Intercultural Ethics and "Critical" Universalism

Giuseppe CACCIATORE
Department of Philosophy, Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II"
Via Porta di Massa 1, 80133 Napoli, Italy
cacciato@unina.it

Abstract. The aim of this article is the analysis of a new model of intercultural ethics. In this way I propose a "creative" and dynamic version of universalism, which can be used as a model for the construction of a pluralistic and intercultural philosophical perspective.
Keywords: universalism, imagination, interculturalism, ethics, common sense

The historical and philosophical emphasis, not less than the theoretical one, of the expression "intercultural ethics" is, as will be seen throughout this report, almost all related to the adjective. And this was precisely as a result of a very simple consideration, so as to seem banal, but no less real. The problems of ethics, nowadays, cannot be conceived and argued if they're not up to outside of a reality marked more and more by intercultural processes and dynamics. Those subjects that were (and, in many ways, still are) the classic areas of humanities – economics, sociology, politics, religion, anthropology, art, etc. – are now being decoded within the dominant character of the time: the confrontation between cultures, not anymore reallocated in the old pattern of philological-historical and socio-anthropological comparative, but in the open scenario presented by globalization and its internal and unresolved dialectic with the ever-increasing elements of regionalization and localization.

For this reason intercultural ethics, in my view, does not intend to present itself as a new and other ethic compared to the utilitarian ethics or to the analytical, normative, universalistic, contextualist, applied ethics, etc. It is, rather, the necessary and conscious realization that today the dimension of the human and the manifestations of its ethical behaviour are increasingly characterized by "being among cultures," by a situation marked, *prima facie*, by an inexorable process of "hybridisation." This process is visible not only from the mixing of cultures but also from the continuous mutual transmission (which has been configured and configures itself, unfortunately, as the imposition of hegemonic models of one or more cultures on the others) of symbols, myths, religions, lifestyles, and artistic and literary models.

Of course we are well aware that globalization is a complex phenomenon and, for this reason, to be properly understood it demands a number of different disciplinary approaches willing to interact and complement each other. No thought of interculturalism can ever be productive, or even conceptually coherent, if it is not able to combine philosophy and politics, history and arts, economics and sociology, psychology and anthropology.

The ethical point of view is just one of these approaches and, as it should be, it can only highlight a specific aspect of the phenomenon, although a very important one. But this is not so much to define in the abstract what intercultural ethics really is. To do this in a concrete way, we need to start from a basic question: are there specific ethical issues related to globalization? And if so, what are they? And, what are the philosophical categories useful to understand and deal with them?

This way we have, although indirectly, a first possible answer to the question of what is meant by the expression "intercultural ethics." One answer, however, which causes other pressing questions. For example, if ethics is a "second" philosophy, to quote Aristotle, and then programmatically turns to the human world, is it not already intercultural in itself? But can the Aristotelian paradigm (as well as the Kantian paradigm) be considered a paradigm of universal type, i.e. is it also applicable to other cultures and worlds that have had a completely different genesis than the world in which Western critical rationality was born? In other words, what should be paramount to define common grounds for ethical discussion and resolution of intercultural type: the research for a good life or the consistency to the universal principles of justice?

And can this limitation to the Western cultural sphere be overcome with the use of what is referred to by many as the most coherent model within intercultural philosophy, i.e. the dialogical/discursive or the narrative model, regarded as the most appropriate approach to create spaces for communication and reflection related to many different cultural contexts? And is this recourse enough to realize a consistent, if not definitive, crossing of the "monological" and unique paradigm of rationality? And then, perhaps the most challenging question: can we, in the current situation, rethink forms of "critical" and "humanizing" universalism – a universalism still capable of activating processes of integration and not of mere assimilation (even when it takes forms of benevolent paternalism)? And, in parallel, can we consider the procedures of individual nar-

rative of life stories and cultural styles to all be equally valid in terms of ethics?

