements suggested by Davidson. According to Cherniak, a complete check of one's current set of beliefs for truth functional consistency would lead to a computational explosion.[5] It is usually the case, indeed, that when an individual tries to solve contradictions between her beliefs she does not commit herself to a process of exhaustive search. People are faced with temporary inconsistency continuously, whenever something unexpected occurs. Accordingly, one of the main requirements posed by Davidson, that is, logical consistency among one's beliefs, seems to be too high a standard of rationality to be safely attributed to any speaker. More generally, it is not

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4    It is noteworthy that according to Dennett (1973/1978) when irrationality takes place (but according to which standard?) no prediction of the other's behaviour can be made by adopting the intentional stance.

5    Cherniak (1986, 93-94) has calculated that, in order to make a complete check for truth functional consistency a belief system containing 138 logically independent propositions would require the power of a super computer which would need to work (in order to complete this task) for more than twenty billion years.

clear how to distinguish between norms of rationality that are appropriate for the kind of finite beings we are and those that are beyond human cognitive capacity.

- Another relevant issue concerns the question of whether rationality and its norms are universal, that is, whether they apply to all humans, regardless of their belonging to a specific community or society. Some recent experimental studies suggest that people from different cultures exhibit different ways of thinking, and different styles of reasoning in particular, suggesting that people's cognitive systems may differ significantly in some basic cognitive processes, such as categorization, perception and reasoning (for a survey of these studies, see Nisbett 2003). What should an interpreter do when interacting with people who have different basic cognitive processes, particularly those underlying reasoning? Does she have to follow Quine's suggestion and thus project her "logic" onto her "exotic" interlocutors? A good answer could be that the interpreter has to project onto her "exotic" interlocutors only a part of her logic, that is, the part that is common to all humans. However, although there must probably exist "a 'bridgehead' of true and rational beliefs" (Hollis 1982, 73) that are common to all humans, it appears that we are far from identifying it.

A possible solution to the issues just mentioned is to replace the Principle of Charity with some other principle that is not grounded on the presumption of rationality. As Richard Grandy (1973) observed, since there can be successful interpretations even when cases of irrationality take place, whether they are real or apparent, we can hypothesize that the presumption of rationality does not ground our mutual understanding. Consequently, Grandy argues for what he calls the "Principle of Humanity." While the Principle of Charity requires the presumption of rationality, Grandy's principle requires the application of a process of "simulation." According to the Principle of Humanity, when interpreting other people's behaviour one has to suppose that one has the same beliefs and desires as those of the speaker in order to ask oneself (*as if* one was her) what she would do in that case. What matters in this case is that other people share with us the same "[…] pattern of relations among beliefs, desires and the world" (Grandy 1973, 443). However, since Grandy remains vague as to what such a pattern of relations amount to, the interpreter could in principle impose any structure upon other people's beliefs and desires, regardless of whether this structure is subjective, context-dependent, logical and so on.

In sum, the centrality of the presumption of rationality in linguistic interpretation seems to be overestimated and, at the same time, its formulation too vague to be acceptable, regardless of whether we should take the Principle of Charity as normative or not. Moreover, when the presumption of rationality is articulated,

as in the case of Davidson, it is very hard to find a definite set of norms of rationality that can be imputed to our interlocutors. Therefore, insofar as the Principle of Charity requires the presumption of rationality, it cannot be accepted as a necessary condition of linguistic interpretation.

## 5. Linguistic interpretation, Grice's Cooperative Principle and argumentative rationality

As we have shown in the previous section, there are serious doubts that rationality is the key to interpreting other people's linguistic behaviour. It may happen that some linguistic behaviour deviates from the relevant norms of rationality, while others meet such norms in some contexts but not in others, and this variability in people's linguistic behaviour compliance with norms of rationality does not help us to maximize agreement, or minimize disagreement, with them.

Accordingly, we should investigate whether there are other, more plausible, ways of making sense of other people's linguistic behaviour. How can we maximize agreement, or minimize disagreement, with our interlocutors in interpreting their linguistic behaviour, while leaving aside the presumption of rationality?

Obviously there could be more than one way of approaching this question, some of which are based on normative considerations (as in the case of Davidson and Dennett), while others are based on psychological ones (see, e.g., Stich 1984; Goldman 1989). Here I will try to outline an alternative approach that aims to account for the relation between linguistic interpretation and rationality, which is based on Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle and his argumentative conception of rationality (see Grice 1975/1989, 1991). At first sight the Principle of Charity and Grice's Cooperative Principle seem to differ in many respects,[6] in particular, it has been argued that the latter cannot be as fundamental in linguistic interpretation as the former is taken to be. Nevertheless, we will try to show that there are good reasons for taking Grice's Cooperative Principle as "[…] a presumption that receivers make (and that it is rational for them to make) for the sake of giving as full an interpretation as possible of what they are told" (Sbisà 2006, 234). As suggested by Sbisà (2001, 2006), this way of conceiving the Cooperative Principle requires an analysis of Grice's notions of non-natural meaning and "implicature" from the hearer's perspective. Within this framework, I maintain that in order to interpret other people's linguistic behaviour we do not need to conceive of their rationality as a conformity to certain norms. Rather, we have to rely upon a cooperativeness presumption regarding the speaker's linguistic

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[6]   For a comparison between Grice's and Davidson's philosophy of language, see Avramides (2001).

behaviour in conversation. Since according to Grice (1975/1989, 28) talking can be seen "[…] as a special case or variety of purposive, indeed rational, behaviour," rationality can be found in our linguistic practices, insofar as these embody a concern for the justification of one's own linguistic moves.

## 5.1 Grice's Cooperative Principle and linguistic interpretation

Let me begin with Grice's formulation of the Cooperative Principle: "[m]ake your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1975/1989, 26). According to the standard interpretation, the Cooperative Principle, together with the conversational maxims that specify its content, is taken to suggest what speakers should do, and probably sometimes do, in order to be cooperative in conversation. This "normative" reading rests on Grice's formulation of the principle that includes the verb "to make" in the imperative mood (second person) and so can be equated to an order: "you ought to do so and so." However, as observed by Sbisà (2006, 234), Grice claims that in "calculating" a conversational implicature what matters is "[…] the assumption, or presumption, that the speaker is observing the Cooperative Principle and not the real observance of it, nor the (possible) obligation, or commitment, of the speaker to observe it." In other words, if this reading is correct, Grice does not treat the Cooperative Principle as a norm that has to be followed by every speaker when participating to a conversation, but as a presumption the audience makes in order to understand what has been said. As Grice (1975/1989, 30) points out,

> […] observance of the Cooperative Principle and maxims is reasonable (rational) along the following lines: that anyone who cares about the goals that are central to conversation/communication […] must be expected to have an interest, given suitable circumstances, in participation in talk exchanges that will be profitable only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with the Cooperative Principle and the maxims.

Here we can find two interesting suggestions made by Grice that may help to overcome the Principle of Charity and its presumption of rationality:

(i) In order to maximize agreement, or minimize disagreement, with other speakers we must expect that they, or at least those who are presumed to care about the goals of the conversation, have some interests in taking part in it and so in communicating with us.

(ii) When (i) holds, as long as we are interested in making the conversation profitable, we should assume that such a conversation is conducted in accord-

ance with the Cooperative Principle and its conversational maxims, that is, we must presume that every participant, including ourselves, will behave in accordance with them (or at least with the Principle governing them).

As Grice points out in the quotation above, the expectation specified in (i), while being necessary, may have some value only if the presumption suggested in (ii) takes place: a conversation is profitable as long as all the participants take each other as being cooperative. In order to have mutual understanding in a conversation, it is not enough to ascribe to the other participants a concern for communicating with us, what matters is to presume that their linguistic moves are made in accordance with the Cooperative Principle and its conversational maxims. In doing so, we acknowledge them as rational beings, since their linguistic moves are taken to be made on the basis of some reasons, that is, they are taken to be appropriate to achieve "the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange" (Grice 1975/1989, 26). Accordingly, whether our interlocutors observe the Cooperative Principle is not strictly an empirical question but a reasonable decision one makes: thanks to this decision, indeed, we make ourselves able to understand their utterances in the ongoing conversation.

By drawing a parallel with the Principle of Charity and its presumption of rationality, we might go on to consider the attribution of the observance of the Cooperative Principle to the speaker (involving the attribution of the actual observance or open violation of the conversational maxims). As underlined by Sbisà (2001, 198) the Cooperative Principle "[…] should be considered as a complex assumption that the audience makes about an utterer, in order to fully understand what the utterer means$_{nn}$ [non-naturally]." According to Grice (1975/1989, 26), indeed, by assuming that the speaker is cooperative, we can determine what we should expect (*ceteris paribus*) from her utterances. What matters here is not the intention of the speaker, which is standardly considered to determine the presence of non-natural meaning and of implicatures, but the ascription of intentions we make in correspondence to the meaning we take to be conveyed by her utterances. Obviously, as underlined by the use of the expression "ceteris paribus," the assumption that our interlocutors are cooperative can be cancelled if we believe that there are sufficient reasons for doing so. When (if ever) this cancellation is complete, linguistic communication fails.

Something different happens when, provided that the speaker is taken to be cooperative, we believe that her utterance violates one or more conversational maxims. When some conversational maxim is violated, but we assume that speaker is cooperative, a conversational implicature has to be worked out in order to achieve the correct understanding of what the speaker means. In such a case, one can ask why the speaker violates one or another maxim if she intends

to be cooperative. Insofar as we can recognize that the "cooperative" speaker has some reasons for violating a conversational maxim, we can ascribe to her the intention that in violating such a maxim she has meant to convey something more than what she has literally said. As Grice points out (1975/1989, 39-40), indeed, "to calculate a conversational implicature is to calculate what has to be supposed in order to preserve the supposition that the Cooperative Principle is being observed."

Successful interpretations of other people's utterances is then determined by our expectation that such utterances have been made in accordance with the Cooperative Principle and its conversational maxims. Since, according to Grice, the meaning conveyed by linguistic expressions can be worked out when participants in the conversation take each other as cooperative, the Cooperative Principle can be seen as setting out a general constraint on linguistic interpretation.


## 5.2 From linguistic interpretation to argumentative rationality, and back again

According to the supporters of the Principle of Charity, at least in its most popular version (see Section 2), the speakers' rationality, conceived as a conformity to certain norms, must be presupposed in order to interpret their linguistic behaviour correctly. However, as we have seen in Section 4, relying on the Principle of Charity in linguistic interpretation gives rise to certain troubles due to the difficulties in defining the extent and degree of rationality needed and the norms which have to be imputed to the speaker. In contrast with this view, according to the Gricean approach here proposed, people's rationality emerges in their linguistic practices, as a concern for their linguistic moves as justified. This alternative view on the relation between linguistic interpretation and rationality is based on a conception of rationality, which Sbisà (2006; 2007) has labelled "argumentative," that can be found in Grice's Carus Lectures (1983), published posthumously with the title *The Conception of Value* (1991). According to this conception, as Sbisà rephrases it (2006, 241-242): human rationality consists in "[...] a concern that one's moves are justified and a capacity (to some degree) to give effect to that concern" (see also Grice 1991, 82-83). The argumentative conception of rationality comprises two aspects: while the first aspect is concerned with one's motivations for justifying what one says or does, the second one focuses on one's actual ability to give effect to this concern, that is, to provide reasons supporting one's behaviour, be it linguistic or not. Accordingly, it implies that it is not enough to be able to provide reasons supporting one's moves, but one must also care about actually having such reasons, that is, one has to find it valuable to provide reasons supporting one's claims or actions.

Let us consider why this conception of rationality matters in linguistic interpretation. Insofar as we take other participants in the conversation as behaving in accordance with the Cooperative Principle, we consider them as being motivated to communicate with us, that is, their linguistic moves are not made at random but based on reasons, i.e. rationally justified, even when one or more conversational maxims are violated. In this sense, both Grice's Cooperative Principle and his conception of argumentative rationality converge on the idea "[t]he justification of one's moves remains a task for every human being who wants to take him or herself seriously as a person" (Sbisà 2006, 243). It is clear here that human rationality is not to be described as a conformity to certain norms, but is something that one can find in conversation, if considered as a cooperative enterprise. Given this general outlook, we turn now to the role of argumentative rationality in linguistic interpretation. On the one side, in presuming that the speaker observes the Cooperative Principle and its conversational maxims, the hearer considers her as behaving rationally, that is, that her linguistic behaviour is well grounded, and appropriate in trying to reach "the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange" (Grice 1975/1989, 26). On the other side, when some of the conversational maxims are taken to be openly violated, in the attempt to give sense to the speaker's utterances the hearer may still assume that she could be taken to be cooperative, after all. When this happens, the hearer can grasp what the speaker has meant by assuming that such violations have been made on the basis of some reasons. As observed by Sbisà (2006, 243-244), indeed, "[e]xplaining a certain part of the meaning of an utterance as a conversational implicature [...] requires that there be an inferential path leading to that implicature and thus an argument in support of it."

More generally, ascription of cooperativeness is a fundamental aspect of our sociality because even when our interlocutors' utterances do not satisfy some of the expectations made explicit by the conversational maxims – e.g. what has been said is taken to be false or lacking adequate evidence, is not as informative as is required, is not relevant or perspicuous – insofar as we acknowledge them as cooperative, we are still able to work out the global meaning conveyed by their utterances. On the one side, in taking our interlocutors as cooperative, we acknowledge them as persons who have reasons for what they say and do, that is, as persons endowed with rationality. On the other side, as we have seen before, since the Cooperative Principle can be considered as a general condition of linguistic interpretation: in doing so we make our interlocutor's utterances interpretable and so understandable.

## 6. Concluding remarks

As stated at the beginning of the paper, my main concern here was to discuss the relation between linguistic interpretation and rationality. In the first part, I examined some relevant accounts of linguistic interpretation based on charity, particularly those proposed by Quine, Davidson and Dennett, respectively. Each of these assumes that in order to interpret other people's linguistic behaviour successfully we have to assume *a priori* their rationality, conceived as a conformity to certain norms. As we have seen, however, it is very hard, or maybe impossible, to determine the extent and degree of rationality needed and the norms which have to be imputed to the speaker. In contrast, we have seen that insofar as we take cooperation as a precondition for linguistic interpretation, we can make sense of other people's utterances by assuming that they are made on the basis of reasons, that is, in a rational way. While this argumentative conception of rationality requires further clarification and refinement, as regards why we should have concern for justifying our linguistic moves, what our ability to give effect to this concern amounts to, what a good reason is etc., relying on it helps us to consider human rationality from a different perspective. In particular, given the strict relationship between the attribution of cooperativeness to a speaker and the acknowledgement of her rationality in conversation, people's rationality can be said to emerge in their linguistic practices. Indeed, insofar as linguistic interpretation requires attribution of cooperativeness to be performed successfully, in presuming that our interlocutors' utterances have been made in accordance with the Cooperative Principle, we treat them as having a concern for justifying their linguistic moves, that is, as having concern for acting rationally in conversation.

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# Nicholas of Cusa: Natural Law, Religions, and Peace

## Facing Diversity through Philosophy in Pre-Modern Europe

MARKO J. FUCHS

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, we have seen seemingly never-ending and somewhat antagonistic discussions about the question of if and how different religions can coexist in a peaceful manner. Some scholars, e.g. Regina Schwartz, hold that religions, especially monotheistic ones, are inherently intolerant and even violent towards others: "Whether as singleness (this God against the others) or totality (this is all the God there is), monotheism abhors, reviles, rejects, and ejects whatever it defines as outside its compass."[1] Others like Jan Assmann argue that this also applies to polytheistic religions, though in a different manner.[2] Either way it seems that peace between different religions is a very rare and difficult thing. When Rolf Schieder demands that "without the capacity for critical self-reflection of the religions there will be no peace of religions in pluralistic societies",[3] the question

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[1]   Schwartz 1997, 63.

[2]   Assmann (2014, 37) points out that monotheism made a certain form of religious violence possible that polytheism did not, namely "violence in the name of God [Gewalt im Namen Gottes]".

[3]   Schieder 2008, 200: "Ohne die Fähigkeit der Religionen zur kritischen Selbstreflexion kann es unter pluralistischen Verhältnissen keinen Religionsfrieden geben." My translation.

is how this critical self-reflection could be possible, how it should proceed, and what results it would lead to.

However, as pressing as these questions may be for our times, it is obvious that they were also intensely discussed in earlier periods and amongst these most prominently in the Age of Enlightenment and the High and especially the late Middle Ages. Lessing's poetic Parable of the Three Rings in his play *Nathan the Wise* is one of the most remarkable examples of an engagement with the problem of peace between the religions in the Age of Enlightenment. In the late Middle Ages it is Nicholas of Cusa's (Cusanus') *The Peace of Faith* (*De pace fidei*), written shortly after the Fall of Constantinople (1453), that gives the deepest and most thorough discussion of the problem, the basis, and the shape of a peaceful religious coexistence, focussing not only on the three monotheistic religions Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, but on polytheistic religions, such as Hinduism, as well. Most interestingly, Cusanus' approach, although inspired by his religious zeal, is not a primarily religious (Christian) or theological reflection, but a genuinely philosophical one.

In this paper I will show how Cusanus conceives of the possibility of different religions coexisting in a peaceful way without being forced to give up their diversity altogether. In order to do so, my text has the following structure: First, I will make some general considerations about the topic 'peace of faith' and explore some of the basic problems connected with it. Second, I will turn to Cusanus' *De pace fidei* (*The Peace of Faith*) to systematically reconstruct its basic theses and arguments. Third and finally, I will ask if Cusanus' approach is apt to give an answer to at least some of the fundamental questions mentioned above.

Before I start, let me give some remarks on method. It is not my primary intent in the following pages to give a philologically correct reconstruction of the intentions of Cusanus. What I am more interested in is the question of what logical possibilities Cusanus opens with his approach. This is also the reason why I concentrate on the philosophical side of Cusanus' argument, i.e. the side where revelation does not play the part of an argument inside a chain of conclusions but as an expression of basic human beliefs and – further – needs. In this sense, the following considerations may be 'theological', but not in a specifically Christian way, but more in a Platonic sense where theology does not depend on revelation but can be pursued by reason.


## 2. General Remarks on the Topic 'Peace of Faith'

The main question connected with the topic 'peace of faith' can be articulated as follows: How can different religions coexist in a peaceful way? This includes two more detailed questions which can be dealt with separately:

I. What is the relation of different religions towards each other?

II. What is the relation of religions towards moral principles, especially principles that claim to be universally applicable?

Let us discuss the first question first. There are three traditional ways to describe the relation between different religions towards each other.[4] From an *exclusivist* point of view, each religion *excludes* all the others, and only one of them is true religion, i.e. contains an orientation towards and is thus relevant for salvation. Contrarily, an *inclusivist* holds that there are many religions, each of them with its own right of existence, because each of them can claim to contain some relevant orientation for salvation, but *one religion is superior to the others*. As we shall see, Nicholas of Cusa can also be counted among the inclusivists. The third position is the standpoint of *pluralism*, which claims that there are many religions, each with its own right of existence, because each of them can claim to contain an orientation relevant for salvation *in the same degree* as all the others.

The second question concerning the relation of religions towards moral principles again can be answered in three ways. A voluntaristic position would point out that good and bad depend on men or God's will: good is good and bad is bad because God (or man) wills it, and what God (or man) wants is revealed (e.g. in sacred scriptures in the case of God) and has to be believed or is decided and promulgated in positive laws. A prominent medieval voluntarist is William of Ockham. The counterposition would be an intellectualism: good and bad depend on God's or man's intellect; good is good and bad is bad because God or human reason recognises it, and the way our human intellect recognises it is by means of the Natural Law. In fact, Natural Law is the very structure of fundamental principles for all our practical reasoning, not only inclining us towards doing good and avoiding bad but also enabling us to scrutinize the current situation and then decide what to do. A very prominent intellectualist thinker is St. Thomas Aquinas, but Cusanus also holds this position as we shall see in the following. A third, less well-known conception was held by early modern Jesuit theologian Gabriel Vásquez[5] who argued that good and bad are independent of God and man's will and intellect but are prior to both. The difference of good and bad is not the result of an act of volition, but also not the result of an act of insight. Rather, Vásquez argues that Natural Law is identical with rational nature (natura

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4   For this distinction I rely on Race 1983.

5   Gabriel Vásquez or Vázquez (1549-1604), important Jesuit theologian, professor in Rom und Alcalá, rival of Francisco Suárez.

rationalis) itself.[6] Some scholars have called this position 'objectivism' or 'objective theorie' of the Natural Law'.[7]

As I have yet insinuated and as we shall see throughout the paper, I will show that Cusanus' position can be called an inclusivist intellectualism. In the next section I will give an overview over Cusanus' philosophical background that works as a basis for his theory of a peace of faith.

## 3. *The Peace of Faith* by Cusanus

3.1. General Philosophical Background of Cusanus' Thought:
God, *ratio*, Intellect, and Learned Ignorance (*docta ignorantia*)

Cusanus (born in 1401 in Kues/Germany, died on the 11th August, 1464 at Todi, Umbria) was, probably via Albert the Great, strongly influenced by Neoplatonism, i.e. classical thinkers like Proclus (412-485), Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (around 500 A. D.), and Plotinus (205-270). In being influenced by these thinkers Cusanus would have agreed to the following basic beliefs: First of all, the aim of all human action is beatitude, and beatitude again consists in attaining knowledge of God or 'the One'. Second: attaining this kind of knowledge means becoming similar to and finally identical with God or 'the One' (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ). This 'becoming-similar-to-God' can be described as an intellectual movement of return to the origin or principle of all being by means of self-recognition. Third, Cusanus would also agree that there is a certain problem with this intellectual movement of recognising 'the One', since 'the One' is *per se* unrecognisable. It is beyond all possible cognition since all cognition would *per definitionem* try to acquire a concept of 'the One' which then would be just a concept and not 'the One' itself (or himself). On the other hand, since we all strive for 'the One' as the destination where our beatitude lies, 'the One' cannot be absolutely unknowable to us. Otherwise we would not know what to strive for. The solution of this problem lies, as so often, in a differentiation: 'the One', says Cusanus, may be unknowable for the understanding (διάνοια; *ratio*; Verstand); however, it is 'tangible' by spirit or 'reason' or 'intellect' (νοῦς; *intelligentia*; Vernunft). Man is in principle capable of understanding, or more accurately: 'seeing' God because he is an image of Him (imago Dei); however, as long as he is dependent on *ratio* in order to live his burdensome mortal life he is

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[6]    Cf. Vásquez 1605, disp. 150, cap. 3, n. 22–26 (II, fol. 10f.).

[7]    See Ilting 1983, 66.

not capable of seeking the 'hidden God' (Deus absconditus) and this beatifying vision cannot take place (DPF I 3).[8]

'*Ratio*' is the discursive intellectual potency of the soul. It allows us to examine, scrutinise and recognise being by the help of contrasts and oppositions and by making comparisons. Its deficiency, however, consists in its very method of comparing and contrasting itself, since this method allows *ratio* to grasp things only in relation to others, not as they are in themselves. In contrast to *ratio* as discursive potency, '*intelligentia*' signifies the intuitive power of our soul. *Intelligentia* is prior to *ratio*, since it is related to the unity (unitas) that transcends and constitutes the opposites *ratio* has to work with and thus enables ratio to gain a unified recognition. The last and absolute unity that is prior to and the basis for all contrasts and opposites is God as 'the One'. In God, all the opposites that *ratio* is able to recognise coincide ('coincidentia oppositorum'). God is absolute infinity ('infinitas'), absolute unity of all determinations before they unfold as opposites.[9] Thus God, being unity and absolute infinity, is unrecognisable for (finite) human beings whose primary source of knowledge lies in discursive *ratio* that is dependant on opposites in order to recognise something at all. However, rational recognition, though not infinite in the absolute sense, still can achieve a certain 'infinity' of her own by indefinitely moving from one premiss to the other and from one conclusion to the next. This is what Hegel would call a 'finite' or 'bad infinity' and what Descartes meant by differentiating between *infinite* and *indefinite*.[10]

How do these two aspects, viz., God's unrecognisability as infinity and unity on the one hand, and his constitutive role for human beings for a) achieving beatitude and b) for rational discursive recognition on the other hand, go together? Cusanus' answer to this lies in the description of a structure he calls 'learned ignorance (dicta ignorantia)'. According to Cusanus, the intellectual ('*intelligentia*') relation of the finite human mind towards God as last aim is connected not only with a factual unrecognisability ('*ratio*') of God as the absolute infinity for the finite human mind (*mens*), but also with a knowledge of that unrecognisability: we know that we cannot know God the way that he really is; however, we at least do know that he at the same time is the last principle and last aim of all our knowledge and striving.

This being Cusanus' basic diagnosis of the human condition, the question is how religion fits into this scheme and how this philosophical theory can contribute to the problem of religious diversity.

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[8]  DPF stands for *De pace fidei*.

[9]  Cf. *Cribratio Alkorani* I, prol. 5-7.

[10]  For Hegel cf. Hegel 1812/1986, 149; for Descartes see *Med*. III 38.

## 3.2. Facing Religious Diversity through Philosophy

Let us start our discussions of DPF and the solutions Cusanus tries to develop there by first describing the historical background Cusanus faces with his text and the setting he gives his theory of a peace of faith. The historical situation that led Cusanus to conceive his theory was the siege and conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire between April 2 and May 5, 1453. This event was generally perceived as a cruel bloodshed due to religious differences between Islam and Christianity and as such, a serious threat to Christianity. Cusanus quite vividly gives this fear a voice at the very beginning of his *De pace fidei* where he develops its setting: we read that "[t]here was a certain man who […] was inflamed with zeal for God as a result of those deeds that were reported to have been perpetrated at Constantinople most recently and most cruelly by the King of the Turks" (DPF I 1). The cause for the cruel deeds at Constatinople is quite clear to Cusanus' protagonist, who, "with many groanings [...] beseeched the Creator of all, because of His kindness, to restrain the persecution that was raging more fiercely than usual on account of the difference of rite between the religions [ob diversum ritum religionum]" (DPF I 1). It is, thus, the diverse rites that the different religions exercise that in the long run seems to lead to or at least to imply a tendency toward conflict, perhaps even violent conflict.

