

On the Art of Intercultural Dialogue.

Some Forms, Conditions and Structures

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Abstract

This essay begins with the claim that *intercultural dialogue* is art rather than a science or technique and it attempts to point out what it takes to learn the art of intercultural dialogue. In **PART ONE** some basic forms of intercultural dialogue are presented which correlate to some *basic forms of human life*, such as family, politics, economy, science, art and religion. Also a few common traits about how *intercultural dialogue* is practised today are specified. **PART TWO** is pointing out that *cultural pluralism* is not merely a political ideology, but rather a realistic political attitude towards the social realities in all cultures. Cultural pluralism means to accept that a certain variety of different forms of life is existing already within every culture, country or nation. Further it is argued that any society whether it is governed by a modern democracy or by a more traditional political system, such as a monarchy, needs some *ethical, legal and political orientation* in order to guarantee civil liberties, but also to limit civil, economic and political freedom. A *common normative orientation* being based on ethical ideals, principles, norms and values can only be established by philosophy and jurisprudence and neither by science nor by religion and neither by democracy nor by economy alone. Finally, **PART THREE** presents and discusses shortly a few reflections about three *philosophical models of dialogue* by Buber, Jaspers and Gadamer which are relevant to intercultural dialogue, to interreligious dialogue and last, but not least to philosophical dialogue.

Biographical Note

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Dialogue among civilizations and cultures like many other forms of intercultural interaction, cooperation and conflict between the economic, political and cultural activities of nations and peoples is ultimately based on the personal abilities of individual human beings who encounter each other in a variety of roles, positions and functions. However, just as much as the personal abilities of individuals matter, such as e.g. communicative and linguistic abilities, cultural knowledge and psychological understanding, ethical attitudes and spiritual insights, the various natural surroundings, the social settings, the psychological atmospheres and the mental contexts are at least equally important for the success in *the art of intercultural dialogue*. For this reason *theoretical knowledge* (knowing-that) about the fundamental structures and conditions allowing intercultural dialogue to take place and to be performed successfully matter just as much as the *practical knowledge* (knowing-how) of the participants about how to communicate with partners from other nations and cultures. But to speak of intercultural dialogue as an *art* rather than a *science* or a *technique* means to say that it is essentially based on some *non-propositional* or *practical knowledge* which cannot be taught and communicated by words alone.¹ Rather it needs to be learned in practice in at least three ways: (a.) by *trial and error*, i.e. by trying to practice intercultural dialogue, by making mistakes and improving upon them; (b.) by *imitation*, i.e. by watching and imitating some models of intercultural communication, and finally (c.) by *reflection*, i.e. by thinking about the difficulties in practice and by improving through constructive (self-) criticism.

There are many ways of learning *the art of dialogue*, but learning it in practice is essential. Even more so when someone has to learn the art of *intercultural dialogue*. The reason is quite simple: most human beings pick up some language at the earliest stage in their childhood. In English we speak about “natural speakers” who have learned their “mother tongue”. These English expressions give us a hint: for human beings it is quite “natural” or at least common to learn to speak some language and to communicate within it with one’s neighbours. Nevertheless it is quite

“unnatural” and not at all common for most people in many countries to learn a second, a third, or even a fourth language and to communicate with people from other nations, countries and cultures in their own languages. And it is even more uncommon and even somewhat artificial to speak a third language, a *lingua franca*, like Latin, French or English, in order to communicate with each other when two speakers of different mother tongues meet. As human beings we all had to make some efforts to learn a second or third language. For many, if not even most people in this world of ours however learning another language is a social skill of such a high level that it is by far out of their reach and by far less important than other social skills which help them to survive, i.e. to overcome poverty and to make a living. When practising and reflecting intercultural dialogue it is necessary not to forget the natural order of basic human needs. After all they are no minor source of conflict between nations, cultures and peoples.²

As a philosopher I would like to reflect the art of intercultural dialogue from a philosophical point of view. To reflect it from such a point of view means to be aware of the various aspects, fundamental conditions and basic structures of intercultural dialogue. Compared to other fields of studies it is the rich complexity of the phenomena which matters to the philosopher. Therefore, what is a philosopher who is not in some cases like Aristotle, a bit of a cosmologist, a physicist or a biologist and in other cases, like Plato, a bit of a sociologist, a psychologist and a linguist and still in other cases, like Socrates, a bit of a self-searcher, a moralist and a psychotherapist? Since my topic is *intercultural dialogue*, I will emulate all of them and reflect on the natural, sociological, psychological and linguistic aspects, conditions and structures of intercultural dialogue.

1. Some forms of intercultural dialogue

Intercultural dialogue like any other form of intercultural interaction, conflict and cooperation is basically performed by individual people who belong as citizens to some nation or country and who were raised as human beings in some culture or civilization. Whenever individuals encounter each other in some place or landscape, they rely on some specific conditions of climate and

weather just as much as on some social, economic and political conditions. While the awareness of the natural and social setting plays an important role to the *practitioners*, i.e. disciples and masters of the art of intercultural dialogue it seems that it is often neglected by many *intellectuals* who theorize on the philosophical implications of intercultural dialogue. Sometimes it seems as if many intellectuals don't want to talk about such "minor issues" such as weather or climate, time and place of the dialogue. But these are no minor issues, as one might think.

