

Intercultural philosophy is dealing with the question of whether it is possible and necessary to develop new ways of philosophizing because of the present condition of humankind. We are living in a global world, while we are still thinking in frameworks conditioned by regionally bound cultural traditions. The answer to our question therefore shall be: problems of philosophy can and ought to be made clear by way of *interculturally orientated polylogues*. What that means and why it is the answer to the question can only be sketched here.

Recently the subject of interculturality has been discussed in growing intensity within several academic disciplines. Thereby it is not primarily concerned with problems of multicultural societies; i.e. not questions concerning the necessary and sufficient conditions to be fulfilled in a society in which the members are rooted in different and sometimes even incompatible traditions. Further, the question is not about a theory of the foundations and the origin of cultures, nor about their mutual relationships. The question is about nothing but philosophy itself.

With respect to philosophy, the question will not only be whether philosophy has originated and developed exclusively in one of the traditional cultures – namely within the occident – or within several cultures independently. Therefore, it will not be dealt primarily with *historical* problems, nor will *hermeneutics* and the methodology of interpretation be the only concern.

The main question is about philosophy – but in such a way that we seriously reflect on fundamental differences of cultural coinages in the forms of thinking itself. Heretofore we shall have to say at the very beginning what is understood by the term “philosophy”. Still more: we have to say why philosophy is seen to be something that deserves to be done, because it can make a special contribution for human life. Lastly, we have to reflect on the impact of cultural frameworks on philosophy as such.

It has been said that there is a “philosophy crisis”. What exactly this crisis is and whether it might be in such a critical situation where recovering would be one possible outcome, remains an open question. Sometimes, philosophy in its traditional occidental understanding has been declared to be dead. This at least would be the end of all of its crises. It could be mentioned here that there seems to be a new aspect concerning the possible end of philosophy in recent years after the breakdown of the socialist systems in Central and Eastern Europe. During the period previous to that, decision makers in the realm of politics of education and culture, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, might have considered philosophy to be one of the useful instruments for ideological fights. Now, one side has disappeared there is no use for such weapons any more. Therefore, it is not only the apparent lack of practicability of philosophical theories, nor is it the main historical orientation of many philosophers which makes philosophy seemingly irrelevant to modern societies. There is still another reason for the decay of philosophy’s prestige: after the period of the Cold War some types of missiles on both sides are being destroyed, as there is no longer any need for them.

Philosophy, it seems, is not needed for ideological and political argumentation. Liberation of the market seems enough. The programs of political parties can be sufficiently provided by help of economists, social scientists, or public relation experts. Philosophers in such a situation might retreat to ethics and try to answer questions of practical life, e.g. about the morals of bio-techniques. With that exception philosophy might survive in the theory of science, or in the deconstruction of great narratives of former times.

There is some absurdity in such a situation. The present is characterized, as few periods have been, by developments which concern the very project of philosophy. Globalization in the fields of economics,

politics, technology, and the sciences is growing, but ancient orientations and forms of life do not simply disappear. Value-systems of old give way to new forms of behaviour, but are still influential in such a degree that some people expect a clash of civilizations in the future. Within some of the present societies fundamentalists are becoming influential. On the other hand, theories of post-modernity become acceptable in the humanities as well as in the arts, and are combined with exoticistic and relativistic traditions.

If philosophy is thought to be possible in such a situation, there are some restrictions to it.

Firstly, philosophy cannot be done by relying on any one cultural tradition whatsoever, trying to continue a "classical" past. Such an approach would definitely be classified as a sort of "ethnophilosophy". The debate about human rights and their rooting in the occidental lore shows the case.

Secondly, philosophy cannot be done by relying on pure methodology, thereby claiming universalism. Although it is convincing that there are some preconditions of thinking itself – e.g. the principles of logic, the implicit claim to validity in every argumentation – such universals are not enough if questions of epistemology, ontology or deontology are at stake.

Philosophy under the conditions outlined above has to search for an alternative to both continuation of a single cultural heritage, as well as formal methodology. It has to develop procedures which might be called "polylogues". Before we can grasp such an idea, we ought to clarify something else.

First, the setting of the main problems and hypotheses, as well as the conditions for successful elaboration of these problems which emerge in the discussions about "intercultural philosophy" have to be formulated. This can be done in the form of four statements:

- "Philosophy is not equal to Occidental Philosophy".
- "Philosophical concepts, methods, and theories which are intended to be universally valid may be culturally bound".
- "An extension of the cultural-historical horizon of the subject matter of historiography of philosophy is both necessary and possible".
- "The claim of superiority of the occidental philosophical heritage can and ought to be criticized".

There are several conditions which have to be fulfilled in order to discuss such hypotheses successfully:

- The concept of 'culture' has to be defined in such a way that it is clear what differences are relevant for philosophy.
- The rules of interpretation of culturally different philosophies are to be defined.
- It must be clear what the criteria are for a philosophical hypothesis which can be called transculturally valid.