However, we cannot give answers to such an accumulation of issues and it is not said that it is possible and desirable to offer definitive or decisive arguments. In this paper, in fact, we will only make an attempt to deepen some aspects of the intercultural debate (questions of gender, human rights, critical universalism), without any assertive or prescriptive pretention, but only with the intent to contribute to the elucidation of concepts and categories of intercultural ethics living with the present time and its problems.

Nowadays there are many versions of universalism, which can be investigated critically in terms of political philosophy. I'm limiting myself to using the classifications proposed by a philosopher and sociologist, Seyla Benhabib (philosopher and scientist of politics at Yale University), reasoning on whether universalism is ethnocentric, who analysed at least four different models: the first is based on the assumption that there would be a human nature as a foundational essence, which makes us human according to the old tradition of natural law; the second looks to universalism, especially from the cognitive point of view, as a "justificatory strategy," both in the negative sense of a claim to objectivity, that however fails to escape the contextualism of cultures and historical situations, and in the positive sense of a justification of validity of the normative content of human reason; the third model is perhaps the most classic, typical of the moral universalism, expressed by the principle of equality of race, religion, gender, culture, etc.; finally, the fourth is the model of juridical universalism, according to which we must identify those fundamental human rights (right to life, liberty, security, freedom of speech, of press, of religion, free trial, etc.) to be recognized and included in the largest possible number of juridical systems (Benhabib, 2002: 26-48).

This is not the time, however, to describe in detail Benhabib's articulated position, which focuses primarily on the connection between universalism and multicultural recognition. I just want to emphasize that it is a research that doesn't focus on the giusnaturalistic model or the conceptual-cognitive model of universalism anymore, but it focuses on the political one of "deliberative democracy," according to which the physical and moral well-being of a community depends on the outcome of a "procedure of free and reasoned deliberation among individuals considered as moral and political equals" (Benhabib, 2002: 105).

Let's talk now about the classification proposed by the sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein (also from Yale University). He talks about three possible versions of universalism. The first one is identified in the thesis of the "pan-European" democracy of human rights; the second is the "trivial" one of the superiority of the Western model of democracy over all others; and the third one is that which identifies itself with the truth and the absolute validity of the market. Even in Wallerstein the discourse has a socio-political nature rather than a philosophical one, but his position is much more radical than Benhabib's. In fact, he gathers much of his analysis around the belief that the modern world has been and still is crossed by an ideological dispute between Eurocentric universalism and what he paradoxically calls "universal universalism," with the caveat, however, that this does not mean endorsing the thesis of ultra-particularism, which ends up surrendering to European universalism (Wallerstein, 2006).

I think that both in philosophy (I am referring not only to my critical-historicistic perspective, but also to the ways in which we attempted a translation of Kantian ethics in the discourse of ethics and communication, or even to the models of political philosophies based on a reworking of universalism in a deliberative sense, and finally to narratives and dialogic ethics that act as a background to a number of multiculturalism and interculturalism theories) and in the juridical-political field (I am thinking in particular of the discussions on the procedural and normative contents of democracy, but above all of the great debates about human rights) the focus is increasingly a basic theme of our times: the fundability and the same plausibility of an "ethical universalism" which, while pursuing the search for a moral norm, wouldn't lose or hide the wealth of the "historical and cultural difference."

Here I will also try to develop, in parallel, an attempt of a conceptual and historiographical clarification of a theory of interculturalism and its ethics, no longer understood as an identification of an accomplished totality of principles and values overlapping the instances of individual life, but conceived as a continuous relation between different features and a tendency to a *shared universalism* able to produce ethical and juridical codes, whose characteristics are relationality and modifiability.

