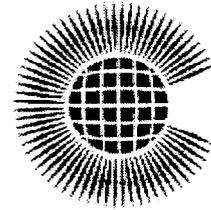




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Contribution to the Debate on **The Challenge of Pluralism**

**INTERCULTURALITY: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH**

by

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## 1. Preliminary remarks<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1. The practical impact of philosophical thinking

It might be a common view that philosophers are most likely to make fools of themselves when trying to cope with the demand for practical devices. But philosophical thinking is practical in its own way: by changing and transforming our comprehension of things and the world in general, our behaviour and interaction with things will change. Most often, such transformations will be long-term transformations; as philosophy is abstract by referring concrete empirical situations to fundamental features of being, the impact of philosophy on the historical world can hardly be immediate. The historical incarnation of philosophical insights is as long in time as they are fundamental in conceptual awareness, and nothing grants that they reach the historical world in the genuine way of their original conception. In the case of interculturality, the immediate practical implication of philosophical thinking becomes evident as soon as we realize that human thinking in its spontaneous functioning is always, in one way or other, embedded in culturally predetermined evidences which have to be neutralized in order to prepare the ground where the encountering of the other becomes possible. As the philosophical reflection of interculturality can claim by no means immediate access to a “transcultural super-perspective”, it is only the long and patient effort and work upon the conceptual presuppositions grown out of the millenniums of traditional thinking patterns that we can liberate thinking to the required openness. Thinking in itself becomes the continuous exercise of transforming assumed evidences into the openness of a new encounter of world and things; and it is basically this work of the philosophizing subject *on himself* which might generate new perspectives leading to the intercultural encounter of human beings.

Thus, the “practical” feature of thinking cannot consist in requesting others to realize our ideas but only in the force to transform human being itself and its relationship to world. Thinking is not practical according to the technological model of producing things, i.e. by the transformation of mental objects into “real” entities, but by the transformation of the human subjects themselves, their way of understanding their being-in-the-world. By working on the transformation of the relationship of Man and World, philosophical thinking is, in this inapparent way, withdrawn from the boasting events of history, immediately practical. It aims at the “ethical” constitution of the human subject according to the original sense of “ethos” (dwelling, sejourning, habitating) - the specific human way to inhabit the world.

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<sup>1</sup>For the background of the following essay, the English-speaking reader may consult my paper: *The situation of philosophy today and the question of Interculturality*, published in: 1. Mesotes. Zeitschrift für philosophischen Ost - West Dialog, 4/1994, Wien, 1995, pg. 491 - 513, and 2. Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research (JICPR), Vol. XIII, Number 1, Delhi, 1996, pg. 1 - 28. For the conceptual elaboration of the philosophical issue of “interculturality”, the German-speaking reader may refer to my monograph: *Heideggers Begriff der Geschichte und das neuzeitliche Geschichtsdenken*, Wien, 1994.

## 1.2. Ethical versus technological approach to interculturality

It is all the more important to stress this ethical subject-centred intention as the interculturality debate has - to quite some extent and following the technological model - suffered from the continuous claims of abstract (presumably universal) values entire humanity is postulated to assume, if necessary, by the force of political and juridical institutions like the UN. As the external implantation and imposition of "values" must fail to create the reality of an incarnated "ethos" of men assumed from within, the intercultural discourse has all too often degraded into a ritual lamentation about the obvious unwillingness of the historical world to work according to the expectations of Western ideology; the presumed "universal values", grown out of the occidental process of secularization in the period of enlightenment, fail to incarnate the historical being of humanity and its project of sharing the one and unique world. In fact, this is little surprising: How should people, whose historical experience is not marked by the desacralization of the Christian religion and the rise of scientific-technological rationality, its socio-economic and political transformations as well as its metaphysical disorientation, conceive of their relationship to the world in terms that simply do not reflect their concrete experiences with the world, accumulated over generations? In this perspective, the major lack of the value-centered interculturality debate seems to be the overleaping of the historical dimension of human being. What man *is*, seems to be viewed as an instantaneous momentary instance deprived of the historical dimension which made him become what he is by culturally shaped experiences and dispositions. But man is not a stone fallen from the sky; the individual person<sup>2</sup> is rather a mask resonating the collective experiences of centuries and millenniums, their distilled knowledge, art and skill in dealing with the world and with his own finiteness as a human being. The "natural" historical growth of human communities and societies as the incarnation of a certain "ethos" and the historical constitution of a culturally specific relationship of Man and World is the only genuine dimension of intercultural thinking. Intercultural thinking can only achieve the required openness by deepening its awareness of its own historical constitution, i.e. not by breaking away from history, but by reinforcing the consciousness of how questionable certain fundamental evidences, historically assumed as basic truths, really are. In this sense, intercultural thinking is not the exclusive domaine of some "specialists", but the concern of everyone aware of his position in the multicultural world.