It will be important to deal with the concept or, rather, concepts of "cultural identity". The reason for including that topic is very simple: whenever we are talking about "intercultural" subjects, quite naturally we have in mind some idea about what a "culture" is. Therefore, we ought to know about the criteria to distinguish between two or more different "cultures", and after all we ought to figure out the features of such a "culture", which are of relevance whenever people are doing philosophy.

Ours is the first period of a global culture. But, this culture is different from the cultures we know from the past. While it is becoming more and more real on a global scale in some of its aspects, it lacks completeness from an important point of view: it does not give people orientation with respect to the everlasting questions of human life, i.e. with respect to happiness and misery, birth and death. Therefore, the origins and developments of philosophical thinking in the main traditions of Eurasia as well as in other regions of the world have to be reflected upon in a fresh view. Because the tradition of occidental philosophy has been rather successful in spreading its own self-understanding during and by the means of colonialism and cultural imperialism, the main features of that picture have to be evaluated in a critical way.

Finally, new ways of philosophizing are being considered according to the conditions of human beings coming from different cultural backgrounds, using different means of conceptualization, and partly aiming to different goals. The concept of "polylogues" is proposed to answer to that challenge.

I now want to sketch only two of the above mentioned points: the problem of "cultural identities" with respect to intercultural philosophy, and the concept of "polylogues".

### Perspectives of cultural identity

We are dealing with different “cultures”. The first question then will be concerning their “identity”. I want to sketch several different perspectives which are logically possible in cases where there is need for the orientation or restitution of “identity”. Usually there is the allusion to a retrospective orientation in such cases, but it is not clear at all that this is the only way to orientate oneself in situations of lost or broken identity.

We can formulate the question in a more subjectivistic way: under that conditions does somebody experience himself as being culturally authentic? This question seems to be approached if we ask: where do people look to, when they experience a “break” of their cultural identity? An answer to that question should provide us a differentiated model for the description of such situations. However, dealing with philosophy, we have to go further: we have to ask whether and how the perspectives chosen to heal cultural breaks are adequate to promote common features of thought within a global culture where cultural differences persist.

If we only try to describe a single “life” we have to conceive of some unity or “identity” of that life. If “culturality” is a factor in this unity, we have to reflect on more unities, i.e. cultural frames. These can be existing before and after an individual’s life, as is usually the case with one’s mother tongue. But such frames can also change completely within a lifespan. This is a complex phenomenon. It happens that systems of rules change: systems which guided and gave meaning to a certain behavior, which can be left behind and continued as a practice. The following might be an example of that: it is customary with mothers in Agrigentum, Sicily, to carry their children riding on the left shoulder when they are visiting a certain church. This is a special custom connected to this particular church. Now it is known by excavations that on the spot of that church there had been a former Roman temple and a Greek one before that. In the remnants of the latter, female statuettes have been found who were carrying a child on the left shoulder. So one might say that the religious system had changed several times, but the specific behavior remained identical.

Our question now is: what kind of reactions are there to breaks within cultural identities? I have to explain what is understood by a “break”. It is the phenomenon in which some system of rules or values is

no longer self-evident (or: one which has not yet become self-evident).

The phenomenon can manifest itself in different ways, for example:

- As speechless misbehaviour of individuals as well as of collectives, which may be based on an erroneous calculation of the relationship between tasks and means. It happens in situations which are culturally unfamiliar that signals of communication are misinterpreted; a European might ask for the way in Japan, he may be answered – and then he perhaps misinterprets this to be a case of “deceit”.
- There might be hypertrophic developments in techniques for recording or remembering (in this respect one could interpret techniques of documentation such as, e.g., photography and the like). Using photography as a means of remembering pertains here, since this is a way of producing an archive for one’s own life. Such behavior can not simply be explained by referring to technical possibilities. This behavior gains or loses its importance alongside cultural as well as situational evaluations.
- Thirdly, the above identity-break can be expressed explicitly in literary works – quite differently again, if we look to the Chinese autofictional writings after the years of the “cultural revolution”; if we look to African novels about losing one’s identity, or if we look at comparable texts coming from eastern Europe after the “Fall of the Wall”. In all of these cases we regularly become aware of the fact that there is or has been a certain form of normality which is not yet or no longer decisive in one’s own life, but which ought and can be restored.

The examples given so far seem to suggest that “break of identity” is understood to describe some situation of loss or lack to be overcome. Such an understanding is at least partly misleading. It can be that the present be imagined as an *origin* or *beginning* of something, rather than as the continuation of some past, be it agreeable or not. There is enough evidence, both from collective as well as from individual history, that a utopian consciousness represents something which could correctly be called a “break”.