Universalism and contextualism are intertwined in the founding dialectic of any possible dialogue, which is between the non-occultable historicity of each culture (lan-

guage, religion, art, literature, lifestyles, etc.) and the perspective of the maximum generalization of freedom and autonomy of the human being. (Cacciatore, 2006: 17)

Even when we wish to remain at a maximum concentration level of logic and epistemology in rethinking the idea of universalism (assuming that the historical and philosophical perspective can ever be completely separate from each other), what is almost always at the centre is the problem of finding the mode (and the possibility itself) in which can be connected the normative content of reason (in any variation it may happen: realistic-ontological, analytical, hermeneutic, cognitivist, neurobiological) and the real and particular empirical phenomena, that occur not only in their bare givenness, but especially in the multiple representation that the historical, analogical methods, etymological and philological procedures, and political and civil structures of common living give of them.

For these reasons I believe that the framework of a critical-historicistic perspective within these general coordinates of the 20th century post-metaphysical philosophies makes it possible to reopen the discussion on universalism outside of all old and new forms of dogmatism and constraints, without making all this result in a schematic reversal, to the real dialectic of conflict the unpressuring cultural material of "social-historical differences."

I have said before that the philosophy of interculturalism, beyond its logical-cognitive, historical and anthropological profiles, is – in my interpretation – a possible new attempt to combine, in the contemporary situation, universalism and particularism. I do not deliberately use the term relativism, because it appears now to be subjected to more than an instrumental attempt of ideological and mass media overexposure that often distorts its logical-conceptual meaning and its story itself.

Here I'm just observing, drawing on one of my recent articles, that a proper philosophical discourse on relativism can only move from the assumption of the criticism of all the absolute foundations of knowledge and understanding. But it's always worth recalling, in accordance with elementary knowledge of history and equally elementary logical and conceptual devices, that:

Relativism does not always coincide with skepticism, since, in most cases, the assumption of a relativity principle does not entail the loss of centrality of the historical consciousness role and the role of the knower or, finally, the role of ethics in the

life of the individual. Some criticisms of relativism, except of course for those that use theological-dogmatic universalism or topics of radical rejection of historicity, are more than reasonable. So has been proposed by many a sensible distinction between relativism in a "strong" and relativism in a "weak" sense, between a totally contextualist relativism and critical of all ethics and epistemology of the absolute and a relativism that joins the particular context to the criterion of equivalence and comparability contexts (also on the ethical choices field). It is quite clear that only in the second version it is possible to activate a cross-cultural discourse (and therefore an intercultural practice), and thus bring out at its best the idea of the relationship as a useful and indispensable good for the survival of mankind. (Cacciatore, 2007: 17–18)

But let me resume the theme of intercultural philosophy to understand what profile the problem of universalism can take in it. From a moral point of view, and then inevitably political (in fact, from an intercultural point of view the two moments appear, they must appear closely related if they want to lose their abstraction and formalism), the universalist paradigm, especially if measured with the historical specificity of a particular identity, can only try to translate the relational procedure in the experience of a cultural communication based on the assumption of equality of starting points, namely on the belief that no hegemony of a single, exclusive cultural tradition should be exercised. Intercultural philosophy, therefore, presents itself even as a mode of thought that, while moving from the historically determined cultural uniqueness and therefore from a condition of vital possibility for the right to particular features, does not give up to a dimension of universality made plausible by the knowledge and communication of common elements and by all the opportunities of intercultural relations.

It may now become easier to understand how, in my point of view, we can recover at this level of intercultural ethics the liaison between universalism and particularism/contextualism. This implies – from the viewpoint of the purely ethical speech – a necessary contamination (we can also call it an eclectic mix and the thing, in my opinion, should not offend too much) between the conditions and contents of the utilitaristic and praxistic ethics (in the sense of accentuation and attention to the real needs and interests that motivate the peculiar act of singular and collective individualities, therefore also of states, cultures and communities) and those of universalist and transcendental ethics (in the sense of identification of principles that exhibit the greatest possible spectrum of consensus and *erga omnes* validity). But we need – in addition to this interaction between realistic-historicistic instance (or relational, which is not the

same thing as relativistic) and normative-universalistic instance – an additional and parallel interaction which, among other things, constitutes the condition of possibility of any intercultural ethics. I'm referring to the availability (we might say the pre-moral condition of each intercultural dynamics) of each culture, every culture, to the dialogue and understanding, based, as mentioned before, on the exchange of knowledge of each other's narratives of individual lives, traditions, languages and literary and artistic codes, religious guidance and necessary relationships among these understandings – dialoguing willingness and the intertwining (which is the opposite of the fight) of different and equal ethical visions of the world.

