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Beyond Multiculturalism: Recognition Through the Relational Reason

Abstract: Multiculturalism is a term spreading in the West during the 1960s to indicate respect, tolerance and defence of cultural minorities. The idea of multiculturalism has become a collective imaginary (“all different, all equals”). It has generated a political ideology supporting an inclusive citizenship towards “different” cultures. After being adopted as official policy in many Countries, multiculturalism has generated more negative than positive effects (fragmenting the society, separating the minorities and fostering cultural relativism). As a political doctrine, it seems harder and harder to be put into practice. At its place, today we talk of interculturality. But this expression too seems quite vague and uncertain. This essay discusses on the possible alternatives to multiculturalism, asking itself whether the way of interculturality can be a solution or not. The Author’s thesis is that the theory of interculturality has the advantage to stress the inter, namely what lies in between different cultures. But it does not possess yet the conceptual and effective means to understand and handle the problems of the public sphere, when the different cultures express cultural values radically conflictual between them. The troubles of interculturality result from two lacks: an insufficient reflexivity inside the single cultures, and the lack of a relational interface between the different cultures (between the carrier subjects). Modern western Reason created a societal structure (lib-lab) promoting neither the first nor the second one. In fact, it neutralizes them, because it faces the dilemmas of values inside the cultural diversities through criteria of ethical indifference. Such criteria set reflexivity to zero, preventing individuals to understand the deepest reasons of the vital experience of the others. Reason is emptied of its meaning and of its understanding capability. To go over the failures of multiculturalism and the fragilities of interculturality, a lay approach to the coexistence of cultures is required, being able to give strength back to Reason, through new semantics of the inter-human diversity. The Author suggests the development of the “relational reason,” beyond the forms already known of rationality. To make Reason relational might be the best way to imagine a new social order of society, being able to humanize the globalizing processes and the growing migrations. The after-modern society would be more or less human, depending on how it will be able to widen the human Reason, structuring it inside a new “relational unit” with the religious faith.

Keywords: multiculturalism; cultural difference; relational sociology; human reason; recognition.

Multiculturalism as an Answer to the Problem of Civil Coexistence Between Different Cultures

What is multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism is usually defined as a public policy approach for managing cultural diversity in a multiethnic society, officially stressing mutual respect and tolerance for cultural differences within a country’s borders. As a policy, multiculturalism emphasizes the unique characteristics of different cultures, especially as they relate to one

another in receiving nations. The word was first used in 1957 to describe Switzerland, but came into common currency in Canada in the late 1960s.

As official political program, multiculturalism was first adopted in Canada in 1971 (see *Canadian Heritage*) to affirm “the value and dignity of all citizens, independently from their racial or ethnic origin, or their language or religion.” It was adopted then by various Countries, as Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain and Holland.

In its original definition, multiculturalism is a “way of incorporation” of immigrants in a society where another kind of culture prevails. A different way from *assimilation* (that defines the standards of interaction in public places by means of law), from the *melting pot* and from *hyphenation* (see the experience of USA), from *hybridization*, *half-breeding* (*cross-breeding*), and *syncretism* (that may be found in the Countries of Asia, Africa and South-America), and from other possible solutions.¹

In the last decades, multiculturalism had many formulations, that we may classify in two big currents. “*Communitarian* multiculturalism” (in many versions, from the anti-liberal one of C. Taylor and E. Sandel, to the new-aristotelic one of A. MacIntyre and A. Etzioni) and “*pluralist* multiculturalism” (W. Kymlicka).² In the communitarian version (Taylor 1992), the multicultural doctrine aims at recomposing ethics and policy within the single cultural communities (giving them self-government), since it is impossible to obtain such recomposition in the space between them. In the pluralist version, it aims at defending the specific cultural groups (ethnicals, nationals, etc.), through forms of political representation, which obtain special rights (namely, in the education of children, in the way of dressing and working, in the ways of taking care of the health, etc.), within the framework of a plural democracy. In any case, multiculturalism does definitely oppose to the modern, liberal and individualistic idea of “open society.”

I am suggesting to distinguish between multiculturalism as a “social fact,” as a collective imaginary (supporting rethorics and theories in the field of social sciences), and as a political ideology.

It is empirical that our societies are less and less homogeneous, as long as the variety of different races, ethnic groups and cultures increases. It results from an historical process that is under everybody’s look, destined to increase even more in the future. A society is virtually *multicultural* when it loses its “tribal” structure and meets interdependency and mixing with other societies having different ethnical cultures. Then some problems arise, to which various and different answers have been given in the course of history.

The ideology of multiculturalism is quite a different matter. Multiculturalism becomes an ideology when it fights for particular values or interests, lived in particular cultural communities, like they were universal values or interests, by appealing to the principle of equality (the political equality granted to all cultural differences).

¹ For instance, the idea of a patriotic and civic constitutionalism (or ‘constitutional patriotism’ as elucidated by J. Habermas) now debated in countries such as Germany, France and Italy.