In opposition to the common technological model, convinced of the feasibility of the historical being of man by means of external, juridical and political determinations in order to reinforce the realization of abstract value claims, the ethical approach is focused on the historical transformation of human beings themselves out of their specific traditions and the autonomous development of culturally specific strategies to deal with the situation of the modern world. No external regulation can take the place of what belongs to the inner transformation of human beings under their very specific traditional and historical conditions. If the ethical issue remains at the core of the

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<sup>2</sup>Let us recall that the word "person" stems from the Latin word "per-sonare" (to sound through, to resonate) as designation of the mask used in the theatre.

intercultural process, this does certainly not exclude the obvious necessity to flank such a process by socio-economic, juridical and political means in order to facilitate the dialogue of cultures within the historical situation of modernity. The ethical approach is by no means exclusive, but rather insists in the perspective of “long-term history” on the priority of the autonomy of partaking cultural subjects and their way of handling, by and out of their traditional anchorage, the challenge of modernity. The recognition of the historical facticity as an autonomous process belonging to the interaction of a multicultural reality entails a basic scepticism towards the imposition of “universal value claims” and any form of “postulating thinking”, pretending to be in full possession of the truth humanity should realize. Devoted to the intellectual probity of perceiving the human reality as it is - the reality principle, the question is rather: what, under the given historical circumstances and conditions, might come into being and how to direct factual historical tendencies towards their best possible fulfilment<sup>3</sup>. “Constructive pluralism” might be such a project - *if and only if* it is deeply rooted within the historical reality itself and its inherent tendencies.

### 1.3. The bipolar constellation of contemporary interculturality

Let us therefore recapitulate the basic features of the contemporary historical situation, central to the issue of interculturality. It seems by no way an oversimplified reduction if we consider the intercultural constellation of modernity as basically *bipolar*, even if this bipolarity leads to highly differentiated and intricated complexities on the different levels of individual, societal and "statal" life. This bipolarity is no other than the one that marks the origin of modernity - the uprise of the new scientific-technological rationality, replacing the foregoing religious world-orientation of Christianity. The first decisive point is that “Modernity”, as delimited by scientific-technological rationality, constitutes an entirely new relationship of Man and World which entails the invalidation of all traditional patterns of religious world orientation in a large sense, including mythology and metaphysics. Scientific-technological rationality is not the mere prolongation or successive fulfilment of former scientific cognitions and technological skills, but a revolution in the basic way of thinking and of dealing with things and world in general. The second decisive point is that the historical event of scientific-technological rationality encompasses, by its own inherent logic, all of humanity. Within the historical process of its realization, leading through the socio-economic and political revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries to the period of European colonialism and the subsequent division of the world into the antagonistic systems of communism and capitalism, scientific-technological rationality operates the fundamental unification of mankind into *one* globalized culture. Seen against the background of the millenary history of Man, the absolutely unique and outstanding event of modernity is the global unification of mankind by one foundational paradigm of dealing with the world - scientific-technological rationality.

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<sup>3</sup>The “best possible fulfilment” implies, of course, an ultimate criterion deciding about the purpose of human being; such a criterion can only be formal with respect to the concrete reality of human being. We will try to articulate such a formal criterion by the concept of “soteriological saturation or appeasement” (see 2.3.).

Scientific-technological rationality is not just another “paradigm” in a sequence of similar comparable world-orientations, but a completely new principle of relating to world, entailing the overall invalidation of former (mythological, religious, metaphysical) “types” of organizing man's relationship to things. Therefore, the realization of a unified world-culture under the sign of scientific-technological rationality, leading inevitably to the neutralization and marginalization of the religious-metaphysical paradigms incarnated by the indefinite number of different “cultures”, has therefore been conceived of as the movement of “secularization” (or, better, “de-sacralization”), thus producing the basic situation of modernity as “nihilism”, i.e. the loss of an ultimate sense and purpose of human being. The metaphysical consciousness of eternity, constitutive for the religious articulation of Man's relationship to world, is substituted by the assumption of an indefinite historical progress, conceived of in terms of a teleological realization of (occidental) Reason; an idea, which, in the course of the 20th century, degrades more and more into a general, cultural and historical relativism. The basic bipolarity of the modern world, essential to the issue of interculturality, may thus be retraced to the fundamental opposition of scientific-technological rationality and religion as radically opposed ways of inhabiting the world.

#### 1.4. Dialectical antagonisms of interculturality

The diagnostic and explanatory value of this bipolar structure, which, in the formation of historical reality, produces the dialectical antagonisms constitutive for the modern world as mutually exclusive but deeply complementary forces, can hardly be overscored. Refracted by the highly critical heritage of colonial politics and the ideological divisions between the capitalist and the communist blocks, these dialectical antagonisms work on different levels (individual, societal, "statal") under different aspects (socio-economic, cultural, political, ideological) to create the diversified spectrum of contemporary intercultural tensions. “Fundamentalisms” (Christian, Jewish, Islamic or other) are generally dialectical counter-reactions against what is felt to be the “nihilism” of modern rationality; they determine as well the divisions within a society as well as its relations to other societies<sup>4</sup>. If the increase of the dialectical tension within the bipolar structure is mutually proportional, fundamentalist fanaticism is a direct function of the perception of the “nihilistic” danger incurred by scientific-technological rationality and its secular orientation. Socio-economic inequalities between different societies and nations, but also between different classes within a given society, usually express the difference in the historical and cultural assumption of scientific-technological rationality. Thus, the intercultural interaction is basically double-sided: On the one side, we find the inverse but complementary movements of immigration

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<sup>4</sup>This is not only observable in the case of the Israelian and generally the Islamic societies, but also in the case of Christian conservative movements (such as “opus Dei”) and, to some extent, the political right/left distinction (religious - secular values); the respective positions are often also indicators of class-belonging and economic status. The fundamentalist counter-reactions against modernity seem to be characteristic of the monotheistic religions of Semitic origin; although India has a Hindu fundamentalist movement, this is, in ideology and practice, very different from those mentioned above. “Polytheistic” religions generally have no basis for being “fundamentalist”: they rather integrate the other religion as a different version of their own, as the Greeks and Romans already did.