I think that at this point it could be argued that intercultural ethics (and of course the accent is on culture as an articulated and complex phenomenon, not only an intellectual but also a social, political, religious and economic one) is not configured as a research of a totality of values of a universalistic type that consequently relegates into the background the problems of recognition and contextual realization of individual life skills. Even in this regard it is about escaping – to make sense and give credibility to intercultural ethics – the dry and unproductive choice between universalism and contextualism, and this is possible as far as we think of (and also realize in practice) an idea of human life that has both the contextual and transformative aspects of moral individual and differential experiences and elements of a shared universalism always willing, however, to measure itself with the relationality of lifestyles (for example, traditions that endure over a long period or that suffer critical processes of transfiguration) and of ethical and juridical codes (which can also undergo modification processes, which however do not affect their value at that time recognized by all, and which arise, also, from social, economic and political changes).

We might, then, by proposing a way out not too far from the positions expressed by Habermas (2001) about the reformulation of the philosophical concept of human nature, not exclude the use of normative paradigms, provided they do not claim to build up a dialogue between different forms of life only in the light of legislative decrees (much less, of course, by waving the banner of "cultural guide"). The moral "postmetaphysical" philosophy (and therefore even intercultural ethics) must be measured from time to time with a critical reflection that does not have as its purpose identifying and bestowing absolute and irrevocable

principles, but that has only the task of developing moral "viewpoints" from which can be defined evaluations and judgments on actions that are deemed to be good for the greatest number of people. It is no longer about remaining passively consistent with a notion of "duty" as an a priori law formulated by an abstract moral community, but about moving from the real perspective of what can widen more and more the sphere of personal skills, both on the individual life stories level, and in terms of particular forms of social and cultural life.

It would be an unforgivable mistake (as sometimes happened in the past and, in some cases, still happens) to think of interculturalism in terms of a pacifistic cancellation of individual differences and characteristics of people and communities and as a result of a fatal yield to reductionism both of rational uniformities and of fanatical religious fundamentalisms.

This does not mean, again, that the cultural contents of intercultural ethics must give up to universally and formally valid juridical references or normative principles but only that these same principles and references must not lose their link with the context in which they were born and in terms of which they measure themselves. We would start from a wrong perspective if we thought about intercultural relations entirely divorced from the contexts and structures from which the interlocutors objectively move. It is from these contexts and structures that we need to build, and not from abstract universal paradigms or from moral catalogues given once and for all. It is inconceivable for an intercultural dialogue not to constantly take into account the fact that the principles and rules – after the critics to traditional metaphysics developed by the historicistic, hermeneutic, pragmatic-transcendental and analytical perspectives – do not derive from an abstract universalism anymore, but from a historical process of universalization that looks at the principles without deleting from them the complex of historical and cultural specificities that characterize them. In short, I believe we can support, with Putnam, the plausibility of a full *Ethics without Ontology* (Putnam, 2004), that is, an ethics that knows how to confront the moral dilemmas and practical issues on the basis of a correct balance between value and fact, between ethical judgment and the foundation of it, still discovered in the historical context that gave rise to the moral problem or the practical matter.