² It is not possible, here, for reasons of space, to stop to analyze all these versions.

In these terms, multiculturalism has grown well beyond the original idea of defending and promoting the ethnical cultures (national or migratory), in a context where another culture prevails. It has become a collective imaginary,³ mythicizing the cultural diversity as an irreconcilable connotation of every personal and social identity. Society is represented as a field of coexistent cultures, considered refractory to one another, not translatable the one into the other, devoid of common values, therefore always potentially conflictual. The image of the *Alter* is absorbed and represented as completely different from the image of *Ego*.

The collective imaginary of multiculturalism may be illustrated by the slogan “all different, all equals.” It supports some political programs that feed some social practices in order to deeply modify social life (Benhabib 2002). Nowadays, as a political doctrine, multiculturalism produces a new version of *secularity* in the public life. It changes the sense of *lay* (= to give supported reasons to somebody’s thoughts and/or acts) to a form of active and overpowering *secularism*. In order to make “normal” all the “different,” it legitimates a political system (at its various territorial levels) that, instead of comparing the sense of the topics in order to catch their differences and give them their pertinent meaning and value, neutralizes the ethical and religious *reasons* constituting the core of the cultural differences and makes them in-different (with no qualitative difference). In short, multiculturalism expresses an ideology legitimating an always further loss of what cements society.

Multiculturalism produces a society distinguished by a growing pluralization of *every* culture, not only because of migrations, but also because of the inner dynamics of the native (national or not) cultures. In particular, multiculturalism erodes the very modern western culture, which loses the rational roots that guaranteed a certain homogeneity for so many centuries. The multicultural ideology, in fact, justifies not only the traditional cultures, but also the new cultures and lifestyles considered to be post-modern. The multiplication (systemic production) of the cultural differences feeds a social order, where the subjects become individuals through the search for an identity referred to particular social spheres that privatize the public sphere. All these novelties are interconnected and depend on the globalizing processes. Over the long term, it will be possible no more to keep the distinction, still dear to the liberal political scientists such as Giovanni Sartori (2000, p. 93), according to which it would be possible to distinguish between the “domestic different” (the natives, which we are accustomed to) and the “foreign different” (the ones coming from the migrations). By now, such distinction has no more acceptable sociological bases.

Therefore, our problem is the following one: does it exist a solution of civil co-existence between different cultures, which may avoid to incur the negative effects of the ethical-cultural relativism and of the political laicism kept by the ideology of multiculturalism? The stakes are those of the civilization as a human and progressive endeavour.⁴

³ About the distinction between ideology and collective imaginary, see Charles Taylor (2005, p. 174).

⁴ One of the deepest criticism to multiculturalism has been expressed by the *Ayn Rand Institute*, according to which multiculturalism is a growing force in America’s universities and public life. In brief, multiculturalism is defined as the view that all cultures, from that of a spirits-worshipping tribe to that of

The Theses

In this contribution, I am suggesting that multiculturalism is a symptom of the cultural crisis of western humanism, in particular of its Reason, the one developed from the Greek civilization until the Enlightenment.⁵

My argument is that western humanism (with Jewish-Greek-Christian roots) risks the implosion and an historical drift, because it has not been able yet to develop a reflexivity of the human thought that can be able to confront the depersonalization of the reason, which is at the origin of multiculturalism as an epistemological, moral and political doctrine. In absence of an adequate reflexivity, a pervasive functionalist rationality—namely the Reason of globalization—prevails over, shaping the social world as an “anonymous matrix of communication”.⁶

I claim that the humanism of the ‘old Europe’ is drifting because it doesn’t see the rifts and voids that prevent from drawing a common world under historical conditions of globalization. The dialogue and meeting of cultures suffer the lack of reasons of a neohumanism up to the global challenge, because reason is referred to partial domains, as a particular culture (as bounded or embedded rationality), or the individual as such (see the rational choice theory), or the functional needs of the social systems (the system rationality). The solution I suggest is to search for “new reasons” to be referred to social relations. My background thesis is that the reason must become reflexive, so that the good reasons of human coexistence would be referred to human relations, distinguishing them from the rationality inherent in individuals, social systems and the very cultures.

Being an ideology, multiculturalism is not a solution expressing a project of society, simply because it generally excludes the possibility to build a common world. The alternatives to the rifts of the society may be searched within a program of inter-

an advanced industrial civilization, are equal in value. Since cultures are obviously not equal in value—not if man’s life is your standard of value—this egalitarian doctrine can have only one purpose: to raze the mountaintops. Multiculturalism seeks to obliterate the value of a free, industrialized civilization (which today exists in the West and elsewhere), by declaring that such a civilization is no better than primitive tribalism. More deeply, it seeks to incapacitate a mind’s ability to distinguish good from evil, to distinguish that which is life promoting from that which is life negating: “We are opposed to this destructive doctrine. We hold that moral judgment is essential to life. The ideas and values that animate a particular culture can and should be judged objectively. A culture that values freedom, progress, reason and science, for instance, is good; one that values oppression, stagnation, mysticism, and ignorance is not.”