I want to distinguish between six logically possible cases. If I am going to further describe these different types by distinctive adjectives, the intention is not to state that any one of the distinguished cases ever exists

in a pure and unmixed way, but rather that one or the other of these perspectives prevails. We can distinguish between the following perspectives or orientations of identity:

1. Retrospective identity, i.e. traditionalism. The origin lays in a past.
2. Prospective identity, i.e. utopism. The best is yet to come.
3. Serial identity, i.e. evolutionism. The present is nothing but a point of transition.
4. Pluripolar identity, i.e. "tourism". Breaks are calculated and can be repeated, coming back into one's own again.
5. Repetitive identity, i.e. metempsychosis. Not only is there an afterlife, but the self is understood to be enduring before and after its present existence in different "lives".
6. Perennial identity, i.e. "A equals A". The measure of identity is seen to lie in structures beyond time and change.

We do not have to stress the last mentioned concept when reflecting upon breaks of identity, with respect to individuals or to cultural units, because there is nothing like "perennial identity" except the perennial identity of a "soul" in a religious sense. But, we ought to be aware of the other types of looking at identity. And it is only from a Hegelian point of view that we would have to look seriously at "repetitive identity" within philosophy, if it was assumed that some "absolute spirit" has developed in different succeeding cultures. So what we will need to discuss to some extent are the concepts One to Four.

#### 1. *Retrospective identity: The origin in the past*

There obviously is no sufficient reason to describe every searching for identity of individuals as well as of groups of people such that this always be looking backwards. However, it is common to do exactly that. Looking for one's identity often is meant to look for some real, and more often for some fictitious past which supposedly no longer exists in the present, at least not the way it is fancied once to have been. In such a perspective, developing new forms of thinking and feeling new forms of life is seen as being a loss of identity. The title of a novel by Chinua Achebe conveys such an idea: "*Things Fall Apart*". In this novel, the author is describing the

changes in an African community, brought about by the influence of missionaries and by colonialism. Okonkwo, the hero of the story, finally commits suicide, which used to be almost unthinkable in ancient times because by such a deed he would interrupt the chain of generations of which he was only one part. Okonkwo is not able to accommodate himself to the new ways of thinking that are entering his world.

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peacably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.<sup>1</sup>

This is a telling phrase: formerly, the community did "act like one", but now things have "fallen apart". It is quite common to associate such a process with modernization or "westernization" of local and regional forms of culture, thereby supposing that there was no danger for such a loss of orientation from within. It may be overstating the facts if it is thought that there are traditional cultures which are not expected to change on their own. In such a view, every basic change in the ways of life of an individual or a community will be seen to be a loss of identity or "authenticity".

There are many ways to lessen the impact of such a loss, be it real or imaginative. Let us briefly sketch some of them.

One way is the cultivation of traditional customs. It seems to be rather general behavior in our time, at least in regions of tourist interest, to revive, even to reinvent customs of old. How else could we explain that there are people transporting wine and salt across the Alps with horses in the period of mass-transportation? There are other people who take pictures of such events. What do they expect to experience by such inefficient behavior, what do they want to document? If we answered these questions by saying that there is an interest in the past, that would clearly miss the point, because it is this form of interest in the past we are wondering about.

There is another way to save retrospective identity by technical means: by documentation of one's life with the help of photography, and similar techniques. There may be certain situations when pictures of one's past become extremely important as instruments to tell oneself as well as others "who I am". A family of refugees from Bosnia, well known to me, had no other way to tell their hosts "who they were" but a dozen of

photographs. The pictures were all almost identical: showing family events from the period before they flew to Austria. One shows these scenes, I suppose, for two reasons: to tell that there had been uncles, aunts, cousins, parents, friends, and that there was normal life in Bosnia before the war. Lacking the knowledge of the other's language on both sides, there was no other way to communicate such things. The second task of the pictures was to hold contact with those loved ones when there was no other way of communication left.

A third way to attempt permanent reconstruction of retrospective cultural identity is provided by the calendar. Whoever is controlling the calendar is controlling an important part of the self-interpretation of a collective. It was rightly understood to be an extremely aggressive measure against Christian traditions from the side of the representative of the French Revolution when the revolutionary calendar provided people with entirely new rhythms. There was no Easter and Christmas any more, but sort of a "scientific" rhythm of the year. It is reported to have been one of the conditions of the Pope, when he was asked to crown Napoleon emperor of France, that the former Christian calendar be restituted. Usually the fight about holidays and feasts is not that exciting. But in conflict situations the case is clear: one of the functions of the calendar is to remind people of their identity by way of recollecting those events of the past which are the most important for the majority. In one of his books, Claus Gatterer describes the situation when he grew up in South Tyrol during the period of Italian fascism. The region formerly had belonged to the Hapsburg empire, but now was part of Italy. The people in his village were ethnically Tyrolians, speaking German, having most relatives beyond the border. On November 2nd they traditionally remembered their deceased, including those who had died in the war against Italy. The boy Gatterer was led to these ceremonies by his parents, but was forbidden to join by his teacher. The next day, on November 3rd there was the official remembering of the victory of Italy against Austria, and the boy had to attend urged by the (Italian) teacher and mayor, but was forbidden to join the ceremony by his parents. In such a situation the relevance of the calendar for one's "identity" becomes quite clear. But it is generally true that the (national, regional, local, family) calendar works as a means to conserve and to revive collective identity, and again this usually is done in a retrospective understanding.