Plato at least, as one of the greatest models of European philosophy, always cared about the natural, social and historical conditions of the dialogue when illustrating where, when and how his beloved teacher Socrates met with his disciples and dialogue partners. Especially at the beginning of every dialogue Plato carefully describes the social and political situation, the outer appearance, the age and profession of the main participants and even their familiar affiliations, almost as if we were reading a drama. But also during the dialogue Plato continues to portrait carefully the personalities and characters of the main figures of the dialogical and dramatic encounter between Socrates and the other participants. Learning from Plato as a great poetic writer of philosophical dialogues it might not be inadequate to be aware of the fact that the philosophical topics, claims and arguments, the dialectical game of questions and answers are embedded in a maieutic and sometimes even therapeutic investigation into the ethical and spiritual quality of the soul of a person. Therefore, even if the various aspects, structures and conditions of intercultural dialogue belong to the undivided totality of Being, we need to distinguish carefully between all the different phenomena.³

Platos great dialogues have the potential to remind us of the importance of roles, positions and functions individual human beings are bound up with when they are engaged in intercultural dialogue. Seldom and almost never it is the case that human beings are *mere individuals* so to speak in complete solitude and bare of any roles, positions and functions. After all human beings are not only citizens of some country or nation and raised within some culture or religion, they are professionals and colleagues, they belong to some age and gender, they are children of their parents, in many cases they are brothers or sisters, sometimes they are fathers or mothers, and

finally they are relatives to the former or following generation.

Generativity, despite of being such a common state of affairs in human life, which all cultures and religions share, remains to be one of the main blind spots of philosophical and political *liberalism* from John Stuart Mill until John Rawls. Other than Aristotelians and Thomists, Hegelians and Marxists most philosophers and intellectuals in the tradition of liberalism still tend to draw a rather *individualist image of man* as if he were some lonely, completely independent and perfectly autonomous individual without having relatives, friends and colleagues and without living within a network of social relations in some natural and social setting. It is by no means just an accident that most of their philosophical opponents, the *communitarians* come from, belong to and rely on some religious tradition whether it is jewish, christian or islamic. Although communitarians have gained more attention within contemporary European and American philosophy recently, generativity like life, birth and death, childhood and family, parenting and education still are rather neglected topics for most philosophers in the liberal tradition. Last, but not least, the liberal ideal of the lonely, independent and autonomous individual has led to many problems especially within medical ethics, and also within other areas of applied ethics.⁴

Despite of these one-sided tendencies we have to speak of individual persons when reflecting intercultural dialogue. First of all, ordinary people from different cultures may get in touch with each other in a *private setting*, such as a family or circle of friends. They may contact each other as guests, friends or relatives rather than as citizens or representatives of a community or a town, a region or a country. Or they may visit each other as tourists on a vacation trip, in a partnership of two cities or in a student exchange program. In any of these various ways of intercultural dialogue the natural surroundings, the psycho-social settings and the mental contexts matter to the possibility and success of the intercultural dialogue. Do they meet in a private place, such as in someone's home, in a hotel or in a sporting club? Do they come together in a meeting room of some religion that belongs to a temple, a synagoge, a church or a mosque? Or do they meet in a public place, such as in a garden, a street or a market? The natural surrounding, the social setting and the mental context might be more or less contributive to some intercultural event depending

on the *natural conditions*, such as weather, climate and time of the day or on the *social conditions*, such as privacy, ownership and responsibility or on the *psychological conditions*, such as habits, preferences and customs or on the *spiritual conditions*, such as the aesthetic qualities, the ethical claims or the religious meanings of the location. Once we become aware of all the various aspects and conditions of intercultural dialogue we may be astonished to discover the whole complexity of the rich and fascinating universe of intercultural dialogue.

Secondly, while in all of these rather playful and leisure intercultural contacts it is quite obvious that they often are largely free from the pressing basic needs and life-serving human interests of their participants, this is definitely not the case when we have a short look at another kind of intercultural dialogue. As soon as the *official political representatives* of the governments, parliaments or other political institutions of some country or nation meet with those of another country or nation, they are not at all free to speak as mere citizens or private persons like tourists on a vacation trip. After all they represent the basic needs and life-serving *economic, political and cultural interests* of the people of their countries or nations.

Nevertheless in the second half of the 20th century and after the cultural catastrophe of World War II it has become quite common in international diplomacy among many countries – as far as I know at least in the Western hemisphere - to rely on rather *personal ties* and *individual friendships* rather than on official regulation and formal etiquette. The European Union and almost 50 years of peace within its members is among other factors also the result of personal ties between many presidents, chancellors and prime ministers. The *political friendship* between De Gaulle and Adenauer, between Schmidt and Giscard D'Estaigne and between Kohl and Mitterrand are well known examples of how personal and informal ties played an important role in international diplomacy and intercultural cooperation. Even more so in times of crises when a whole regime is tumbling down and about to be replaced by another, as it was the case when the former German chancellor Helmut Kohl and the former President of the Soviet Union Michail Gorbatschow had to find an agreement on the reunion of East and West Germany. Since personal ties between official representatives matter in politics today citizens in their homes, journalists in

the media and employers in their businesses watch very carefully what is going on when political representatives meet, build up personal ties and rely on such private connections when making future plans, joint ventures and political contracts.

Thirdly, when *salesmen and managers* meet for the sake of international trade negotiations and business partnerships they do not have to represent primarily their countries or nations, but rather their companies and employers. Unlike official political representatives salesmen and managers have always been less formal and more pragmatic when dealing with their partners from other countries and cultures. Not having to represent a nation or country with the basic needs and life-serving human interests of the people, but rather the special *economic interests* of the company and its employers has always given them more freedom to leave official formalities behind and act more like a private person, such as e.g. a father who has to take care of his family.