Reflecting on the philosophical sense that today can still be assigned to a universalistic perspective that maintains the required fixed point of the

anti-metaphysics and the criticism of each substantialistic ontology, I read a few theoretically very intense pages by Pietro Piovani. He returns, in his last book, on a topic that already in the late 1950s – in an unfairly forgotten book on the philosophy of law – was the leitmotif of his theoretical research: the connection between universalism and particularism (Piovani, 1958).[1] He returned to it after a historiographical journey of analyses and essays, placed as if they were "soundings" before landing on a secure philosophical side, the one of the great anti-substantialist and anti-cosmological revolution of the modern world.

With an always sure awareness of their own intuitions, the modern thought, in its fundamental characteristics, can, in its turn, be regarded as a criticism of any attempt to substantialization of the being and demonstration of its vanity. In fact, it is a conscious decosmologization, therefore a dismantling of that order in which the being, to ensure its stability, had sought an encompassing structure. (Piovani, 1980: 102)

It is the abolition of the universe, Piovani writes, reproposing a famous page by Koyré, the most notable effect of modern scientific revolution, which opens to a relative, open and undetermined concept of the universe: "Every discourse on the qualities of universalized universal lacks of interest because the universal proposes itself as universalizing and claims that the reasons, the conditions of its universalization are studied" (Piovani, 1980: 103).

In short, this is the core of Piovani's argument: the universe is "universalization," the functional vision of the world definitely takes the place of the material one. Thinking of the universal as universalizing means first not considering the particular as a mere and factual empirical fact but as a "problem," as an individuality to know and understand in its eminently anthropological, humanistic or, as Piovani puts it, humanological meaning.

After almost thirty years of reflection by Piovani, I came across an interesting book by a French philosopher and sinologist, François Jullien (2008a), who, among other topics, uses exactly the "universalizing" notion as an antidote to any "arrogant" universalism. Jullien analyses and diversifies the concepts of universal, common and uniform by highlighting, for example, the distance between what necessarily tends to draw from a transcendental "One" and what is rather reduced to the regularity of something that repeats itself mechanically; between what the singular individual has for its opposite and what instead produces the different as

its negation. Here there is no space to carry out a detailed analysis and discuss Jullien's assumptions. I'm limiting myself only to point out the interesting proposal of the identification of a third "categorical" level which goes beyond the logical reductionism of the concept of the universal and the economic-utilitaristic concept of the uniform.

This level is given by the concept of *common*, meaning what we participate in, in its original political meaning, but that may extend to all levels of community that characterize the human experience (ethical, religious, familiar, ideological, of gender, etc.). Here I stand in commenting on Jullien's positions, even because he tends to take on a philosophical view of "communitas" which, in my opinion, brings with it many elements of unresolved ambiguity due to not only an epistemological emphasis, but also to a political-philosophical one (from Derrida to Nancy to Esposito) of the pristine anthropological concept of *munus* and experience of the reciprocity of the gift.

Here, the reference to such a reformulation and reinterpretation of the idea of universal seems to be used both in a philosophical and political way. But above all in the latter, because by considering the universal as always open and problematic, universalizing reduces the distance between the universal ought-to-be rule of juridical and/or moral law and the particular historical contingency by which the norm itself derives (and introduces possible elements of correction of contrast between the logic of emancipation of the universal rights and logic of the integration of community/communion experiences). In this sense, any ethical and/or juridical principle does not express or finalize an immutability status and its "universality/universalization" "stands as a regulative idea that is never satisfied, and that leads the search indefinitely" (Jullien, 2008b: 20).

But the reconciliation of the issue to a preliminary philosophical level could – united with the distinction between universal and universalizing – reduce the paralyzing effects of a long series of questions that are difficult to resolve: is universalism a neutral theory or is it ideologically justified? Is it the result of a principle of unconditional truth or is the fruit of a Eurocentric or ethnocentric context? Can we avoid the dry and unproductive dichotomy between a perceived universality of rights and moral principles and their specific cultural and historical genealogy? And can we, in the name of an equally dogmatic particularism of the most dogmatic of universalisms, renounce the universal value of a cosmopolitan battle for human rights (even considering the wider audience of funda-

mental rights, passed from the narrow confines of those rights directed to ensure the person, its freedom and its inviolability, to those, increasingly more comprehensive, of labour, social equity, environment)?