How can we interpret such phenomena? Generally

speaking, in a retrospective orientation, the answering of the question "who am I?" or "who are we?" is done by recollecting some outstanding events or situations in the past. This may be done in order not to forget what has been lost – for example family life back home in Bosnia. In that example, the events themselves had not been extraordinary at the time of their happening, but become important by way of recollection. The English word 'recording' is derived from the Latin 're-cordare' which literally means to take something back into one's heart. The German 'erinnern' (taking something into one's inner knowledge) gives a similar impression. Records are providing us with the linkage to those parts of the past which we are afraid to lose, thereby being in danger of losing completeness and self-understanding.

The example of the calendar shows still other characteristics of the retrospective search for identity. In such a view, borderlines between "us" and "them" always have to be drawn. Retrospective orientation is looking into the past in order to include the ones who belong to "us" (even if they do not know or do not agree with that) and to exclude others who do not belong to "us".

There are corresponding ways in philosophy to such a searching of identity in a retrospective orientation. If we rely on the conviction that there is one and only one classical tradition of philosophical thought, we are led to traditionalism and historicism, and to some sort of "ethnophilosophy" in the last consequence. We will then try to revive some past philosophical tradition, will see the main task of philosophers in the documentation and continuation of what has been done in the past, and will most probably be content with concepts, theories and periodisations derived from one tradition.

It goes without saying that such an orientation disables us to see anything other than deviations from normality in culturally different forms of thinking. The difficulty is that such an orientation will be "falling apart" with a closer look at whatever tradition, and not only as those which are commonly regarded as "culturally different".

## 2. *Prospective identity: The best is yet to come*

The source of one's identity must not be seen as necessarily being part of one's own past or in the past of a community one claims to belong to. Not only logically,

but historically as well, we also meet the contrary to that. ‘Utopism’ might be the right word to describe an understanding of “who I am”: the conviction that the center of what I am is not yet realized. In such a perspective, looking backwards into a heroic or ideal past would never provide us with any certainty. Of course there never has existed the possibility for human beings to start into a future entirely from scratch, with no links to traditions whatsoever. But there have nevertheless been approaches and images coming close to that. The original man – Adam in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic lore – had no forefathers. His beginnings really are from scratch. He could not possibly be misled by any tradition. On the other hand he could not rely on any cultural heritage because there is none. His situation is the creation of culture in a pure form.

That there are cultural heroes comparable to Adam in many traditions. The imagination of the real possibility that there can be a fresh beginning after numerous erroneous approaches in the past, the idea of the origin of a better or even of the best world has played its part on several occasions in history. It is the central idea of Enlightenment that there can be drawn no argument whatsoever from any tradition. Both rationalists and empiricists at the beginning of the Modern Age are in search of the means how to start from scratch and go ahead without relying on traditions. Again, as in the former case, I want to sketch several forms of this idea.

One form of utopian consciousness is based on the belief that natural man, if he avoids the traps of prejudices, will come to sound and reliable opinions. The story of a human being who did this entirely out of himself has been told by Ibn Tufail, 12th century-Andalusian and contemporary of Ibn Rushd (=Averroës). The book and the figure were extremely popular in Europe in the 16th century – there have been translations not only into Latin, but into many national languages as well, including Danish and Yiddish. Ernst Bloch names “Haji Ibn Jaqzan” to be a “saint of Enlightenment”. What is it about? The figure of Ibn Tufail is born by a woman, he is not directly created by God. But then he grows up without any human contacts (on an island, nourished by an animal). He comes to understand his world by use of observation, reason and memory alone. Thereby, he not only acquires knowledge about astronomy, anatomy, physics etc., but also develops conceptions about the Supreme Being and the laws of nature, thereby becoming a metaphysicist.

The situation is changed when an emigrant arrives on the island, another wise man and theologian who had been expelled by his people. The two manage to communicate with each other, and the outcome is surprising (and not very orthodox within the Islamic world): Haji Ibn Jaqzan, the natural man without a society, without tradition and without the help of a holy book, is superior in knowledge as well as in religion.

There are ways in philosophy to use the utopian idea: to base all knowledge on methods which can be proved by reason alone. It was one of the central ideas of Enlightenment that every tradition as such can be given up without loss, because there will be something more reliable: the purely scientific description and explanation of the world. The main problem with such an approach is that every proposal to overcome traditions as such is still rooted in some tradition itself.

### 3. *Serial identity: Evolutionism or reality as transition*

The Romans are said to have worshipped a god called “Janus” whom they imagined to look into opposite directions all the time. This “god of transition”, whom the Christians later identified as Noah, never knows about the past without the future, the future without the past. There is no way for him to look into only one direction. There is no history as such from his point of view, nor is there ever room for cutting the lines. It is hard to imagine what even a concept like “orientation” could possibly mean in such a situation. The god who is always looking backwards and forwards at once, does not know about the origin of the flow of time, nor does he know about the goal he is aiming at. If we conceive “evolution” as possibly having no purpose at all, this type of consciousness might be correctly called “evolutionary”: the consciousness of existing in a flow of time without knowing where one comes from and where one goes to. The present then is nothing but transition.