and tourism, both founded on the socio-economic advance of “modern” countries, which, on the other side, when faced with their “nihilistic” lack of religious and metaphysical orientation, generate a strong sense for the reception of cultural traditions capable of filling the gap: on the culturally “legitimate” level of modern rationality, by the creation of academic disciplines concerned with different cultures (like the orientalist philologies, anthropology, ethnology, history of religion, etc.) or the artistic re-evaluation of marginalized traditions, on the culturally rather “illegitimate” or “ideological” level, by the constitution of religious and esoteric sects or the introduction of culturally “alien” practices, such as yoga, acupuncture or alternative medicines and psychotherapies<sup>5</sup>. Western “de-sacralized” societies aspire to a certain “re-sacralization” of their being-in-the-world, while those still anchored in religious paradigms inevitably pursue their secularization, haunted by fears of various degrees about its “nihilistic” side-effects. Thus, the tendency towards globalization, propagated under the auspices of secular universalism, is dialectically counterbalanced by the inverse movement of particularization, claiming the specificity of a cultural heritage and tradition.

The recent fragmentation of the former USSR and Yugoslavia, both unifying different cultures within a secular state, makes evident that mere ideological unities fail to grant a real community of the people. In a similar way, European unification is becoming increasingly disturbed by tendencies towards “regionalization”, motivated by cultural specificity and aiming at political autonomy which might break up the unity of the State<sup>6</sup>. The same movements are observable in Africa, where colonial politics drew “national” borders without any regard to the cultural differences of the people who had to assume a common political destiny, thus leading to the continuous power fights between different cultural groups, not to speak of the external implantation of western political models on traditions where they had no cultural anchorage. The partition of India and Pakistan or the occupation of Tibet by China, although a heritage of colonialism, equally reflect the tension between secular and religious definitions of political and cultural identity. Even in classical countries of immigration like the US, the overall national identity is always strongly counterbalanced by the particular identity of a cultural group, defined in ethnic or religious terms. The universalizing “secular” identity is generally felt to be “artificial” and “superficial”, whereas the particularizing (ethnic or religious) identity is perceived to be “deep” and “natural”. Secular identities, if not reinforced by strong ideological push-ups<sup>7</sup>, seem to be felt as “weak” in opposition to the “strong” identities of rather limited and well-defined communities. Whatever is “universal”, seems to threaten the strong rooted sense of belonging, incarnated by the particular cultural tradition as a counterweight against the “alienating” process of modernity. But if this

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<sup>5</sup>The distinction of the two levels (legitimate/illegitimate) is made according to the proper principles of scientific-technological rationality and reflects the different degree of social acceptance of other cultures; while the (Western) “Buddhologue”, for example, safeguards his Western identity, the (Western) “Buddhist” assumes a cultural converted identity.

<sup>6</sup>Besides the classical European conflicts like in Northern Ireland or with the Basques or the Corsicans, we recently observe strong tendencies of disaggregation in Italy (North - South) and Spain (Catalans, Galicians, Andalusians). In the light of secular rationality, claims of cultural specificity always appear as signs of an “irrational”, retrograde mentality.

<sup>7</sup>As in the antagonism of communist and fascist ideology; both might be considered as secular revolts against secular liberalization (= “democratic nihilism”), thereby assuming “nihilistic” features into a “pseudo-religious” ideology.

“alienation” is experienced as the failure of scientific-technological rationality to offer a response to the essential human question of how to deal with life and death, human finiteness and negativity, it is this “metaphysical lack” of modernity which is at the root of the quest for an identity *as* a well-defined strategy to conceive of human being in an ultimate onto-soteriological perspective.

### 1.5. Political and philosophical issues of interculturality

We will thus be able to delimit more precisely the specific philosophical issue of interculturality as distinct from socio-economic and political problems, by definition withdrawn from any philosophical treatment. Philosophy will have nothing to contribute where the nature of the problem is not genuinely philosophical, that is pertaining to the foundation of the relationship of Man and World. Insofar as contemporary politics is marked by what has been called “the end of ideologies”, i.e. the absence of any valid project to organize human reality, this lack of political conception leads more and more to a day-to-day and case-to-case management of socio-economic and political affairs, determined by the mass media and the short-term strategies of electoral reaffirmation. From a philosophical point of view, politics need a (non-ideological) ethical re-orientation, sustained by long term-thinking and centred in the project to assure culturally diversified ways of inhabiting the world. Instead of trying to impose “universal values” according to the Occidental paradigm of secular “enlightenment”, it might foster culturally autonomous ways of dealing with the challenge of modernity. So long as every culture bears, within its own traditions, the capacities for creating its own way of integrating scientific-technological rationality into a new cultural constellation of Man and World, this might be the only way to break up the imprisonment within the dialectical structure of cultural antagonisms and their inherent violence. The way to the unified world of scientific-technological rationality might not necessarily lead through secular enlightenment nor might this be the only valid framework for dealing with intercultural difference. The flagrant disproportion between the socio-economic and political leadership of the Occidental world and its inherent “nihilistic” lack of ethical and metaphysical orientation, producing the ideological fragmentation of Western society under the leadership of traditional, mostly non-Occidental, paradigms, makes evident that a basically confused world can lead the rest of the world only by confusing it in turn. Philosophical thinking in a confused world might be nothing else than the foolish attempt to re-think the constellation of Man and World, captured within the dialectical antagonism of religion and scientific-technological rationality, in view of a new relationship to things. Therefore, we will concentrate in the following pages on the question of how religion and scientific-technological rationality are opposed to each other. What is at stake in their antagonistic articulation of human relationship to world?