Ever since the pre-modern democracies in ancient Greece, sound economic foundations and successful trade relations have not only been the necessary basis for the common wealth of the *polis* they have also served in many ways as bridges to other countries and cultures. Great interest in science and technology, promising economic growth and vivid trade relations with other countries and its peoples have always been an important factor for the wealth of cities, countries and nations. Although they have contributed to intercultural exchange and thereby also to peace and freedom, they cannot guarantee them by themselves. In the long run peace and freedom depend mainly on *justice* as the main virtue of any political state of affairs whatever political system or form of government we have to deal with. Mainly being based on utilitarian rather than on aesthetic, ethical and religious values *economic interests* just as much as scientific knowledge and technological know-how cannot only be used in a *constructive* manner serving wealth and peace, freedom and justice, law and order, but also in a *destructive* manner leading to poverty and war, tyranny and injustice, anarchy and hegemony among nations, regimes and peoples.

Finally, there are even other forms of intercultural dialogue and encounter between people of different cultures than these three forms: (1.) *ordinary people* in the private setting of family or

friendship, (2.) *political representatives* in a more or less official setting and (3.) *salesmen and managers* of production or business companies. Another important form of intercultural dialogue is practiced by (4.) *scientists* who often conceive of themselves as belonging to a worldwide transcultural (rather than intercultural) scientific community who do research, theorize and teach according to similar methods and standards of quality and who communicate on the basis of a commonly accepted *status quo* of scientific knowledge. Transcultural (rather than intercultural) are also the principles and methods of formal logic and mathematics which are presupposed by the common scientific practice and knowledge. Again another form of intercultural dialogue is performed by (5.) *artists and writers* who in many cases tend to be outsiders and non-conformists within their own cultures and who sometimes even get in conflict with the hereditary religion and political regime. This is why they often need to rely on support from their friends and admirers in other countries. Finally, a last form of intercultural dialogue is executed by (6.) *religious leaders and believers* who usually conform to the ethical code and spiritual teaching of their religion, but often are non-conformist with respect to the “worldly affairs” of politics and economics. Although there have been some noteworthy paradigms of peaceful philosophical dialogue between religions and confessions in former times, like Akbar, Kabir, Lullus, Cusanus and Lessing ecumenical efforts of interreligious and interconfessional dialogue and cooperation are a rather recent, but promising invention of the 20th century. Although humanity still has a long way to go before reaching a state of just and peaceful coexistence between religions and confessions which is not dominated by fear and hate, resentment and prejudice.

2. Cultural pluralism and the necessity of practical orientation

As soon as we realize that there are several forms of intercultural dialogue relating to different *forms of life* we also realize the adequacy of what is commonly called *cultural pluralism*. However, cultural pluralism, unlike liberalism or totalitarianism, is not merely a political ideology, but rather a realistic outlook on the social realities in almost all cultures. Cultural pluralism means to accept the fact that some plurality of various forms of life is a social reality within any culture, country or nation. Even when we focus on the most difficult forms of *cultural*

diversity, i.e. on ethnic and religious diversity, some measure of cultural diversity belongs to the common social facts in all cultures. But in order to reason realistically about the social facts of cultural diversity we have to accept at least three general statements about these matters: (1.) Human nature and the social and cultural state of human affairs are such that cultural diversity is often leading to serious conflicts and various forms of aggression. (2.) In any culture, country or nation the main problems about cultural plurality, such as xenophobia and prejudice, immigration and unemployment, racism and chauvinism, nationalism and fundamentalism, fanaticism and terrorism are a matter of intelligent political government and control. (3.) In the long run however, no intelligent political government and control of public behavior can be successful if a majority of people have no substantial educational and cultural opportunities which helps them (a.) to overcome prejudice and ignorance by acquiring the knowledge needed to deal with people from other cultures, (b.) to tame their emotions of fear, hate and resentment by means of music, dance, cuisine and others arts, and (c.) to engage in philosophical ideas and spiritual practices leading to tolerance, solidarity and empathy.

One of the main advocates of the modern democracy against the dangers of totalitarianism in the 20th century, the remarkable philosopher of science, Sir Karl Popper, used the term “open society” in order to defend cultural pluralism. According to Popper there are at least three cultural conditions which are contributive to the *open society* in the modern world: (1.) they rely on *the free market economy* which is not only opposed to the socialist bureaucratic economy, but also to any religious organisation of economy, (2.) they maintain *international trade relations*, rather than isolate themselves through customary trade restrictions, and finally (3.) they further *progress in science and technology* which do not only serve basic human needs and life-serving purposes, but also enhance rational and critical discussion by challenging the self-defensive strategies of totalitarian ideologies.⁵

However, as much as Popper was right about these contributions to *cultural pluralism* or to *the open society* in the modern world, I think that he was wrong about *the ethical and legal foundations* of modern democracies. In as much as I am willing to defend the legal state, the

constitutional law and the parliamentary system of modern democracies I am convinced that any open society and modern democracy needs ethical and legal ideals, principles, norms and values which go by far beyond the merely utilitarian needs and pragmatic goals embodied in economic, scientific and technological endeavours. These ethical and legal ideals, principles, norms and values however can neither be generated by free markets and international trade relations nor by any progress in science and technology alone. Just to the opposite: the free market economy and the international trade relations as well as current and future progress in science and technology, as e.g. in human genetics and medicine, sometimes even appear to be serious dangers to the established humanitarian normativity of ethical and legal ideals and principles, norms and values.⁶

Like any other society modern democracies are in need of normative practical orientation in order to guarantee freedom and justice, inner and outer peace: (1.) *ethical orientation* within a vital culture of moral norms and ethical values, (2.) *legal orientation* through some higher constitutional ideals and some essential principles of law which are as such not an object of discussion or voting processes, and (3.) *political orientation* within a fair political system of mutual control of power and government which is (a.) peaceful, (b.) rational, (c.) debateable, (d.) corrigible, and (e.) exchangeable. Without such ethical, legal and political orientation there are no acceptable limits to individual freedom – neither to the economic freedom of the market nor to the civil liberties of the citizens. Economic freedom and civil liberties do not only have to be guaranteed by the constitution and the law system, they also have to be limited by the legal and political institutions themselves.