This “serial” type of identity can be met especially in autobiographical descriptions of emigrants, as for instance in the description, recently given by Georghe Purdea, of the first years of a Romanian family after they flew from their country to the West.<sup>2</sup> The story is told by the wife: the family emigrated from Romania ruled by Ceaucescu. At this moment they know where they come from and that they do not want to stay. But here clarity comes to an end. The wife is a scien-

tist and wants to go to Canada, the husband had studied philosophy and intends to live in Germany, where he had had scholarly contacts. The daughter is a child of six. Both of the parents speak German as well as English. The first place where they have to stop after crossing the Hungarian border is Traiskirchen, an Austrian immigration-camp. There never was an idea of going to Austria. During the weeks in the camp the future is vanishing in a brutal way. The Golden West they were aiming at turns out to be different from their hopes and images. Somebody comes back from Canada to Traiskirchen – there had been no living for him over there. The expected invitations from Germany do not come. And the past they had thought to leave behind is still present in the camp: the wife somehow has the impression that the secret service of Romania is still here.

So the new life normalizes in a unexpected way. The wife is working as a maid, while the husband finds work in a vineyard. There is almost no social contact with the Austrian population in the small village they are living in. Sometimes isolation is interrupted by means of the old country: cooking, singing songs, dancing in the courtyard. Then the husband goes for a trip to Vienna. In the hall of the old university with its monuments of the heroes of scholarship he has the feeling to come into his own. His grades from Bucarest are accepted, he is allowed to enroll for a Ph.D., is invited to read a paper at a conference, to publish an article. Meanwhile, the wife is cleaning dishes. Then they find an apartment in Vienna, the wife gets a job according to her profession. The family starts a new life. Canada as well as Germany are forgotten, the original purpose of the flight is no longer in their mind. In Romania, revolution overthrows Ceaucescu's dictatorship. They do not belong to that anymore, but are ashamed about that, especially the husband. The new world where they are living now remains foreign, the old one where they had come from is getting more and more foreign as well.

The very word "back home" gets an unexpected meaning in a dialogue between mother and child:

"I want to go back home, mum." "But why, darling? We cannot go back home any more. But, you know, grandpa and aunt Geta certainly will come to visit us here one day." "No", did she interrupt me: "I want to go back where all the uncles and aunts have been – to Trais-ichen." We laughed. Whatever a child can desire!

The story closes with a dream. It is the dream of eternal wandering, not looking for roots nor for destinations any

more. The woman dreams finally of being herself because there is no stability and there never will be roots nor a definite scope.

Finally, it is done. All men are on the way. Let us join them. There will be wandering eternally. We will be young forever. We will never die.

"Identity" or "authenticity" may be conceived of as being eternally on the road. In one of his last texts Jean Améry wrote:

The everlasting exile I choose was the only form of authenticity which was open to me; being Jewish I had no other options.<sup>3</sup>

In our epoch of increasing migrations we ought to be careful in describing the meaning of "identity". There are cases where we even cannot talk about "immigration" if we take into account the individual experience, and not only the administrative point of view. The Romanian couple of the autobiographical novel did not "immigrate" to Austria except in the sense that they had no choice left to go elsewhere. Gaining identity under this condition may mean saying farewell to every point of orientation, be it in one's back or ahead of the present.

In the field of philosophy such an attitude of "serial" identity is not unknown, but is leading to relativism immediately. From traditionalism and ethnophilosophy it may be only different by what can be called a principle of distinctless tolerance. If we take it seriously, a decisive part of the project of philosophy is given up with such a view: the attempt to come to valid and evident – or at least to intelligible – propositions.

#### 4. *Pluripolar identity: "Tourism"*

If "traditionalism", "utopism" and "evolutionism" are providing us with an established terminology to describe certain understandings of "identity", we are at a loss with another type which nevertheless is gaining importance in the present world. Maybe the French expression of "bricolage" has been proposed to describe this meaning: a form of self-understanding which consists of what we could call patchwork-identity. It is becoming more and more natural for many people to combine items coming from very different cultural frameworks into their own ways of life. But such a terminology would suggest to me an intentional activity, while the phenomenon we are dealing with is rather unconscious

behavior. Therefore, for the time being I prefer to talk about a “touristic” type of searching for identity.