## 2. Religion versus scientific-technological rationality

### 2.1. The concept of religion

The concept of religion contains the answer to the question: "What is religion?" To answer this question, we have to open our minds to the almost limitless variety of religious phenomena and experiences documented by human history in order to characterize equally all religions without according distinction or privilege to any one of them. Historically, "religion" is so fundamental to human existence that up to now no human society has existed without it. Therefore, we have to cancel the prejudices and presuppositions about "religion" generated by the Christian-Occidental tradition or, more generally, by monotheistic religions defining the common feature of "religion" by the "belief in God" or - from a pagan perspective - "in Gods". But besides the wide variety of notions of the divine, the realm of religion is by no means restricted to what exclusively refers to God (or the Gods). The object of a religious attitude might just as well be a stone, an animal, a human being, the sky or the stars, physical elements or the cosmos, the manes, souls and spirits, or demons and heroes. Since the distinction between "nature" and "not-nature" is inexistent in most of the ancient cultures, it is equally misleading to replace the term "God" with the more indifferent term "supernatural". As "God" is not a constitutive concept of religion, "atheistic religiosity" is no contradiction in terms, even if the Divine belongs undoubtedly to the religious dimension. But the "Divine" might even be experienced without any "God", or, in the inverse sense, "Gods" might dilute into a general and undifferentiated religious feeling for "It" - something "divine". The religious function of these notions remains obscure unless we can identify a more fundamental feature of religious phenomena. This might be easier than expected; rather than astuteness or deep metaphysical intuition, it requires attentiveness to a fundamental trait of religious attitudes so obvious that we mostly overlook and neglect it. A prayer - even if uttered by an atheist or someone considering himself entirely "irreligious" - calls for help or tries to conjure evil; it evokes hope for a favourable outcome of things, tries to remove endangering forces and to protect against failure. Religious rites and cults, sacrifices and collective ceremonies have a similar function: they seek to promote what is deemed to be good and to banish the bad and evil. This simple observation, taken seriously, might give us a decisive clue to religious behaviour and experience: they neither refer to *what is* nor to *what should be*, but to what things *mean* to human existence in a *soteriological* sense, that is, in the sense, in which they save, liberate, release and deliver humans from threats and dangers to their being. All the concrete aspects of religious institutions, behaviours and attitudes have a fundamental "soteriological" sense of preserving and delivering from what is experienced to be negative, awesome, bad, evil, destructive, painful. Religion is, in this respect, focused on salvation, liberation, release, deliverance (*soteria*) - however these terms might be conceived of within the realm of different religions. In the given context, we can only try to summarize how this

fundamental trait of religious phenomena can serve as a sufficient basis for the elaboration of a concept of religion as *Soteriology*<sup>8</sup>.

If “Religion” consists basically of the soteriological pursuit of salvation, liberation and deliverance, it intrinsically refers to something man has to be saved, liberated and delivered from - the bad and the evil, the awesome and destructive: in short, all that we indicate by the formal concept of the *negative*. The concept of Soteriology implies thus, as its constitutive element, the concept of *Negativity*, which comprehends everything that is perceived by Man as endangering, threatening him with alienation, annihilation, privation or destruction. Soteriologically, man is essentially viewed as the endangered being - as being-in-danger. Only as “being-in-danger”, exposed to the negativity of being, are liberation and salvation constitutive for Man's being human. Negativity and Liberation are constitutive moments inextricably belonging to each other within the given understanding of human being soteriologically enacted by a concrete religious community<sup>9</sup>. Man is essentially finite in the sense that neither his being (birth) and not-being (death) nor his well-being, his fulfilment, beatitude and bliss, depend entirely upon him. As has been pointed out many times, religion is rooted in a “feeling of dependence” which, far from excluding the self-consciousness of man's power to determine things, delimits the “sacrality” of things as withdrawn from human dispositions. In the experience of the world and factual being in general as “sacred”, that is, as “untouchable”, as “not to be hurt” by human intervention, man steps back from and out of his habitual greed for appropriation, conferring respect, attentiveness and dignity to things as they exist in themselves. The religious, “soteriological” relationship to world is therefore strictly non-technical: it prohibits the immediate grasp of things within the horizon of human finalities. The soteriological, religious activity never aims at the technological eradication of the negative, but pursues, by means of symbolic interactions, interpretations and sense-attributions, different states of consciousness and awareness, the overcoming of negativity. In the religious attitude to the world, the negativity of being is not to be excluded, but to be integrated into human life; however, its

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<sup>8</sup>See for the concept of Soteriology, besides the works already indicated, my: *Warum Heidegger keine Ethik geschrieben hat*. Wien 1992, and my paper in English: *What is Religion? Attempt at a phenomenological clarification* (forthcoming in: *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Manchester, U.K.). The soteriological concept of religion is based on the phenomenological research on History of Religions, which has received ingenious elaboration by authors such as R. Otto, W. F. Otto, G. Van der Leeuw, Mircea Eliade and Friedrich Heiler, just to name a few. It should be noted that the soteriological approach is fundamentally opposed to a theoretical concept of religion as a certain (primitive) theory about the world. Religious intentions are *not* (quasi- or pseudo-) theoretical intentions treatable by the alternative of true - false knowledge, but soteriological intentions that liberate or not from experienced negativity.