While Poppers *critical rationalism* is right about his defense of the open society he fails with respect to the necessary ethical, legal and political orientation through normative and evaluative insights. Both of his merely instrumentalist substitutes for normative and evaluative insights, i.e. “negative utilitarianism” and “social piecemeal engineering” are not at all sufficient. Without any substantial conception of ethical and legal orientation the democratic politics of the open society has to fail. It is bound to end up in a labyrinth of merely pragmatist guidelines, instrumentalist

goals and utilitarian values. Moreover, under the social and psychological conditions of human life within the real world there is no prevention from ethical corruption. Merely being open is not enough for human societies. Modern democracies, like all human societies, need substantial ethical, legal and political orientation. Openness, economic freedom and civil liberties belong to the necessary conditions of the normative orientation of modern democracies, but they are not sufficient by themselves, as current debates about human genetic engineering show: Without the ethical principle of human dignity there is no reliable limitation to the genetic manipulation of man according to arbitrary utilitarian purposes.⁷

In fact, openness, economic freedom and civil liberties are not enough for *any* human society with *any* political system whatsoever. Any human society needs some ethical orientation and legal regulation simply because human beings are not bound by natural instinct like animals. More precisely, any human society needs to be well governed by legal institutions and well oriented by the moral sense and sensibility of the people. And although many if not most of the ethical orientations and legal regulations may be also an object of discussion by legal experts, politicians and citizens, even in a modern democracy and in an open society there have to be certain limits to discussions and voting procedures with respect to the ethical foundations of the constitutional law. One might even say that especially modern democracies and open societies are dependent on ethical and legal ideas, principles, values and norms which are no possible object for voting procedures and which therefore have to be safeguarded to some sufficient extent by the legal state from the arbitrary will of the people, from the emotionally influenced and wavering opinions of the crowd, from the uninformed judgements of many laymen and from the prejudiced and unenlightened minds of many ordinary people. Just as much as the open society needs law and order, modern democracies need scientific studies about social facts, intelligent prognoses about future tendencies and philosophical insight into the ethical contents, values and norms of its constitutional law and its legal system.⁸

Modern democracy needs philosophy and contrary to the American neo-pragmatic philosopher Richard Rorty, who advocates *the priority of democracy* over philosophy I would like to advocate *the priority of philosophy* over democracy.⁹ After all, there are political systems other than

modern democracies. And even if someone is convinced that the modern democracy with a constitutional legal state is the best political system there is (at least for European and North American countries), he or she has to admit that there have been and still are nations with other political systems, e.g. like representative or constitutional monarchies which might be governed well and even wisely and which manage to contribute to the wealth of its people, just as much as to peace, freedom, justice and ecological endurance.

If someone does not accept the *priority of philosophy*, the love of wisdom, over his or her preference for democracy, a well functioning political system among others, (1.) he could not give a reasoned and justified judgement about the strenghts and weaknesses of (some specific) democracy, (2.) democracy would be something absolute and (3.) he or she would turn into a fundamentalist about democracy. It would amount to revering democracy absolutely like an object of religious faith rather than appreciating it adequately as a more or less well functioning political system. Even more so, *intercultural dialogue* between the adherents of *modern democracies* on the one hand and the adherents of *traditional* regimes, e.g. like representative or constitutional monarchies, would hardly be possible. The result would be fourfold: (1.) an *arrogant* or even *inimical attitude* towards any political system other than modern democracy, (2.) a tendency to accept a *cultural clash* between different political systems as unavoidable, (3.) a tendency to take *political conflicts* between both types of political systems as necessary and (4.) a tendency to accept that *war* is “the continuation of politics with other means” (Clausewitz) necessary in order to solve such political conflicts.

Fundamentalism about democracy which often is propagated to be the only true source of freedom and social justice suddenly turns out to be a serious hindrance to the *acceptance of the other* culture, country or nation. Without acceptance of the other as being substantially different in some regards, there is no viable road to peace, freedom, justice and ecological endurance. In order to allow for a viable coexistence of the unequal however one has to realize that one’s own position or system is not equal to the absolute.

To hold on to the primacy of *philosophy* however can be a substantial contribution to the solution of these problems which arise when citizens, intellectuals and politicians from modern democracies and those of more traditional political regimes engage in intercultural dialogue – whether they are based on the Jewish tradition, like the state of Israel, the Christian tradition, like the Principality of Liechtenstein, or the Islamic tradition, like the Kingdom of Jordan. Although these are important and difficult political affairs, *philosophy*, i.e. philosophical education at schools and universities as well as philosophical consulting of governments and other cultural institutions can be a way of helping to solve them in the long run. This is not an utopian vision if we remind ourselves that there is more philosophy among people in the broader sense of a human search for wisdom than there is philosophy in the narrower sense of academic instruction about philosophy and its history. Frankly, it does not take academic studies of philosophy to understand that all political systems and institutions are merely means in order to realize such higher ethical and political goals, like peace, freedom, justice and the promotion of (human) life on Earth. It would be rather narrow minded if one would not admit that all countries and nations have to find their own best way of realizing these respectable ethical and political goals on the basis of their own cultural and religious traditions. Their success however depends on good judgment.