His passionate quest leads our man after a few days of "prolonged, incessant meditation" to "a vision": "The few wise men who are rich in the experiential knowledge of all such differences as are observed throughout the world in the [different] religions can find a single, readily-available harmony [concordantia] and through this harmony there can be constituted, by a suitable and true means, perpetual peace within [the domain of] religion" (DPF I 1). In this vision, our narrator is being translated "to an intellectual height where, as it were, in the presence of those who have departed from life a hearing on this matter – [a hearing] in the council of the loftiest beings and under the presiding direction of the Almighty – was being held"; in more detail, our narrator is being transferred to a heavenly congregation of God (the Word), angels, saints, and 17 wise men – 17 men of diverse religions, all being translated to the presence of God in the same way in order to settle their disagreements (DPF I 2).

The main question Cusanus' protagonist moves in DPF against this background is: how is it that although all humans strive for the same aim, viz., beatitude as vision of God, there is so much difference and, as a result, hatred between the religions? Cusanus' answer to this is based on the neo-Platonist theory discussed above: God is in principle unrecognisable for the finite human mind (*mens*) and at the same time necessary for man's eternal happiness. In order to make this paradoxical situation for man bearable, God sent "different seers, called

prophets" who, as God's "legates, instituted (in Your [i.e. God's] name) worship and laws and instructed an uneducated people. [Men] accepted these laws just as if You Yourself, the King of kings, had spoken to them face to face; they believed that they heard not kings and prophets but You Yourself in and through kings and prophets" (DPF I 4). Different religions are thus the result of this work of the prophets who were instructed by God to help the uneducated people live a virtuous life; however, people mistook these rules the prophets uttered, taking them not for just relative truths measured for the respective human intellectual grasp, but for the one and only truth itself, since "the earthly human condition has this characteristic: viz., that longstanding custom, which is regarded as having passed over into nature, is defended as the truth. In this way there arise great quarrels when each community prefers its own faith to another [faith]" (DPF I 4).

This ignorance all religions share concerning the true essence of God, as well as the fact that at the same time all religions have the same goal, can for Cusanus, if recognised and acknowledged, work as a basis for a concordance (concordantia) between the religions. Concordance is possible because all religions try to achieve a (or even more: the same) vision of God: "For this strife occurs for the sake of You, whom alone all [men] worship in everything they are seen to adore. For no one, in whatever he is seen to desire, desires [anything] except the good, which You are. And in all intellectual inference [discursus intellectualis] no one seeks anything other than the truth, which You are. […] You, then, who are the giver of life and of existence, are the one who is seen to be sought in different ways in different rites, and You are named in different names; for as You are [in Yourself] You remain unknown and ineffable to all" (DPF I 5). Therefore, all religions are based on "una religio in rituum varietate" (DPF I 6). This becomes clear when the basis of the different religions is investigated, as we have shown in the previous section.

However, this does not mean that Cusanus suggests that as a result of the uniqueness of the religions' common goal the difference of religious rites would have to be abolished. Rather, Cusanus sees their pedagogical function in teaching the unlearned people the way to real beatitude in a manner they can understand – even more, since, as we have seen, a true vision of God is impossible for us in this life. That is why Cusanus argues that different rites are to be welcomed. As a matter of fact, Cusanus even pleads that "to seek exact conformity in all respects is rather to disturb the peace" (DPF XIX 67). For example, Indian statues and effigies are allowed inasmuch they "lead to a knowledge of the things which are admissible in the true worship of the one God are not condemned. But when they lead away from the true worshipping of the one God as Sovereign (as if in stones there were some portion of deity and as if [the deity] were bound to a statue), then, rightly, the images ought to be broken, because they deceive [men]

and turn [them] away from the truth" (DPF IV 19). We can conclude that the diversity of the religions has to be accepted, providing no single religion claims to be the 'una religio' itself.


3.3. The Natural Law as Moral Basis for all Religions

But what is the common basis that allows the believers of different religions to accept this diversity? It is the Natural Law. Natural Law precedes the differences of interpretation concerning what the highest good may be and how it is to be pursued, just as the universal human striving for beatitude does. As we have already insinuated in section 2.1. above, Cusanus here follows the lines of the Thomistic tradition. According to Cusanus, man – here: Adam –, "by the very fact that he was created and had received a rational spirit, he found in that spirit a natural law, i.e., a pathway of justice" (Sermo CCLXXII, 22). This Natural Law that man finds within himself is a set of basic principles of practical reason allowing people to not only pursue the good and beatific but also to reasonably tell good from evil and to decide what to do. On the basis of this law, people hold "that the known God be worshipped. Moreover, this [natural] law shows that good practices differ from bad ones and that good ones are to be chosen – i.e., not to do to another what one does not want done to himself" (ibid.). Aquinas argues that this innate structure is a) our way of participating in God's Eternal Law, viz., His providence that guides and rules all creation, and that b) we are therefore able to act in providence for ourselves and others, i.e. to give ourselves and others concrete rules for our and their actions.[11] Cusanus takes this up when he says that "this law of rational nature is the pathway of justice and so is the Word of God, or is Christ, who says that He is the Way. For He is the Way of Peace and of Justice. Hence, this law is written in the rational spirit and is the image of the Word of God, even as the law written on a tablet imitates the concept or word of a lawgiver" (ibid.). Finally, Natural Law is not only common to all rational creatures but also universally known, as Cusanus lets St. Paul explain: "The divine commandments are very terse and very well known to everyone and are common to all nations. Indeed, the light that shows us these [commandments] is created together with the rational soul. For God speaks within us, [commanding us] to love Him from whom we receive being and not to do unto another anything except that which we want done unto us. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of God's law, and all [other] laws are reducible to the law of love" (DPF XVI 59). These commandments of the Natural Law work as a framework within which different

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[11]    See Aquinas ST I-II prooem.

moral choices and religious praxes are possible and explicitly allowed; however, both moral actions and religious rites must not transgress this framework. Both are more concrete than the most universal commandments of Natural Law, and both can be considered kinds of positive laws: the positive laws that are established by human deliberation and which rule our societies, and the positive divine laws God has promulgated through the mouths of the prophets and which are expressed within the different religious rites.

Since these positive laws were promulgated in time, they on the one hand serve the specific purpose of giving a concrete human society in a specific historical period a determinate set of rules with regards how to pursue what is best for the members of this community. For the same reason, on the other hand, these positive laws can claim neither the timelessness nor the universal application of the commandments of Natural Law. Since they have been established by deliberation of men or of God they can also be altered or even abolished by new deliberation if they are no longer useful for their genuine purpose, viz., giving concrete directions about how the good is to be pursued.


3.4. Preponderance of Christian Faith

Despite all of these considerations, Cusanus tries to argue for a certain preponderance of Christianity. This might seem surprising at first glance: how, one might ask, can any of the religions have preponderance over any others at all, since all of them seem to share the same fate, viz., being unable to give a real recognition of God? The solution for this problem lies in Cusanus' idea that the happiness which all men seek is "the desire and the hope only for eternal life in their own human nature", and this means that "[t]his happiness is only human life's enjoyment of—i.e., union with—its own Fount, from which flows life itself and [which] is immortal divine life" (DPF XIII 44). According to Cusanus, thus, it is the anthropological aspect of men's striving for happiness that is especially and more than elsewhere fulfilled by Christian religion, since achieving this goal would be impossible "unless in a given [man] the nature common to all [men] were permitted to be elevated unto such a union" (ibid.). This 'given man', who is, of course, Jesus, then can function as a mediator through whom "all [other] men would be able to attain the final goal of their desires" (ibid.). Cusanus concludes that "this [Mediator] is the Way, because He is the man through whom every [other] man has access to God, who is the [final] goal of desires. Hence, Christ is the one who is presupposed by all who hope to attain ultimate happiness" (ibid.). In other words: Christian faith has a certain preponderance or offers a certain advantage over other religions not so much because it would reveal a

higher insight into God's essence but because it is able to answer to human needs and desires concerning beatitude to a higher degree on the basis of the myth of God's incarnation and the resurrection of Christ.

## 4. Conclusion

We can summarize that for Cusanus the diversity of religions is due to:

1.  the rational unrecognisability of God,

2.  the idea that God has expressed himself toward different prophets in different times and in different ways,

3.  the fact that most humans are bound to the sensible world (rites etc.) and to custom or consuetude (consuetudo),

4.  the claim that human beings have to realise their striving for beatitude under the conditions of temporality and history and that they therefore are not only universally pursuing beatitude within the boundaries of the equally universal Natural Law, but that they need concrete instructions regarding how to do so that take their specific historical situation into consideration.

As we have seen, these instructions are revealed in the shape of different religious rites. However, despite of Cusanus' strong focus on and his defence of the diversity of religious rites, he turned out to hold both an intellectualist and an inclusivist position. His theory is to be called a neoplatonic intellectualism since Cusanus argues that a) the basic principles of the natural law are intellectually known by everyone, that b) the natural aim for everyone is knowledge as an intellectual vision of God, and that c) all human beings are somehow, even in this life, intellectually aware of this. It is inclusivist since for Cusanus all religion has a relative right to existence since every religion is referring to the one God. The basis for this theory of a 'single religion' (una religio) of which all other concrete historical religions (or 'rites') are just variations or expressions is again to be found in Cusanus' intellectualism. However, we have seen that one religion, viz., Christianity, is superior to the others. According to Cusanus the reason for this lies in the fact that Christianity has a higher capacity than the other religions to symbolise and express what the content of a specifically human beatified life would look like due to the myth of the incarnation of God and the resurrection of Christ. For Cusanus it seems that these Christian myths answer to man's deepest needs and highest aim in a far more accurate way than the other religions. Yet again, this does not mean that Christians would be allowed to force their belief on others, and if they did so in the course of history, they were wrong.

Diversity of religions, therefore can, according to Cusanus, be faced through philosophy, especially neoplatonic thought, which is capable of taking a standpoint different from that of the religions themselves, and at the same time is able to take the aim of the religions seriously. Philosophy can, in Cusanus' opinion, contribute to the project of a peace of faith not by providing a positive insight into God's essence superior to the rites of the religions but by showing and determining the boundaries of all human striving for the transcendent and thereby critically rejecting the absolute claims particular religions tend to put forth. It is obvious that the possibility offered by this philosophical thought has not lost any of its relevance in our days.

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# The Challenge of Multiculturalism: Universalism and Particularism in Alasdair MacIntyre's Ethics

INES POTZERNHEIM

## 1. MacIntyre and Multiculturalism

The fundamental questions of multiculturalism and ethics regarding the issues of universalism and particularism are quite clear: Is it possible, and how so, to bring together different concepts of ethics and moral beliefs of different cultures in one society? Can moral conflicts between different cultures be solved and can there be rational dispute about ethics between different cultures? Can there be found commonalities, or a universal standing ground?

On the first glance of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre's claim that there is no possibility of a rational solution to such conflicts, because there are no rational criteria independent of tradition (cf. MacIntyre 1995, 366 f.)[1], seems strongly relativistic. Here one could leave aside the topic of multiculturalism and ethics, and affiliate oneself to MacIntyre's pessimistic analysis of the disastrous state of modern moral debates, which he describes in the first chapters of *After Virtue*. However,

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[1]    "So it is possible for one such tradition to defeat another in respect of the adequacy of its claims to truth and to rational justification, even though there are no neutral standards available by appeal to which any rational agent whatsoever could determine which tradition is superior to which" (MacIntyre 2007, Prologue xiii).

it is also the claim that his account does not account for relativism,[2] which urges us to make a closer examination of his account. He claims that a rejection of the modern (Marxist and liberal Individualistic) "ethos" can supply us with a rational and moral position (meaning a traditional virtue ethics), from which one can judge and act, and on which grounds one is able to evaluate several rival moral systems. (cf. MacIntyre 1995, 10) If the last claim is right, why is there no way of solving conflicts between different cultures? If it's not, why should one bother engaging with MacIntyre's ethical theory? In the context of the above mentioned claims the question arises as to whether MacIntyre's theory is able to cope with the conditions of a multicultural society, or not.

For the purpose of answering this question I will presuppose that a multicultural society, i.e. the cohabitation of different cultures in a society (be it a Canadian "salad bowl" or an American "melting pot") or the clash of different cultures in global space, needs some kind of universal approach towards ethics, that is either independent from culture or is at least open to intercultural commonalities. "Universalism" in this context means the general applicability and intercultural communication and comprehension of ethical theories. "Particularism" refers to an understanding of ethics that only applies to or derives from a specific context or can be understood by a specific group (e.g. a "culture").

In the attempt to explore whether MacIntyre is able to answer any of the questions that multiculturalism poses for ethics, this essay will analyse the tension between particularistic and universalistic parts of MacIntyre's approach, which can already be seen in the conflict highlighted between the above mentioned claims. The analysis in this essay does not claim to be exhaustive, but it will focus on some prominent points in the debate and aims to be sufficiently comprehensive to allow a critique of MacIntyre in support of the claim that the usefulness of MacIntyre's theory for multicultural questions is limited.

The essay begins by looking at a description of the moral crisis and its implication for MacIntyre's project and multiculturalism. (2.1) The consideration then attends to MacIntyre's search for the "best moral theory" and to his concept of teleology (2.2) that indicates both universal and particular aspects. This will be followed by the examination of MacIntyre's core concept of virtue and the idea of practice which is central to this concept (2.3). The last section of this part (2.4) concentrates on the role of the search for the good life and its

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[2]    For example see the post scriptum of the 2nd edition of *After Virtue*, where he spends a chapter defending against charges of relativism (cf. MacIntyre 1995, 362-368) or the analysis of Weber: "MacIntyre möchte sich nicht dem historischen oder theoretischen Relativismus verschreiben, sondern im Gegenteil seine Idee verteidigen, daß die Philosophie, die Welt, die Politik eine neue und starke Konzeption des menschlichen Guten braucht, verbunden mit einem wiedergewonnenen Tugendbegriff. Die Tugenden unterstützen seiner Ansicht nach unsere Verbindung zur Vergangenheit und Zukunft und weisen uns unseren Platz innerhalb der Tradition" (Weber 2002, 42).

connection to the traditional and historical aspects of MacIntyre's approach in correlation to the narrative condition of the human being. In the following part (3) the implications of the universal and particular aspects of multiculturalism will be drawn together and supplemented by the investigation of two common accusations made towards MacIntyre's approach: the differentiation of good and harmful traditions, and the problem of relativism, (3.1) which purport to have severe influence on the evaluation of the question of multiculturalism. This point will be followed lastly by a discussion of the problem of how MacIntyre is able to choose an Aristotelian ethics without independent rational criteria (3.2). Finally an evaluation and an overview of the question of multiculturalism with the help of MacIntyre's approach will be given.

## 2. The universal and particular implications of MacIntyre's theory

2.1 MacIntyre's history of ethics as a world-historical universalism

The moral crisis of the present day, as already mentioned, is MacIntyre's view of the status of modern moral philosophy: While there was a blooming period of ethics in the ancient world and even the dark ages, an "unremarked"[3] catastrophe led to the impossibility of justifying moral conviction, or the resolution of moral disputes, because moral language (terms like "good" or "moral" or "right") has lost its context and become meaningless.[4] According to MacIntyre, it is in the light of this loss of meaning that nowadays incommensurate moral concepts face each other and this actual moral status is to be understood as "emotivistic": Moral verdicts are only apparent sentences and are used to express feelings or as an attempt to generate a change in others e.g. in their beliefs or behaviour. (cf. MacIntyre 1981, chapter 2 , p. 13-26) (MacIntyre is referring to a prevalent pluralism and relativism which have dominated moral debates.) Thus, the determination of moral problems with the help of rational argumentation is no longer possible.

MacIntyre explains the rise of the crisis as follows: previously we find traditional moral theories, which were teleological, particular ethics concerned with virtues and practices, and as such functioning ethical accounts[5] (i.e the above

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3    "For the catastrophe will have to have been of such a kind that it was not and has not been [...] recognized as catastrophe. We shall have to look not for a few brief striking events [...], but for a much longer, more complex and less easily identified process [...]" (MacIntyre 1981, 4).

4    Cf. MacIntyre 1981, chapter 1, 1-5. MacIntyre's explanation of this loss of context will be discussed later.

5    MacIntyres notion of a "functional" account of ethics will be explained in the following chapter.

mentioned "blooming period"). But the turning away from virtue-orientated accounts towards universalistic approaches and especially the "failure" of the Enlightenment of formulating a rational founded universal moral principle bear the blame for the moral crisis (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 50-52).

This analysis of the history of the decline of the virtues and the sketch of a relativistic *status quo* in moral debates can be called universal insofar as MacIntyre is describing the history of moral philosophy as a whole and as a continuing process. Here two implications arise for multiculturalism: (i) According to MacIntyre's prognosis modern multicultural society seems doomed to moral misunderstandings and endless ethical debates as there is no rational way of understanding each other. (ii) There seems to be some hope, nevertheless, as there have been functional ethical theories in the past. MacIntyre's claim is to "revive"[6] one of these theories, namely: Aristotelian virtue ethics.

## 2.2 The search for the "best moral theory" and the telos-concept

MacIntyre asserts that there can be no perfect theory of ethics (which every rational being necessarily has to consent to) but we can at least try to identify the best theory to emerge so far in the history of this class of theories, [7] (cf. MacIntyre 1995, 359) and therefore we have to strive for this best theory. There are a number of problems with this idea which will be dealt with in a later section of this essay (3.3.). For now it shall be noted that such a search implies that there can be rational agreement on what constitutes the "best theory" and thus there can be rational dispute beforehand. For MacIntyre the best moral theory available is Aristotle's. His ambition in *After Virtue* is to break off the Aristotelian model from its historical context and recommend it as a rational way of dealing with traditions[8], because it is the best tradition to be found to date (cf. Reese-Schäfer 1997, 266). MacIntyre discards and alters many aspects of Aristotle's ethics[9], e.g. the refusal of Aristotle's "metaphysical biology" and the total alteration of the

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[6]    MacIntyre says explicitly that he wants to: "make a new start to the enquiry in order to put Aristotelianism to the question all over again" (MacIntyre 1981, 112).

[7]    MacIntyre brings up this point as a defence against relativism and against the claim that he has to use the very modern principles that he rejects. This aspect will be discussed later in this essay.

[8]    This seems contrary to his claim that a philosophical tradition is bound to its context (cf. MacIntyre 1995, 356). MacIntyre himself claims to regard Aristotle as a representative of a long tradition (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 137).

[9]    In fact there are different opinions on MacIntyre's interpretation of Aristotle. Some claim that MacIntyre is "much less Aristotelian than he allows" (cf. Gutting 1999, 99).

concept of practice. However, one of the most important notions that MacIntyre retains is that of teleology.

According to MacIntyre only a teleological account of ethics is reasonable, because he understands ethics as a doctrine of the transition from the current (natural) status of the human being ("man-as-he-happens-to-be" (MacIntyre 1981, 59)) to the status of "man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-*telos*" (ibid.). With the loss of teleology, all moral prescriptions lose their reference and their meaning (i.e. their intelligibility). MacIntyre claims that this is what happened in the above mentioned crisis: teleology was given up as an ethical concept and MacIntyre blames the Enlightenment.

The *telos*-concept which MacIntyre is trying to recreate, whose necessity to ethics he proclaims, indicates an essentialist notion (at least if it is an Aristotelian teleology, that sets the ends into the being itself), which has as such a universal claim as it is defined by striving for the highest goal/end set down by nature.

> The precepts which enjoin the various virtues and prohibit the vices which are their counterparts instruct us how to move from potentiality to act, how to realize our true nature, and to reach our true end. To defy them will be to be frustrated and incomplete, to fail to achieve that good of rational happiness which it is peculiarly ours as a species to pursue. (MacIntyre 1981, 50)

However, in the recreation of the *telos*-concept, MacIntyre connects the *telos* to his practice-concept and claims that it can only be conveyed through social context: If the practices an individual takes part in (and their internal goods) as well as their virtues are not compatible, the choice between competing claims is "individual" (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 188). So there has to be a concept of a superior *telos* that connects or "transcends" the practices and their goods; for MacIntyre this is the good of a whole human life as a unity, and this unity of a whole life is a narrative order. (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 189) Consequently, the *telos* has to constitute the good of a whole human life in order to transcend the limited goods of practices and to order the virtues, which are derived from these goods. (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 188-189). Thus, the *telos* can only be found relative to the goods of the practices the individual takes part in. Here the question arises: Is the *telos* only internal to its context? If such a *telos* is thought as particular/relative (to the individual human being and its social context), then there is no *telos* which is inherent to all human beings. How then can such a *telos* add to the search for a good life?

The concept of a transcending *telos* is clearly somehow universal insofar as the structure of this teleological narrative frame should be the same for every person. However, as the narrative unity of every human life is different and depends on the narrative of its society, the *telos* is relative (to the kind of practices a human takes part in in his life). How then can this *telos* of one good human life as a uni-

ty, which derives from the individual history of a person, connect the practices shared in a community?[10] This is only possible if all individuals in a society take part in the same practices. Even then, the *telos* or *teloi* remain culture-relative.

The full implications for multiculturalism regarding this point are unclear: Following MacIntyre's idea of the *telos* would not different practices from other traditions lead to different *teloi*? As the *telos* is that to which moral rules refer to, in MacIntyre's concept of ethics, there seems to be no way to bring together different moral ideas from different cultures.


## 2.3 MacIntyre's theory of virtue and practice

In his effort to develop a non-metaphysical concept of *telos* and to renew Aristotelian virtue ethics, whilst also accepting the fact that there are different ideas of the virtues, MacIntyre proclaims the possibility of a "unitary core concept" of virtue: "[…] we can discover such a core concept and […] it turns out to provide the tradition […] with its conceptual unity" (MacIntyre 1981, 174). Hence, he can not only determine a theory superior to others, he also implies that there is a concept of virtue every virtue theory shares and which applies to virtues as such. MacIntyre puts this core concept, his definition of the virtues, as follows:

> A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods. (MacIntyre 1981, 178)

MacIntyre's concept of the virtues strongly depends on the internal goods of the practices, so that the practice itself sets the scale for excellency. But as the practices are relative to the context of society and to their own histories, their particular virtues are as well. Hence, MacIntyre's theory differs from the Aristotelian model insofar as the Aristotelian virtues are the expression of the human *ratio,* thus are anthropological constants and not dependent on culture or history (cf. Weber 2002, 45 and Rapp 1994, 343).

Nevertheless, to MacIntyre's notion of a core concept belongs also the idea of "genuine virtues": Justice, courage and truthfulness are necessary for the reten-

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[10] MacIntyre names in this context the virtue of integrity or constancy, "which cannot be specified at all except with reference to the wholeness of a human life. […] This notion of singleness of purpose in a whole life can have no application unless that of a whole life does" (MacIntyre 1981, 189). The notion of a single purpose for a whole life is a questionable thesis. E.g. Borchers criticizes that few people regard their life as a unity or as a reasonable, structured whole thing or the development of a plan: many people don't have a scheme of life and many things they do are the product of coincidence (cf. Borchers 2001, 196-199).

tion of every practice. These virtues are necessary, independent of particular rules of the society or personal moral beliefs (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 179). The codes of justice, etc. are however different and relative to particular traditions. MacIntyre gives the following example:

> Lutheran pietists brought up their children to believe that one ought to tell the truth to everybody at all times, whatever the circumstances or consequences […]. Traditional Bantu parents brought up their children not to tell the truth to unknown strangers, since they believed that this could render the family vulnerable to witchcraft. In our culture many of us have been brought up not to tell the truth to elderly great-aunts who invite us to admire their new hats. (MacIntyre 1981, 180)

He wants to show that each of these traditions has its own way of dealing with named virtues, but that these virtues nonetheless play an important role in all of them. This idea of genuine virtues derives from MacIntyre's classification of practices as social relations to others (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 178).[11] The universal part of this is: every practice functions in a similar way, and named virtues are constitutive to practices, insofar they are "those goods in reference to which […] we define our relationships to those other people with whom we share the kind of purposes and standards which inform practices" (MacIntyre 1981, 178-179). This means that the concept of practices and the constitutive virtues are formally universal: this structure applies to every culture which shares such forms of social activity. It is important to mention that this works only in special forms of society[12], namely those which appreciate virtues (cf. MacIntyre 1995, 258). What is the particular part about this idea is the way it allows for the different "shaping" of practices in different societies or cultures with different codes of truthfulness, justice and courage as shown in the example above.

What are the implications for multiculturalism to this point? According to MacIntyre there can be several societies or cultures (coexisting) with a functional virtue ethics with different beliefs about justice, truthfulness and so on, but yet the structure of practices and virtues are the same. Could these societies not engage in rational communication about these constitutive virtues or their structure? Or does the adhesion of the virtues and their particular specification to their practices, which are not shared by traditions, avert such an intercultural communication?

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[11]  MacIntyre's definition of practice is quite complex: "[It is] any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended"(MacIntyre 1981, 175).

[12]  MacIntyre is referring to the ancient polis, the form of which he regards as ideal for a flourishing virtue ethics.

## 2.4 The search for the good life and the aspect of tradition and historicity

As a result of the idea that virtues can only be conveyed through tradition and social context and are intelligible only within these, MacIntyre can be named a particularist, more exactly, a cultural and historical particularist. This results from his definition of virtues as internal goods of practices (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 178), which are enclosed in so called "narrative unities" of the human life. Those unities are important for his notion of the good life (which again he needs for his teleology outlined above): "[T]he good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man […]" (MacIntyre 1981, 204).

The question about the good life is the question about the unity of individual life as a narrative unity of incarnated narration (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 204). Mac-Intyre's circular definition of the good life as a life of posing systematic questions about what is good for "me" and good for human beings points to his conception of the unity of the moral life (MacIntyre 1981, 203).[13] The last question (what is good for human beings?) is the question about what all answers to the first question (what is good for me?) have in common. (ibid.) According to Mac-Intyre, it is this search for the definition of the good that enables us to order other goods, enhances our understanding of the purpose and content of the virtues and to comprehend the place of integrity and constancy in our lives (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 204).