It is a surprising fact that the substantive “tourist”, denominating a certain type of travellers, is coming into use parallel to the respective stages of industrialization in Europe. The word was imported into German from the French which again had it from previous English usage. And not only the stations are the same as in the process of industrial revolutions, but the periodical rhythm is similar as well: the term had been used first in England at about 1800, then in France starting with 1810, and came to be part of the German language during the thirties of the 19th century. Shortly after that, in 1847, the authors of the famous German lexicon “Brockhaus” gave a description of its meaning which is quite pertinent until today. By this word, we are describing “a special class of travellers and travel-writers”:<sup>4</sup>

The tourist is different from other travellers by the fact that his travels have no special purpose, for instance no scientific goal, he is travelling for no other purpose but for having performed the travel and consequently reporting about it.

The “tourist” therefore is expected to report to somebody else. So he will write letters and diaries, and will take photographs later on. It is part of his job to document what he has seen. His way of documentation, however, is different from the one we have met with the retrospective orientation producing the family-album. The tourist’s documentation is described by Susan Sontag in her essay “On Photography”:

As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure. Thus, photography develops in tandem with one of the most characteristic of modern activities: tourism. For the first time in history, large numbers of people regularly travel out of their habitual environments for short periods of time. It seems positively unnatural to travel for pleasure without taking a camera along. Photographs will offer indisputable evidence that the trip was made, that the program was carried out, that fun was had. Photographs document sequences of consumption carried on outside the view of family, friends, neighbors. But dependence on the camera, as the device that makes real what one is experiencing, doesn’t fade when people travel more. Taking photographs fills the same need for the cosmopolitans accumulating photograph-trophies of their boat trip up the Albert Nile or their fourteen days in China as it does for lower-middle-class vacationers taking snapshots of the Eiffel Tower or Niagara Falls.<sup>5</sup>

There are so many places of tourist interest like the “Eiffel Tower or Niagara Falls” where there definitely

is no need of being more documentation because there can be found enough pictures of sufficient quality in so many forms, from postcards to ashtrays. One definitely is wondering why people are taking snapshots of Mozart’s birthplace on rainy days from an overcrowded small square. Sontag gave us a hint to explain that: there has to be an undeniable record to prove my having been close to the place where the genius himself is born. Similarly, there increasingly is a standard understanding of places worth visiting, where the “Eiffel Tower or Niagara Falls” belong to. By recording such a place, my own participation in the history of mankind is secured.

It seems to me that no other than a “tourist” orientation in philosophy can be argued for, given the cultural situation of today: living in a globalised world with different cultural traditions competing with each other, and still trying to clarify our ways of thinking.

### The need for Polylogues

There are tensions in probably every society or country in our days, demonstrating the need of polylogic argumentations: tensions between traditions and modernity, between ethnic groups within a society, between laicist and religious convictions. Has philosophy anything to say with respect to such tensions?

As an example I intend to discuss the case of Julian Tzul, reported by Rafael Angel Herra:

A special example for the occidental way of treating different cultures is provided by *the crime of Julian TZUL*, an Indio from Guatemala who was sentenced to jail by the occidentalized jury of *ladinos* because of a crime. The jury was not able to interpret the case in Julian Tzul’s own cultural context. Starting from the Spanish conquest, the Guatemaltecos were forced to submit to laws and forms of justice which are alien to the *Weltanschauung* of the indigenous Indian population, which represents the majority until today. Therefore, the indio Julian TZUL became victim to these laws. He had killed a *brujo*, brought to this action by his *Weltanschauung*, because he surprised the man ejecting maledictions against himself and his children, having previously put to death his wife in the same way. The jury did not judge because of self-defence (which would have been a European legal concept, globalized by penal law) in case of this Indio surprising his superior enemy who was invoking the demons and wishing destruction to him. Despair in that moment facilitated the action of Julian Tzul. This judgement shows the impossibility to do justice to such persons within the (monocultural) legal system of the type of Spanish law, who are living in the cultural climate of Quiché, and having a system of values belonging to the pre-colonial epoch.<sup>6</sup>

From this description questions of two types result:

- Firstly, concerning cases in our society or societies which are structurally similar: what cases exist, and how are they handled? These are empirical questions, namely questions of social sciences and of theory and/or practice of law.
- Second: what can philosophy contribute to a clarification of such cases? These are methodological and ethical questions.

It is useful to be informed about the first kind of questions as precisely as possible, but this is not sufficient to answer the second kind of questions. However, reflections of sociologists and political scientists are very helpful in this respect. Concerning the problems of the second kind of questions, Herra's argument can be rendered more clearly:

- "There is a uniform ("monocultural") legal system." The question following from such a description would be: Is there an alternative to the regulation of a society by a uniform legal system, valid for all of its members? What could a legal system look like, which would not be monocultural?

Historically, of course, most of the legal systems we know about signed different weight to different testimonies; e.g. the sworn statement of a noble outweighed the farmer's, that of a muslim overrode the non-muslim's, a man's word was to be believed more than a woman's, and so forth. We may say that in many respects in traditional legal systems a sort of regulated inequality was the rule. Modern legal systems, after the period of the Enlightenment, put an end to that, at least in theory. Positive knowledge (e.g. of an eye-witness or from a fingerprint) was supposed to outweigh everything else.