The idea of "universalization," which was also Piovani's and which is now being repeated in other changed historical and political, more than just philosophical, contexts, may constitute, in my opinion, an important premise for a critique of every form of universalism that claims to attribute to a priori statements of truth not only a universal given once for all, but what, always a priori, can be thought of and defined as universalizable. This of course does not mean that we must abandon the effectiveness of a moral and political struggle for the realization of those human rights that, beyond their historical genetic belonging to the democratic and Enlightenment culture (as well as to the liberal and Christian-personalistic one) of Western Europe, have been so far historically recognized as a universal heritage of the people: I am referring to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and its subsequent amendments and additions.

The idea of "universalization" contains in itself the concept and the image itself of a dynamic process, something not yet in motion, something that has nothing of the static reclining in a state of apparent uniqueness. And individuality, even when responding to the reasonable requirements of the quest for unity, must always show itself as universalizing, not as data but as a problem. The critical universalism assumes, at the same time, a knowledge and anthropological profile that renews, centuries away and in new forms of today's globalized world, the humanistic revolution's task.

François Jullien recalls a Chinese anecdote: a man seeing a child about to fall into a pit makes a natural and instinctive gesture to hold him, certainly not dictated by the fact that he may know the child or for fear of a penalty. It is a gesture that we cannot avoid doing, primarily because, as says the Chinese philosopher of the 4th century BC Meng-tsu, "the one who does not have such a consciousness of pity is not a man." This episode brings to my mind the parable of the sheep in Matthew 12.11. When the Pharisees accuses Jesus of healing the lame on the Sabbath, he says, "Is there a man among you who, if he had one sheep and it fell into a ditch on the Sabbath, wouldn't take hold of it and pull it out? Now, a man is worth more than a sheep."

In short, the low point from which to start again to build attitudes and universalizing values is the "shared sense of humanity." So that "considering the diversity of cultures and the way it forces us to seek out the unexpected in our thinking is not equivalent to abandoning the requirement of the common" (Jullien, 2008b: 21). Now, for a visitor to Vico's pages, the reference to "common sense" becomes almost obligatory, especially when, as I recently tried to show, we find in Neapolitan philosophy a few key passages that help to philosophically rethink the connection between universalism and difference. In the light of Vico's reflection we can say that:

The natural principles of sociality and politics do not remain still in the perfection of universal reason, they must be recognized again and again and found the historical difference of common sense in what commonly and historically recurs in the anthropological, mental and linguistic diversity of men. (Cacciatore, 2008a: 19)

This recalls the possible prolegomena to a speech on critical-humanistic universalism that has in place a reasonable

Mediation (made possible, on the one hand, by practical-civil philosophy, and on the other, by the epistemological and ethical value of the poetic wisdom) between historical-anthropologic-linguistic particularity and universality of common elements of religions and mythologies, as well as fantastic characters and mental dictionaries (Cacciatore, 2008a: 11–12).

Common sense, thus, is not only a logical and cognitive function, or just space of different historical-political and cultural-anthropologic experiences, but also, and essentially, universalization of an idea of *communion* as a privileged place of human needs and common utilities.

I think it could be argued, just given the "dilemmas" of conjugability between ethical universalism and differences, which increasingly cross our horizon of philosophers and men and women committed to meet the challenges of globalization and its dramatic contradictions, an idea of ethical and critical universalism which does not forget, among others, historicistic criticisms, launched by Vico, of calculating and uniforming rationalism that relies on the return to the things of man, to the inescapable "humanological" dimension (Piovani, 1990),[2] which was "revolutionary" at the time of the nascent modernism, and which now increasingly appears to dissolve in the distorting mirror of old and new material and moral absolutisms.