As follows from this definition, the internal goods of practices and the good life are substantially identified in the traditions (cf. Weber 2002, 42). To attain the virtue(s) of a practice it is necessary that the individual is embedded in a self-contained life story and a cultural union, and thus he can only recognize himself as an individual in this context (cf. Weber 2002, 42). The concept of the historicity of human life is the necessary replacement for Aristotle's metaphysical/naturalistic foundation of the essence and *telos* of human life, which MacIntyre rejects. It implies that our action has a genuine historical character for without narrative order human action would only be a dislocated sequence (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 200).[14]

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13   While the Aristotelian good is developed from a species-specific theory of perfection (and therefore obviously teleological), MacIntyre's concept of a "good life" refers to the constitution of practices, which also have intrinsic aims: the goods are internal to the action, e.g. the special goods achieved by playing chess (analytical skill, strategic imagination).

14   "The heart of his elaborate argument is the claim that there is no way of understanding an action apart from locating it in a causal and temporal sequence of actions" (Gutting 1999, 96).

[…] action itself has a basically historical character. It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the action of others. Stories are lived before they are told – except in the case of fiction. (MacIntyre 1981, 197)

An individual's own history in turn is embedded in the history of the community, which again extends to the past and to tradition. Therefore the virtues have to preserve the traditions, because they provide the historical context necessary for the life and praxis of the individual. This means that MacIntyre enhances the Aristotelian thought of the locally bound and at the same time universal good insofar as the good can only be found in the context of tradition and society, but never in the individual alone, since the identity of an individual originates from the roles one has in society (in contrary to Aristotle's universal nature of the human being) (cf. Rapp 1994, 338). The individual circumstances are the bearer of a special social identity and as such an accumulation of roles. Thus, in the works of MacIntyre the good for the individual derives from tradition and the roles one occupies within the tradition, e.g. a fifth-century Athenian general or being member of this or that guild or profession (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 204). "Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles" (MacIntyre 1981, 205). (This implies that historical, social and moral identities coincide.) The outcome of this is the impossibility of an impartial standpoint, because the individual is bound to a particular social net, from which it cannot break loose (cf. Weber 2002, 43).

To connect the notion of the search for the good and the social embeddedness of the individual, MacIntyre argues that we need a starting point (i.e. any notion of the good), which derives from the social context and its tradition one is born to and is as such particular (MacIntyre 1981, 203). It is the starting point such that: "moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, for the universal, consists" (MacIntyre 1981, 205). "But, given MacIntyre's starting point in specific practices, it is impossible for him to achieve such universalism [comparable to that which Aristotle achieves with his conception of a general human good]" (Gutting 1999, 98). MacIntyre accepts that "[…] particularity can never be simply left behind or obliterated. The notion of escaping from it into a realm of entirely universal maxims which belong to man as such […] is an illusion" (MacIntyre 1981, 205-206). As a result it is not entirely clear what MacIntyre has to say regarding individuals that belong to more than one tradition, as is very common in our globalised world (cf. Gutting 1999, 98). "MacIntyre claims that an individual life is typically embedded in more than one tradition […] (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 222). So we do not typically find ourselves limited by the specificity of a single tradition" (Gutting 1999, 96). Further, individuals do not need to

accept the moral limitations of their tradition (MacIntyre 1981, 221), yet there is no escaping entirely from the tradition in which we are born. Imagine a child with parents from different cultural backgrounds, raised in one or more countries, exposed to further different cultures as the parents move around. According to MacIntyre there is "no way to unify their [the traditions] incommensurable goods and virtues" (ibid.), which makes it impossible for the individual to derive a conception of his "life as a whole". Would the child have to choose one of the traditions, to get the necessary starting point for moral reflection (and how could he do so)?[15]

Leaving the claim about particularity aside, the quest for the good life is, according to MacIntyre, something that human beings seem to have in common. This shared quest is not the only general description of the human being that is found in *After Virtue*. His major definition of human beings is that the human is a "story-telling animal" (MacIntyre 1981, 201). As we have already looked at some of the implications of this definition, it will suffice here to notice that in holding this view MacIntyre has a general (universal) idea of the *conditio humana*.

Also connected to this is MacIntyre's account of the self as a "narrative unity", as an "unacknowledged presence" (MacIntyre 1981, 191) and the naturalness of thinking about the self in a narrative form, for the human being (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 192). Regarding these descriptions at least it seems that MacIntyre is trying (like Aristotle does with his naturalistic definition of the human as a *rational animal*) to derive his concept of a historically based morality from a common definition of human beings and a universal human way of thinking and acting.

Can this narrative nature and striving for the good life, that all human beings seem to share, be an aspect of how different cultures can communicate about the good? But as the good can only derive from the good(s) of particular individuals sharing particular practices in a particular tradition, that someone outside these practices can't understand[16], there seems to be no way for an intercultural communication about the good, even if all human beings share the same structure of thinking. In locating the narrative order of action into the particular practices MacIntyre bars this possibility.

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[15]   Gutting looks into the subject of conflicting traditions, drawing on MacIntyre's explanations of an individual accepting a tradition in *Whose justice- Which rationality?*, with the conclusion that they require "that individuals exist as rational inquirers without a full commitment to any tradition"(Gutting, 1999, 104) what "sits ill" with his notion that rational inquiry is impossible outside some specific tradition (cf. ibid., 105).

[16]   "For MacIntyre, tradition is precisely the locus of rational thought" (Gutting 1999, 97).

## 3. The usefulness of MacIntyre's theory regarding multiculturalism

As can be seen from the course of the essay hitherto, the debate in question covers both universal and particular aspects of moral theory (that cannot always be distinguished clearly). So far, on the one hand, the analysis of the history of ethics and the *telos*-concept "as it sets the standard of highest end for which we strive" have been proven universal, as well as the implicit possibility of rational agreement on the "best moral theory" and the explicit search for a "unitary core concept" of virtues. Also of formal universality is MacIntyre's concept of practices and along with it the "genuine virtues" (the virtues constitutive to practices). Likewise the search for the good life that is inherent to all human beings and the narrative mode of thought and action are notions of universal scope.

On the other hand, the *telos*-concept is particular insofar it has to remain culture-relative, because it only transcends the particular goods of one own culture's practices. Also particular is the shaping of practices and therefore the manifestations of the virtues in different traditions or cultures. The dependency of the virtues on tradition and social context, the embeddedness of the individual in his specific context, and the dependence of the search for the good for the individual on the society he lives in, where he fulfils his roles, as well as his particular "starting point" also imply particularity.

The implications for multiculturalism and its question of conflicting moral beliefs or systems on this point are the following: The world-historical universalism is descriptive and cannot show how or if there's a possibility of solving this problem, on the contrary, MacIntyre's description of the decline of the virtues is a pessimistic response to this challenge. The superior *telos* cannot transcend the practices of different cultures, but just the one it is derived from, so there cannot be the one *telos* that connects them all. Even if there can be cultures with analogous structures of practices and virtues, there still would be a difference regarding the practices and virtues themselves, insofar as which practices are shared and how their particular virtues are shaped. If the practices of the different cultures have no interference points, there is no means of approach for communication about the virtues. Though all human beings share a narrative condition, different cultures can't communicate about the good, if they have no common practices.

Though the evaluation of MacIntyre's approach regarding multicultural problems is rather pessimistic at this point, there are two aspects which still deserve closer study in order to evaluate further the implications for multiculturalism.

## 3.1 Differentiation of good and harmful traditions and the accusation of relativism

One of these aspects is the question of differentiation of good and harmful traditions, which ensues from MacIntyre's notion of tradition as the source of the good life: If the traditions determine what a good life is, which scale do we use to judge these traditions themselves? (cf. O'Neill 1996, 36, 37). According to this objection particularistic notions like this run the risk of approving harmful traditions.

A potential counterargument for the cultural particularist would be to claim that it is possible to offer situative or internal criticism within the tradition/culture (cf. O'Neill 1996, 37). Thus, local stories, which represent everyday practices, would be sufficiently reflexive and self-critical to judge themselves. MacIntyre formulates the possibility of internal criticism in his idea of a "living tradition" (MacIntyre 1995, 296-297), which he defines as "a historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constituted that tradition" (MacIntyre 1981, 207).

This idea implies that every critique and invention (and also every moral progress?) takes place in the context of the previous tradition. The definition of tradition as a kind of continuing argument neglects the fact that surely not all traditions are self-reflective in the sense of engaging in dispute about its own goods, and the fact that traditions change doesn't imply this offhandedly. Seyla Benhabib makes this criticism, as I will elaborate:

First, cultures and traditions are not distinct and homogenous semantic fields "as would be necessary for this kind of internal criticism", but in their particular definition (e.g. "the western culture", "the Anglo-American liberal thinking tradition") they are "ideal types" (in Max Weber's terms) (cf. Benhabib 1993, 22). They are formed from the "rug of meaning and interpretation" within the horizon of the social world. (cf. ibid.) Thus, within a culture there are no predefined criteria of legitimation and self-critique, but the norms, principles and values are continuously interpreted, adopted, reconstructed, reformed etc. As has been shown previously, MacIntyre does define tradition as an "argument" and "living tradition", but there is never a sole complex of constitutive criteria to characterize complex social practices, about which a universal consensus rules in the culture and which allows an immanent critique. Such critique would require that the meaning of the culture's tales be unambiguous, which as such, is not the case. On the contrary, cultural narrations are conflict-laden and often irreconcilable (cf. Benhabib 1993, 22-23). Thus the argument of internal criticism is useless for distinguishing good and harmful traditions, because the internal scale of tradition and self-criticism itself varies and can't solve problems which regard borders and categories (cf. O'Neill 1996, 37-38).

Second, to hold the claim of situative critique it is necessary that the constitutive norms of a culture hold sufficient criteria of rationality in order to criticize itself. However, within a culture or society, there can be times in which discussion and critique is improbable or "exiled". This means that critique requires a necessary distance from an individual's everyday-certainties – "a room outside" becomes necessary, so to speak (and in case of the exile another social room) (cf. Benhabib 1993, 23). This can also be made clear with the example of discrimination, which isn't necessarily obvious, but can be deep-rooted in the methods of interpretation and judgment itself and limit the critical potential internal to tradition (cf. O'Neill 1996, 37-38).

Another possible answer to the objection of "harmful traditions" is a kind of external criticism that MacIntyre describes: When two rival, incompatible traditions meet in a historical situation it is sometimes possible that such traditions rely on considerations which are effective in both of them (cf. MacIntyre 1995, 366). That is to say that they necessarily share some common attributes and thereby sometimes it will be possible to evaluate the positions of their rivals with their own scales "which derive from their own practices" (cf. ibid.). Accordingly, the only possibility for a rational solution is the chance of shared criteria of morality. With this, however, arises the question of how we find such commonalities?

Thus, for a society consisting of plural cultures the strategy of external criticism seems applicable only if there are already common grounds. For MacIntyre's theory that is to say that they share practices from which grasp of internal goods common moral criteria can be derived. If a tradition or society is already too "corrupted" to offer possibilities of confrontation and communication, there is no possibility of internal or external criticism and therefore no way of distinguishing good from harmful traditions.

The problem of differentiation leads finally to the accusation of relativism. An ethical approach of this kind struggles to escape the criticism of being relativistic and with it arbitrary, as it can give no justification for the acknowledgement of a tradition in contrary to another as ethically relevant (cf. O'Neill 1996, 36), because moral judgements can only be rendered intelligible from within a tradition and relative to its practices: The *telos* of a human life is relative to the internal goods of the practices it is connected to, and is thus relative to its culture; the virtues are relative to their practices (except the "genuine" ones, as mentioned above); and the practices in turn are relative to their culture or tradition, which is again relative to its history. It follows that, moral judgements about the virtues of practices are culture- and history-relative. Even MacIntyre's argument of possible common practices, as mentioned above, doesn't help to escape the claim that those judgements are still relative to the tradition(s). In addition, it is still arbitrary if there are commonalities of those traditions "even if those traditions

derive from a shared history". Consequentially there are no superordinate criteria to judge the practices, traditions or moral beliefs derived from them.

## 3.2 The retorsion: Which criterion determines the "best moral theory"?

Likewise the absence of an absolute criterion to judge moral philosophy (cf. MacIntyre 1995, 357) is a problem for MacIntyre's claim that Aristotelian moral philosophy is superior to other theories, because for this judgement he needs a criterion on a higher level, in order to come to this conclusion.

Against the charge of needing non-historical standards himself to judge several moral systems with a pragmatic argument (cf. Illies 2003, 169), he makes his claim about "the best theory so far", mentioned in (2.2), which can be replaced by or rather changed into a better theory (his concept of "living tradition"), which implies a never-ending writing of philosophical history and excludes any claim to absolute knowledge (cf. MacIntyre 1995, 359). A moral philosophy which is better than another means it has rational superiority over its rival theory, and it demonstrates the ability to identify and transcend the limitations of its rival, which again have been identified by the rational standards of the rival theory itself (cf. MacIntyre 1995, 357).

This counter-argument is problematic, insofar as the rational superiority of a theory over another implies that the "better theory" understands the rational standards of its rival, thus, either there are rational standards which apply to both theories, independently of their traditional and historical position, or there is a way to understand particular rational standards from outside of the theory that they belong to – MacIntyre denies both possibilities. He proclaims (by contrast to his search for "the best moral theory") that moral philosophy is the explicit articulation of a particular social and cultural position (cf. MacIntyre 1995, 356) and a tradition of thinking can't be replaced totally, as the present is only a comment on the past, and can correct and transcend the past, but never totally get rid of it (cf. MacIntyre 1981, 137-138). So, on the one hand, MacIntyre has a notion of moral progress in history, which stands diagonally to his history of decay of moral philosophy. On the other hand, moral philosophies are bound to their cultural context and can never totally be replaced.

Regarding MacIntyre's historicistic view of moral theories, the question remains how MacIntyre is able to pick out Aristotle's ethics as the best theory so far and especially out of which tradition of moral theories? How MacIntyre himself can even understand Aristotle as the connection of the tradition of the ancient polis to a Scottish Catholic society cannot clearly be followed. He can't escape the accusation that he selects from the past from his own criteria and therefore uses

modern principles (cf. Reese-Schäfer 1997, 267). To be able to judge which the best theory is he still needs timeless standards in order to asses which theory is the best one. According to Illies (2003):

> If the standards for a "better" theory is that it replaces prior theories (as he suggests on p. 270), then Nietzsche's theory (…) must be regarded as much better than Aristotle's or MacIntyre's own – after all, there are many more philosophers following Nietzsche's rejection of truth in moral matters than philosophers who look to the Aristotelian tradition for the telos of man. (Illies 2003, 169)

In summary MacIntyre lacks a scale for judging tradition and so does internal criticism; he therefore cannot escape arbitrariness and can give no reasonable criterion for why he chooses an Aristotelian virtue ethics instead of another.


## 4. Ethical question in a globalised society

The evaluation of the universal and particular aspects of MacIntyre's approach, on the one hand points to an universal understanding of the history of ethics and the possibility of finding a moral theory superior to all others, more precisely a core conception of virtue ethics with a formally universal structure of a *telos* and practices, which are based on the narrative condition of thinking and acting common to all human beings. On the other hand it shows us that though those structures can be equal, these concepts of narrative imply a strong dependency of moral theories and beliefs on tradition and history, because they are construed from the practices relative to those. The strong social and historical embeddedness of the individual and the intelligibility of morality don't allow a search for the good independently of society and thus no impartial standpoint and no intercultural reasoning about the good, as without shared practices there can be no common standing ground for understanding each other.

Out of this evaluation arises the question of whether it is really true that traditions don't share practices or have a common narrative frame? As MacIntyre regards world history as a whole, it can be argued that at least many traditions must be connected in a narrative way. If nothing else, MacIntyre regards himself in the same tradition as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. It could be argued that we just have to go back in history far enough to find practices that our current different traditions once shared, and then to develop a comprehension of the practices of other traditions from there. This would mean that the commonalities would not be arbitrary any more (as criticised in 3.1) but originate from a common narration and would be inherent to both traditions. According to what MacIntyre does himself in going back to Aristotle and redeveloping his ethics this should be

possible. Using this means one could knot a world-historical narration for all existing traditions, and search for the practices common to all of them (see Martha Nussbaum's empirical search for the fundamental elements of live for all human beings). If this can be defended, the constraint of traditions as closed narrative frame would cease to apply (as per the criticism in 3.1) - and the relativism with it. The thought can't be excluded that from a shared practice emerge different "branches" and these can be traced back to a common history and thus be intelligible from the context of the respectively new practices. If the apprehension of a practice through its predecessor isn't possible, MacIntyre's approach of historical intelligibility will have to be dumped, because intelligibility herein derives from narration. For multiculturalism this approach would mean that different nations and cultures have to become aware of their common roots (if those exist) and develop a history of common practices to comprehend their particular grasps of morality. The question remains: can this lead to a common standing ground from which evaluation of different moral systems are possible?

It follows that MacIntyre has not fully resolved the question of how the constraint to a tradition- and local-bound moral system at least in respect of practice is adequate for modern society. For example his theory has difficulties providing a satisfying explanation of justice. Orientation of modern political and economical systems cannot take place on the basis of local and traditional situatedness, but inevitably demands a standard, which is universally or interculturally applicable (cf. O'Neill 1996, 35). As we have seen, MacIntyre would consent to the problem of practical difficulties of comprehension, which emerges in ethical dialogues with individuals between different traditions, because these are exactly the symptoms he describes regarding his thesis about the modern moral debate. However, his particularistic view of ethics offers no answer to the ethical questions which arise when different traditions have to deal with each other. A cultural particularistic account of ethics, which proclaims every understanding between different cultures is impossible, seems to be entirely misplaced in a modern world of multicultural societies.

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# Reason, Recognition, and Diversity

JOHN STOPFORD

Cultural controversy combined with an intensified awareness of cultural difference and of the salience of culture as a political force has done much in recent years to erode the liberal consensus that was a mark of postwar European politics.[1] Ethnic and religious differences threaten the stability of democratic regimes. Liberal democracy is faulted for ignoring indigenous cultures and postcolonial peoples while embracing schemes of economic development that disrupt traditional values and ways of life. Communitarians and cultural conservatives argue that liberals ignore the role of cultural traditions in shaping the character and goals of democratic political institutions. Social theorists and postmodernists see in liberal institutions an apparatus of domination that abandons cultural diversity to industrial development and the forces of economic globalization.

In this paper I argue that liberals must respond to such challenges by re-examining the role of culture in liberal political theory.[2] There was a time when

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[1]    Cf. Fraser 2003, 112.

[2]    My understanding of the term "liberalism" is closely linked to the theory of political liberalism presented in Rawls 1996. This is not to overlook the substantial literature devoted to what Kymlicka calls "liberal culturalism" that has accumulated in recent years. See Kymlicka 2001, 42-48 and Hooker 2009, 55-86. My concern here, however, is less with questions of multicultural rights and the rights of ethnocultural groups, than with a type of scepticism about the liberal project that is associated with

political economists assumed social and political institutions to be culturally homogeneous. Culture was regarded as a public good that should be available to all rather than as a source of differential rights claims.[3] Even liberals who rejected perfectionist cultural ideals assumed the communities within which political institutions were embedded to be culturally homogeneous.[4] For the purposes of cultural policy the existence of a common language, literature, and cultural traditions could be taken for granted. Cultural diversity was not a factor in political policy and rarely viewed as a source of claims against the state. The cultural choices of the representative citizen were treated as a matter of preferential rationality.

As time passed, the assumption that modern political communities are culturally homogeneous became controversial. Cultural diversity acquired a new salience.[5] Cultural difference, it was argued, may be an important source of political injustice.[6] Modern societies are composed of different cultures, many of which are invisible from the perspective of what came to be seen as the "dominant culture".[7] The culture of the nation state was dominated by ruling elites. As the culture of the *status quo* it embodied a dominant identity, an authoritative set of cultural practices and norms that shaped not only the way members of minority groups were viewed by others, but also the way they viewed themselves.[8] What is sometimes called the "politics of identity" is a reaction to the discovery and rejection of the hegemony of these established cultural powers.

For the politics of identity culture is a matter not of perfection or of preference satisfaction but of identity, of who a person is. The consciousness of cultural oppression is the consciousness that one has been denied one's true identity by assimilation into the narratives of another culture. When people are compelled to view themselves not from the perspective of a culture they call their own but through the eyes of a culture that is not their own they experience this discrepancy as a loss of self. Such misrecognition is not merely a matter of misrepresentation or of mistaken identity. It is a matter of being overlooked altogether.

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what Fraser calls the "cultural turn". Fraser uses this phrase to identify a (new) salience of culture and cultural paradigms, closely connected with the emergence of post-socialist political movements; see Fraser 2003, 212.

[3]    See Kymlicka 1995, 77; Stopford 2009, 76.

[4]    The term "perfectionism" is used here and below in the stricter of the two senses discussed by Rawls 1971, §50.

[5]    Fraser 2003, 212; Stopford 2009, 7.

[6]    Kymlicka 1989, 123.

[7]    See e.g. Appiah 1994, 23.

[8]    Said 1979, 25; Stopford 2009, 94.

Cultural domination is an instrument of political domination. Misrecognition and marginalization allow one culture to manage another politically. What Said calls "Orientalism" is an integral part of European material civilization, a kind of cultural discourse "with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" through which knowledge of the Orient is filtered into Western consciousness.[9] Orientalism is more than a cognitive and semiotic lens that shapes perceptions of the Orient. It is a medium by which discourse is translated into power, "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[10]

The constitution of power through discourse is not a matter of cultivating negative attitudes, far less of conspiracy. It is an effect of systems of representation --- treatises, histories, novels, handbooks --- that structure the political and cultural profile of the colonized domain in such a way that the culture of the "Other" is no longer visible. To the extent that they also adopt the cultural perspective of the oppressor, people whose experience is constituted in this way become involuntary agents of their own misrecognition. To manufacture cultural invisibility is not merely to deny the other a voice.[11] It is to win their complicity in denying themselves that voice.

Persons and groups who are overlooked by a dominant culture are sometimes said to be "marginalized". To be marginalized is not merely to be disadvantaged in a distribution of social goods or opportunities. It is to be excluded from the system of distribution and the consensus on which it rests. Cultural exclusion subverts political inclusion. Recognition theorists stress the importance of cultural inclusion as a presupposition of political enfranchisement.[12] Participation in democratic practices presupposes the recognition of cultural identity. Recognition is more than mere respect. It has something to do with social visibility, equality of condition and the independence that arises from justified inclusion within the political community.

The discovery of cultural misrecognition at the heart of the democratic process makes it necessary to restore cultural visibility and a political identity to those who have been marginalized in this way. The politics of identity focuses less on the marginalization of individuals in their own right than on individuals as members of marginalized groups.[13] Such groups range from ethnic and religious minorities to indigenous and postcolonial peoples. Efforts to restore visibility to

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[9]   Said 1979, 2.

[10]   Said 1979, 3.

[11]   Said 1979, 15.

[12]   Stopford 2009, 57-62.

[13]   Stopford 2009, 60.

the marginalized may take different forms. Some seek to foster the character and distinctive features of a cultural identity that has been effaced through colonialism or other forms of cultural domination.[14]

For others, the focus of the politics of identity is less on the character of the oppressed than on resistance to the oppressor. Such initiatives are intent on rejecting a dominant regime and only secondarily on reclaiming a lost identity.[15] The resulting struggles are divisive, spawning new orthodoxies rather than fostering cultural inclusion.[16] The reassertion of group identities may promote cultural stereotyping and the "misbegotten politicization" of identity at the expense of a sensitivity to individual differences.[17] Systems of imagined singularity encourage the conceptual partitioning of peoples in ways that blunt the perception of cultural complexity.[18] Group identifications fortified by a sense of destiny crush human sympathy and feed sectarian confrontation. Hatred becomes structural when it sees others only through the groups to which they belong.[19]

When the politics of identity is concerned less with the identity of groups than with the awareness of identity on which the development of group identities depends it becomes the politics of recognition. For the politics of recognition, the inwardly derived awareness of identity rests on a practical consciousness of self that is interpersonal in origin. It is achieved rather than discovered.[20] Some regard the concrete experience of struggle as a condition of moral growth.[21] Modern political persons owe the ability to act as autonomous selves to developmental processes that can only occur in response to a challenge posed by the actions of another subject. Such interactions are necessary to develop and confirm a person's moral status.

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[14]   Spivak 1988; Guha 1998; Morton 2003, 50-59.

[15]   Stopford 2009, 61; Fox-Genovese 1991, 226.

[16]   Fraser 2003, 29.

[17]   Sen 2006, 10-11,71; Huntington 1996. Sen argues that Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis is conceptually parasitic on the unsubstantiated presumption "that humanity can be pre-eminently classified into discrete and distinct civilizations, and that the relations *between different human beings* can somehow be seen, without serious loss of understanding, in terms of relations *between different civilizations*." Such classifications are not only divisive, in Sen's view: they are empirically misleading.

[18]   Sen 2006, 10-12.

[19]   Cf. Stopford 2009, 66.

[20]   Taylor 1994, 34-35; Stopford 2009, 58.

[21]   On the role of recognition and dialogue in the development of identity see Taylor (1994, 32-35) and Honneth (1995). Honneth develops the theme of the struggle for recognition in Hegel's *Jena Realphilosophie* while passing over the later philosophy of Spirit. His discussion of recognition and the pathologies of modern institutions also borrows from Hegel's early distinction between the spheres of family, civil society, and state which came to play a central role in the *Philosophy of Right*. See Honneth 1995 12f., 31f, 1998, 133-134.