<sup>9</sup>If, for example, the process of giving birth is experienced by a particular religious community as dangerous and polluting, calling for purification rites in order to conjure its inherent negativity, this self-understanding of human being and its relationship to world may be quite different from that of communities where this is not the case. Neither does the “negative” exclusively indicate physical or biological needs, nor do “salvation” and “liberation” by themselves imply a “metaphysical” or “otherworldly” conception of things. If you are hungry, you need food, not religion, but for killing and slaughtering animals in order to eat you might need exculpation - liberation from the culpability of murder - and therefore soteriological rites; for food production, the intervention of other soteriological rites might be necessary to promote the fertility of the earth, favourable weather or the success of hunting. The formal concept of “negativity” never means a self-subsistent reality or physical entity, but the intendedness of something *as* negating, annihilating, depriving or endangering.

integration is possible only by overcoming and transcending it, that is, by specific liberating experiences that elevate human being *beyond* the sphere of death and failure, need and pain.

As most religions depict the negative in terms of contamination, pollution and impurity (in abstract terms bad, evil, sin), the correlative soteriological rites are concerned with (apotropaic) rejection and removal, as well as purge and purification, which, even if they seem to be almost physical procedures, encompass the innermost symbolic sense of liberation from the negative. "Liberation" means withdrawal from the grasp of something, the movement by which we step out of the reach of something imprisoning and become free. It indicates the movement of overcoming, going beyond, by-passing, transcending. "Liberated" from something, we are out of its reach - beyond it. However "materialistic" a soteriological rite might appear, it is never without the evocation of transcendence. No liberation without the movement of transcending. Only the moment of transcendence liberates - relieves from the pressure of being banned by the negativity of being. Laughter and serenity, the encounter of natural and artistic beauty or the sudden and gratuitous moments of entire relief are such liberating experiences in which we transcend our everyday occupations, fears and worries, unloosening the ties and knots of our affectivity, leaving everything behind or, rather, below. But we can never produce these moments by or out of ourselves. We can look out for them and search for them, but when they happen, they happen by themselves, gratuitously, making us not only happy, but also grateful to them. Gratefulness is a reflection of transcendence.

Therefore, it would be a fundamental error to reduce the notion of transcendence to a mere "subjective" movement; in fact, it has its "objectivity" within the soteriological experience itself, restricted to the *experiencing* subjects - the religious community. Within the "subjective" movement of transcending, there is already an "objective" sense of transcendence at work tending towards its realization within the soteriological experience of liberation. Real liberation, which is not merely rhetorical, ideological or auto-suggestive, implies liberation as the *event* of being-liberated by something which is basically not at the disposal of the "subject", but transcends it. Only in this way, the liberating experience of transcendence becomes the foundation of the religious community as such. Consequently, soteriological competence, incarnated by particular individuals (shamans, medicine-men, yogins, priests, poets etc.) "specialized" in the handling of the negative, is conferred upon the authoritative leadership of the community. Even in a secularized context, leadership (psychological, political, scientific, etc.) will always be invested with the soteriological charisma of "showing the way" to the rest of humanity; that is, the liberated passage to a de-negativated, *free* state of things. Religious institutions, such as collective rites, cults and festivities which stand at the core of the religious life of the community, but also ascetic and ecstatic practices - often combined with dance and music, the use of various drugs or erotic exaltation - aim basically at the realization of soteriological experiences as regenerative, refreshing and reviving events of life. Where life transcends itself, it is liberated from the pressure of the negative - revived and regenerated in order to face anew the negativity of human existence. From ascetism, self-mutilation and self-immolation, unchained violence against oneself and the other,

unrestrained erotism and inebriating states of mind to the subtlest meditations and profoundest states of thought and devotion, mankind seems to have tried almost everything which can promote a soteriological experience. The immensely rich phenomenology of soteriological experiences generated by religious communities shows how divergent and even contradictory such soteriological strategies can be within one and the same religious system.

If “transcendence” is the heart of the soteriological experience and the innermost unity of the constitutive moments of the concept of Soteriology, i.e. negativity and liberation, we can define Religion as the soteriological “sense” for transcendence: All religions are founded and based upon a central soteriological experience of transcendence, enacted, re-produced, commemorated and propagated throughout the community which only by this “communion” becomes a *real* community. It is this soteriological event of transcendence that constitutes the realm of the sacred and holy, the divine and immortal as the specific object of the religious attitude. Accordingly, the notions of good and evil, divine and sacred (etc.) have to be delimited as specifically *soteriological concepts*, which reflect the liberating experiences of a historical community in relation to their particular view on the negativity of being. Unlike “real predicates” (house, shoe, etc.) which seize the objective being of things in themselves, soteriological concepts circumscribe the encountering of world and things as blissful or destructive to human being, i. e. in their relationship to the experience of the de-negativated, liberated being of humans. If this is the origin of the formation of soteriological concepts, the notions of the “divine”, of “god” or its configuration within a multiplicity of “gods”, might be elucidated out of the specific soteriological experiences of transcendence constitutive for a particular historical community. If the judgement “God exists”, theoretically understood as the affirmation of the objectified being of something (as well as its opposite: “God exists not ”), is strictly “non-sensical” , the reason is that we are not dealing with a theoretical affirmation at all; soteriologically understood, it refers to the realization of a liberating transcending experience given within the event of the “experience” itself and “objective” only for those who share it. The “divine” is nothing that “is” in a reified sense (like a house or a shoe), but something that happens as the *event of liberation*, communicating a state of mind beyond the intricacies of life and its utmost negation - death. If a day, perfect in its exalted splendour of the blue sky, or a tree, vigourously unfolding into the plentitude of its flourishing, the starred sky or the boasting sea are called “divine”, it is so because of the overwhelming beauty they communicate within a soteriological experience, liberating and transcending the dullness of everyday life. There is no doubt that the (natural or artistic) experience of beauty is exactly what in the religious context constitutes a genuine soteriological experience related to the divine, including those aspects of the divine that are terrifying and sublime. In this perspective, the aesthetic experience in modernity is nothing but the secularized rest of and substitute for an original religious experience.