3. Three Philosophical Models of Dialogue

Once we have realized the importance of *philosophy* for intercultural dialogue about the ethical, legal and political foundations of human societies we finally have to reflect the structure of philosophical dialogue itself. Since it is philosophy rather than any other basic form of life, such as family, economy, politics, science, arts and religion which is able to reflect the common ethical, legal and political foundations of human societies it is also up to philosophy to *mediate* between different ethical, legal and political systems. Therefore any success in the art of intercultural dialogue which is aiming at just and peaceful *coexistence* of cultures, countries or nations depends on an adequate, reasonable and thorough understanding of philosophical dialogue.

In the course of human life *dialogue* is prior to philosophy and there is no real understanding of philosophy without any understanding of dialogue (even it is only an inner dialogue with an imagined opponent).¹⁰ Although dialogue is prior to philosophy one needs to have some understanding of philosophy in order to reflect and understand dialogue and even more understanding of philosophy to reflect and understand *philosophical* dialogue. Reflecting and understanding dialogue is demanding some adequate conception of dialogue and any adequate conception of dialogue contains some model of the basic structure of dialogue.

There are several philosophical models of dialogue, but not all of them are adequate to intercultural and philosophical dialogue. Since intercultural dialogue is a reality and not just an illusion we don't have to discuss *the scepticist model* of the empiricist, naturalist, behaviorist and nominalist philosopher W.V.O. Quine. According to Quine human beings are nothing but stimulus-conditioned talking animals captured within their own languages. Human consciousness is nothing but an epiphenomenon of the brain and nervous system. The mind does not exist. Words and sentences do not have any meaning apart from the function of actual utterances and written sentences. Accordingly translation between languages is supposed to be impossible, because we cannot really ascertain the sameness of the meaning of words when comparing two sentences within different natural languages. (His books are translated into several languages nevertheless.)¹¹

Since intercultural and philosophical dialogue (and to some degree *any* dialogue) is essentially such that *prima facie* its participants neither share the same self-understanding nor the same *Weltanschauung* nor the same ethical, legal and political values nor the same religious convictions we have to question also various *dogmatist models* according to which all human beings despite of their different religions and confessions basically have the same self-understanding as a person, the same basic structure of *Weltanschauung* or even the same basic ethical values and norms. If this were true there hardly would be any real problem about intercultural and philosophical dialogue (or even any dialogue whatsoever). These philosophers are so consumed by their own conceptions and truth claims that they do not realize that there

other conceptions and different truth claims equally worthwhile to be considered. However all truth claims are claims. Claims can be right or wrong, justified or unjustified. Any dialogue is easy, boring and uninformative when both sides agree. On the contrary dialogue is difficult, exciting and instructive when both sides do not agree. Real philosophical dialogue starts when different truth claims are not compatible and it often seems that the fundamental problem of practicing philosophical dialogue is not the problem of other minds, but rather the problem of *other* minds.

How is it possible to incorporate *the otherness* of other minds into philosophy, into philosophical dialogue and into an adequate model of philosophical dialogue? There are models of dialogue which do not only accept the difference between *oneself* and *the other person*, but also the difference between one's *self-understanding* and the *self-understanding* of the other person. This is a minimal condition for any reasonable model of dialogue, whether it is applied to intercultural dialogue or not. This minimal condition is fulfilled by a first philosophical model of dialogue which has been developed by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's in his famous book "Das dialogische Prinzip".¹²

However, Martin Buber does not only presuppose a difference between the intentional reference towards any other person as a *Thou* and the intentional reference towards some object as an *It*, he is also assuming that both partners of dialogue are related to the absolute *Thou*, i.e. the personal God. Even if both dialogue partners may accept and rely on the *I-Thou*-distinction and even if they would also both accept other common ontological distinctions such as between mere things, animals and human beings they may differ with respect to their conception of the Absolute. While one partner might have a personal understanding of God, the other partner might have an impersonal understanding of God. And it is also possible that he or she might be agnostic or even atheist and therefore not accept even the possibility to refer to God except as some human idea, fiction or illusion. An agnostic or atheist however might be able to refer to Being as such or to the idea of the Good as the highest and most perfect idea. This is why one cannot generally presuppose that both partners in intercultural or philosophical dialogue agree on their intentional

reference to the same God as one and the same Absolute. Reference to (the personal) God is not always a common ground to rely on when entering intercultural, interreligious or philosophical dialogue. One simply has to accept the possibility of the *otherness* of the other.

For this reason Buber's model is all too simple and it seems to presuppose that the dialogue partners belong to the same religious community of believers in God or at least to the group of such people who share some faith in God and conceive of God as some personal Being. Since there is dialogue without such religious or metaphysical agreements it is not possible to take such a common belief or attitude to be a necessary condition of any intercultural dialogue or philosophical dialogue. Faith in (the personal) God cannot be an essential constituent of an adequate model of intercultural or philosophical dialogue.