Liberal theory is also said to be in the grip of a monological picture of the self.[22] Political subjects, on this view, develop moral agency in isolation and without other selves or constitutive cultural attachments. This individualistic social atomism lacks psychological and historical depth.[23] Its central doctrine is "an affirmation of what we could call the primacy of rights".[24] Social atomists are unmindful of these developmental aspects of human life and of their political significance. They are oblivious to the shared history of risk, conflict, and agreement with others that is essential to self-discovery and personal autonomy. Whether we are for or against others, human identity is interpersonal and dialogical in a way that individualistic liberal models fail to see.

Some recognition theorists go further and argue that it is in the experience of injustice and social suffering that the normative core of the politics of recognition should be sought.[25] To belong to the human world is to be vulnerable to such harms from the beginnings of one's life.[26] Liberal democracy suffers from a "post-traditional normative deficit". This deficit is evident in a systematic insensitivity to the plight of cultural minorities. Struggles that originate in the interpersonal and pre-political basis of society must be confronted and worked out within the public political community. Failing this, psychosocial dysfunctions that derive from the reification of intersubjective relations of recognition cannot be addressed.[27]

People depend on relationships of recognition with significant others for the way they see themselves and for what Honneth calls their "practical relation-to-self". Misrecognition is a special form of disrespect or moral injury that is damaging to the development of moral autonomy: first, to a person's confidence in abilities that they can only develop within relationships involving love and care or "basic self-confidence";[28] second, to their self-respect as free moral agents who can enjoy and assume the rights and responsibilities of equal citizenship; and

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22    Thus Taylor 1994, 32: "In order to understand the close connection between identity and recognition, we have to take into account a crucial feature of the human condition that has been rendered almost invisible by the overwhelmingly monological bent of mainstream modern philosophy."

23    Taylor 1985, 197; 1992, 58-60. Taylor links modern identity and the need for recognition to the search for authenticity. Appiah (1994, 155-156) distinguishes essentialist and monological accounts of authenticity, arguing that a further approach, different from either, is needed to deal with the special case of political morality. See also Stopford 2009, 31.

24    Taylor 1985, 188.

25    Honneth 2003, 129.

26    Honneth 1998, 133.

27    See Honneth's remarks on reification, self-reification, recognition, and social pathologies in Honneth 2008, 80-85.

28    "Self-trust" would be a more literal translation of *Selbstvertrauen*.

third, to their self-esteem as valued and contributing members of society.[29] Moral development depends on a social organization that supports these basic categories of recognition in the three corresponding social spheres that Honneth refers to with the terms 'love', 'law', and 'achievement'.[30]

Honneth rejects the view that the recognition spheres are merely cultural.[31] Recognition is a function of economic, moral, and affective relationships that interact with the pre-political psychology of citizens on several levels. Recognition calls for more than the consciousness of cultural diversity. It involves an understanding of how and as what political persons recognize one another.[32] The call for recognition embodied in three recognition principles corresponding to each of the fundamental recognition spheres marks off a 'quasi-transcendental' social perspective from which the moral standpoint can be formed.

The recognition principles are too abstract to guide social policy directly. Struggles for recognition are engines of social change. They emerge from the margins of modern industrial democracies to influence public awareness. But the public sphere is not univocal. As soon as they enter the public sphere, recognition struggles confront hard cases in which competing norms and recognition principles jar.[33] Not only may recognition principles clash.[34] The public sphere is the scene of another kind of struggle that has to do not with recognition and misrecognition but with inequalities of wealth, opportunity and power. The social suffering attendant on misrecognition cannot always be distinguished from the social suffering caused by "maldistribution".[35]

Honneth concedes that it is difficult to spell out the content to his idea of political progress, especially in the recognition spheres of love and achievement. Distribution struggles can be reinterpreted as struggles for recognition surrounding the "appropriate evaluation of individuals' or groups' social contributions."[36]

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[29]    "Self-valuing" would be a more literal translation of Honneth's *Selbstschätzung,* rendered here as "self-esteem". See also the translator's introduction in Honneth (1995 xii-xiii). Both "misrecognition" and "disrespect" could serve as translations of *Mißachtung*. Taylor (1994, 25) uses both "nonrecognition" and "misrecognition" to characterize harms of this kind.

[30]    Overreliance on the legal system to resolve social conflicts which may have their origins in other recognition spheres and the consequent "juridification" (*Verrechtlichung*) of these spheres is an example of such an imbalance. See Honneth (1998, 133-134) and Habermas (1983, 53-67), whose account of the role of intersubjectivity in moral development Honneth cites.

[31]    Honneth 1997, 151.

[32]    Stopford 2009, 58.

[33]    Fraser 2003, 224-226; Stopford 2009, 64.

[34]    Fraser 2003, 228; Stopford 2009, 64.

[35]    Fraser 2000, 118: "Distribution and recognition are not neatly separated from each other in capitalist societies"; see also Honneth 2004, 351-352.

[36]    Honneth 2004, 353.

He also argues that it is not the task of social theory to address cases in which principles conflict. The proper task of social theory is to develop a pluralist theory of justice guided by the ideal of undistorted identity formation in relation to each of the three recognition spheres.[37]

Unresolved tensions between recognition and distribution principles point to another kind of conflict: between recognition and justice. The moral perspective of justice is no less compelling than the quasi-transcendental moral authority commanded by calls for recognition.[38] The claims of the marginalized must be reconciled with the claims of the citizen who participates in a public system of cooperation involving responsibility and the management of legitimate expectations.[39] Policies that are intended to compensate the misrecognition of some may result in discrimination against others. The failure to resolve such conflicts may trigger social resentment and feelings of injustice among those who believe they are already playing their part in a well-ordered scheme of distribution, as well as among those excluded from that scheme.[40]

Should we think of misrecognition as a form of injustice, or of injustice as a form of misrecognition? Publicly recognized rules and standards that regulate the legitimate expectations of citizens of a well-ordered society play a central role in determining the fairness and stability of social cooperation. Calls for recognition may, as Honneth believes, constitute a necessary stimulus to social action. But to understand misrecognition as a form of injustice we also need to know something about the relationship between justice and recognition.[41] Do liberal democratic political relationships presuppose mutual recognition? Must the experience of social injustice invariably be "measured in terms of the withholding of some recognition held to be legitimate"?[42]

It is sometimes argued that Rawls's "ideal theory" is blind to the fact of institutional misrecognition because it identifies social justice with the elimination of contingencies that are arbitrary from a moral point of view.[43] Principles that

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[37]   Honneth 2004, 351-354.

[38]   Honneth and Rawls approach the genesis, function, and character of moral theory and the moral point of view from methodologically distinct perspectives.

[39]   Rawls 1971, 310-315.

[40]   Fraser 2000, 119. On the relation between reciprocity and the sense of justice, see Rawls's 1971 essay "Justice as Reciprocity", reprinted in *Collected Papers*, 190-224. See also Bankovsky (2012, 120-121, 164-65) and Rawls (2007).

[41]   Rawls 1999, 7; 1996. 16, 181. Rawls is aware of the problem of misrecognition. But he holds that analysis of the sources of misrecognition lacks a practical point unless it can be integrated within a workable account of institutions.

[42]   Honneth 2004, 351.

[43]   Rawls 1971, 15; on ideal theory, 8-9.

are designed to nullify the effects of mere contingencies cannot address injustices that are systematic in origin.[44] This is a misunderstanding. Rawls's theory applies to the special case of the basic structure of a well-ordered society: the major social institutions and the way they fit together to distribute rights and duties and to "determine the division of advantages from social cooperation".[45] It is an ideal theory of institutional justice, developed with the problems of institutional misrecognition and discrimination in full view. *Ad hoc* attempts to address institutional oppression, through antidiscrimination laws and other external remedial measures do not address the systematic sources of injustice and misrecognition.[46] Rawls recognizes that partial compliance deals with the "pressing and urgent matters". But only ideal theory offers us a systematic grasp of the truly urgent problems."[47]

To ask what is practically possible is to seek realistic criteria of agreement rather than criteria of agreement about the real. Lasting solutions to pressing problems presuppose a stable consensus on basic principles. Calls for recognition must begin rather than end with a clarification of the role of recognition in a well-ordered society.[48] Realistic agreement under such circumstances has something to do with the recognition of reasonable difference. The problems faced by societies which are seeking to become more inclusive cannot be solved by compensating historical injustice or policies of redistribution. They call for a renegotiation of reasonable terms of cooperation between parties who may lack not only a common conception of the good but also a common cultural heritage.[49]

In liberal democracies it is the system of public education that is the focus of efforts to develop such a conception of cooperation. Public reasonableness is caught between the forces of exclusion and inclusion; between an exclusive tradition steeped in perfectionism, on the one hand, and progressive but uncritical demands for social inclusiveness on the other. Humanistic educational schemes often rest on perfectionist ideals that are believed to embody the "best that has been thought and said in the world".[50] Advocates of Western civilization

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[44]   Hooker 2009, 61. Hooker's conclusion that Rawls presumes "that problems of racial injustice are contingent rather than constitutive" may depend on a misunderstanding of the role of the basic structure in Rawls's project.

[45]   Rawls 1971, 7.

[46]   Hooker 2009, 60.

[47]   Rawls 1971, 9; 245-246.

[48]   On the connection between the idea of the reasonable, fair terms of cooperation, and reciprocity see Rawls (1996, 51).

[49]   Rawls connects the idea of the reasonable with the willingness to propose and honour fair terms of cooperation, and with the readiness to recognize and accept the burdens of judgment.

[50]   Arnold 1993, 190. Arnold argues in the introduction to *Culture and Anarchy* that culture as the

programs argue that students must study canonical works if they are to become reflective and reasonable members of civil society.[51]

Sloterdijk has described the powerful sense of belonging engendered within this tradition.[52] Humanistic education was long viewed on the model of the intimate society of letters. Education was a Platonic enterprise reserving the highest knowledge for a few while excluding those deemed incapable of rational insight.[53] Its function was to construct the "armed and literate" nation in which "the power of reading actually did mean something like membership of a secret elite".[54] Compulsory military service for males and the universal obligation of both sexes to read the classics were marks of inclusion.[55] Schools and institutions of higher learning were to forge the intellectual and moral capacities on which the political and economic order relied.[56]

Calls for the recognition of cultural diversity challenge the democratic legitimacy of this exclusive educational model. Critics of traditional humanistic curricula argue that public education must abandon its special relationship to the Western canon.[57] Modern political communities are demographically and culturally diverse. Public education cannot be grounded in the understanding of a single cultural tradition. If culture is a matter of identity, if a political community embraces many cultures, and if no culture is in itself more valuable than any another, then the public representation of marginalized cultures is essential to their rehabilitation.

Public education should encourage participatory inclusion rather than metaphysical exclusion. It derives its standards not from the highest values in any particular tradition but from the representation of disparate values within a democratic tradition. What is at stake for the critic of Western perfectionism is not only the underrepresentation of non-standard voices in the curriculum but also the social and political invisibility of the cultures from which they stem. Hege-

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study of perfection leads us "to conceive of true human perfection as a *harmonious* perfection, developing all sides of our humanity; and as a general perfection, developing all parts of our society" (Arnold 1993, 192); see also Stopford 2009, 91. Many perfectionists attempt to extrapolate from perfectionism as a principle of individual morality to perfectionism as a principle of political morality. See, for example, Cavell's remarks on Emersonian Perfectionism and democracy in the context of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in Cavell 1990, 3, 32.

[51]    Hook 1990, 135-36.

[52]    Sloterdijk 2009, 13.

[53]    Stopford 2009, 93.

[54]    Sloterdijk 2009, 13. This characterization of a Platonic education brings to mind the "Pursuit of the Ideal" discussed by Berlin in his essay of that title: Berlin 1990, 1-20.

[55]    Sloterdijk 2009, 14.

[56]    Cf. Plato, *The Statesman*, 311b-c; Sloterdijk 2009, 26.

[57]    Stopford 2009, 92; Gandhi, 43, 53, 84-86.

monic culture is a system of knowledge about the "Other" and other cultures that secures and maintains the superiority of knower over known.[58] Foucault's reconstructions of subjugated knowledges and Said's studies of cultural hegemony suggest that the first task of education should be to challenge this superiority.[59]

Striving for curricular inclusiveness tells us little about the point of inclusion. Ideals of reason and rationality play only a minor role in many cultures. Given such difficulties it is unsurprising that attacks on Western conceptions of truth and rationality, exemplified in the writing of philosophical and literary poststructuralists and postmodernists, sometimes overshoot and target not only Western perfectionism but also much else that we regard as reasonable. Some, like Barthes and Rorty, reject an intermediate position between the perfectionist tradition – "God and his hypostases" --- and the sanctioned Babel of interpretation.[60] The consequences of this refusal are evident in the postmodern apothegm: "anything goes": "the notion that there is something a given text is *really* about, something which rigorous application of a method will reveal, is as bad as the Aristotelian idea that there is something which a substance really, intrinsically, *is* as opposed to what it only apparently or accidentally or relationally is".[61]

The "text" thus "practises the infinite deferment of the signified".[62] Its dominant metaphor is the self-reproducing network without origin, a semiotic pluralism anchored in the proliferation and ceaseless recycling of signs.[63] The slide into "a space which leaves no language safe outside" discards the hegemonic aspirations of the Western tradition, and with it the ideal of a transcultural moral perspective.[64] Such a utopia of language would be "a space where no language has a hold over any other", a society beyond the dialectic of recognition, Hegelian Socialism and political thinking.[65] No culture can pass judgment on another and none can be judged from outside.[66] The liberated reader provides the model for a society in which the conflict of interpretations is *de rigeur*.

Structuralist models of signification reclaim linguistic difference and cultural diversity from the "totalitarian" control of perfectionist systems, but they have

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[58]    Said 1979, 7f. Said's *Orientalism*, primarily a study of the role of Western cultural discourse in colonialism, draws heavily on Foucault's studies of the relationship between knowledge and power.

[59]    Said 1979, 3.

[60]    Barthes 1977, 147; Stopford 1990.

[61]    Rorty 1992, 102; Eco 2000, 49-50.

[62]    Barthes 1984, 171.

[63]    Barthes 1984, 171; see also Derrida 1984, 18.

[64]    Barthes 1984, 174.

[65]    Lübecker 2009, 136-138.

[66]    Scruton 2014, 86.

nothing to say about political cooperation in a multicultural democracy once the value of diversity has been recognized and accepted.[67] Barthes' reliance on an impersonal and apolitical linguistic model of signification encourages him to abandon the distinction between human and semiotic interpretants.[68] The dialogical and intersubjective aspect of interpretation by living and breathing human beings is absorbed into the monological and aleatoric play of signs – "textuality".[69] But political theory cannot ignore intersubjectivity, or call a halt at the conflict of interpretations. Literature and literary theory may work in the interstices of politics and political theory, but they cannot replace it.[70] Disparate cultures find cohabitation more challenging than the analogy with the "text" suggests. The capitulation of postmodernism to global consumer capitalism and the culture of accessibility reminds us that, left to their own devices, signs have no loyalties but to their language.[71]

It was suggested above that liberal political theory must re-examine its response to the intensified awareness of cultural difference associated with what some have called the "cultural turn". Liberal philosophers have focused on questions of liberty, political legitimacy, and entitlement that arise with the development of modern legal and economic institutions.[72] The role of liberalism as a cultural force at the origin of its own system of cultural significations is rarely scrutinized in any detail.[73] Yet understanding the role of this system in shaping and distorting but also sustaining social cooperation, especially in the public sphere, is necessary if liberal political theory is to clarify the relationship between social justice and cultural domination in multicultural democracies.[74]

It is sometimes argued that liberal governments can avoid arbitrary bias in favour of one culture or another by creating a public sphere that is impartial between different cultures and comprehensive value systems.[75] We can follow

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[67]   Stopford 1990; 2009, 6; Eco 2000, 50-51.

[68]   See especially Saussure 1966.

[69]   Compare Stopford 2008, 179f.; see also Habermas 1995, 243-266. Habermas makes an analogous criticism of C.S. Peirce's semiotics which he believes remains locked into a monological (as opposed to "dialogical") view of subjectivity. Peirce, like Barthes, seems to lose sight of the facticity of the relation between self and other. Habermas, by contrast, holds on to the priority of linguistic intersubjectivity and rejects semiotic attempts to reconstruct intersubjectivity in terms of a more general semiotic theory.

[70]   Compare Barthes 1979, 35.

[71]   On the "culture of accessibility" and the appropriation of culture by the market, see Stopford 2009, 5-7.

[72]   Stopford 2009, ix, 3.

[73]   On the idea of a liberal cultural structure, see Dworkin 1985, 229-33; Kymlicka 1989, 177; Stopford 2009, 40-41.

[74]   Stopford 2009, 40-41, 75-78.

[75]   Rawls 1996, 191.

Levinson here in distinguishing between "exclusionary" and "inclusionary" neutrality. Both types of neutrality purpose a public sphere in which no one culture is favoured over any other. Exclusionary neutrality attempts to achieve this through the exclusion of cultural difference.[76] Children, for example, may be expected to discard certain religious and ethnic symbols or types of clothing when they enter state schools. Some culturally significant behaviours might be forbidden in public spaces, and public symbols of state might have to be removed or shorn of some of their cultural associations.

A public sphere that restricts manifestations of cultural difference in this way may encourage rather than inhibit cultural oppression by allowing forms of civic identification that are tainted with state perfectionism to flourish within the space vacated by the forbidden signs and symbols.[77] A space from which the tokens of cultural difference have been banished is a space in which encounters between members of different cultures are inevitably impoverished. In an open society such encounters play an important role in promoting intercultural understanding and the public virtues of tolerance, the readiness to meet others halfway, and reasonableness.[78]

Inclusionary neutrality is less susceptible to such criticisms. Guided by the principle of equal inclusion rather than equal exclusion, its goal is a public identity "in which all private individuals and identities find inclusion".[79] Where exclusionary neutrality sets limits to manifestations of difference and avoids cultural confrontation in the public sphere, inclusionary neutrality permits and encourages members of different cultures to fit together in the same public space despite their differences.[80] In this way it creates a forum in which civic virtue can develop. But where exclusionary neutrality may facilitate state perfectionism, experience suggests that inclusionary neutrality may not do enough to encourage the kind of cultural framework within which identification with civic values can flourish.[81] An inclusionary public sphere may fail to flourish because private identifications remain stronger than allegiances to the public project.[82]

Both exclusionary and inclusionary neutrality are outcome-oriented policies. They seek to create a culture of a certain kind. Yet of what kind remains unclear.

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[76]  Levinson 1999, 117.

[77]  Levinson 1999, 123; Stopford 2009, 102.

[78]  Rawls 1996, 157.

[79]  Levinson 1999, 117.

[80]  Levinson 1999, 118.

[81]  See Stopford 2009, 101-102.

[82]  Levinson 1999, 121.

What does it mean to say that a culture is neutral? Is a neutral culture just another kind of culture? Is it perhaps a mixture of cultures in which no single culture is allowed to predominate? Or is the idea of a neutral culture in itself impractical or even incoherent?[83] Because it is difficult to make sense of the idea of cultural neutrality as an outcome some argue that theories of public culture should focus on the procedures that precede outcomes rather than on the outcomes themselves.

A procedure is sometimes said to be neutral if it is justified by appeal to neutral values such as impartiality.[84] Thus Habermas offers an apparently impartial account of the way in which democratic deliberation can reconcile the claims of individuals from differing communities and cultures.[85] The heart of this view is a model of public deliberation that is inclusive, egalitarian, and noncoercive.[86] Participants must speak and act reasonably and sincerely, strive for mutual understanding, and must be prepared to accept the force of the better argument. Consensual decisions reached through deliberation in accordance with these procedural criteria are said to result from a process of democratic will formation the conclusions of which all participants can accept because of the impartiality of the procedure that led to them.[87]

Here it is not neutrality of outcome but the deliberative procedure by which decisions are reached that determines the character of the political culture. Habermas argues that public deliberations in conformity with the ideal of communicative rationality are the source of an "innerworldly transcendence" and context-transcending validity claims that lift democratic discourse above the systemic forces that are responsible for the 'colonization' of the culture of everyday life.[88] Communicative rationality restores the sense of purpose to moral-practical agency by reconnecting social choice to consensus oriented communication that is rooted in the 'lifeworld' and the factical recognition of different cultural perspectives.

Some doubt whether the innerworldly transcendence of ideal discourse is sufficient to address the marginalization and misrecognition that are the focus of identity- and recognition-theoretical attacks on liberal theory. Honneth thinks that Habermas's preoccupation with system rationality and the distinction between communicative and instrumental rationality leads him to overlook the political importance of pre-political social struggles involving moral conflict and misrecognition. Rawls sees Habermas's conception of the public sphere as per-

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83  Rawls 1996, 194.

84  Compare here Rawls 1996, 191.

85  See especially Habermas 1984, 1987.

86  Habermas 1990, 89.

87  Habermas 1994, 138.

88  Stopford 2009, 33.

fectionist. It embodies a civic humanist ideal of political participation according to which human nature is "most fully realized in a democratic society in which there is widespread and vigorous participation in political life".[89]

A public culture that is grounded in civic humanist ideals depends on a "high" conception of rationality that may marginalize those who think and communicate in different ways. Such ideal conceptions represent a significant hurdle for members of cultures that emphasize social interdependence, collectivism, and group learning. Their approach to moral questions may be guided by their responsiveness to the ethical features of particular situations rather than by dialog and criticism.[90] The forum of ideal discourse is not, certainly, elitist in the sense of Sloterdijk. But if ideal discourse theory is wedded to a civic humanist ideal that is foreign and perhaps even puzzling to many, it surely will fail to command a consensus as a model for the public political culture of a multicultural democracy.

Rawls's approach to the public sphere differs from this in three important respects. Firstly, *A Theory of Justice* makes the rejection of perfectionism as a political principle explicit. The use of state power to impose perfectionist cultural ideals, whether by direct or indirect methods, violates the principle of equal liberty.[91] In addition, the standards of reasoning that are operative within the public sphere must be specified in ways that avoid perfectionism. This excludes not just Western civic humanism, but any conception of rationality that is biased towards Western values.[92] For this reason Rawls's "political liberalism" explicitly rejects the idea of a comprehensive political consensus in favour of a practical overlapping consensus between adherents of different value systems based on reasonableness and reciprocity.[93]

Secondly, Rawls characterizes the public sphere in a way that is constructive rather than corrective and remedial.[94] Habermas views deliberative democracy as a way of preserving the enlightenment potential of modernity in the form of an intact linguistic community that is still rooted in the lifeworld. Only a powerful public sphere sustained by the rational communicative accomplishments of citizens

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[89]   Rawls 1996, 206.

[90]   Stopford 2009, 98.

[91]   Rawls 1971, 325-328.

[92]   See Stopford 2009, 98-99.

[93]   See Rawls 1996. xlvii: "the thought is to formulate a liberal political conception that those nonliberal doctrines might be able to endorse. To find this political conception we do not look at known comprehensive doctrines with the aim of striking a balance or average between them, nor do we attempt to strike a compromise with a sufficient number of those doctrines actually existing in society by tailoring the political conception to fit them. Doing that appeals to the wrong idea of consensus and makes the political conception political in the wrong way. […] Rather, we formulate a freestanding political conception having its own intrinsic (moral) political ideal expressed by the criterion of reciprocity."

[94]   See Rawls 1980.

can play this role.[95] The focus of Rawls's approach lies in the construction of a practical, freestanding political consensus that holders of nonliberal doctrines might be able to endorse. Such a consensus seeks normative solutions to practical political problems that comprehensive doctrines are not equipped to solve. It is 'freestanding' because it does not presuppose public agreement on comprehensive values.

This consensus is so constructed that citizens who hold different reasonable comprehensive views and doctrines can also affirm the content of the public agreement from their own perspectives. Such a consensus does not presuppose a commitment to Western conceptions of autonomy and individuality. Nor is it procedurally neutral.[96] Rawls rejects both procedural neutrality and neutrality of outcome in favour of what he calls "neutrality of aim".[97] Neutrality of aim is achieved by building a political consensus on the design and intentions of basic institutions. Such an agreement has substantive consequences, and is thus not purely procedural, but it is neutral in the sense that it does not favour one comprehensive doctrine or view over another.

Thirdly, Rawls's approach to religious, moral and cultural conflict begins with the search for criteria of reasonable agreement. Reasonableness for the purposes of a workable political theory is evident in the readiness to propose and honour fair terms of cooperation.[98] When the depth of religious, moral, and cultural diversity becomes apparent the first step of a reasonable person is to determine what it is possible to agree about.[99] Political consensus has its roots in consensus about consensus, in an agreement about what we can agree about.[100] The first task of liberal theory in contemporary multicultural democracies is to establish what kind of consensus we must begin from if we wish to construct liberal political institutions that are not disfigured by the most serious forms of cultural oppression?[101]

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[95]  Stopford 2009, 38.

[96]  Rawls 1996, 192.

[97]  Rawls 1996, 192-194.

[98]  Rawls 1996, 24, 49-54. "The first basic aspect of the reasonable, then, is the willingness to propose fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them provided others do" (54).

[99]  Stopford 2009, 192.

[100]  Cf. Stopford 2009, 108.

[101]  Compare Rawls 1996, 37. Since disagreement on fundamental religious, philosophical and moral questions is more than likely in such circumstances, pluralism is not a surprising fact. Reasonable people accept it as a fact of life. Only the use of oppressive state power can sustain a social consensus on such questions. Rawls refers to this as the *fact of oppression*: "a continuing shared understanding of one comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine can be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power."

To answer this question we need to understand what Rawls refers to as the "fact of reasonable pluralism".[102] In a political liberal democracy citizens accept that moral disagreement is not an imperfection that must be eradicated by the use of oppressive state power. It is a permanent feature of the free use of reason in free societies.[103] One of the features of reasonable disagreement is the readiness to accept that those we disagree with are not therefore unreasonable. When people acknowledge this they assume the "burdens of judgment". Judgment is thought of as a burden in such cases because reasonable persons do not assume that the truth of their own views impugns the reasonableness of those with whom they disagree.[104] To assume the burdens of judgment is to accept the diversity of values as an objective fact about the social world; the fact of reasonable pluralism.