The soteriological concept of religion thus allows us an insight into the fundamental ambivalence of Religion: If liberation is liberation *from* the negative as the *negation* of the negative, then liberation is intrinsically rooted in negativity and in itself a *potentiated form of negativity*. As the soteriological experience is generated only by overcoming the immediate natural impulses of human being, i.e.

their negation, the sacred and divine realized in the soteriological experience counterstrike the seclusion of the subject in the egocentered sphere of his natural existence, destroying and annihilating his immediate identity. The divine that elevates, sets free and liberates is, at first encounter, terrifying. The sacred, divine and transcendent are therefore equally the object of attraction and repulsion, of desire and fear, fascination and terror; they are equally healing and destroying, terrifying and liberating, in short, they are basically *ambivalent*. The ambivalence of transcendence is the basic ambivalence of religion itself. Therefore, religion always includes a strong amount of negating forces, that is, those forces which are applied to overcome the negative, including the negativity of human behaviour (violence, injustice, greed etc.). Prohibitions, restrictions on the most powerful natural impulses (food, sexuality), observances and regulations imposed on natural behaviour are constitutive for all religions as negating instances conveying a soteriological - and not a moral - sense. From a moral point of view, religion is rather immoral. Morality is alien to religion; it is what remains when a religion has died - its corpse as the altered and alienated sense of its life. But if the negating forces of religion are necessary constituents of the soteriological attitude, they might also degenerate and originate a "soteriological catastrophe". It is equally naive to think of "Religion" in terms of something exclusively "good" or "bad". The soteriological potential of religion to liberate Man from his negativity is never ensured but always at the point of dialectically turning into its opposite. The soteriological project may turn into the production of negativity invading human life as a destruction of everything considered to be human. By the disaggregation of its negating forces, "Religion" thus becomes what we have to be liberated from - negativity itself. In brief, "Religion" is in itself a soteriological problem - the problem, how and to what extent it might regenerate its self-healing forces in order to preserve, save and liberate itself from soteriological deterioration and perversion. The historical violence of religions is *not* necessarily a symptom of their soteriological perversion, as if "Religion", taken in itself, were necessarily "peaceful" and "non-violent". It is rather the opposite which is the case. If the soteriological activity is directed *against the negative*, it assumes *the negation of the negative* in order to overcome and transcend it. In this sense, "violence" is inherent to the soteriological activity; the major problem of the soteriological activity, then, would be to handle its own negativity in a soteriological sense. The original ambivalence of religion means that violence is an original trait of a soteriological strategy and not due to any form of its secondary or accidental degradation.

## 2.2. The scientific-technological revolution

Against the background of the soteriological structure of religion as the basic pattern of human relationship to world, we can now deepen our understanding of the scientific-technological revolution - the decisive historical event of modernity. If religion as the soteriological handling of negativity is constitutive for human being as such, the historical negation, exclusion and exteriorization of "religion" can operate only by means of its fundamental substitution. The

substitute is scientific-technological rationality itself. As a substitute, it takes the place of what formerly has been the function of “religion”, not as just another “religion”, but as something completely different, i.e. in regard to its principles. Paradoxically stated, modernity is the soteriological project to save and liberate humanity from its soteriological projects, realized by the religions, philosophies and metaphysics of the past. If the modern project of emancipation (from illusion and error, slavery and submission, alienation and dependance, etc.) is soteriological in its focus - the liberation of humanity from all natural and historically assumed negativity, it is radically anti-soteriological by its means - the technological eradication of negativity which, *by definition*, is supposed to cancel all human need for “religion”. While the soteriological relation to world is centred in a symbolic practice, transforming and transfiguring the sense and meaning of things by a transcending, liberating experience, scientific-technological rationality attacks the negativity of things itself by the physical and social production of technologies expected to radically eliminate the negative within the reality of the physical, psychological and socio-political world itself: The negation of the negative ceases to be transcending - it becomes technological. There is nothing “sacred” (untouchable, tabou) any more. The religious attitude appears as a soteriological failure of mankind - the history of an illusion. Technological negation works at the continuous transformation of things into a state of being where everything “negative” will be eliminated<sup>10</sup>. In this sense, “Technology” means neither a secondary application of science nor a particular realm of human activity, but the innermost impulse of scientific-technological rationality - its general attitude to things, be they physical, biological, socio-economic and political, psychological, spiritual or other - to make them available within the range of the human finality of overcoming negativity. The basic trend of technological rationality is to “humanize” the world, i.e. to assimilate everything to the human expectation of “harmony” and “happiness” by rendering the world identical to the project of what it should be; its innermost tendency is to abolish any encountered difference of things, their inherent potential to counter, to resist or to obstruct, to cancel and negate human finalities, in short, the basic difference of the world revealed by the experience of negativity. The “technological” attitude is the attitude of negating forces that do not transcend, but eliminate and annihilate. From Marxism to positivism, from psycho- and socio-political technologies to bio-genetics, globalized economical liberalism and universal computerized communication, scientific-technological rationality unfolds into a sort of a nihilistic soteriology, a soteriology without transcendence or, rather, with the secularized historical transcendence of the eschatological expectation of a future (“brave new”) world as the “final dissolution” of negativity. “We invented happiness”, said the last human being, his eyes twinkling, in Nietzsche's Zarathustra.