So the question rather is: is there an alternative to a uniform legal system in *modern* societies? Let us set apart the reality of "Ghetto"-law in some cases – it certainly cannot be applied generally. Then there seems to be no alternative, except that we have to look for possibilities like the ones shown in cases reported from some countries where legal procedures are practiced differently with respect to members of different ethnic groups: there it is not open for interpretation that a certain deed is a crime, nor is it doubted that crimes have to be sanctioned. But the final task of legal procedures may be formulated differently, and therefore different ways of "doing justice" may be searched for.

- "There are legally relevant world-views which can be different up to contrariety, i.e. it is possible that certain actions for one individual not only are permitted, but ought to be performed, which are prohibited for other individuals." Therefore we have to ask: Is it thinkable that in a given uniform legal system an action/a kind of behavior is at the same time prescribed or permitted *and* forbidden? What is the role of convictions relative to the legal judging of the actions of other human beings? Which opinions have developed in philosophy of law, and how are these argued for?

What is "natural" or "real" to Julian Tzul is "superstition" to his judges. There are cases logically equivalent to this one in many of our societies, and it does not really make a difference whether the people to be judged represent the majority or not.

At least it should be made as clear as possible to the judge or the jury what the relevant views are of a person like Julian Tzul. Experts of his/her world-view ought to be heard (there is an example in the Odera Oruka's book on Sage Philosophy, referred to in the article of Bekele Gutema).

- "Under such conditions it is impossible to do justice to every member of the society." Again, we have to ask: Is there a concept of justice which is culturally independent? Which concept of justice is more adequate to multicultural societies than other concepts?

These questions concern the possibility of a universal ethics. True universal ethics has to argue for values and norms which are intelligible in a transcultural way. Therefore, no single national, religious, or cultural tradition can be considered as being the definite authority as long as it has not convinced people from different traditions, something that is expected to be the normal case in the sciences, but is not in ethical, moral, or juridical matters.

Before we ask about the possibility of a universal ethics, we ought to ask why it is needed at all. There are practical reasons, but above all there is a theoretical reason for its necessity.

If an argument does not intend to be universally valid, it is not a philosophical argument at all. However, there are different cultures in the field of philosophy as well as in other fields. During the process of civilization in the past centuries these traditions usually have

not considered each other as being equally valuable. Their respective convincing force has not really been tested. Therefore, the question is pending, whether one or the other philosophically relevant cultural tradition has more or less to say on a global scale.

In this situation it is rightly said that past generations of philosophers was not sufficiently informed about differing ways of thinking in other cultures. Maybe they did not have the means, nor feel the necessity. It is a striking fact, for example, that ancient Chinese, Indian, and Japanese texts concerning concepts of human rights have not been collected, translated or commented upon in any Western language to this day. Such ignorance has to be overcome. But it is not only comparative information that is needed. Information about philosophy in different cultures may meet mere exotic interest. Such knowledge is a necessary but not sufficient precondition to serious dialogues or rather polylogues.

A universal ethics is possible under two presuppositions: that human reason is universal and that there are values and norms which can be made intelligible by reason itself. If we deny one or the other of these presuppositions, we may as well forget about a universal ethics.

Are these presuppositions open to doubt? The least that one can say in this respect is: if we negate the first of these presuppositions, then the idea and project of philosophy will be a mere illusion. There would be but one thinkable solution in such a case: to distinguish between philosophically competent and incompetent groups of human beings – and that would mean racism, sexism, or culturalism on an epistemological level.

If we do not negate the first of the said presuppositions, we still can doubt the second, holding that neither norms nor values can be argued for by pure reason. The impossibility of philosophical proofs of norms and values, therefore of ethics and aesthetics, has been stated repeatedly. However, in this question lays a great chance of intercultural philosophy, since we do not really know whether these disciplines are possible at all, as long as we have not confronted all known approaches in an open polylogue.

### The concept of a polylogue

What are the tasks and the means of philosophy with respect to the reality of different cultures?

The relevance of cultural traditions for the present and the future has to be analysed. The first step will be to reconstruct different traditions of thought in a comprehensive and differentiated way. In that field, contemporary African and Latin American philosophers did pioneering work. However, if their work is not limited to providing better self-understanding, but must lead to better understanding between persons of different cultural coinage, new categories and concepts must be elaborated. This will be a continuation of the project of European Enlightenment with different means, not by relying on a unique method of science, but by creating a *polylogue* of traditions.