Reasonable pluralism is not a joyful pluralism in the sense of Nietzsche or Barthes. Nor does it hold out the prospect of an ever-widening circle of inclusiveness and harmonious co-operation between consociates. The task of political theory is to construct a form of political association that sustains political consensus without eliminating those features of the consensus that make cultural diversity valuable, not merely to a political community but to the individuals who belong to that community. The solution to problems that stem from metaphysical and cultural conflict lies not in political agreement on a single comprehensive view of the good, but in an agreement to take certain kinds of religious and metaphysical question off the political agenda. In this way a plurality of incompatible and irreconcilable yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines or religious views may be combined in a stable system of cooperation.[105]

To acknowledge the fact of reasonable pluralism is not the end of political philosophy but its beginning.[106] Liberal democracy recognizes the objectivity of different beliefs about value and rejects the use of political power to shape citizen's conceptions of the good. But it also recognizes the need for workable political integration. In existing liberal democracies the broadening of political consensus into overlapping consensus is likely to prove challenging. Political integration presupposes that citizens assume the burdens of reasonableness not only

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[102]   Rawls 1996, 24, 36; 1999, 11-12, 15-16.

[103]   See Rawls 1996, xxvi-xxvii: "This pluralism is not seen as disaster but rather as the natural outcome of the activities of human reason under enduring free institutions. To see reasonable pluralism as a disaster is to see the exercise of reason under the conditions of freedom itself as a disaster."

[104]   Reasonable disagreement can be explained in part by the burdens associated with assessing and weighing evidence, the effects of personal experiences on a person's judgments and the inscrutability and incommensurability of values. See Rawls 1996, 54-58. There are other ways in which reasonable disagreement may arise. These sources of reasonable disagreement, on Rawls's view, reflect the hazards and uncertainties which accompany the free exercise of reason.

[105]   On the idea of a reasonable comprehensive doctrine, see e.g. Rawls (1996, xviii).

[106]   Rawls 1996, 37.

when confronted with the diversity of cultures and value systems, but also when the realization of public policies presupposes sustained public commitment over time. Citizens, no matter how diverse their aspirations and cultural perspectives, must be prepared to assume these burdens if they are to play their role in sustaining and defending democratic institutions.

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# Politics and the Relevance of Cultures

GABRIELE DE ANNA

## 1. Introduction

Most countries have invested – and are still investing – a huge amount in sustaining the study of cultures and heritages, as a means of building towards their futures. The presupposition is that cultures and heritages matter for our choices. In this essay, I would like to consider and address some objections against this presupposition, which might emerge in the face of recent developments that are changing the shape of our societies. Globalization processes seem to have accelerated in the past few years, and we inevitably live in societies which are much more diverse than we could have expected only few years ago. Does it still make sense to try to know and understand traditional cultures, when we have to cope with everyday problems where the challenge is to build a future together, not to worry about the past? Wouldn't it make more sense to find technical solutions to the practical problems opened by the need to live together, than trying to understand each other? For example, should we not struggle to find the best possible procedures to deal with practical problems, rather than spending time investigating our different heritages?

I will try to show that there are reasons to keep worrying about cultural heritages and to try to understand and compare different cultures. Such endeavours,

I will claim, are not just exercises for academic life, but guide the actual, practical processes of development that our multicultural societies need to go through. In the next section, I will consider a common conception of politics, i.e. the social contract tradition, which seems to tell against the stance I want to defend. I will argue that this conception of politics opens up several problems concerning practical reason. In the third section, I will discuss the nature of practical reason and argue that it has some universalistic features, but also some features which link it to particular cultures. In the fourth section, I will show how the account of practical reason I have proposed can be used to argue that the study of cultures should matter for our current practical problems in the domain of politics.

## 2. The social contract tradition and the political role of cultures

The idea that attention to cultural heritages should be avoided in political contexts is typically supported on social-contract grounds. The social contract tradition contends that political communities are established through an arbitrary act of individuals, who initially live independently one from the other and who, at some point, decide – based on what their reasons suggest – that living together is to the best advantage of each of them. Hence, they subscribe a contract and give rise to a political society. In recent times, this view received a sophisticated and incredibly well thought out formulation by John Rawls in his *Theory of Justice* (1971).

Rawls' account is founded on a conception of practical reason, according to which reason is universal, i.e. it can choose according to criteria that apply to anyone, anywhere, and at any time. His claim is that we can understand what is best to do if we imagine what one would choose to do while standing behind a veil of ignorance, i.e. without knowing the contingencies of one's own life. Imagine that you do not know anything about yourself, e.g. race, level of instruction, wealth, social sanding, job, accepted values, all sorts of preferences, and so on. In Rawls' view, from behind the veil of ignorance, we all would consider best a social setting which assumes two fundamental principles: the existence of a system of equal liberties for everyone, and a principle of redistribution of the available goods that he called Maxmin. According to Maxmin, it is rational to choose the outset which grants the highest possible share (max), to those who occupy the lowest levels of society (min). For Rawls, a just political system is one in which the institutions and legal settings respect the two fundamental principles. Since the two basic principles are universally rational and are acceptable to anyone, any political system which satisfies them should also be acceptable to anyone.

From this point of view, a political system is universally acceptable, since it is neutral, i.e. is not committed to any particular view of the good or of truth. Let us

recall that the two basic principles are chosen behind the veil of ignorance, where one does not even know what one's conception of the good is. That means that the principles are chosen regardless of what one's conception of the good might be. This is what makes the principles universal.

Social-contract theory offers the premises needed for an argument for proceduralism. Proceduralism is a legal and political theory according to which the establishment and the respect of right or fair procedures are sufficient for the legitimacy of a legal system or a political power. The word 'sufficient' is crucial. Any reasonable theorist would recognise that procedures are necessary. A very simple argument seems very compelling in this sense: without procedures, we could not apply the law in a consistent way, and this would be unacceptable for any reasonable understanding of the nature of justice. Proceduralism wants to claim more: the point is that when the right procedures are implemented and followed, a law or a decision is always legitimate, no matter what its content might be.

The outlook of politics offered by the social contract tradition can furnish the premises for an argument to the conclusion that cultures and heritages should not matter in the political arena. The basic principles of a just society, as we have seen, are chosen behind a veil of ignorance, and that means that the person choosing them has no idea of what her or his cultural affiliations are. Any political system respecting those basic principal will be neutral when it comes to differences in metaphysical outlooks, value-choices, or cultural heritages. Institutional and legal procedures will be correct if they respect neutrality and follow the basic principles. Hence, the cultural differences among people will be politically irrelevant, as far as a state can implement just procedures and people will generally adhere to them.

The idea that a political system can be neutral in the suggested sense was widely criticised and Rawls himself revised his own view at a later stage (1993). The main stream of criticism came from the outlook which became known as communitarianism. Philosophers including Michael Sandel (1982), Charles Taylor (1989) and Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) complained that practical reason does not quite match the description provided by Rawls. The main point is: what is left of a self when we have hidden most of its features behind a veil? On what grounds can that self make choices at all, without knowing what its criteria really are? Communitarians generally stress the importance of communities, in building the subjectivity of agents and thereby in furnishing them the rational and emotion tools that they deploy when they make their choices. The upshot is that cultures, conceptions of the good and values are not politically irrelevant and political systems cannot be neutral. The practical reason of each person would be totally dependent on the culture of that person. One cannot escape the heritage of one's tradition, since that heritage furnishes the very criteria that one uses to make choices.

Someone could object that conversions are a counterexample, but communitarians reject this move: they claim that events that are commonly considered conversions are either led by the criteria of the original culture, and thus they are not really conversions, or they are irrational leaps.

Communitarians brought a new emphasis to the notions of tradition and community, but they did it at the expense of reason: trans-cultural judgements are ultimately irrational. The argument between liberals and communitarians can be seen as a new version of an older debate, namely that between supporters of the idea of a universal reason and those who support the thesis that practical reason is culturally relative.

Communitarian objections to the liberal conception of reason have well made, but their alternative view of reason is also unsatisfying. We have a normative intuition according to which certain actions are wrong for everyone, apart from distinctions of cultures. An example might be gratuitously killing an innocent person. If someone says that one's culture allows this, we would think that there must be something wrong with that culture. Furthermore, these deeds are usually evaluated in similar manners in cultures which are very different from one another. This suggests that we can nurse more hope in the possibility that reason might achieve universal consensus than communitarians recognise. There must be something wrong with their view of practical reason too.

A rejoinder to both these positions is found in the *mixed proposal*, i.e. a group of views, which support the importance of cultures on liberal grounds, the paradigmatic example being the thought of Will Kymlicka (1995, 2001). These views develop Rawls' position in a direction which is meant to recognise the importance of cultures. These positions accept Rawls' conception of practical reason and his view that politics is mainly committed to granting the maximum possible expansion of everyone's liberty (let us recall that Rawls' first principle of a just society calls for a system of equal liberties). At the same time, however, these views suggest that cultures and values are politically relevant. The argument starts from the recognition that in order to effectively exercise one's liberty, one must be able to find, in the social environment, the resources that one needs. However, one's wishes are largely culture-dependent, and therefore there could be no protection of liberty without the protection of forms of life which make the exercise of the relevant wishes possible. One could not chose to engage in competitive chess playing, for example, if there were no chess community, no chess tournaments, etc. The very protection of individual liberty, hence, calls for the protection and the empowerment of the cultural forms in which individuals want to exercise their choices. This concession to cultures does not risk the relativistic consequences of communitarianism: following Rawls, the mixed position suggests that a well-formed political system

will only allow in its domain those cultures which are compatible with the protection of the freedom of all.

The mixed position attempts to reconcile the universal and the culturally relative conceptions of reason. It manages to acknowledge the importance of cultures, without giving up the possibility that reason reaches a universal perspective. The proposal, however, has some problems and I will mention here two. Firstly, it does not really address the objection about the nature of practical reason that communitarianism raised against Rawls, i.e. the objection that when all criteria are hidden from her view, the subject isn't in a position to make a choice. Secondly, the proposed reconciliation is problematic: the importance of cultures is granted, but the only cultures acceptable from this point of view are those which share the same conception of the good and the same values of the liberal perspective, i.e. those which would rank the protection of a system of equal liberties as the most fundamental principle. The problem is that neutrality does not seem an achievable political target. The claim that the most important goal of society is to put as far as possible all individuals in the position where they can do what they desire depends on a particular conception of what is valuable and good. Cultures which do not share this priority cannot simply be ruled out as unreasonable: a suitable conception of practical reason should be able to engage these perspectives too.

## 3. Rethinking practical reason

In recent years, debates on practical reason have made much progress, due to philosophers such as Elizabeth Anscombe (1957), John McDowell (1998), and Thomas Nagel (1986), to mention only a few names, which lie behind the reflections which follow. The results of these discussions offer a solution to the problems that both sides face in the debate between communitarians and liberals. In this section, I will try to show why this is so, by summarizing an account of practical reason which I have argued for previously (De Anna 2015).[1] In the next section, I will suggest that the ensuing view of practical reason can account for the importance of cultures and heritages in politics, while taking into account the normative intuition and explaining how reason can have a universal value.

Practical reason has to do with choices in practical situations, hence with human action. An action is a doing which belongs to the agent. Not all doings belong to agents. If someone pushes me and I hit someone else, the hitting is

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[1]   The essay in which I lay out this account more fully is included in a previous volume of the same research project to which the present volume also belongs (De Anna and Martinelli 2015).

something my body does, but it is not my action. Actions are doings for which an agent can give a reason as the answer to the question: "Why did you do it?". "Why did you give money to that beggar?" Answer: "Because he is hungry."

What are reasons for actions, then? They certainly involve facts. "Because he is hungry" offers a fact as a reason. But that is not enough. They are facts concerning an object that the agent must see as valuable (in the example: the human person who is begging); those facts must involve some deficiency in the valuable object (the beggar is hungry); the agent must have the power to make the valuable object better off (I have no reason to do anything, if there is nothing I can do). All this suggests that reasons have an objective side (a fact) and a subjective side (the way in which the subject responds to the fact).

I mentioned above that we share a normative intuition. That intuition is now relevant again, since it suggests that not all ways of responding to a situation by a subject are equally acceptable. I could give the money to the beggar or offer him a sandwich. We would consider both these ways of responding as good. However, I could ignore him, and be insensitive to his starvation. Or I could respond to the starvation by killing him. Both these two latter responses would be wrong. Now the problem is: what constrains the range of viable responses to a situation?

Let us remember that we are talking about practical reason, i.e. reason at work in action. That means that we have to consider how normative constraints shape action from the point of view of the agent. From that point of view, the question about what the right ways of responding to a situation are takes the following form: "The fact f seems to me a reason to do action a, but is it really such?" Raising this doubt amounts to asking how a well-functioning human being would respond in the same situation. That means that normativity arises from the consideration by an agent of how a well-functioning human being should be and how she would respond to the facts of the situation.

The result we reached accounts for two features of practical reason that we considered above: its universality and its dependence on culture. When an agent wonders how a well-functioning human being would react in the situation, she asks a question about human nature, about what all humans are and how they should be. On the other hand, the agent has no other way of conceiving how a well-functioning human being would respond than considering examples of humans whom she has encountered and who were flourishing, happy, respected and appreciated by others. That means that the agent's judgements about human nature are concretely shaped by her experience of humanity and human flourishing.

It is important to stress that the judgements about flourishing and about what counts as successful realisations of human life that an agent gives, depend on the kind of human being the agent is. They depend on her way of responding to surrounding facts, and therefore they depend on the form of life she is engaged in.

Ultimately, they depend on her "culture". The upshot is that there is no absolute point of view on human nature or on the good that we can access *a priori*. We form and shape our appreciation of the good through our engagement in our lives. This does not mean that judgements are completely subjective or agent-relative: they are objective to the extent that they concern facts. To the extent that humans share a common nature, we can hope to be able to find shared views on what the best way of responding to practical situations are.

The view of practical reason that we have acquired acknowledges the importance of cultures for practical reasons in a similar way to communitarians. It claims, indeed, that only through the experience of humanity that an agent has in her culture, can she form a notion of a flourishing life to be employed in practical reasoning. At the same time, however, the proposed view follows Rawls in endorsing a universal conception of reason: given our common humanity, it is possible that we comprehend the ways that others respond, even if they are culturally very different from us. We can also hope that mutual recognition and dialogue can lead us to overcome conflicts between views, even if, of course, we can have no guarantee that an agreement can be reached in all situations. The proposed view also overcomes the failure of the mixed proposal to achieve neutrality: it recognises that neutrality is impossible, and at the same time it does not exclude *a priori* all cultures that do not share the liberal view on the priority of liberty. Liberals can hope that members of cultures which are very far from theirs can see the point of their values and recognise that their perspective opens better chances for human flourishing.

## 4. Practical reason and the significance of cultures

The perspective on practical reason that we have reached highlights the importance of individual features of subjects for practical reason. One responds to situations in ways which are shaped by one's sensitivity, and one's sensitivity is in its turn shaped by one's education, by one's habits and by the examples of successful and unsuccessful human life that one encountered in one's social environment throughout one's life. This means that cultures have a prior role in shaping the practical sensitivity of their members. In what follows, I will construe some arguments that assume this premise and, by joining it with various consideration about the nature of cultural studies, conclude that pursuing cultural studies is important in the practical situations in which current social conditions set us.

*The importance of history.* Very often our sensitivity to practical situations is shaped by strong dislikes or strong predilections for kinds of situations that are inherited from our cultures. Sometimes these dislikes and predilections depend

on features, which are not essential for the relevant kinds of situations, but depend on contingencies of those kinds which were typical of our past and which are the result of our historical evolution. Studying history may help us to recognise the contingency of some of the features of these kinds of situation, which are relevant in triggering our responses. Hence, it is important to study history, in order to tune our sensitivity in practical situations. Let us consider an example. I will use a trivial one, in order to bypass possible interferences of disagreements in the evaluation of real historical cases. Suppose that someone dislikes philosophy since philosophers are excessively narcissistic and they always talk about things which are only interesting for themselves. Suppose also that one is justified in having this sensitivity, given the state of philosophy in one's society. By looking at the history of philosophy and reading the works of great philosophers of the past, however, one might realise that some great philosophers of the past were relevantly different from those common in one's own time. This may lead one to recognise that one's response to philosophy has to be more finely tuned, and that one can be open to forms of philosophizing different from that typical of one's culture, which might contribute to a rich and flourishing life.

*The importance of literature.* Literature, as a form of art, offers idealised representations of life which highlight the fundamental values of the culture which produced the work and offer deep insights into universal features of humanity. In this way, literature offers representations of the practical sensitivity typical of its background culture. Such representations can highlight the profoundly human aspects of particular cultural forms of life, but they can also point to weaknesses and other dangers to human flourishing. Consequently, studying literature can be important for improving our practical sensitivity, for various reasons. Firstly, through literature we take a distance from ourselves and from our forms of life, and become capable of seeing them as though from outside. This experience is sometimes very strong and effective in pointing to what goes wrong with our lives, and how we should change them. Secondly, by reading literature from cultures different from ours, we can engage enlightening representations of those cultures and appreciate what aspects of human flourishing can be grasped through them.

*The importance of comparative cultural studies and human sciences.* Cultural studies and some human sciences, e.g. anthropology, seek an objective outlook on different cultures. Objectivity remains only an ideal, but attempting to reach it lets scholars and students of these disciplines to reach a position above different cultures, from which those cultures can be compared. Of course that position is still subject-dependent, i.e. it depends on the sensitivity of the scholars who outline it, but there is no escape route from this role of subjectivity in any science. However, cultural studies and human sciences can find ways to interpret different cultures from superior points of view, and to evaluate - from their own positions

– the practical sensitivities that those cultures produce. This means that these forms of studies make a universal exercise of practical reason possible, according to the account of practical reason that I offered above.


## 5. Conclusion

The three cases I outline above suggest that, if practical reason is what I claimed, cultures and heritages should still be studied, even in face of current, rapid processes of globalization. Purely procedural solutions to our practical problems will not be sufficient, since humans, being endowed with practical reason, seek with their actions what seems good to them, that is: what they take to have reasons to do. There will be no peace in society, no stability, unless most members of society can share a good deal of their reasons for action. Sharing reasons for action, however, requires akin sensitivities. Reflection on human life, on what human flourishing is, on how humans can become and develop is necessary in order to achieve a harmony of sensitivities. This kind of activity, however, is precisely what the study of culture, in all its forms, does. If we want to have a peaceful and prosperous future, we need politicians and administrators who have both technical expertise and the cultural background needed to understand other cultures and to engage in debates about ways of human flourishing. Therefore, the policy followed by those countries, which invest on the study of cultures and heritages, is reasonable.

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# Everyday Multiculturalism: Individual Experience of Cultural Diversity

ANTONELLA POCECCO

## 1. Introduction

According to some ideological visions, social cohesion is jeopardized by the growing process of cultural fragmentation, as well as by the revival of cultural specificities, so powerful as to destroy national identities.

The re-emergence of cultural specificities is often presented as a new phenomenon[1], reasoning that we have moved from a monocultural social configuration, characterized by a strong national identity (in the sense given by Modernity of overlap of culture, religion and territory), to a multicultural one, characterized by a weak national identity and by the demand for recognition of particular identities, even in an aggressive and conflictual way.

The discovery of this cultural heterogeneity is very frequently accompanied by the return of ideologies and social practices inspired by exacerbated forms of nationalism, regionalism, localism and, in extreme cases, of xenophobia and racism. On the other hand, it is just as often the case that forms of defensive closure

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[1]    This change could be essentially explained by the transition from an *industrial society* to a *post-industrial* one and by the end of the ideological conflict of the Cold War.

by minority cultural groups emerge, a closure that engenders different kinds of self-marginalization situations, even self-ghettoization.

In addition to this, it is now undeniable that the panoramas of the group identities [the *ethnoscapes* – recalling the Appadurai's term (2012, 67)] no longer represent tightly territorialized groups, spatially confined, unaware of their history or culturally homogeneous. This assumption implies that the relationship among cultures becomes increasingly more fluid, and ambiguous in its practical consequences, manifesting an antithesis between a radical relativism on the one hand, and an all-encompassing claim to universalism on the other.

Recalling the radical idea of a jeopardized social cohesion, multiculturalism would be the sign of a deep crisis of contemporary societies. The "management of the cultural difference" is not only a Western problem, but it is particularly acute in liberal democracies which have inscribed respect of cultural difference into their Constitutions and made the integration of difference a milestone of their legitimacy (and, sometimes, one of the main arguments in defence of their civil and moral superiority)[2]. The solution has been, for a long time, to "dilute" the notion of difference into that of equality.

This theoretical step is flawed in a fundamental way, based on a perception of difference as a transitory phase toward a unit of higher order (toward a mechanistic vision of the social equilibrium), and as an individual and private fact, with which the institutions have not to deal. This "individualism of difference" reveals some important consequences:

– First of all, it demonstrates that the political sphere is no longer able to provide adequate and satisfying answers to the claims of the civil society.

– The political sphere seems compromised in its legitimacy, effectiveness and perspectives.

– The political sphere can barely maintain the central position that modernity has conferred to it.

In fact, all the problems related to a multicultural society unequivocally converge in the direction of a questioning of the philosophical project of modernity: "(...) the ideas and practices of democratic citizenship – as conceived by modernity – are no more able to provide significant steps towards the resolution of the problems associated with the political coexistence of different cultures" (Donati 1996, 247 – my translation).

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[2]    As Walzer said: "The construction of the European Union, the increasing mobility of Europeans and the presence in Europe of significant populations from other parts of the world, have opened a debate on the Old Continent that the United States know since long time. (...) It is undeniable that the questions, the concerns that were American become European too (...)" (Walzer 1999, 55).

Accepting the notion of post-modernity, one has thus to consider the transition from a multiracial society to a multicultural one.

Belohradsky suggests that modern society is multiracial in the sense that racial and ethnic differences are offset by common belief in the cultural unity of mankind: culture has a compensatory role. "The post-modern condition means that, above all, the compensatory role of culture has failed (…), all the discourses centred on mankind are perceived as mere rhetoric masking the imperialism of Western industrial civilization (…) the post-modern condition is the contradictory process in which democracy slowly adapts to the multicultural ideal" (Donati 1996, 264 – my translation).

Considering the foundations of society, one immediately realizes that a *culture* (national, ethnic, etc.) never constitutes a monolithic block, but it is nourished and remains alive thanks to the contact and inputs of other cultures, thanks to an uninterrupted "contamination" – in Nancy's sense – from outside. A culture is a *mélange*, its vitality derives from the convergence of elements originated from other cultures: "Cultures are not summed one to each other: they meet, they mingle, they alter, they configure" (Nancy 1993, 13 – my translation)[3]. And it contains in embryo respect for difference, which also increases the same multicultural respect within a nation: a nation that it is not defensive but which contains multiple identities.

Every culture is, therefore, *multicultural in itself*, "(…) not only because there has always been previous acculturation, and there is not a pure and simple origin but, more deeply, because the act of culture is itself an act of mixture: it deals with, transforms, diverts, develops, reconstructs, combines, fixes" (*Idem*).

At the same time, the rediscovery of the cultural specificities has opened wide-ranging analytical horizons and new interpretive perspectives in terms of understanding current social and political dynamics. However, this also implies a substantial risk, namely giving rise to a univocal culturalisation of reality, deforming the same cultural categories and explaining many conflicts solely through cultural variables.

Are we therefore at the end of economic and/or ideological conflicts, and at the onset of real culture wars? This does not seem the most appropriate approach for dealing with the complexity of contemporary societies, but it appears, once again, the synonym of a reductionism that is sometimes naive but often conscious. It is perhaps more productive to think that we are at the end of the era of ideological debates and the beginning of the debates on society *tout court*.

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[3]    One has to bear in mind, among several examples, such as *paper*, *gunpowder* and *print* found their origins in China some centuries before than in Europe, similarly *spaghetti*, or as much of the philosophy of ancient Greece has reached Western Europe thanks to the Arabic translations that were subsequently translated in Latin or in the various vernacular languages, or the *Greek P*, etc.

## 2. The visibility of cultural diversity

As we have seen, cultural diversity is not a new phenomenon: societies are based, in their very nature, on a complex variety of differences and specificities, whether these are grounded in religion, politics, class, gender, etc.

The problem of transition from a monocultural to a multicultural society is therefore a false problem: a society remains multicultural despite more or less explicit attempts of homogenization and its supposed monoculturalism is nothing other than an intellectual construction. In this sense, the intellectual and political elites hold considerable responsibility in the creation, organization and diffusion of myths and mythologies, collective imaginaries and cultural attitudes, oriented to either univocity or plurality.

The question must be then formulated in other terms: it is not so much the transition from a monocultural society to a multicultural one that undermines the political and institutional sphere, but its *visibility*.

The contemporary public visibility of cultural diversity is linked to the growing social and economic fragmentation of Western societies. The two movements appear intimately linked: "The greater the gap between the proclaimed egalitarian ideals and observed inequalities, the more people seem to seek refuge in exclusive identities and cultures that will try to be recognized" (Martiniello 1997, 26 – my translation). When, on the contrary, this gap is less pronounced, individuals will refer to open identities and cultures.

The current manifestation of cultural diversity has many faces, which are bound together both by the fact that culture forms an intermediate space between the individual and the abstract nation, and by its capability to claim public recognition (ranging from a symbolic dimension to that of politically separate dimension from the rest of society).

Assuming that each culture has been therefore confronted with others, producing forms of coexistence or conflict, why do we now perceive differently this relation between cultures? And, more importantly, why do we perceive it so dramatically?

As stated previously, this is essentially a problem of *visibility*.

I use the term *visibility* in a metaphorical sense, departing from a more stringent definition, namely: "the quality or state of being known by the public".[4] Rather, considering the several theoretical contributions about the concept, I want to contextualize it in the framework of multiculturalism in contemporary societies.

Consequently, I define *visibility* as:

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[4]   Merriam-Webster: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/visibility (Accessed November 15 – 2014).