In our troubled present, "the pride of nations" has reappeared, strong and overbearing on the history and life of man, recognizable in the forms of annihilation of the other, of forced assimilation of individual historical identities, of presupposed uniqueness of a falsely universalizing thought.

Maintaining a necessary balance between universalism and particularism needs at any time to be based on a humanist critique of ethnocentrism and of every manifestation of contempt for other cultures, it needs to develop a continuous comparison of different political, juridical and ethical systems, of different religions and cultural sensibilities (not only a descriptive but above all a "comprehensive" and dialogical comparison); it needs to get rid of any illusion of domination of one people over another.

The "dialogic" perspective set out above, which is characteristic of intercultural ethics, can be one of the possible answers to the question of how to understand and make workable in practice a form of universalism which, although critically revised, cannot by itself exorcise the tangled threads of persistent forms of identitarian contextualism that continue to claim more independence or show, however, distrust towards universalizing ethical and juridical processes or towards more or less explicit assumptions to giusnaturalistic remises. The dialogic solution, if you do not want it to be just comforting rhetoric, cannot be univocal and closed to other concurrent options (first of all that of a growing universalization of human rights in all its civil, political, social and economic "generations"); however it can, in my opinion, be open to a method that is cognitive and practical at the same time, a method of interaction between imagination and interculturality, an interaction increasingly necessary in an increasingly globally mixed world.

The link imagination/interculturality[3] acquires a specific and decisive weight also in the policies and ethics at the base of a pluralistic and dialogic view of civilizations and cultures. Very often, in fact, the possibility of establishing an equal relationship of exchange of an intercultural type, before it can be realized (and it is not certain that this would happen), rests upon a normative and/or juridical action, on forms of hybridity and "imagined" reciprocity in a creative way.

This happens especially when we try to activate a process (which is also of historical-cultural knowledge) of narration of the different contexts in which, next to the necessary translatability of languages and cul-

tural "grammars," we could constitute an imaginative activity which could substitute the fixity of ordering principles of a culture with forms of contamination, sites of possible future common knowledge and spaces of shared ethical choices and fundamental rights: the survival, the integrity of the person and the body (especially feminine) and the reduction of the situations of poverty, the expansion of the *chances* of implementation of skills. The imagination issue goes beyond the scope of the aesthetic and epistemological reflection and inserts itself strongly in the context of contemporary discussions of political philosophy and ethics.

The moral "post-metaphysical" philosophy (and therefore intercultural ethics) must be measured from time to time in critical reflection that does not have as its purpose the identification of bestowing and claiming absolute and irrevocable principles, but only the task of developing moral "points of view" from which evaluations and judgments are defined on actions that are deemed to be good for the greatest number of people. It is no longer about passively remaining consistent with a notion of "duty" as an a priori law formulated by an abstract moral community, but about moving from the first real prospect of what can make ever-widening the sphere of personal skills, both at individual life histories level, and in terms of particular forms of social and cultural life. (Cacciatore, 2006: 16–17)

I think that the meaning I have tried to argue in searching for an increasingly close and necessary relationship between the imaginative paradigm (both in its narrative version, and in the representational and symbolic one) and the resolution policy that, in case of the choice and the activation of cross-cultural constraints, must be consistently democratic and basically egalitarian is clear, or at least less obscure,. The great task which opens today before political and democratic philosophy is to look at the history and evolution of cultures not only in their identitarian genesis (religion, customs, lifestyles), but also and especially in the dynamics of their being places in which human practices are organized in languages, images, attributions of meanings and symbols, plural and sometimes conflicting narratives of individual and collective lives. According to Benhabib, "cultures are formed through complex dialogues with other cultures. In most cultures that have attained some degree of internal differentiation, the dialogue with the other(s) is internal rather than extrinsic to the culture itself" (Benhabib, 2002: IX). This means that narrative imagination, ethics and politics – put in fruitful tension on the field of intercultural philosophy – can achieve a desirable alliance between respect for the identity and call for universality, between the unavoidable

singular articulation of religions and cultures, with universalistic rights and ethics, based on the rules and principles of a cosmopolitan law of human rights.