We have to consider the preconditions and the limitations, as well as expected results of such a polylogue. Different degrees and forms of the influence of one or more traditions upon other traditions have to be distinguished. For the purpose of an illustration, let us take the case of, say, four relevant traditions: A, B, C, D. Between all of these traditions there might be unilateral ( $\rightarrow$ ) or bilateral ( $\leftrightarrow$ ) influences. Under these conditions we can formally distinguish the following models:

(1) Unilateral centristic influence:

$$A \rightarrow B \text{ and } A \rightarrow C \text{ and } A \rightarrow D$$

In this case, it is logically possible (but not expected in real life) that there are no dialogues (and of course there is no polylogue) between A, B, C, and D. Every tradition with the exception of A is considered to be totally irrelevant, i.e. that B, C, and D have to be changed and eliminated by some means, in order to be finally overcome. The task is the extension of A and the elimination of B, C, and D. The idea behind that concept is expressed in terms like “civilisation”, “westernisation”, “cultural imperialism”, or “Euro-centrism”. It should be noted that in this model B, C, and D are *ignoring* each other. It is not at all expected in a given discussion that there will be unanimous agreement about what “A, B, C, D” means, nor about what traditions are relevant. These are questions of historical knowledge and interpretation. However, here I only want to consider the formal side of the question.

(2) Unilateral and transitive influence:

$$A \rightarrow B \text{ and } A \rightarrow C \text{ and } A \rightarrow D \text{ and } B \rightarrow C$$

In this stage, no dialogues are necessary, although by the double sided influence of C (by A and by B) com-

parative descriptions between A and B become possible. For the tradition A in this case every other tradition remains barbarian; B ignores D, C also ignores D. But B imitates A and therefore “civilizes” C with concepts partly derived from A.

(3) Partially bilateral influence: the stage of dialogues:

There are many logically possible stages from

$$A \leftrightarrow B \text{ and } A \rightarrow C \text{ and } A \rightarrow D$$

via

$$A \leftrightarrow B \text{ and } A \rightarrow C \text{ and } A \rightarrow D \text{ and } B \rightarrow C$$

up to

$$A \leftrightarrow B \text{ and } A \leftrightarrow C \text{ and } B \leftrightarrow C \text{ and } B \leftrightarrow D \text{ and } C \leftrightarrow D \text{ and } A \rightarrow D$$

Between each of these models several stages can be distinguished. We can skip listing all of them. Partly bilateral influences are processes of selective acculturation. For tradition A, some other traditions are not “barbarian”, i.e. no longer totally irrelevant, but rather *exotic*. The same holds for B, C, and D in an increasing manner, but mutual influence is never complete. The stage symbolized in the last line represents a polylogue between all relevant traditions with the partial exclusion of D. In that situation, comparative philosophy is firmly established.

(4) Complete bilateral influence: the stage of polylogues:

$$A \leftrightarrow B \text{ and } A \leftrightarrow C \text{ and } A \leftrightarrow D \text{ and } B \leftrightarrow C \text{ and } B \leftrightarrow D \text{ and } C \leftrightarrow D$$

For every tradition, any difference is exotic: the consequent form of a polylogue, and of intercultural philosophy is achieved.

We have to ask whether philosophy is possible under the conditions of a polylogue. The question can perhaps be answered by analysing processes from the (European) history of ideas, something I do not want to do here.

We can resume the program of philosophy in an intercultural orientation in two points. Firstly, there has to be created a fresh view on the history of philosophy, and secondly, there is a need for a polylogue in every systematic question of philosophy.

Is there a third way, a real alternative to Eurocentrism – or any other form of centrism – and the separatism

of ethnophilosophy? I think there is such an alternative in a procedure, which is no longer merely comparative or “dia-logical”, but rather “polylogical”. Questions of philosophy – questions concerning the fundamental structures of reality, the knowledgeability, the validity of norms – have to be discussed in such a way that a solution is not propagated unless a polylogue between as many traditions as possible has taken place. This presupposes the relativity of concepts and methods, and it implies a non-centristic view to the history of human thinking.

At the very beginning there can be formulated a negative rule: *never accept a philosophical thesis from authors of a single cultural tradition to be well founded.*

This rule can be formulated in a positive way too: *Wherever possible, look for transcultural, “overlapping” (Ram A. Mall) philosophical concepts, since it is probable that well-founded ideas have developed in more than one cultural tradition.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Doubleday 1994, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> Georgehe Purdea: *Bekreuzige dich mit der Zunge und geh weiter*. Wien: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik 1992. Quotations translated by FW.

<sup>3</sup> “Das immerwährende Exil, das ich wählte, war die einzige Authentizität, die ich mir erringen konnte; das Jude-sein verlegte mir alle anderen Auswege.” quoted from: Jean Améry: *Mein Judentum*, Hg. von Hans Jürgen Schultz, nach einer Sendereihe des Süddeutschen Rundfunks, Kreuz Verlag 1978, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyclopädie für die gebildeten Stände. Conversations-Lexikon*. Leipzig: Brockhaus vol. XIV, 1847, p. 352.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Sontag: *On Photography*. New York: Dell 1977, p. 9

<sup>6</sup> Cf.: Herra, Rafael Angel: “Kritik der Globalphilosophie”. in: Wimmer, Franz Martin (Hg.): *Vier Fragen zur Philosophie in Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika*. Wien: Passagen Verlag (1988) pp. 13–34, quoted from: p. 15.

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