- The capacity of the media to impose on to public opinion the prioritization of certain issues/problems over others (creating consequent shared collective visions of reality): "In an increasingly complex world, turned into a sort of global arena, where cultures come together, collide, and also strongly impose themselves for fear of disappearing, the media provide symbolic resources for establishing belonging and the worldwide stages for the performance of rituals and identity acts (including terroristic ones)" (Giaccardi 2012, 144 – my translation).

- The demand for recognition of groups in the public sphere on the basis of their cultural belonging ["Visibility is closely associated to recognition" Brighenti writes (2007, 329)].

- The possibility of each person experiencing in daily life the dimensions of the phenomenon and its implications: "As opposed to policy-oriented multiculturalism focused on group based rights, service provision and legislation, the everyday multiculturalism perspective explores how cultural diversity is experienced and negotiated on the ground in everyday situations such as neighbourhoods, schools, and workplaces, and how social relations and social actors' identities are shaped and reshaped in the process" (Wise 2014, 156).

Visibility is therefore "(...) a metaphor of knowledge, but it is not simply an image: it is a real social process in itself" (Brighenti 2007, 325).

There are – of course – many causes that contribute to the contemporary visibility of cultural diversity. At least three main reasons can be stressed: (i) the changes which have occurred in the quantity and quality of migration flows, related to the changes both in the countries of arrival and of departure; (ii) the crisis of citizenship as model related to the nation-state and (iii) the globalization processes which considerably differ from the universalisation processes.

To these explications, I add a further one which reiterates what has been said above: the relevance of the media spotlights on the phenomena connected to immigration and multiculturalism. Media representations are directly reflected in the formation of collective perceptions, fears and insecurities that settle in civil society and are then revised and/or manipulated by political society[5]. Media content that seems to describe reality in a neutral and objective way, on closer examination is imbued by stereotypes, prejudices and forms of ethnocentrism, uncritically empowering the paradigm of a radical ethnicisation of most phenomena affecting contemporary societies[6].

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[5]    I think here to the influence of Italian media, by which immigration is prevalently presented (and explained) in terms of social emergency, loss of autochthonous identity and deviance.

[6]    Paradigmatic in this sense are the concepts of "tautology of fear" and "ethnicisation of crime" coined by Dal Lago (2005).

Returning to the first hypothesis, the relationship between cultures has been transformed because some important changes have occurred at the levels of quantity and quality of contemporary migration flows: current migrations have little in common with those of the past, mainly as a result of poverty. Contemporary migration flows become essential for many individuals, regardless of their economic or social status: migration becomes synonymous with the possibility of a new way of life, a solution to a dramatic existential precariousness. On this point, one may easily recall the recent massive flows of refugees and asylum seekers throughout Europe, which are the evidence of a peculiar migratory push that finds its reasons in conflictual and emergency situations of their countries of origin.

Immigrants appear today "(…) younger, often literate and politicized. The generation of silence and repressed anger is now replaced by a generation determined to not be fooled", Ben Jelloun wrote (1998, 59) as early as the end of Nineties. And, undoubtedly, this new situation necessarily requires an urgent and different analysis about how the coexistence of different cultures changes over time, in regard to every peculiar social context. (Not forgetting that temporary hospitality towards immigrants is, for the host society, something quite different from their full and conscious integration, as well as that of their descendants).

A significant example of this trend concerns the Muslim presence in Europe.

In countries like France, England and Germany, Muslim communities are a historical presence, even if initially they were almost invisible, sunk into a "double silence". On one side, these communities were not for a long time an object of study and so were cloaked in the silence of theory, largely due to the complexity of the dynamics of post-colonialism and the relationships with the Islamic world. From another point of view, in spite of the massive flow of Muslim immigrants as a result of the de-colonization and post-colonialism processes, Islam has been "enclosed in the suitcases" (Massari 2006), lived in the private sphere and not transferred in the public sphere: it has been a silence due to the immigrants themselves.

Since the Seventies, specifically in the second half of the decade, the situation has changed and a form of visibility of the religious dimension of these immigrant communities has taken shape. Massari (2006) uses the evocative expression that Islam has been "removed from the suitcases" to point out its socialization, and the fact that the Muslim religion is beginning to be made public and collectively lived, giving origin to a peculiar way of being Muslim in Europe.

"From the original *migratory* Islam, transplanted onto European soil (…), it has transitioned, not without conflicts, tensions and misunderstandings, to a post-migratory Islam (…), European, indigenous, *Europeanized* (…), transnational" (Ibid., 33 – my translation) ([7]).

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[7]    My italics.

Since the early Eighties, the variety of experiences of living Islam in Europe became an important field of study, and there has been a sort of systematization of the various suggestions and analyses. Islam is in fact now the second largest religious presence in Europe, but it is born "migrant", it is an unintended consequence and not (as a certain collective imaginary would like) the result of a planned strategy.

In these times, we are confronted with another, different visibility of Muslim communities in Europe, essentially engendered by post-11th September perceptions. Such perceptions include the idea of an Otherness with which any form of dialogue is impossible[8]. In such a context, it is useful to recall the results of some inquiries – carried out in Europe – that clearly highlight the changes which have occurred in the collective perception of the visibility of this cultural distance in recent years.

For example, in 2010, the majority of French and German interviewees have declared to perceive the presence of a Muslim community as a threat to the cultural identity of their own country[9], have deemed Muslims and individuals of Muslim origin as non-integrated[10] and have defined the influence and visibility of Islam as more important than it should be[11]. Five years later, in 2015, two months after the attack in Paris on the editorial staff of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, a sample of 1339 French citizens declared itself in favour of the ban on wearing the veil or the Islamic headscarf in universities (72%), in favour of the prohibition on wearing the veil or the Islamic headscarf by a person accompanying children on a school trip (68%) and the elimination of halal food in school canteens (55%)[12]. More recently, an international survey[13] revealed that

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8    This imaginary is clearly rooted in a strong trivialization of the controversial hypothesis of the clash of civilizations as theorized by Huntington, for whom "(…) the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great division among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (Huntington 1993, 22).

9    More specifically, the 42% of respondents belonging to the French sample and the 40% to the German one have responded in this way. The question was: "Would you say that the presence of a Muslim community in France/Germany is…?" (Ifop 2010, 4).

10   In detail, the 68% (48% – *No, not really* + 20% – *Not at all*) of respondents in the French sample and 75% (55% – *No, not really* + 20% – *Not at all*) in the German one. The question was: "Would you say that today Muslims and people of Muslim origin are well integrated into French society / German society?" (Ibid., 7).

11   In detail, the 68% (48% – *No, not really* + 20% – *Not at all*) of respondents in the French sample and 75% (55% – *No, not really* + 20% – *Not at all*) in the German one. The question was: "Would you say that today Muslims and people of Muslim origin are well integrated into French society / German society?" (Ibid., 7).

12   The question is: "Personally, are you in favour of or opposed to…?" (Ifop 2015, 5).

13   "The 2015 Pew Research Center survey was conducted after the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre and the simultaneous attack on a Jewish grocery store, perpetrated by radical Islamists in Paris. But, in the wake of these events, there is no evidence that the atrocity sparked new public antipathy toward Muslims in

the Italians appear as the most critical of a Muslim presence in their own country (61%), followed by the Poles (56%) and the Spanish (42%).

## 3. The aura of multiculturalism *versus* everyday multiculturalism

Some time ago, while I was surfing the Web, I came across a site[14] where a lapidary title stood out: "The multiculturalism we like". This title attracted my curiosity and I read the following lines: "A girl with gentle Indian somatic features, who dresses with French elegance, speaks with British accent and loves Italian food. The multiculturalism we like".

To make clear my critical approach, I immediately state that this is not the multiculturalism I like: it seems to me rather the glossy cover of a long series of stereotypes and more or less conscious trivializations – hiding thereby the complexity of the challenges involved in multiculturalism.

The term *multiculturalism* still unveils several ambiguities: widely used, even abused, it does not appear clearly defined, because in its articulations different schools of thought, and even different world views, are confronted.

In spite of this, multiculturalism seems to become the obsessive refrain of several media contents and political discourses to which one can assist every day, and one of the analytical *topos* most frequently discussed in the academic field, putting it in correlation with other concepts such as democracy, citizenship, globalization, etc.

Generally, multiculturalism is a concept employed to describe diversity, that is the demographic and cultural diversification of societies, by referring to a multitude of social, political and philosophical attitudes. Every society, in fact, develops rules and procedures of a more or less explicit political action in order to practically manage its own cultural diversity and plurality of identities. This represents the comprehension of multiculturalism as a *descriptive term*, while its interpretation as a *prescriptive term* refers to ideologies and policies promoting diversity and/or its institutionalization. In this sense multiculturalism is the expression of a society which recognizes the desire of individuals to express their own identity in the manner they see fit.

In any case, multiculturalism – accepted, celebrated, denied, refused – imposes itself, as a "historical concept of change of both institutions and policies within Western democratic societies" (Kastoryano 2000, 164 – my translation).

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any of the six European Union nations surveyed. In fact, favourability of Muslims actually improved in some nations. At the same time, French sympathy for Jews increased" (Stoker et al. 2015, 21).

[14]   See http://www.liberamenteonline.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=21 6:il-multiculturalismo-che-ci-piace&catid=28:brownsversion&Itemid=60 (December 2014).

Moving from the intrinsic dualism of multiculturalism (as description and as prescription), my critical approach is developed in the light of some considerations that seem unavoidable for the purpose of a proper understanding of the concept, of its relevance and significance, as well as of its direct consequences on everyday life.

Firstly, the time has come to put a stop to the media spectacularization (and not only to theirs) and to try assume a greater intellectual strictness. This is important because of the urgent and even dramatic nature which characterizes some recent and growing episodes of discrimination and racism in Europe. Secondly, one has always to remember that multiculturalism is not simply an interpretative category of contemporary cultural complexity (and certainly not the only one!), but a common and daily experience in which political, ethical, moral, solidaristic and, of course, cultural elements and references simultaneously play a role. And it is perhaps this multifaceted dimension which generates the "explosive" characteristic of multiculturalism: the simultaneity of levels and questions involved, so one can rightly talk of *everyday multiculturalism*.

Related to these assumptions, and in order to remove the misleading *aura* of multiculturalism as new "golden age" of society, it should be stressed that the dialogue and the confrontation with the Otherness is a difficult practice. It needs not only of the will of the individual, but also requires a substantial capacity to put oneself in question, to accept that one's own cultural references are to be compared to others – a capability which is not easy to develop immediately. At the collective level, the density and variety of requests posed by multiculturalism to societal structural organization may be summarized at least in two fundamental questions:

– Is it then possible to reconcile the democratic exigencies, traditionally linked to the nation-state, with an idea of supposed homogeneity, which encompasses cultural diversity and which is empirically verifiable in everyday life?;

– How do we reconcile the demand for recognition of cultural specificity with one of the basic postulates of any democracy, namely the equality of all citizens?

To focus the issue of everyday multiculturalism more clearly, I would like to mention an episode from my own experience which occurred a few years ago.

I was in the Gorizia railway station and, suddenly, a boy furtively approached me and fanned under my nose a train ticket. The ticket had Ventimiglia (on the far side of Italy, at the border with France) as its last destination, and the boy, gesturing, asked me on which platform the train had to depart. I answered him in Italian, then in English, and then in French: nothing to do, clearly the boy did not understand any of these languages and he repeated the question in a likewise unknown one. Then, he shook his head and walked away.

Some minutes later, I saw him again, confused in a group of people (men, women and some children) and I noted that all of them were trying to "be invisible" in the bustle of the station. Indeed, when I smiled to one of the children who was staring at me, the mother (or at least, the woman I presumed to be) pulled at him, as though to protect him from my sight.

Thinking back to this episode, I came to the conclusion that it was a group of illegal immigrants, probably Kurds, abandoned by an unscrupulous smuggler (*passeur*) with a ticket for a journey to nowhere.

This experience forced me to immediately reflect on some questions. The first concerns the real experience of *incommunicability*, because the sharing of a language is in itself a bridge for the sharing of a universal identity (the identity of human being); its lack is crucial in making almost impossible mutual understanding and dialogue. Moreover, if in that case I had wanted to help these people, maybe accompanying them to a voluntary association or centre, I would have immediately revealed their condition as clandestine, making visible their situation of illegality in the framework of Italian legislation.

This reveals a conflict between the obligations of citizenship imposed on everyone by national belonging and a fundamental ethical sense of solidarity and support. The experience of Otherness often leaves an individual facing a deep contradiction between the principles of the identity of *civis* [as citizen of a specific political-cultural community, participating to the sense of civic loyalty][15] and of the identity of human being, as subject and social actor, with its distinctive cultural frames.

It is at this point that the second question clearly and unambiguously emerges, inherent in *the distance between practice and theory*. The exaltation of multiculturalism as the golden age of a society can be a merely theoretical exercise when everyday life constrains each one of us to resolve (or at least to try to resolve) situations involving a lack of communication, or conscious/unconscious forms of politically correct racism, or radical refusal of the Otherness based on fear and disorientation, skilfully amplified at a social level.

An interesting notation in this regard is proposed by the writer Ben Jelloun (1998, 27 – my translation) when he employs the sociological concept of *threshold of tolerance*: "(...) from a certain percentage (from 10% to 11%) of foreigners in an inhabited space, the risks of non-tolerance towards the Other are real and can lead to tragedies". He continues, touching a sensible point regarding the collective mentality: "(...) there would be foreigners less foreign than others". With this statement, he points out that the attitude towards immigrants is not

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[15]    See the interesting text of Waldron (2000).

unique: there are immigrants perceived as "less different", "less problematic" than others. In Italy, a Spanish, Portuguese or Greek immigrant arouses less mistrust and fear than an immigrant coming from the Arab world or Africa, because the collective perception is that of a small dissimilarity from the dominant culture. Likewise an immigrant from US or Canada will not be considered as "extra-communitarian" (non-EU citizen), although he is, compared to an immigrant from the Maghreb or Asia. As well emphasized by Ben Jalloun, "(…) the greater the distance between two cultures, the more the Other becomes a screen of anxiety and rejection" (Ibid., 83 – my translation).

On another perspective, Otherness may become the object of what I call "cultural paternalism" (a post-modern version of a not-too-veiled ethnocentrism) that similarly estranges individuals far from the consciousness of the universality of rights and duties. The intuition of the recognition and of the confrontation with Otherness (with the Stranger, the Different) is trivialized in contingent phenomenon, leading to uncritical acceptance, that is, lack of recognition: "The 'different culture' of immigrants, foreigners (extra-communitarians) must be protected as *Curiosum* and, when it touches the religious sphere, it should be accepted without entering because in the sphere of the sacred it is better not to interfere" (Rusconi 1997, 1011 – my translation).

*Cultural paternalism* is the contemporary form of the denial of coevalness, mainly expressed in accidental altruistic attitudes or temporary empathy, that nevertheless lead individuals to conceive of the Other as not belonging to their time or world, de-individualising and relegating him to a dimension of total extraneousness and dissimilarity, even inferiority. So, in its uncritical interpretation, multiculturalism acts in the direction of a radical relativism, a growing cultural mosaic of non-communicating identities and produces new inequalities: it aims at tolerance, but it generates intolerance.

The uncritical acquiescence of all the elements of a diverse culture is not the framework in which intercultural interactions may really take place: this cultural bulimia or cultural zapping swallows the same notion of Otherness. On the contrary, individuals must recognize that everyone brings with him a "particular mental software" and they have to try to understand, without prejudices or mental closures, others' values, without disclaiming their own.

## 4. Conclusions: changing paradigms

Being a citizen of a global world does not automatically mean being a global citizen: "Passing from one civilization to another is the equivalent of a mutation, a metamorphosis that involves suffering and work, and that has nothing to do with

the noiseless slip of the jet plane that connects all parts of the planet" (Bruckner 1994, 31 – my translation).

Participation in an era deeply imbued by flows of people, ideas, and information, does not automatically lead to share this era's basic axioms, nor to decrypting its complexity. The sense of dislocation carried by the globalization processes can push people to adopt more or less overt forms of closure, to retreat into crystallized identities, a sort of social autism which could degenerate into the dehumanization of Otherness. At the same time, an uncritical acceptance is becoming a sort of new belief, in whose name forms of inequality and discrimination are equally practiced, nourishing the non-communication among cultural identities. It is in a such climate of disorientation that stereotypical social representations, demonisation of the Otherness, fears, etc. easily take root, because they allow a simplified reading of reality and therefore offer a sense of consolation (they make one feel to be on the side of the right). They are in fact the "less laborious" solutions to a contradictory everyday experience of cultural diversity.

A first solution would be to clear the analysis from misleading misunderstandings, which constitute the humus for a dangerous confusion and ideological manipulation of the concept of multiculturalism.

The first misunderstanding is the overlap of terms *cohabitation* and *coexistence* of cultures. One can readily point out how the use of the two words is not an innocent choice but, indeed, underlies precise semantic differences and then, on a practical level, specific social situations and relational dynamics. *Cohabitation* in fact means "live with", to an active sharing of existential and referential systems, a mutual recognition of coevalness, a dialogic dimension, and so on. *Coexistence* focuses instead the simple "existence with" and the term can be conceptually pushed up to a "existence despite", recalling cultural universes closed in themselves, impenetrable and incommunicable, stranger one to another.

The opposition between the two concepts stands out in translating multiculturalism as a source of individual/collective enrichment and incessant process, not a *status quo* based on a mechanistic definition of social equilibrium. Finally, the term cohabitation refers to a precise idea of culture, not considered a monolithic and unchanging whole, but one in constant transformation, as a mix of different elements from the beginning.

Another kind of confusion concerns the terms *integration* and *assimilation*.

Despite being a classic dichotomy in sociology, it is still possible to observe how these terms are – not infrequently – used interchangeably in media and political discourse. The case of integration and assimilation is different to the previous distinction because even though the etymological roots and theoretical definitions are clear, the practical implications are nevertheless not equally evident. It is often noted that integrative practices can hide markedly assimilatory aspects,

or practices that provoke negative effects or dysfunctions – it is sufficient to make reference here to the debate about the consequences of Affirmative action.

The last consideration is that multiculturalism is not substantiated by abstract subjects, but by real individuals who live, experience and negotiate cultural diversity in their everyday situations, while not ruling out *a priori* the involvement of social and political structures. The meaning of everyday multiculturalism thus allows us to adopt a perspective that is "(…) both a way of observing and a way of conceiving diversity as it is lived on the ground daily by people" (Wise 2014, 156).

This process must necessarily be established at the individual level, as part of the relationship between the Self and the Other, where the Self does not exalt his uniqueness, making it absolute, and the belonging does not lead to emulation of the group.

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# Facing Differences and Indifference in Mexico

## Suggestions Concerning the Discursive Dynamics of Morality in *2666* by Roberto Bolaño and "El principio del placer" and *Las batallas en el desierto* by José Emilio Pacheco

ARNDT LAINCK

### 1. The blind and the winking eye of evil

The acclaimed novel *2666* by the Chilean author Roberto Bolaño was published posthumously in 2004 and centres around a moral dilemma: that of indifference towards evil. Set in the fictional city of Santa Teresa in the 1990s but based on real events whereby hundreds of unaccounted female corpses were discovered in landfills and in the desert around the Mexican city Ciudad Juárez, the narrative tries to get a grip on the mystifying scope of generalized inaction. The fictionalized events are mainly rendered in gruesome detail in the fourth part of the book, the so-called "The Part about the Crimes".

The novel's main question is somewhat similar to the one triggered by the staggering impact the Holocaust had on Western self-image and its moral foundations. In this case the question is: how can it be that in the 1990s hundreds of female bodies turn up in a major city on the Mexican border opposite El Paso, Texas, and no one is held accountable except for a number of blatantly obvious scapegoats? The sheer number of murdered women at hand is simply too big for one or several serial killers: rather something systemic must have been at work here. The constant lack of results in the ongoing investigation in the novel hints

at the fact that something has failed in the moral core of Santa Teresa's society that needs to be looked at more closely.

Possible explanations for the murders alluded to in the novel are serial killers, gangs of spoiled kids, satanic rituals, snuff movies, an ugly undercurrent of *machismo* in the police force and in society, wide-spread corruption and collusion between the police force and organized drug trafficking resulting in utter incompetency of self-serving authorities bent on sweeping everything under the rug. The problem is especially compounded by another dynamic: a generalized fear and rampant lack of moral courage stemming from the extreme social stratification and socioeconomic inequality in Mexican society, since most victims belong to an underclass of migrants from the South working for minimal wage in the so-called *maquiladoras* on the Mexican-United States border. In the end, nobody feels responsible for these people who cannot afford the protection of the state and somehow have been *too many* in the first place. But the novel's polyphony carefully steers away from closing in on one explanation only. Whatever the explanation may be, three shades of one particular type of moral shortcoming stand out, combine and seem to aggravate each other: a lack of empathy, indifference and self-interest.

In order to distinguish a lack of empathy from indifference for our purposes here, I would like to define a lack of empathy as the interested version of indifference, namely to actively repress compassion out of some ulterior motive, whereas simple indifference might be viewed more straightforwardly as the flaw of omission lacking a specific focus.[1] Even when one defines indifference as a lighter shade of a lack of empathy, indifference still lends itself to be an ideal breeding ground conducive to evil in a society that is preoccupied, for varying motives, with its own absorbing self-interests and that is unable to develop an interest in solidarity beyond its own narrow field of self-preservation.

Self-interest and self-preservation are initially neutral terms, describing a focus or direction of attention (the self or individual), as opposed to solidarity, empathy or altruism, which turn their focus outwards. Extreme versions of self-interest could be called egoism or narcissism, maybe hedonism or, with the stress on the absence of pain, Epicureanism, whereas the lighter version is better described as individualism, a central catalyst for modernity and therefore still highly valued with all its positive and negative effects. We might ask: But is there also a positive version of indifference? Obviously: tolerance. Without delving into the

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[1]    When Daniuska González asked Roberto Bolaño about his concept of evil, his answer was: "Pensar que el otro no existe, no piensa, no siente, y hacerle daño. O saber que existe, piensa y siente, y hacerle daño. Destruir dentro de uno mismo, consciente o inconscientemente, toda atadura moral y ética. Creer que todo vale" (González González 2004, 28). This definition of evil would lay emphasis on an active lack of empathy combined with self-interest rather than on indifference.

debate between Michael Walzer, Karl Popper and John Rawls as to how far the intolerant can or should be tolerated as well, I would like to recall the promise a positive kind of indifference held for Voltaire in the age of Enlightenment, in the words of George Steiner:

> Voltaire and his informed contemporaries expressed the confident belief that torture and other bestialities practiced on subjects or enemies were passing for ever from civilized society. […] With the decline in the strength of religious creeds, there would follow […] a concomitant decline in human hatreds, in the urge to destroy another man because he is the embodiment of evil or falsehood. Indifference would breed tolerance. (Steiner 1971, 42-43)

Indifference is, in this sense, tantamount to tolerating difference, but in highly individualistic cultures an unwillingness to look past one's own fashioned set of interests could lead easily to dismissing anything that might draw attention and resources away from one's own goals. On the flipside of tolerance then, rather than indifference, lurks an interested lack of empathy with a lot of potential for tacit approval of patent wrong-doings. Even in a time in history when tolerance might be viewed as the order of the day, one still has to decide constantly on what constitutes a minor evil worth tolerating and what should or must be interfered with.[2]

To return to the supreme example of negative indifference in modern times, the Holocaust, George Steiner reflects on the turning point in thinking about the difference between civilization and barbarism in the following terms:

> When the first reports of the death camps were smuggled out of Poland they were largely disbelieved: such things could not be taking place in civilized Europe, in the mid-twentieth century. Today, it is difficult to conjecture a bestiality, a lunacy of oppression or sudden devastation, which would not be credible, which would not soon be located in the order of facts. Morally, psychologically, it is a terrible thing to be so un-astonished. Inevitably, the new realism conspires with what is, or should be, least acceptable in reality. (Steiner 1971, 57)

Allocating evil a place in the order of facts seems to be reassuring and might even be a simple cognitive necessity for human beings, even though it seems cynical at first. Finding a place for evil in the order of facts, giving it a place in relation to good, calls for a measure, a backdrop against which evil can be discerned and assessed. It is the essential task of ethics: establishing criteria for the separation of good and evil and possibly quantifying its differences when they are assembled on some kind of scale, distributed in some kind of hierarchy or coherent whole.

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[2]    For a wide-ranging discussion of the concept of tolerance see Forst 2007 and 2009.

When we ignore in *2666* all the sideshows designed to distract the public from the real and deep-seated roots in the middle of Santa Teresa's society, one can look at what a journalist, Guadalupe Roncal, who is investigating the crimes and whose work does not get much attention, has to say in a key sentence of the novel about being so "un-astonished": "Nadie presta atención a estos asesinatos, pero en ellos se esconde el secreto del mundo" (Bolaño 2004, 439). The secret of the novel, that is, the identity of those responsible for killing all the women, is never given away, but the secret of the world alluded to here is that the supposed secret is not a secret, but is in front of everyone's eyes without being noticed. The secret of evil is its apparentness that does not register because it is systematically abetted by a culture of impunity founded on all forms of indifference which undermine any understanding of evil that might violate one's own interests. It would follow that the mentioned secret of the world can be found in the rationale of any moral code which by default functions in ways that interpret evil only as something harmful to a group one belongs to as a member in order to enjoy its protection, but leaves out those who cannot stake a claim to the group's protective moral cloak.[3]

Since the murders continue, a kind of superdetective from the United States, specializing in serial killers, is called in: Professor Kessler. He is as unsuccessful at solving the case as all the other officers, but makes a relevant observation:

> A: esa sociedad está fuera de la sociedad, todos, absolutamente todos son como los antiguos cristianos en el circo. B: los crímenes tienen firmas diferentes. C: esa ciudad parece pujante, parece progresar de alguna manera, pero lo mejor que podrían hacer es salir una noche al desierto y cruzar la frontera, todos sin excepción, todos, todos. (Bolaño 2004, 339)

We can paraphrase here: (a) a lot of Santa Teresa's inhabitants do not belong to the circle of those citizens protected by their community and who fully enjoy its rights, but are separated by some invisible line and excluded from the perceived social order; (b) the committed crimes clearly have a systemic social dimension; (c) Santa Teresa is rife with all the problems and imperfections of a modernity which is out of kilter when it comes to protecting those who substantially generate economic progress for the enjoyment of others, for those across the border or Santa Teresa's upper class.