But the soteriological ambivalence of religion and scientific-technological rationality is basically the same. The negating forces employed to overcome the negative might dialectically turn into the indefinite production of negativity itself. What started some four hundred years ago as the soteriological project of modernity may nowadays appear rather as a soteriological disaster and

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<sup>10</sup>The basic strategy to legitimate new technologies, especially in bio-genetics, is to claim a further eradication of the “Negative” (pain, disease, hunger, etc.); but however far we push the limit, there will always remain a decisive “rest” - the constitutive finiteness of human being in all its aspects, which forms the genuine object of Soteriology.

catastrophe of entire humanity with no way out. The natural, socioeconomic and political, psychological and ideological negativity *generated* by modernity seems at the end of what probably has been the bloodiest century of WorldHistory to exceed more and more the sphere of the technological success in handling the negative features of reality. The soteriological investment of technology and the universalized expectation of the availability and feasibility of everything entails, on the other hand, an important decrease if not a decisive deterioration and degradation of modern man's soteriological competence to face the negative by and out of himself, leading thus to his psychological and ideological collapse. Scientificotechnological rationality produces in itself the inner ideologization of modern society, which is increasingly fragmented into an indefinite number of esoteric hailseekers, religious sects and mystical visionaries, sustained by the metaphysical abuse of scientific theories and pseudoscientific eschatologies. The origin of this specifically modern "irrationality" is less a retrograde, archaic mentality than the soteriological fragility of modern man produced by the scientificotechnological turn itself. The turning point of modernity is where modernity becomes capable of doubting its own soteriological truth beyond any ideological compensation for its deficits; and the intercultural encounter of the Occidental world with other cultures, by recalling the soteriological structure of human being beyond its technological reduction, has already considerably reinforced its suspicion that there is something going basically wrong with the modern relationship of man to world. The awareness of the ambivalent, questionable and controversial situation of modernity, replacing genuine soteriology by technology, is as much a function of intercultural encounter as the globalization of scientificotechnological rationality. As inverse but complementary movements in the constitution of the complex situation of the modern world, they indicate the soteriological issue of global human life: What is at stake in the global intercultural encounter, is the soteriological organization of the human relationship to world.

### 2.3. The soteriological issue in the intercultural perspective

The historical process has its own logic. The conceptual clarification of what is at stake in the antagonisms of the contemporary world might be just a little step ahead in developing soteriological strategies for dealing with the negative features of the intercultural encounter. Convinced of the necessity of *genuine* soteriological ways of dealing with negativity or, inversely, of the *soteriological insufficiency* of scientificotechnological rationality, we nevertheless expect a profound historical transformation of traditional "religions" by modernity. In the longterm scale, the historical situation of modernity is likely to generate entirely new soteriological strategies which, by relocating the sense and purpose of scientificotechnological rationality, might be genuine soteriologies without belonging to the traditional pattern of "religion". In the intercultural perspective, the future of different cultures depends on their capacity to develop, on the historical background of their traditions, a genuine soteriological project of humanbeingintheworld, integrating scientificotechnological rationality by means which transcend its inherent "nihilistic"

features. The decisive issue for the contemporary world, however, is to introduce the explicit project of a *soteriologically saturated* (*satiated, appeased or stilled*) society as a fundamental intention and purpose of human being to be pursued and worked on by the different cultures from their different cultural points of view. But what is a society, *soteriologically saturated, appeased and stilled*?

In a first, general approach, we could say: Individual and societal human being is soteriologically saturated, appeased and stilled, if the foundational soteriological paradigm of transcending negativity is not of itself a new source and origin of negativity. With regard to the major part of the contemporary world, this is obviously not the case: the soteriological structures of contemporary societies, be they modern or traditional, became in themselves the major source and root of intercultural negativity. As we have already pointed out, Soteriology is in itself a soteriological problem the problem of not dialectically turning into a soteriological catastrophe in becoming a new source for the indefinite production and propagation of violence and injustice, murder and hatred, failure and alienation, deception and voidness, unfulfilment and need. The ultimate root of what we have called the constitutive soteriological “ambivalence” is the dialectics of liberation itself: Human being cannot exist without generating a soteriologically liberated relationship to its own finiteness and, in general, the negativity of being but liberation by overcoming and transcending the negative is in itself a function of the negation. The process of liberation is possible only by entirely assuming negativity in order to overcome the negative. Every soteriological practice, as already mentioned, is therefore deeply involved in negating procedures, concentrating the whole of negating forces to generate human being *beyond* the realm of the Negative. Only insofar as man is the master of negation, he can overcome and transform himself. To deny yourself the most basic natural impulses, to withhold affectivity and emotions, to be critical towards yourself or to think “twice even the most elementary ways constitutive for the formation of human being are ruled by the negation. Where the negation ceases to liberate, it turns into the source of negativity. The negation that saves and liberates can equally destroy and annihilate: It is basically ambivalent. What generates liberation and transcendence might as well imprison human being even more in the violence of negativity. Handling human negativity is the soteriological art Soteriology the Art of Negation. Soteriological perfection as *entire* liberation from negativity is the ultimate point, where the negating forces at work in liberation are free from producing any negativity; where human being, rooted in negativity, is appeased and stilled in its beingintheworld. Stilled human being is liberated human being as the mastership of an entirely *liberating* negation.