I think then we can conclude that this new hypothesis of the relationship between image and interculturalism can and should now use the sometimes diverging and sometimes similar phenomena of the fragmentation, hybridism and marginality as places of freedom and autonomy, and as experimental spaces for new forms of individual and group identity. To classic universalism, which behind the formal equality almost always concealed a white male, financially independent, at the peak of his physical strength, we want to substitute a new form of universalism. Each individual and each group can and must be guaranteed its right to live and maintain its identity, but also researching, in the intercultural dialogue, the mix of affiliations with unusual instruments of cognitive and linguistic hybridization, but also with the strength of creative imagination.[4]

References

Benhabib, Seyla. *The Claims of Culture. Equality and diversity in the global era*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Cacciatore, Giuseppe. "Capire il racconto degli altri." *Reset*. CXVII (2006): 16-19.

Cacciatore, Giuseppe. "Relativismo e relatività nel dibattito filosofico contemporaneo." *Come alla corte di Federico II*. 8 (2007): 17-18.

Cacciatore, Giuseppe. "Universalismo etico e differenza: a partire da Vico." *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani*. 2.38 (2008a): 7-26.

Cacciatore, Giuseppe. "La logica poetica e l'identità meticcia. Note sul nesso fra immaginazione, identità e interculturalità". In *Immaginazione etica interculturalità*. Vanna Gessa Kurotschka, Chiara de Luzenberger. Eds. Milano: Mimesis, 2008. 213-229.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur Auf dem Weg zur liberalen Eugenetik?* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001.

Jullien, François. *De l'universel, de l'uniforme, du commun et du dialogue entre les cultures*. Paris: Fayard, 2008a.

Jullien, François. "Sono davvero universali i diritti dell'uomo?" *Le monde diplomatique - Il Manifesto*. 20, 22 February (2008b): 20.

Piovani, Pietro. *Oggettivazione etica e assenzialismo*. Fulvio Tessitore. Ed. Napoli: Morano, 1980.

Piovani, Pietro. *La filosofia nuova di Vico*. Fulvio Tessitore. Ed. Napoli: Morano, 1990.

Piovani, Pietro. *Linee di una filosofia del diritto*. Padova: CEDAM, 1958.

Putnam, Hilary. *Ethics without Ontology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. *European Universalism. The Rhetoric of Power.* New York-London: The New Press, 2006.

Notes

---

[1] I'm referring to P. Piovani, *Linee di una filosofia del diritto*. Padua: CEDAM, 1958. I'm quoting from the second edition of 1964. In particular, cf. chapter XII, entitled *Oltre universalismo e particolarismo*, 181 et sq. "Linked to this perspective is, of course, a vision of normativity that refuses to determine what, ever, and finally, the rules should be, for their content, serving as universally required precepts, but accepts as a principle of normativity only the criterion that is the rule of the tension itself for which every thought, every action, to be realized, must idealize itself referring to a term that is *more* of the immediacy of individual thought and individual action." (Piovani, 1958: 190).

[2] It is a theme dear to Vico's reflection by P. Piovani, whose essays on Vico are now collected in *La filosofia nuova di Vico*. F. Tessitore. Ed. Naples: Morano, 1990.

[3] These are positions that I have argued in a paper I held in November of 2007 in Tepoztlan (Mexico) at the XIV International Congress of Philosophy. The title was *The Ethics of Imagination in the New Space of Interculturalism.*

[4] For a detailed analysis of the relationship between imagination, identity and interculturalism see G. Cacciatore, *La logica poetica e l'identità meticcia. Note sul nesso fra immaginazione, identità e interculturalità*. In *Immaginazione etica interculturalità*. Vanna Gessa Kurotschka, Chiara de Luzenberger. Eds. Milano: Mimesis, 2008. 213–119.