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[3]   The moral relativist Gilbert Harman stresses that these types of 'agreements' (in this case here to enjoy the protective rights of an in-group not afforded in the same way to the out-group) need not be based on overt forms of agreements: "There is an agreement, in the relevant sense, if each of a number of people intends to adhere to some schedule, plan, or set of principles, intending to do this on the understanding that the others similarly intend. The agreement or understanding need not be conscious or explicit […]" (Harman 2007, 84-85).

Giorgio Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* as someone who may be killed, officially codified in Roman law as an exception to the *ius humanum*, describes a case similar to the point (a) addressed by Professor Kessler in the novel.[4] But how is it, one might ask, that these people count for less and seem to fall out of the established moral code? The official, visible code seems to be at odds with a *de facto* exclusion. One decisive answer given in the novel in the form of a conversation between Kessler and a younger interlocutor is the tendency to cloak evil through words:

> –Nos hemos acostumbrado a la muerte –oyó que decía el tipo joven.
> –Siempre –dijo el tipo canoso–, siempre ha sido así.
> En el siglo XIX, a mediados o a finales del XIX, dijo el tipo canoso, la sociedad acostumbraba a colar la muerte por el filtro de las palabras. Si uno lee las crónicas de esa época se diría que casi no había hechos delictivos o que un asesinato era capaz de conmocionar a todo un país. No queríamos tener a la muerte en casa, en nuestros sueños y fantasías, sin embargo es un hecho que se cometían crímenes terribles, descuartizamientos, violaciones de todo tipo, e incluso asesinatos en serie. Por supuesto, la mayoría de los asesinos en serie no eran capturados jamás, [...]. Todo pasaba por el filtro de las palabras, convenientemente adecuado a nuestro miedo. ¿Qué hace un niño cuando tiene miedo? Cierra los ojos. [...] Las palabras servían para ese fin. (Bolaño 2004, 337-338)

Kessler dwells here on the curious phenomenon that a homicide can figure sometimes as such in the social discourse and cause scandal, being perceived and accordingly labelled as harmful and as a detrimental infringement upon the rules set up by society to regulate its interactions and further the self-preservation of the community. At other times, the deed cannot punch through into social discourse and is simply filtered out by means of words which prefer non-representation for the sake of propriety and discretion. The different reactions seem to be founded either on the relevance of the harmed person or the victim's capacity to summon attention. In order to receive just attention, the victim would have to be claimed after the fact as one of 'society's own', as having belonged.

Inversely, the fear of a perceived danger that might put oneself in peril when voicing concerns seems to unravel this social discourse on evil. The discourse hits a natural limit whenever an imminent threat to one's own well-being outweighs

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[4]    According to Agamben it might even give a window into the foundation of law itself as a sovereign, unbound decision in the first place: "This violence—the unsanctionable killing that, in his case, anyone may commit—is classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide, neither as the execution of a condemnation to death nor as sacrilege. [...] This sphere is that of the sovereign decision, which suspends law in the state of exception and thus implicates bare life within it. [...] We may even then advance a hypothesis: once brought back to his proper place beyond both penal law and sacrifice, *homo sacer* presents the originary figure of life taken into the sovereign ban and preserves the memory of the originary exclusion through which the political dimension was first constituted" (Agamben 1998, 82-83).

the benefit of throwing one's own weight of moral indignation behind the task of upholding the social fabric. The discourse on morality is, in the sense of a social practice, prevented from taking place, because no one wants to endanger themselves or established privileges. Nobody is barred from benefitting from an assumed agreement to actually belong to society's in-group by professing its allegiance to moral standards and tacitly refraining from enforcing them when it seems convenient. More precisely, and concerning only the discourse on morality, we are encouraged to talk about feeling for others up to the point where it becomes unlikely that people to whom one might feel an even closer social obligation want to hear about their privileges being attacked. The picture is complicated because we have two disparities with two moving parts each which are not necessarily visible at the same time: an open discourse, on the one hand, and a (diverging) practice, on the other hand; an implicit discourse on the universality of moral rights and a reality of assumed tacit agreements to be part of the group worth protecting. Everyone wants of course to belong to this in-group, but nobody can guarantee its precise status and nobody seems, more often than not, to be willing to do so when push comes to shove.

Discourse on moral behaviour, because of its inherent discursiveness, needs people who are willing to speak out and people who are willing to listen in order to take place. A transgression, as the word implies, figures as such only when some other agency feels encroached upon and the transgressor is called out. When one pits private pain against social harm, naturally the social relevance tends to win out in a discourse. But if there is a hidden social benefit to rephrasing the discourse, as it were, and to dissociating it from the social practice, the act of weighing the two against each other becomes virtually invisible. Discourses seem to have a special relevance for the individual whenever they touch upon his or her relation to society and therefore need a wider context to establish themselves. Because discourse, as an aggregate of (heard) voices, requires a solid foundation, there also seems to be a built-in restriction and a blind eye turned to its limits: since taking part in the discourse was initially motivated by the allure of making use of the protection the discourse offered in relation to the individual, the agreement on the extension of people it *practically* applies to must vary and remain unclear.

Therefore, there is a sharp contrast between moral discourses that usually strengthen the ties in an existing community and alternative moral discourses which establish a *communitas* outside existing ties. Joseph Campbell quotes the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:34-37[5] as an example to draw attention to the fact

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[5] "I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law", etc. (cit. in Campbell 2004, 326).

that in mythologies where son figures kill father figures in an act of apparent subversion of the reigning order, the patricide is actually only staged in order to usher in a new kind of hierarchical order. Another obvious example also taken from the Bible would be the serpent tempting Eve to eat the fruit in Genesis 3:4-5: "'Of course you will not die,' said the serpent; 'for God knows that, as soon as you eat it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God himself, knowing both good and evil'" (*The Revised English Bible* 1989, 2). The allure of knowing right from wrong brings about the fall from grace. Eve is ousted from paradise for assuming the burden to think for herself. In each one of these cases the discourse on moral behaviour is tied into a social framework and founded on the formation of alliances. The invitations to partake in a covenant seemingly superior to its alternative are at the same time designed as appeals to the individual's fear of being an outcast, of standing on the outside of grace.

Our Professor Kessler from *2666* reflects in a similar vein on the fact that categories like good and evil have to be invented in the first place in order to figure as such in our discourses when he muses about the origins of Western civilization: "Los griegos inventaron, por decirlo de alguna manera, el mal, vieron el mal que todos llevamos dentro, pero los testimonios o las pruebas de ese mal ya no nos conmueven, nos parecen fútiles, ininteligibles" (Bolaño 2004, 338). It is interesting here to point out that the "invention of evil" means "seeing evil" and bearing witness to it in some form or another. Evil as a moral category needs to be conceptualized in order to distinguish itself from pain as a mere part of life. In a different context Malcolm K. Read makes an observation on a similar relationship between *violence* and *exploitation* which closely resembles the relationship between *pain* and *evil*:

> 'Exploitation' is altogether more politically charged and materially based. It immediately raises the specter of the exploiter and the exploited. My indigence is connected to your opulence. Violence, by way of contrast, poses as a telluric, primordial force or ontological condition prior to its historical configurations. (Read 2010, 196)

Evil would then be the politically charged and discursively based counterpart to pain here. My speaking of evil is connected to your pain only insofar as you are relevant in my moral code because you belong to a group which feels responsible for your pain. Pain on the other hand would be a primordial condition of life prior to its historical configuration as something evil. Only a discourse on evil then makes pain *socially* visible as well.

Another way of dealing with evil, rather than simply silencing it or not having a formulated concept at one's disposal that distinguishes evil from pain, involves ignoring it willingly by partially blending out its inchoate representations in discourse. That is, one *decides* that testimonies and proofs are irrelevant and futile;

that they do not make sense in relation to the privileges of one's own group. But how, one might ask, does this very interested kind of indifference, this habituation to evil, come about? In the words of Professor Kessler it becomes apparent that language cannot only be revealing but is very suited to cloak pain and to further the negative kind of indifference mentioned earlier by drawing attention to a certain class of victims and taking it away from others. In the English translation of the novel by Natasha Wimmer, "[u]na explicación plausible es que *la sociedad*, en aquella época, era pequeña" (Bolaño 2004, 338, emphasis added) in the original is rendered as: "Maybe it's because *polite* society was so small back then" (Bolaño 2006, 266, italics mine). This small change in the form of the insertion of an adjective might not be an innocent one as we shall see when we look for another explanation for indifference in the works of the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, who argues that human beings have a natural tendency towards not feeling for others, towards a lack of empathy and indifference under one specific condition, that is, when the group size is too large for a (moral) focus:

> Our increasing interconnectedness—and our growing awareness of it—has not, of course, made us into denizens of a single community, the proverbial 'global village'. Everyone knows you cannot have face-to-face relations with six billion people. [...] nations differ from the πόλις [polis] so substantially in scale [...] that relations between citizens must, of necessity, be relations between strangers. What accounts, then, for the thick, black line we draw between these strangers and (in a convenient shorthand of Michael Walzer's) 'political strangers,' those who are not members of our polity? (Appiah 2005, 216-217)

The search for this black line is at the core of *2666*. The motivation behind the evil and the suppression of empathy, the very visibility and invisibility of those lines that cross and zigzag through the histories of our societies in so many different ways is what we should try to get a grasp on in order to be able to understand what the afore-mentioned "secret of the world" consists of. What accounts for the line we draw is shaped, portrayed, handed down and encouraged by certain discourses. These discourses rely on language that is somehow complicit in helping to delineate demarcation lines which uphold and further perpetuate forms of exclusion. Slavoj Žižek accentuates this even further when he points to this kind of understanding of moral codes as some kind of evil *Kulturfertigkeit*:

> This limitation of our ethical concern to a narrow circle seems to run counter to our spontaneous insight that we are all humans, with the same justified claim to respect and dignity. Consequently, those who constrain the scope of their ethical concern are in a profound sense inconsistent, 'hypocritical' even. To put it in Habermasian terms, they are involved in a pragmatic contradiction, since they violate the ethical norms which sustain their own speech community. Refusing the same basic ethical rights to

those outside our community as to those inside it is something that does not come naturally to a human being. It is a violation of our spontaneous ethical proclivity. It involves brutal repression and self-denial. (Žižek 2008, 48)

We may still insist on asking ourselves: but how is this "cultural feat" (note the inverted commas) accomplished? How does a moral code become a *double entendre* in an almost official way? We might add here that the progressive inclusion of ever larger groups into the ideal of universal human rights has also considerably broadened the gap between a staked claim to universality and reality. The very effect of this gap is a rather counterproductive one insofar as the claim is understood more and more as a form of appeasing wishful thinking or simply as an imperfection and only a matter of time for the gap to be finally closed in the natural progress of mankind.

Harking back to Professor Kessler's words that human nature and the archetypes of crimes do not change (cf. Bolaño 2004, 338), what indeed has changed is our way of conceptualizing evil: it has become synonymous with an exaggeration, an aberration, with something unforeseen and an error in the matrix that is essentially unintelligible from the standpoint of the Good and of righteousness. In this respect, Baudrillard goes as far as claiming that we have simply lost the capacity to speak of evil, or one might say, to speak ill of anything in the sense of a generalized but ultimately harmful decorum:

> We can no longer speak Evil. All we can do is discourse on the rights of man – a discourse which is pious, weak, useless and hypocritical, its supposed value deriving from the Enlightenment belief in a natural attraction of the Good, from an idealized view of human relationships […]. This is the condescending and depressive power of good intentions, a power that can dream of nothing except rectitude in the world, that refuses even to consider a bending of Evil, or an intelligence of Evil. (Baudrillard 2009, 97)

When Baudrillard says "we can no longer speak Evil" he essentially means that we prefer speaking Good, thereby cloaking real evil for our own purposes and intentions, as is the case in the example from *2666* mentioned above. It is important to emphasize that here again ethics itself is not at stake, but rather something much more tangible: the talk thereof, the discourse on Good and Evil. One only has to look to any kind of horror movie, or indeed any typical contemporary movie, to see that Evil is usually represented as something peripheral and anachronistic, as essentially impermeable and unreal. Evil has become somewhat a necessary myth, a myth that is, that can be beheld but not probed. One of the novel's characters therefore aptly concludes the state of affairs in *2666* thus: "Hay algunos detenidos. [...] Pero la leyenda quiere que el asesino sea uno solo y además inatrapable"

(Bolaño 2004, 363). Legend holds, one might paraphrase, that evil exists generally only on the outside of the community or on the inside, but then it is *not to be seen* in the open. By propping up legends that tend to make evil formulaic, nobody really has to deal with any dimension of evil that might bear upon his or her own entanglement in its social fabric. The little overlap that exists between representing evil and the reality of evil is the foundation of its success. This must essentially be so, because evil is only visible and eligible for being communicated when it affects the very fabric of a community and its vital interests as defined by the prevalent discourse in that society. Any representation of evil in discourse has to pass the filter of general interest.

This very answer to our conundrum in *2666* is also perfectly echoed in a conversation in another novel, *Así empieza lo malo* (2014) by Javier Marías. Here the narrator is shocked to learn from his mentor and employer, the film director Muriel, that he all of a sudden does not want him to look any further into the murky past of one of his personal acquaintances. When pressed for his reasons, Muriel declares that he does not believe in justice anymore and goes on to accurately describe broken attempts at justice when judicial systems are faced with large groups, or rather, when the social practice of judging others hits too close to home:

> La justicia no existe. O sólo como excepción: unos pocos escarmientos para guardar las apariencias, en los crímenes individuales nada más. Mala suerte para el que le toca. En los colectivos no, en los nacionales no, ahí no existe nunca, ni se pretende. A la justicia la atemoriza siempre la magnitud, la desborda la superabundancia, la inhibe la cantidad. Todo eso la paraliza y la asusta, y es iluso apelar a ella después de una dictadura, o de una guerra, incluso de un mero linchamiento en un pueblo de mala muerte, siempre son demasiados los que toman parte. ¿Cuánta gente crees que cometió delitos o fue cómplice en Alemania, y cuánta fue castigada? No me refiero a sometida a juicio y condenada, que todavía menos, sino a algo mucho más factible y más fácil: ¿cuánta fue castigada socialmente o a nivel personal? […] Una minúscula proporción. […] Seríamos los estúpidos justicieros los que nos quedaríamos apestados y aislados, no te quepa duda. Nadie execra a sus iguales, nadie acusa a quien se le parece. (Marías 2014, 464-465)

Not only are large groups unwieldy when it comes to judging whole nations or specific portions of society; much more to the point here is the observation that groups are generally unwilling to formulate judgments against their own members. Generally speaking, people have a keen sense, more so than an awareness, of how to manoeuver between paying lip service to morality and the fact that nobody wants to act against one's own (and the group's) interests.

## 2. Comparing the blind with the winking eye of evil

"El principio del placer" and *Las batallas en el desierto* by José Emilio Pacheco are two other literary examples which also reflect back upon the discursive nature of good and evil. The two small narrations, similar in scope, centre around young adolescents' first unhappy love. "El principio del placer" is narrated as the personal diary of Jorge and *Las batallas en el desierto* is narrated by its protagonist, Carlos, who looks back at his childhood in the 1940s in Mexico City to tell the story of an unrequited love for the mother of his classmate Jim. In both accounts the cultural influence of the United States becomes more and more noticeable and Jorge and Carlos begin, most importantly, to establish their own moral criteria when they learn to critically observe a multitude of conflicting adult views on the changing world around them. They both have to reconcile contrasting viewpoints on offer in order to make sense of them and to arrive at their own worldview. The two narrations perfectly fit the mold of the initiation story showing how from the contradictions in the adult discourses they start to detect, they manage in the end to draw their own conclusions in order to find their place *between* them instead of simply accepting one of the models they are confronted with.

At the beginning of "El principio del placer" Jorge has to justify his girlish pursuit of writing a diary in front of himself and a supposed posterity. One of the teachers has recommended taking up the habit of writing a diary to see one's own development through time, whereas the gym teacher advises his pupils plainly against too much reading, leaving Jorge wondering: "Nadie entiende a los maestros, uno dice algo y el otro lo contrario" (Pacheco 2010a, 176). However, the main objective behind his diary-writing soon becomes clear to Jorge: to chronicle his falling in and out of love with Ana Luisa, a girl from a lower socioeconomic class and, at age fifteen, two or three years older than him. One day Jorge sees a dead person for the first time, a victim of a crime of passion. He is astonished above all that someone would kill for an elderly and to him unattractive woman, having assumed that falling in love is a prerogative of the young and wondering what impact the sight of dead bodies during the Revolution might have had on his own father, "aunque dice que al poco tiempo de andar en eso uno se acostumbra a ver muertos" (180), just as Professor Kessler had observed. Only two diary entries later, Jorge comes into conflict with his own thoughts, having denied his interest in Ana Luisa after an inquisitive question by his older sister. In writing he becomes aware that he lied about his attraction to Ana Luisa, telling his sister: "–No, cómo crees: hay muchachas mil veces más bonitas" (181). With a little bit of distance, the diary helps him to notice the intricate pitfalls set up by the restrictions that apply to discourse in the open and he has to abide by, navigate or reconcile within himself.

His father, a military officer of high rank in the Mexican army, has to deal with farmers who are unwilling to clear some land the government has claimed for a hydroelectric project. Jorge's mother thinks (along the lines of the revolutionary discourse of the PRI) that there should not be this conflict of interests, since the army is supposedly only a mere extension of the people and her husband had heavily benefited from the uprising of the poor he himself formerly belonged to (cf. 185). But when Jorge's mother warns Jorge about Ana Luisa because of her low socioeconomic standing and bad reputation in unmistakable terms, Jorge reflects back, instead, on his own father: "Más debería avergonzarme el que mi padre se haya ganado la vida derramando sangre" (197). He is also quick to notice that the official discourse of adults does not always match their actions when he gets humiliated by the school's principal and lectured about sexuality as the bane of humanity, since he is well aware of the principal's lurid glances at girls' legs (cf. 199). His father turns out to be not unlike the principal when he exhorts Jorge that he ought to study and obey until he earns his own money, in order to have as many women as he wants, even though it would be the worst path to take, as he can tell from his own personal experience (cf. 206).[6]

The disillusionments that come upon Jorge in the discrepancy of words are not restricted only to adult discourse. A prime example of this is the last letter he receives from Ana Luisa which is supposed to explain and clarify why she has to end the relationship. Instead of finally giving Jorge the chance to make sense of her elusive behaviour, the letter becomes a mock example of further stonewalling and couching utter dishonesty in buttered-up terms. So much so that the passage becomes reminiscent of the "filter of words" mentioned above to serve the purpose of *Uneigentlichkeit* of semantics to a degree that everything in the letter can be taken as its exact opposite:

> Resulta Jórge que ya nos bamos a seguirnos viendo como astaora [he has not been seeing her for quite some time at all], se que me entenderas [he does not understand at all] y no me pediras esplicaciones [he has, in fact, been asking for explanations several times already] pues tan poco podria dartélas [she could, of course, if she wanted to]. Jórge siempre e sido sinsera contigo [she is entertaining several love interests unbeknownst to him at this point in the narration] y te e querido mucho nunca sabrás cuando deveras [he will at the end, when he sees her with Durán, his confidant and his father's orderly], me será muy difisil olvidarte, ojála no sufras como estoi sufriendo y te olvides pronto de mi [he, ironically, does not think he could fall in love with anybody else until he quickly becomes interested in another girl named Yolanda]. (208)

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6    Dan Ariely illustrates this natural blindness towards moral double standards with a joke: "Eight-year-old Jimmy comes home from school with a note from his teacher that says, "Jimmy stole a pencil from the student sitting next to him." Jimmy's father is furious. He goes to great lengths to lecture Jimmy and let him know how upset and disappointed he is […]. Finally he concludes, "[…] Why didn't you simply ask? You know very well that I can bring you dozens of pencils from work" (Ariely 2012, 31).

The experience of being confronted with such a rich density of insincerity leaves Jorge numb, but when his mother finds him crying, and embarrassed about it, he admits in his diary to giving her an embellished version of his plight (cf. 209). Jorge learns once again that he cannot count on his mother's empathy when she tells him that Ana Luisa is not worth his suffering and that he should be happy to network with children his age who could potentially be useful for his later career. Being honest with her would entail going against a perceived restriction in the discourse.

That Jorge himself is not free of contradictions can be easily gleaned from a careful reading of the diary: on the one hand he is always afraid of getting found out when he is writing about his feelings for Ana Luisa, on the other hand, he himself secretly reads his sister's diary and love letters. Jorge is shocked at himself, for example, when he relates eating meat for the first time with death, thus discovering another link between the Freudian *pleasure principle*[7] and the *reality principle*: "Soy tan imbécil que a mi edad no había relacionado los llamados placeres de la mesa con la muerte y el sufrimiento que los hacen posibles" (213). Relating two distant but connected phenomena is what Jorge has to accomplish in reverse engineering. Even though Jorge is wealthy, he arrives at the formula *my opulence is connected to your indigence* mentioned above, when he muses about rich people: "Si en México la mayoría de la gente es tan pobre ¿de dónde sacarán, cómo le harán algunos para robar en tales cantidades?" (213).

We can cautiously conclude here that in order to arrive at moral questions or to build moral criteria, the most important prerequisite in these texts seems to be some kind of wonder and estrangement from reality that is sparked by carefully observing cracks and inconsistencies in the fabric of reality. These inconsistencies can either become apparent in comparing some type of official discourse with observed reality (as a recognisable divergence from something professed, for instance) or by relating two phenomena which have not been thought together before.

Habituation to evil then can ideally also be detected in one's own behaviour, when Jorge catches himself for example in an instance of *Schadenfreude*: "La Nena, Maricarmen y yo nos moríamos de risa mientras Yolanda narraba y actuaba la tragedia de la gorda. Luego sentí remordimientos: soy tan canalla como Adelina. No está bien alegrarse del mal ajeno, por mucho que deteste a Óscar y a su hermana […]" (214). Keeping this childish sense of wonder alive, being astonished at oneself, establishes a vital distance with oneself and others, opening

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7    Cf.: "Desde su título mismo, la *nouvelle* remite directamente al conocido ensayo de Freud *Más allá del principio del placer* [*Jenseits des Lustprinzips*]. […] En "El principio del placer" la incompatibilidad del deseo con la realidad promueve una revaloración de la experiencia vivida, que marca el paso de Jorge a la vida adulta, el comienzo del desengaño en su combate por la gratificación vital" (Verani 2003, 9-10).

up the confines of a purely subjective perspective. Fortunately, Jorge has still a grasp on his own inconsistencies and is able to reflect on his own behaviour in a way that is often abandoned in adult life at the altar of *all too* practical rationality: "No entiendo cómo es uno. El otro día sentí piedad al ver a los animales asesinados en el patio trasero de mi casa y hoy me divertí pisando cangrejos en la playa" (214). His main pleasure then derives from noticing that being removed from the immediacy of the world has something to do with writing the diary itself: it takes him out of the immediacy of the moment, the direct impact of his emotions and the rules he has to otherwise observe in social interactions. It is not so much the activity of writing itself, but the sensation of having a tool for the preservation of time, for creating a distance that enables Jorge to overcome bad experiences by making them seem more relative in a safe place for reflection. It is this distance even from himself and the keen observations he can make from this vantage point that help Jorge ultimately to grow and to find his way through conflicting impressions.

The narrative's most emblematic disillusionment comes at the end as a double blow for Jorge when he realizes that his favorite sport, American wrestling or *lucha libre*, is not free at all, but a rigged game. After a match he not only sees the two enemies from the ring drinking and joking at the beachfront like old buddies, but also his father's orderly Durán hand in hand with Ana Luisa. Just after Durán has rescued Jorge from angry fans because the corn cob Jorge had thrown at the "evil" one of the two wrestlers was eventually used to harm the "good" wrestler, he is lectured in what proves to be a premonition about their own relationship in which Durán is about to betray Jorge: "primero está uno y nunca hay que tomar partido por nadie" (219).

This drastic warning against solidarity is usually presented in a more disguised form in the narration. The reader has to compare, for example, the fact that Jorge's mother and sisters preside over a festival for poor children but never miss an opportunity to dissuade anybody in their environment from succumbing to the charms of lower class girls (cf. 200). Applying solidarity[8] seems to be restricted once again only to in-group behaviour when we compare the official discourse, i.e. hosting a charitable festival for poor children, with the private practice of deriding servant girls and wishing they would not mingle with the upper class.

But "El principio del placer" is not a clear-cut coming of age story: Jorge himself does not yet overcome his own contradictions similar to those he observes in the behaviour of others. The reader only witnesses his being baffled by the fact that the discourse does not seem to align with his own observations. He also cannot help getting revenge upon Durán's ex-girlfriend in the end. More than

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[8]  For a more extensive discussion of the concept of solidarity see Scholz 2012.

anything, Jorge learns that it is very difficult to act for the better even though he should know better: "Qué metida de pata mi supuesta venganza" (223). The *in*sight has only been possible here with *hind*sight due to the *posterior pleasure* of reflecting back on it in writing.