Karl Jaspers who saw this problem about Buber's model of dialogue presented in Volume I of his main work *Philosophy* a more complicated second *model of existential communication* which does not rely on these questionable assumptions. Instead of the personal God to which both dialogue partners can rely he accepted the *radical difference* of the conceptions of the Absolute which both dialogue partners might have. He did not question that they do have some conception of the Absolute, but he accepted that existential communication or true philosophical dialogue has to leave it open whether or not two dialogue partners *can* agree upon the same or even only a similar conception of the Absolute. As a remarkable psychiatrist Jaspers was also aware of the problem to which degree we can truly understand *other forms of consciousness* and *otherwise structured human minds* which phenomenologically appear to be qualitatively so radically different such that empathy and ingenuity reach borders of imagination which cannot be completely overcome. In his daily work as a psychiatrist he was always confronted with this problem of the possibility and limits of understanding other human minds. This also led to his innovative psychological study about the philosophical structure of various types of views about oneself and the world.¹³

The problem about Buber's theological assumption within his model of dialogue can also be

extended to other basic ontological assumptions, such as about the fundamental categories of things, animals and human beings. An ontological naturalist or materialist e.g. would deny that there is a substantial ontological difference between animals and human beings. Philosophical dialogue in the realm of the philosophy of mind however has to continue also between the naturalist and the personalist, the materialist and the dualist. True dialogue is often leading to sometimes painful and at other times joyful moments of understanding the other, of discovering my own self and of discovering some of the limits of my own knowledge. Such is the philosophical path to wisdom.

With respect to intercultural and interreligious dialogue Jaspers realized that it is necessary to embrace a phenomenological *epoché* towards the symbols of my religion or confession and the religion and confession of the other. Unless the main symbols of my own religion cannot be considered as a *symbols among others*, i.e. as a *chiffre* of the Absolute, rather than as the one and only real *presence* of the Absolute, one cannot really tolerate the symbols of the other religion or confession as an equally respectable and worthy symbol of the Absolute. In such a case one can only *pretend* to enter into dialogue, because one is not able to engage in a certain distance towards one's own self. The spiritual and psychological possibility to take a certain distance towards one's own self including one's convictions, claims and values is necessary in order to be able to accept *the other person* with incompatible convictions, claims and values as an *equal partner* within existential communication or philosophical dialogue. Especially with respect to interreligious dialogue it is necessary to be able to accept that God is equally referred to in some way and to some degree in the different symbols, scriptures and teachings of other religions and confessions.

But how is it possible to engage in such an attitude about oneself and the other? This is a difficult question which cannot be sufficiently discussed here. Nevertheless a hint might be allowed: Love, reason, humour and philanthropic irony being the opposite attitudes of self-righteousness, irrationality, intolerance and fanaticism do help believers of all religions and confessions not to feel all too important and thereby to manage to be faithful without having "the one and only right

faith". According to Jaspers conception of *existential communication* no religion or confession can convincingly prove to have the one and only true symbol of God nor can they convincingly prove to have the one and only true scripture or teaching about God. Certainly, they can make such truth claims, but they remain to be claims. Truth however is transcending any such claims. Similar reflections also apply to the religious institutions and its representatives. Consequently no religion or confession can prove to have the one and only true faith in God. Faith as such is implicit at the bottom of all various forms of religious life and it is an attitude which manifests itself in the long run.

All of this is to be kept in mind when we consider the problem how intercultural dialogue between the citizens, intellectuals and politicians of modern democracies and the those of more traditional political regimes, like constitutional or representative monarchies is possible. It is not religions or confessions as such which cause difficulties within intercultural dialogue, but the very self-understanding and attitude which believers have towards their own forms of faith, symbols, convictions, values and claims, towards their scriptures, teachings, institutions, authorities and traditions.

As a psychiatrist and psychologist Jaspers was also aware that true existential communication and real philosophical dialogue is a rather rare event. In many cases people fail to be able to practice true empathetic understanding of the other *as the other* which presupposes a true acceptance of the other *as the other*. Failure of dialogue and miscommunication is a common human affair. Fundamentalism is primarily a psychological and spiritual phenomenon and only in the second place it is also a sociological and political phenomenon. This is the reason why (1.) religious fundamentalism as a form of misunderstood orthodoxy can occur in all religions whether jewish, christian, islamic, hindu, or other religions, why (2.) there also is ideological and political fundamentalism within non-religious belief-systems, and why (3.) philosophy as the love and search for wisdom and as a method to heal the dangerous and erroneous ways of the human mind can build bridges between modern democracies and more traditional forms of political government. Humanity needs to find many ways to build such bridges in the future.

The classical philologist and philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer has spent many years to reflect on these problems of human dialogue which have been considered before by Buber, Jaspers and other philosophers. Having been drawn to poetry rather than to science already as a young man Gadamer became a disciple of the influential and controversial philosopher Martin Heidegger. From Heidegger he learned to keep an eye on those irrational, affective and emotional aspects of individual human behavior, self-understanding and *Weltanschauung* which cannot easily be grasped in the rather cold and dissociated, objective and logical language of science, but rather in the warm and empathetic, subjective and sometimes even paradoxical language of poetry. Although poetry was his secret love Gadamer did not only reflect the problems of understanding and interpretation of poetry and literature. He also reflected the phenomena of understanding and interpretation of other texts, which matter to all people in modern and traditional societies, such as religious scriptures, theological treatises, philosophical books and legal codes. Having reflected all the various aspects of the understanding and interpretation of written documents for many years Gadamer developed in his main work *Wahrheit und Methode (Truth and Method)* a rather sophisticated philosophical outlook on *hermeneutics* as the art of understanding and interpretation as it is necessary for all the humanities. Even later he extended his interest to all the other phenomena in human life which are based on understanding and interpretation, such as having a good conversation, engaging in a mutually instructive philosophical dialogue or reaching at mutual comprehension in intercultural and interreligious dialogue.¹⁴