It is obvious that hereby we dispose of a criterion for the evaluation of the soteriological performance of human ethical behaviour; applied to the “History of Religions”, we can critically examine religious realities without any false pretention to universal tolerance and its “nihilistic” basis historical relativism. Only religions succeeding in handling their own inherent negativity in a soteriologically liberated way, i.e. in producing soteriologically saturated individuals and therefore also a soteriologically saturated society, are to be recognized as genuine soteriological perspectives for the future of humanity. But religious tradition is not the only soteriological instance humanity

developed. Art and Philosophy are equally centred in soteriological liberation. Political philosophy has, from Plato to Hegel, developed different conceptions of soteriologically saturated societies, which, by their internal structure, break down the endless chain of violence. The different philosophies and thinking schools of the East and the West have founded diverging insights into the soteriological structure of Being transcending its inherent negativity. Contemporary thinking is not deprived of an immensely rich field of research about soteriological structures of human being, capable of stimulating and enriching the soteriological perspective of interculturality. As the pretention of scientificotechnological rationality, to found a soteriologically saturated society, is as void as the pretentions of traditional religions, disaggregated and invalidated by the effects of modernity, are illusionary, the intercultural issue, instead of only trying to manage the violence of the existant, might engage in opening up a different future. The project of a soteriologically saturated society could be a first step in redrawing the direction.

### 3. Conclusion: The question of practical recommendations

The intercultural situation of today is critical, even explosive. And this even more, as there is an evident lack of political will to operationalize the rich knowledge already accumulated. But deep and decisive revolutions in human history are generally preceded and flanked by philosophical, artistic and intellectual works, transforming the comprehension of human being in the world. The ethical (moral) reorientation of politics and the incarnation of a political will to operationalize accumulated knowledge might still be in the phase of its theoretical preparation, which, in search for a real support in the people concerned, slowly modifies their attitudes and behaviours. The decisive step against the inherent tendency of human beings to suppress and repress their own consciousness of the Negative, is to foster the acute awareness of the negativity of the modern world and the necessity of facing it by means of ethical soteriological reorientation. From a philosophical point of view, the pragmatics of a fundamental intellectual change as basis for a different relationship to world are *hermeneutical*, that is: pertaining to the structures of comprehension and understanding. But comprehension and understanding are only operative foundations of attitudes and behaviours when being incarnated as structures of human affectivity. Real and concrete understanding is, where things are immediately “felt” in a certain way. Hermeneutical pragmatics is far from being “intellectual” and “abstract” in the common sense of an uprooted rhetorical performance: It aims at the formation of the affective relation to world in its immediate operativity. Accordingly, the hermeutical problem of interculturality is less a problem of intellectual understanding than a problem of affectivity. The problem, if and to what extent individuals *want* to understand each other, is primarily the problem if, on the affective level of their existential feelings, they are disposed to open up to the Other. As long as the Other is the obscure object of fears and worries (economical, social, political, existential, etc.), no genuine process of understanding and communication seems possible. If the subject's affective openness to the Other is a function of his own soteriological saturation and appeasement, only a soteriologically saturated

state of affairs can grant intercultural understanding and communication. The hermeneutical issue of mutual comprehension and communication is dependent on the affective incarnation of soteriologically released states of human being as produced by Art.

In the longterm perspective, the practical work can only consist of the hermeneutical work producing a different awareness of things, corresponding to the soteriological necessities of global human being within the different cultures. Intercultural institutions, which promote the encounter of the culturally Other in the released context of Art and Philosophy, withdrawn from the practical pressures of everyday life, are as important as the institutionalization of intercultural disciplines (e.g. Anthropology, History of Religions, etc.) on a basic educational level. In view of the helplessness of politics to deal with the actual challenges of the globalized world, the formation of new competences becomes an evident necessity. The stimulation of soteriological research in Religion, Philosophy and Art might produce a *new soteriological competence* in dealing with human affairs, necessary for the prevention and mediation of the dialectical disruption of societies. As already pointed out, this soteriological competence would have to be culturally plural, rooted in the different traditional cultures and their specific soteriological background.

The project of “Constructive Pluralism” can only have a real impact, if the complex historical situation of mankind assumes to be its realizing subject. As it will only assume to be its realizing subject, if the project itself seems to be soteriologically promising, in brief: by soteriological seduction and temptation, hermeneutical pragmatics, based on soteriological competence, will have the difficult task of seducing. This, in turn, will only be possible by anticipating in some way or the other a soteriologically saturated relationship to world. The pivot of hermeneutical change remains the ethical transformation of the promoting subjects, which, by incarnating an “ethos” ahead of the historical situation, might assume the charismatic leadership of historical transformations. But there is no doubt, that charismatic leadership is highly *ambivalent*.