This perspective of hindsight is, in *Las batallas en el desierto*, fully realized in the form of an adult narrator who looks back at his childhood. In particular, the promise of modernity and progress in the official discourse can now be put into a clear focus by the narrator:

> La cara del Señorpresidente en dondequiera: dibujos inmensos, retratos idealizados, fotos ubicuas, alegorías del progreso con Miguel Alemán como Dios Padre, caricaturas laudatorias, monumentos. Adulación pública, insaciable maledicencia privada. […] Para el impensable año dos mil se auguraba −sin especificar cómo íbamos a lograrlo− un porvenir de plenitud y bienestar universales. […] Las máquinas harían todo el trabajo. […] El paraíso en la tierra. La utopía al fin conquistada. (Pacheco 2010b, 14-15)

From whatever moment in posterity the narrator speaks, it becomes clear that the charm of the future, of unlimited progress and modernity is broken. In the case of Mexico, modernity in the late 40s appeared to be almost synonymous with the uncritical Americanization of Mexican society and to be a version of modernity that was still only accessible to the upper classes.[9] This process of unreflecting adaptation does not only include copying tastes, but trickles down from the adult world into Carlos's classmates schematic conceptualizations of good and evil. The *battles of the desert* in the title of the book are the games of foe and friend which are modelled on real-life historical developments on a world scale, even without having a direct relevance in the context of Mexican culture:

> Jugábamos en dos bandos: árabes y judíos. Acababa de establecerse Israel y había guerra contra la Liga Árabe. Los niños que de verdad eran árabes y judíos sólo se hablaban para insultarse y pelear. Bernardo Mondragón, nuestro profesor, les decía: Ustedes nacieron aquí. Son tan mexicanos como sus compañeros. No hereden el odio. Después de cuanto acaba de pasar (las infinitas matanzas, los campos de exterminio, la bomba atómica, los millones y millones de muertos), el mundo de mañana, el mundo en el que ustedes serán hombres, debe de ser un sitio de paz, un lugar sin crímenes y sin infamias. En las filas de atrás sonaba una risita. (17)

The battles fought out in the desert (the schoolyard being referred to as a desert simply because it is a dry and unappealing courtyard) could, ultimately, be a meta-

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9    Cf.: "La Coca Cola sepultaba las aguas frescas de Jamaica, chía, limón. Los pobres seguían tomando tepache. Nuestros padres se habituaban al jaibol que en principio les supo a medicina. En mi casa está prohibido el tequila, le escuché decir a mi tío Julián […] hay que *blanquear* el gusto de los mexicanos." (16, emphasis added)

phor for the motive of evil itself: even without any real-life relevance the pose of dichotomous thinking perpetuates itself on the playground, keeping some kind of shadow-boxing alive that becomes real again without any strict necessity. At the back of the schoolyard is significantly a half-forgotten passageway which was built during the times of religious persecution as an escape route (cf. 19). Only the adult narrator can qualify this supposedly "prehistoric era" of the *guerra carlista* (in which his mother's family was even *gladly* involved) as a time in history that was at the time of his classmates' infancy actually closer to them than it is to them now as adults. The power and historical reach of fanaticism seems to be stronger than those playing in the courtyard could possibly know in their innocence.

The reader witnesses how concepts can indirectly acquire their own life and dynamic regardless of their cogency and current validity. Carlitos himself has his own very personal and interested view on those battles. Even though he takes part in them he distinguishes for himself another way of categorizing the classmates involved, a way of categorizing that is itself anachronistic and just a historic remnant like a dead star in the sky in hindsight, since the real line of division is, again, drawn according to economic criteria:

> Hasta entonces el imperio otomano perduraba como la luz de una estrella muerta: Para mí, niño de la colonia Roma, árabes y judíos eran «turcos». Los «turcos» no me resultaban extraños como Jim, que nació en San Francisco y hablaba sin acento los dos idiomas; o Toru, crecido en un campo de concentración para japoneses; o Peralta y Rosales. Ellos no pagaban colegiatura, estaban becados, vivían en las vecindades ruinosas de la colonia de los Doctores. La calzada de La Piedad […] y el parque Urueta formaban la línea divisoria entre Roma y Doctores. […] Antes de la guerra en el Medioriente el principal deporte de nuestra clase consistía en molestar a Toru. […] Nunca me sumé a las burlas. Pensaba en lo que sentiría yo, único mexicano en una escuela de Tokio; y lo que sufriría Toru con aquellas películas en que los japoneses eran representados como simios gesticulantes y morían por millares. […] Hoy dirige una industria japonesa con cuatro mil esclavos mexicanos. (18-19)

In this ironic afterthought it becomes apparent how Toru has learned to excel at the game of dominating others in the adult world in a way that turns his childhood experience on its head, but that somehow abides by the same logic. Before the Arab-Israeli conflict, the children circled in on their Japanese classmate who could be singled out because of the status his nation of origin suffered in Mexico because of the (already bygone) Second World War and the enduring media representations of Asians as gesticulating monkeys. Once grown up, the (dominating) logic of economic success can establish itself and prevail again in a way that makes out of the ridiculed a respected business figure and "enslaver" of Mexicans. Carlos begins to learn to see through these sham battles, commenting about the recess wars: "Hoy los judíos tomaron Jerusalén pero mañana será la venganza de

los árabes" (25). The instability and fleetingness of historical domination is ironically mirrored in the fickle back and forth between rivalling schoolyard factions.

The problem of empathy and indifference towards those who are perceived as standing outside of (temporary) alliances extends to all forms of representation insofar as they manifest forms of discourse. When Carlos thinks back on the feelings he had when he saw Bambi for the first time, he remembers that he was deeply affected and that he had to be dragged out of the theater in tears, distraught at seeing how the hunters had killed Bambi's mother (cf. 26). The adult narrator admits to sort of knowing even back then that millions of *real* mothers had been killed during WWII, but he did not cry for them, even though he saw the graphic newsreels in "Cinelandia" along with Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse. The famous Milgram experiment on obedience to authority figures by Stanley Milgram has shown how much empathy and compassion have to do with encouragement and setting[10]. The visibility of evil, of being represented as such or not, is crucially linked to the setting and encouragement, namely whether they allow for something to register as bad and to speak out on it.

In a similar vein Carlos remembers one of the kitchen aids, Antonia, as having been very pretty and always kind to him: "Antonia era muy linda y era buena conmigo. Sin embargo yo le decía: Eres mala porque ahorcas a las gallinas. Me angustiaba verlas agonizar. Mejor comprarlas muertas y desplumadas. Pero esa costumbre apenas se iniciaba" (51). The narrative voice of the older Carlos has learned to appreciate Antonia's kindness: looking back he can fully value her as an essentially good person because of the way she treated him. But from his childish and ultimately very telling perspective the visibility of killing the chicken can be dealt with simply by outsourcing the task of slaughtering the chicken. Carlitos takes umbrage at the sight of something he figures to be an ostensible sign of cruelty, but he takes no offense at the underlying practice he cannot relate to the consumption of chicken. His anger at Antonia might be misguided, but his sense for what is acceptable (eating chicken) and what is not (having to watch how animals die) is actually perfectly attuned to the society he is growing up in. In the political arena nowadays, the treatment of whistleblowers often mirrors this very same 'attacking the messenger' effect one can observe in Carlitos's reaction to Antonia.

The servant girl Antonia is finally fired because Héctor, Carlos's older brother, does not stop harassing her sexually. Héctor had tried to rape several servant maids in his youth, being egged on by his friends' motto "Carne de gata, buena y barata" and the consumption of erotic novels:

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[10]    Milgram theorized for example about the lack of emphatic cues in his experimental set-up that "[i]n the Remote and … Voice-Feedback conditions, the victim's suffering possesses an abstract, remote quality for the subject" (cited in Miller 1986, 44).

[…] forcejeaba con las muchachas y durante los ataques y defensas Héctor eyacula-
ba en sus camisones sin lograr penetrarlas: los gritos despertaban a mis padres; […]
regañaban a Héctor, amenazaban con echarlo de la casa y a esas horas despedían a la
criada, aún más culpable que "el joven" por andar *provocándolo* […]. (59-60, italics
in the original)

As a grown-up Héctor will be a respected businessman at the service of multina-
tional corporations not unlike Toru, as well as a Catholic "gentleman", father of
eleven children and an outstanding man of the Mexican extreme right (cf. 59).
The apparent evolution in Héctor's life is debunked as fully consistent with the
double standards and sanctimonious discourse perceived in society and is com-
mented on by the narrator in brackets: "En esto al menos ha sido de una coher-
encia a toda prueba" (59). Once again moral judgment comes harder down on
those who are not afforded the protection of the in-group. 'Do as I say, not as I
do' holds also true when everybody around Carlos is scandalized at his behaviour
when he is caught for truancy after visiting Jim's mother Mariana. He cannot
help but muse: "Todos somos hipócritas, no podemos vernos ni juzgarnos como
vemos y juzgamos a los demás. Hasta yo que no me daba cuenta de nada sabía
que mi padre llevaba años manteniendo la casa chica de una señora, su ex secre-
taria, con la que tuvo dos niñas" (49-50).[11]

In order to fix his deviant behaviour, Carlos is sent to two psychiatrists and a
priest. In the end, Carlos has to conclude that the attempts designed to fix him
in the eyes of society are all spawned from criteria of judgment that do not neces-
sarily apply to him from his own point of view: "Me juzgaban según leyes en las
que no cabían mis actos" (64). The problem of his falling in love with Mariana
and the ensuing scandal is struck at the root when Carlos is sent to a new school.
The blemish associated with Carlos's behaviour is removed much in the same way
as his chance at further nurturing his infatuation is taken away from him: out
of sight, out of mind. In the new school the battles in the desert have lost their
importance as well, but in a chance encounter Carlos sees his old underprivileged
classmate Rosales once again selling chewing gum on the bus and catches up with
him to find out about Mariana. Carlos cannot feel empathy for the economic
situation Rosales is in but invites him generously for lunch, only eager to obtain
information about Mariana. Rosales is unwilling at first and more interested in
his sandwich:

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[11]   Carlos thus overcomes what is normally the case: "[…] social forces around us work in two different
ways: When the cheater is part of our social group, we identify with that person and, as a consequence,
feel that cheating is more socially acceptable. But when the person cheating is an outsider, it is harder
to justify our misbehaviour, and we become more ethical out of a desire to distance ourselves from that
immoral person and from that other (much less moral) out-group" (Ariely 2012, 206-207).

Déjame acabarme mis tortas. Están riquísimas. Llevo un día sin comer. Mi mamá se quedó sin trabajo porque trató de formar un sindicato en el hospital. Y el tipo que ahora vive con ella dice que, como no soy hijo suyo, él no está obligado a mantenerme. Rosales, de verdad lo siento; pero eso no es asunto mío y no tengo por qué meterme. Come lo que quieras […]. (70)

Rosales remains on the outside of the established discourses designed to keep him on the outside of society since his mother has lost her job trying to form a union that could have possibly aggregated sufficient clout to establish an alternative discourse for the working poor if it had not been thwarted by opposing interests. In the sphere of familiar ties he also remains on the outside since his stepfather does not feel that he is responsible for a child born out of wedlock.

Only after receiving the shock news of Mariana's supposed suicide, Carlos has a kind of moral epiphany which provides him with a heightened sense of death and startles him into connecting all sorts of phenomena he has not been able to relate to before. He suddenly and fully comes to life in the very moment he is confronted with death, leaving behind his indifference towards signs of death. He becomes aware of the constant connections that exist between life and death all around him and which are open for observation when one has not gotten used to the blending out of death: "Vi la muerte por todas partes: en los pedazos de animales a punto de convertirse en tortas y tacos entre la cebolla, los tomates, la lechuga, el queso, la crema, los frijoles, [etc.]. Animales vivos como los árboles que acababan de talar[…]" (73). Inviting Rosales for lunch had cost Carlos a pittance, but the extreme subjectivity of his pain of loss for something he loved, Mariana, now extends beyond his own narrow focus and makes him sensitive and perceptive to other kinds of pain in an exaggerated kind of way.

His shell of an affluent *señorito* is shattered and he is jolted into life. Years later, the narrator does not even remember the year of the events or their certainty; nothing remains for him but the persisting feeling that they have shaped his life from that moment on.

The examples analysed in these different texts are highly indicative of how intimately intertwined conceptualizations of evil are with their respective representation in discourse and how difficult it can be to extricate oneself from this dynamic. While the extrapolations from these examples are not intended to necessarily say anything about morality itself, the literary texts clearly speak to an awareness of how predetermined any thinking on moral behaviour is by the social circumstances of those who partake in the discourse, and how naturally it lends itself to promote a hidden agenda. Observing differences and discourses closely can often help to uncover the underlying interested motives for indifference.

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# The Moral of the Fable

BRUNELLO LOTTI

It is indisputable that the cohesion of a political community is a structural condition for its existence and its proper functioning. Multiculturalism, that is the presence of different cultures in the same territory under the same jurisdiction, is a potential threat to social and political cohesion. In Western political thought awareness of this danger has been documented since antiquity. Aristotle wrote: "Whether a communication with the sea is beneficial to a well-ordered state or not is a question which has often been asked. It is argued that the introduction of strangers brought up under other laws, and the increase of population, will be adverse to good order; the increase arises from their using the sea and having a crowd of merchants coming and going, and is inimical to good government"[1]. If we wanted to read our current situation through these Aristotelian lenses, we would be compelled to say that multiculturalism and globalization are intrinsically incompatible with the ideal of good government. Of course, Aristotle cannot be our guide today: after all, he looked at the traditional Greek *polis* as the normal and ideal form of political community: a homogeneous population so limited in number, and a territory so small that both the land and the inhabit-

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[1]    Aristotle, *Pol.* VII. 6 1327a 11-18, trans. Jowett.

ants "should be taken in at a single view"[2]! Everyone knows that when Aristotle wrote his *Politics* Greece and the whole Eastern part of the Mediterranean area were about to be temporarily unified under the multicultural empire created by Aristotle's pupil, Alexander the Great. So if we want to understand how multiculturalism has coexisted with common political institutions we should rather forget Aristotle and his idealized *polis*, and consider political formations of a different kind, such as the great empires of our distant and recent past.

Multiculturalism has been a feature of many political communities throughout history, and it is even stronger today in a world characterized by swifter and easier opportunities of travelling and moving from one territory to another. The ever increasing means of transport and of communication in a globalized context, while favoring the creation of multicultural societies, tend also to integrate cultural diversities and to produce common lifestyles and shared ways of thinking. In this respect, as often happens in the dialectical rhythms of human history, the illness provides its own remedy, at least in the long run. A process of assimilation and the emergence of a common unified culture is always under way when different cultures meet each other or even when they clash with each other. This inevitable process of fusion may require a long time and may be more or less deep and wide; so, it does not guarantee by itself a smooth and easy solution to the political difficulties arising from the cohabitation of different cultures. Tensions are part of every process of cultural interaction and, depending on circumstances, can be so strong as to disintegrate common political institutions.

Traditionally, Europe is a multicultural area, at least in the sense that our continent consists of many countries with a complex stratified past, with many different languages and several religions. The different Christian confessions, the presence of non-Christian religions, and the massive influence of a secular culture and mentality from the French Revolution onwards have rendered Europe a multicultural space over many centuries. One may say that the very formation of the European political union in the last sixty years is an attempt to overcome the divisive features of the different European cultures and the traditional national closures. The aim is to enhance the common traits of the European tradition as a basis upon which to build the future common destiny of the countries and populations of this old continent. Examining the issue of multiculturalism from this point of view is tantamount to reconstructing historically the evolution of the European Union, its limits and uncertainties. It is a question and a task more for an historian than for a political philosopher. Multiculturalism as such belongs to the European tradition, and the whole of European history is pervaded by it; in this sense only an historical view might instruct us in how the unity of politi-

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2    Ibid. VII. 5 1327a 1.

cal communities has been achieved notwithstanding the coexistence of different cultures. Cultural differences, however marked, do not undermine the stability of a society as long as there are strong political institutions which create the frame for a communal life. Efficient bureaucracy, a unified economy, a common legal system, a recognized political leadership, a set of ideological symbols standing above cultural differences, and a common military force which protects the integrity of the state, all of these are standard ingredients necessary for keeping together groups of different cultures and traditions in a single political entity. Of the aforementioned factors, only one (a unified economy, at least in terms of free trade and of a common currency) characterizes Europe today. The other factors exist only in an inchoative state or are entirely missing (a European army). The whole situation is further confused by the overlapping of competence and sovereignty between European and national institutions.

Taking into account the 'experimental' and precarious quality of Europe as a political community, we must ask ourselves whether multiculturalism today can be seen as the traditional background from which a richer and stronger European community can emerge or if we are facing a new form of multiculturalism, which is no longer the effect of traditional differences among European countries and which presents new challenges to the stability and the very existence of European democracies.

The main aspect to be considered is the massive flux of immigrants coming to Europe from other continents, mainly from Africa and Asia. The fundamental cause of this wave of immigration is economic, sometimes disguised under the pretext of seeking political asylum: western Europe is a more prosperous area and is perceived as offering better life opportunities to masses of people living in poorer countries. An observer of this phenomenon, which has dramatically increased in the last twenty years, cannot help noticing the almost complete absence of an immigration policy both in the European Union as a whole and in each single country. Whatever the different laws and practices in various European states, it is correct to say that there is no planning and no selection of immigrants to be admitted according to economic, social and cultural criteria. The effective expulsion of illegal immigrants is very limited and very often means simply that expelled immigrants move from one European country to another. In many European countries there have been amnesties which have legalized the condition of many immigrants. The idea that Europe as a whole or that a single European country might select which immigrants are allowed to be admitted and which of them should be refused has never been put into place. In short, the phenomenon of immigration from extra-European areas is not governed, it is passively accepted.

The tacit ideological assumption underlying the lack of a selective policy of immigration is that such a policy would be discriminatory and therefore unac-

ceptable. This assumption is part of a commonplace ideological attitude towards immigration, centered around vague humanitarian ideas such as 'hospitality', 'compassion', 'acceptance', 'solidarity', 'inclusion'. These ideas express a 'false moral conscience', and do not have any political significance other than being a justification of the passive and lax policy which I have described. A typical 'official' ideology invoked to justify the acceptance of 'migrants' is the theory of human rights[3]. I have defined this humanitarian approach a form of 'false moral conscience', since it is only a way to gratify the self-righteousness of those who entertain these views. If they were adopted consistently, they should not be practiced in a passive way, but should become the guidelines of an active foreign policy: Europe should actively promote and encourage the indiscriminate entry into its territory of all those who aspire to live there in order to improve their economic condition, and even more of all the people coming from states where democratic rights are not guaranteed according to European standards, welcoming them as political refugees. A consistent application of the theory of human rights – for instance taking into account The Universal Declaration of Human Rights – would imply that Europe should open its doors and actively offer its protection and its resources to all the people in the world living in countries in which human rights are not implemented. For instance, Article 24 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay". If the theory of human rights, apart from being a list of good intentions, would or could become an effective instrument of international policy, the European Union should help all those living in countries where this right is not implemented to come to Europe, to offer them the opportunity of enjoying here "the right to rest and leisure". The result of this hypothetically "consistent" humanitarian foreign policy would be the collapse of European societies as well as of every other society promoting so called 'human rights' actively and to their full extent. The gap between reality and ideal humanitarian principles is so wide that it clearly shows the utopian character of those principles.

The absurdity of a humanitarian foreign policy which, if genuinely practiced, would lead to the self-destruction of every political entity, reverberates to a lesser degree in the passive and non-selective acceptance of immigration. The effect of this policy has been and will be a progressive change in the composition of the European population with an increase of groups coming from different cul-

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[3]  The Universal Declaration of Human Right, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948, states at the article 13 (2) that "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country", but it does not state an unlikely 'cosmopolitan' right to be admitted as a citizen in whatever country everyone would like to move, unless you are seeking asylum from persecution (art. 14).

tures and lifestyles: some of these groups share aspects of the European traditions (such as religion or the second language) due to their colonial inheritance; other groups, such as the Chinese or the Muslim immigrants, are much more alien to European history, tradition, cultural values and social behaviours.

The passive attitude towards immigration has had the effect that all the undesirable consequences of multiculturalism have grown uncontrolled to the point of constituting a real danger for the security and stability of European societies. In the current situation the threat is posed by Muslim immigration, due to the widespread aggressive ideology of Islamic fundamentalism. In a sense, the examination of the growth in the last century of Islamic fundamentalism in terms of its historical and cultural roots is of secondary importance; what matters more is to become aware that radical Muslims, who hate western values, culture and lifestyle, live and act within European societies, enjoying the freedom and rights which democracies accord to their citizens and to every person living in their territory. The long string of violent terrorist acts, fueled by a fanatical ideology in which religious faith and political beliefs are merged, constitute the most severe threat to a safe and free existence in European society today. Islamic fundamentalism in Europe is the degenerative factual consequence of a process of multiculturalism left ungoverned and pushed beyond any reasonable limits; however, due to its absolute negation of freedom and its subordination of all aspects of human existence to the *sharia* (the Islamic law directly drawn from the precepts of the Islamic religion), Islamic fundamentalism is also the very negation of multiculturalism insofar as it denies the peaceful and free expression of those differences which have made European liberal and democratic societies so rich and free. More than one hundred and fifty years ago, in his essay *On liberty* (1860), John Stuart Mill theorized that the essence of freedom is pluralism and multiculturalism:

> What has made the European family of nations an improving, instead of a stationary portion of mankind? Not any superior excellence in them, which when it exists, exists as the effect, not as the cause; but their remarkable diversity of character and culture. Individuals, classes, nations, have been extremely unlike one another: they have struck out a great variety of paths, each leading to something valuable; and although at every period those who travelled in different paths have been intolerant of one another, and each would have thought it an excellent thing if all the rest could have been compelled to travel his road, their attempts to thwart each other's development have rarely had any permanent success, and each has in time endured to receive the good which the others have offered. Europe is, in my judgement, wholly indebted to this plurality of paths for its progressive and many-sided development[4].

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4    Mill 1991, 80.

This long difficult process, which has led to the achievements of liberal democracies in the Western world, is entirely alien to the Islamic civilization. In particular, the tension and then separation between the political and religious spheres, which have characterized the whole of European history, is incompatible with Islamic fundamentalism. Even more, a liberal, open, multicultural society is antithetical to the oppressive theocracy pursued by Muslim fundamentalists.

How this danger, arising from the acceptance of the enemy on our soil, should be tackled and neutralized is again something which does not concern political philosophy as such (even less practical philosophy in its most general form): it is a question which should be posed and resolved in the concrete political actions of statesmen *if* they are willing to act against this threat. No strategy should be excluded *a priori* and a variety of means can be adopted to eliminate and eradicate this threat: from preventing more Muslim immigrants from entering the European territory, to an adequate military response, from an educational campaign addressed to the Muslim population already living in Europe to the support and dialogue with all those forces which in the Islamic world do not accept the involution of fundamentalism. The contribution of philosophy, in tune with common sense, to the analysis and solution of this dangerous situation should consist in exposing some unpleasant elementary truths, which are likely to be concealed by the false humanitarian consciousness dominating the official public discourse in western Europe today.

The first truth is that multiculturalism has reached the point of denying itself through an unlimited openness which 'includes' its most radical enemies; this is equivalent to the contradiction of making use of freedom in order to fall back into slavery. We should remind ourselves in Lockean terms that toleration cannot be exerted in order to tolerate groups or individuals whose aim is to suppress any toleration of ideas other than their own. The second truth is that dialogue is impossible with an antagonist who is determined to refuse any dialogue and who craves to kill its enemies and to subjugate them by means of a generalized and barbaric holy war. The third truth is that in a political community governing institutions lose any legitimacy if they fail to protect the lives of their citizens threatened by acts of violence perpetrated by enemies which have been allowed to live within that community where they operate to subvert its institutions. Admitting into European territory potential terrorists, offering them the opportunity to diffuse their ideas, to establish a network of affiliates, and to conduct their initiatives is unwise to say the least. It is simply foolish to grant freedom of action and of speech to radical Muslims who, exploiting the freedom accorded to them by European societies, want to establish here as everywhere else the negation of freedom, that is the absolute blind obedience to their religious law. In sum, a multicultural community which accepts and protects groups whose main goal is

to suppress any culture other than their own is a community which shows either a high suicidal instinct or a self-complacency close to reckless madness.

I am aware that the situation which I have outlined in clear cut traits would be interpreted in a more 'sophisticated', convoluted and 'original' way by a certain type of moral philosopher, so common in our culture today, who displays his/her wisdom in the ritual *proskinesis* in front of the idolized Other. It's a current version of what Hegel in his age justly despised as "the brew and stew of the 'heart, friendship, and inspiration'"[5,] meaning by that a reflection based on subjective sentimental delusions and on the projection of wishful thinking rather than on the consideration of the structures of social life and of political institutions. If we want to understand brutal facts, we need a way of thinking adequate to them and not rhetorical exorcisms; we need a realistic political philosophy which does not preach lofty empty ideals in disdain of common sense and of the most elementary logic. Better than any philosophical essay, a fable can help us to understand in the most simple terms the danger which Europe is facing today:

*The Countryman and the Serpent*

A countryman, as Æsop certifies,
A charitable man, but not so wise,
One day in winter found,
Stretch'd on the snowy ground,
A chill'd or frozen snake,
As torpid as a stake,
And, if alive, devoid of sense.
He took him up, and bore him home,
And, thinking not what recompense
For such a charity would come,
Before the fire stretch'd him,
And back to being fetch'd him.
The snake scarce felt the genial heat
Before his heart with native malice beat.
He raised his head, thrust out his forkèd tongue,
Coil'd up, and at his benefactor sprung.
"Ungrateful wretch!" said he, "is this the way
My care and kindness you repay?
Now you shall die." With that his axe he takes,
And with two blows three serpents makes.
Trunk, head, and tail were separate snakes;
And, leaping up with all their might,
They vainly sought to reunite.

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5    Hegel 1821/1896, xxii.

'Tis good and lovely to be kind;
But charity should not be blind;
For as to wretchedness ingrate,
You cannot raise it from its wretched state[6].

The moral of the fable is clear, the finale is not so certain. If you read Aesop and Phaedrus you find another version in which the story ends with the death of the generous and naive farmer. As with every similitude, this one too presents an inexactitude: Europe cannot be seriously compared to a naive farmer; rather it seems like a fat old man who in his senescent decadence has lost both his clarity of vision and his strength of will. Europe has lost above all the first political quality of every protagonist in human history: the will to lead and dominate historical processes instead of being carried away by them.

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[6]    La Fontaine 1900, 102.

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