Whenever two dialogue partners meet it they do not share exactly the same self-understanding, conception of Man and *Weltanschauung*. There is always some disagreement even if there also are many agreements. Therefore real dialogue always implies some *controversy*. Any controversy however depends on being able to focus on controversial issues. In order to focus on controversial issues one has to be able to hold on to one's own truth claims as well as being able to be open for the incompatible truth claims of the other. Philosophical and scientific, intercultural and interreligious dialogue do not only presuppose the ability to engage playfully in *epoché* towards one's own convictions, truth claims and values in order to embrace, listen to and truly consider the

convictions, truth claims and values of the other. It also presupposes to be able to clearly determine, state and express ones own convictions, truth claims and values rather than to escape into a general relativism, subjectivism and scepticism. Simply giving up one's truth claims is not a viable solution either.¹⁵

On the other hand the strict orthodoxe and fundamentalist rejection of mysticism in Jewish, Christian and Islamic orthodoxy is no general solution either. Any adversary attitude towards mysticism is only an obvious example for the well known fact about the rich and complex history of religion that spiritual congeniality and theological opposition often run across the conventional borderlines of religions and confessions. In many cases Christian mystics feel closer to Chassidic or Sufi mystics than to the orthodoxe, lawful and self-righteous theologians of their own religion and *vice versa*. However many orthodoxe, lawful and self-righteous Jewish, Christian and Islamic theologians share a common reservation against mystics with their heart-felt love of God and their prospering love for their fellow human beings of whichever religion or confession.

As soon as both partners in any philosophical, intercultural or interreligious dialogue have not only intellectually understood what the necessary and productive psychological attitudes are, but are also able to realize them the question arises what happens about such convictions, truth claims and values where they cannot find and reach any agreement. Since the self-understanding and *Weltanschauung* of all human beings (even of rational scientists, enlightened philosophers, inspired prophets, enthusiastic mystics and self-knowing wise men) are always also based on some irrational, affective and emotional aspects of individual, contingent and historical human existence (like being born into and raised in some religious tradition, language and culture or country and nation) there is no single human being which can be *absolutely* and *universally* considered to be “the highest incarnation of God” (as Hindus think of Krishna), “the true and final prophet of God” (as muslims think of Mohammed), “the way, the truth and the life” (as Christians think of Jesus) or the greatest philosopher of “the history of the absolute spirit” (like Hegelians think of Hegel).

Such absolute and universal religious and philosophical convictions, truth claims and value statements have not only created many controversies without any possible final agreement, they have also led to religious prejudice, deep rooted hate towards the other, political suppression of dissidents, political hostility, cruel wars and even systematic murder of a whole people or religion like in the Shoah. Is it really a sign of *good sense* to expect that believers of all religions can, will and should hold onto such absolute and universal truth claims in the future? Is it really a word of *wisdom* if many of the religious leaders and theologians advise their adherents, spiritual teachers and laymen to hold onto such absolute and universal truth claims? Is it really a source of hope for a more promising future for peace among religions and confessions, cultures and nations to hold onto such absolute and universal religious truth claims?

I don't think so because I am convinced about the deeply personal and subjective character of true religious faith in God which can grow only within the free atmosphere of friendly love for the other which is based on mutual respect and understanding of each other before it can extend itself into solidarity and care. This is why authentic philosophical dialogue can make a very valuable contribution to peace because it can and will lead us in the long run to a more modest view about what we (as limited individuals and as limited human beings) know and can know objectively and what we do not know and cannot know objectively, but rather subjectively believe, assume, claim, suspect, fear or hope for. This is why we have to be able to distinguish our various personal attitudes and mental acts into those which have an objective intention and content from those which only have a subjective intention and content. They cannot be reduced to each other and it takes sense and sensibility, decent education and philosophical reflection to discern them.

Endnotes

¹ The meaning and the importance of the distinction between propositional and non-propositional knowledge has been pointed out by G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Harmondsworth 1978, but also by H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen 1960 and W. Wieland, *Platon und die Formen des Wissens*, Göttingen 1982. Of course non-propositional knowledge especially matters to all kinds of arts, practical competences and the capacity of *good judgment* - in the Aristotelian understanding of *phronesis* as well as in the Kantian understanding of *Urteilkraft*. Nevertheless it is a common prejudice to think that it is of minor importance in the exact sciences (logic, mathematics and physics) in the humanities and in philosophy. This prejudice is rooted in forgetting the habitual, emotional and aesthetic aspects of Aristotelian *phronesis* and Platonic *sophrosyne*.

² The old Roman saying *Primum vivere, deinde philosophare* (At first living, then philosophizing) reminds us of this natural order of basic human needs. Nevertheless, having one's basic needs satisfied does not prevent many people in many regions of the world from xenophobia, intolerance and aggression towards outsiders, minorities and strangers. In such cases it is rather a problem of their psychological and spiritual need for self-identity, integrity, belonging, acceptance and personal meaning of life through friendship, generativity, work and other productive activities.

³ Concerning Plato's artistic mastery of drawing a vivid portray of Socrates, his disciples and his adversaries, see H.-G. Gadamer, *Plato als Porträtist* (1988) in : H.-G. Gadamer, *Wege zu Plato*, Stuttgart: Reclam 2001.

⁴ The topic of generativity and family is rather neglected in the most prominent German reader about the American debate on communitarianism: A. Honneth (Ed.), *Kommunitarismus, Eine Debatte über die moralischen Grundlagen moderner Gesellschaften*, Frankfurt/New York: Campus 1995.

⁵ The term "open society" refers to Karl Poppers main critical work on the philosophical adversaries of democratic societies, such as K.R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. I and II, London, 1945.. The mentioned three claims about the contributive conditions are to be found in some of his more popular essays on social and political affairs, such as: K.R. Popper, *Auf der Suche nach einer besseren Welt. Vorträge und Aufsätze aus dreißig Jahren*, München: Piper 1984 and *Alles leben ist Problemlösen. Über Erkenntnis, Geschichte und Politik*, München: Piper 1994.

⁶ Josef Seifert has argued that there are still some positivistic assumptions in Poppers epistemology which lead to his rather irrationalist attitude and merely instrumentalist position concerning ethics and philosophy of law. With respect to practical philosophy Popper is still on Humean grounds and further away from Socrates, Kant and Aristotle than he thinks - although he refers to them as some of his witnesses when criticizing Plato, Hegel and Marx in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. It seems to me that Seiferts criticism of Poppers basic epistemological assumptions is mostly convincing. However this does not touch upon what contemporary philosophy of science owes to Popper concerning the ideal of scientific methodology and what philosophy of psychology owes to his defense of the metaphysics implied in the so-called mind-body-problem and in the problem of freedom of the will against the adherents of Carnap, Wittgenstein, Ryle and Quine. Cf. J.Seifert, *Objektivismus in der Wissenschaft und Grundlagen philosophischer Rationalität. Kritische Überlegungen zu Karl Poppers Wissenschafts-, Erkenntnis und Wahrheitstheorie*, in: N.Leser, J.Seifert, K.Plitzner, *Die Gedankenwelt Sir Karl Poppers. Kritischer Rationalismus im Dialog*, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Carl Winter 1991.

⁷ Cf. F. Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future. Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, New York Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2002, V.Gerhardt, *Der Mensch wird geboren. Kleine Apologie der Humanität*, München: Beck 2001; C.Geyer, *Biopolitik. Die Positionen*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 2001; J.Habermas,

Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur. Auf dem Weg zu einer liberalen Eugenik? Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 2001; O.Höffe, L.Honnfelder, J.Isensee, P.Kirchhof, Gentechnik und Menschenwürde. An den Grenzen von Ethik und Recht, Köln: DuMont 2002.

⁸ How philosophical insight into the ethical contents, values and norms of the constitutional law and its legal system can be achieved however is controversial among neo-kantian, phenomenological, contractual and discourse-oriented approaches within the philosophy of law. At any rate any of these approaches is more convincing than scepticism, subjectivism and relativism about the possibility of philosophical insight within the realm of ideals, principles, values and norms. An informative description and comparison is given by R.Zippelius, *Das Wesen des Rechts. Eine Einführung in die Rechtsphilosophie*, München: Beck1997.

⁹ Cf. R.Rorty, *The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy* (Der Vorrang der Demokratie vor der Philosophie) in: R.Rorty, *Solidarität oder Objektivität. Drei philosophische Essays*, Stuttgart: Reclam 1988.

¹⁰ Even *formal logic* as the most abstract field of philosophical reflection presupposing the principle of (the excluded) contradiction mirrors on the pragmatic level the basic structure of dialogue. Any proposition which is not compatible with its contradiction reflects the statement of a proponent and the negation of an opponent about some state of affairs.

¹¹ Quine's philosophical views are to be found mainly in his following books: W.V.O. Quine, *Word and Object*, New York/ London 1960; *ibid.*, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. New York 1969; *ibid.*, *The Roots of Reference*, La Salle 1974; *ibid.*, *Theories and Things*; Cambridge, Mass./London 1981.

¹² Buber's reflections on dialogue are to be found in M. Buber, *Das dialogische Prinzip* (1962), Gerlingen ⁶1992 which is a collection of several writings of Buber including „Ich and Du“. The English translation is titled "I and Thou". Not contained in this collection is his criticism of the philosophical anthropology of Max Scheler and Martin Heidegger in: *Das Problem des Menschen* (1942), Heidelberg ⁵1982 nor his reflections on some religious and mythological views of good and evil, *Bilder von Gut und Böse*, Heidelberg ⁴1986.

¹³ Jaspers has developed his ideas on existential communication at the first time in his main work K. Jaspers, *Philosophie*, Bd. 1, Berlin 1932; paperback edition: München/Zürich 1987. They occur also in his lectures *Vernunft und Existenz. Fünf Vorlesungen*, Groningen 1935; pb ed. München/Zürich 1987 and in his more popular introduction to philosophy: *Einführung in die Philosophie. Zwölf Radiovorträge*, Zürich 1950; pb ed. München 1953. His main work on psychiatric psychopathology is: *Allgemeine Psychopathologie. Ein Leitfaden für Studierende, Ärzte und Psychologen*, Berlin 1913; ninth edition Berlin/Heidelberg/New York 1973. His main work on philosophical psychology is: *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Berlin 1919; pb ed. München 1985.

¹⁴ Cf. H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen 1960.

¹⁵ Like M.Theunissen and other than R.Rorty and G.Vattimo I think that Gadamer is would also agree with Josef Seifert's claim in this volume that giving up one's truth claims or giving up one's search for the truth in all matters is not furthering intercultural, interreligious or philosophical dialogue. Cf. "Sein,

*das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache” Hommage an Hans-Georg Gadamer, Frankfurt a.M. 2001. A similar reading of Gadamer is presented by G.Reale, *Gadamer, ein großer Platoniker des 20. Jahrhunderts*; in: G.Figal (Hrsg.) *Begegnungen mit Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Stuttgart 2000.*