⁵ In confirmation, there are several societies that are virtually multicultural (as Brazil, for instance, but generally various Countries of South-America, Africa and Asia), even if imaginary and ideology of multiculturalism are totally absent.

⁶ According to Gunther Teubner (2006): “Since violations of fundamental rights stem from the totalising tendencies of partial rationalities, there is no longer any point in seeing the horizontal effect as if rights of private actors have to be weighed up against each other. On one side of the human rights relation is no longer a private actor as the fundamental-rights violator, but the anonymous matrix of an autonomised communicative medium. On the other side, the fundamental rights are divided into three dimensions: first, institutional rights protecting the autonomy of social discourses—art, science, religion—against their subjugation by the totalising tendencies of the communicative matrix; secondly, personal rights protecting the autonomy of communication, attributed not to institutions, but to the social artefacts called ‘persons’; and thirdly, human rights as negative bounds on societal communication, where the integrity of individuals’ body and mind is endangered.”

culturality, where the inter (what is between cultures) must be read, interpreted and acted through a relational paradigm. The sense of such paradigm is to expand the reason from the human person to the social relations, so that the reason might play the role of mediation between cultures. I will name it “relational reason” (for a more extensive explanation of this concept: see Donati 2008).

Multiculturalism as Social Fact and Ideology

My first argumentation is that multiculturalism represents a way to turn a social fact into a political program being the expression of an ideology. As such, it is not a suitable answer to the problem of reconciling cultural differences.

The existence of a variety of cultures, as a mere social fact, represents a richness, because it expresses different aspects of the humanity of persons, social groups and populations. Obviously, it reflects peculiar contextual situations (Gupta, Ferguson 1992). The social-cultural practices, insofar as they exist and express a *modus vivendi* (Archer 2000) that shows a stable ability to survive, reflect some experiences of the human nature, which there is always something to learn from. Every cultural position or stance has its good reasons, even when there is not a full and satisfying rationality, because it expresses the nature of the human behaviour, which is free in creating the cultural forms.

We must accept the social fact as a given, although it calls for a moral evaluation. You always have to answer to the facts. At the same time the social fact may not be the best and more acceptable solution to face the human needs. The problem starts when multiculturalism becomes an ideology, transforming the social fact of difference in a representation, for which a “partial” identity poses some instances that are incompatible with the basic values of social life. This is the case of a culture, where religion is coercively ascribed to the person for life (or vice versa, a coercive atheism or agnosticism is imposed); or a culture, where a disabled child (or the embryo with a pathology) is killed; or a culture, where the woman is considered to be inferior or a man’s property; or a culture, which admits polygamous marriage where women have unequal dignities. In such cases, the values of these cultures affirm a partiality towards a conception that gives a full universal value to the human person, denying that dignity conquered in many centuries of cultural progress.

Ideology enters the field when the cultural differences are asserted to defend or promote some particular interests as if they were universal. There are many examples under this respect: a religion which denies the right to freedom to other religions; religions which are wholly ascriptive (people born within it cannot exit); cultures which legitimises the killing of an embryo or a new born child, despite his human dignity, because he is not a ‘perfect child’; and so on. The right to diversity, to every cultural diversity, is passed off as the right to the equality of opportunities that any culture should have in configuring its choices and practices (while in fact it is not). The ideology of cultural difference becomes the basis of a new conception of secularity of the public sphere, which affirms that, in order to coexist, it is necessary that all cultures

were relativized (none of them can pretend to say the truth). Nobody is allowed to speak the language of truth when talking to others in the public sphere.

If the public social space becomes devoid of common values (because the only common value is that all differences have equal dignity), the social acting must be inspired by that principle of “politically correct,” which compels people to adopt a relativistic point of view. The fight for the acknowledgement of the different identities causes distancing and rifts. It is a new tragedy of common goods (that, with some similarities, recalls the tragedy of commons emerged with the rise of the modern capitalism). We see the fall of the “institutions of the sense” (that are common, public and collective as a matter of fact), and of the rational orders of justification, that have supported the western society up to now.⁷ The social order becomes more chaotic, risky and liquid. The “eastern” morphogenesis (guided by a circular idea of time, and by a purely naturalistic idea of the human being) prevails over the “western” one (guided by the linear sense of time, and by an idea giving transcendental potentialities to the human being). It is the reign of the pure media communication, thus forcing the social actors to adopt behaviours whose reasons are no more judgeable or comparable between them on the basis of the old parameters of western rationality. The argumentations considered being “rational” (or also reasonable) up to now become useless and devoid of value. As a consequence, in the public sphere there is an increasing of anomy and irrationality, avoidable by the individual only if retiring into its own cultural community of reference. Both mechanical and organic solidarity⁸ are reduced, and the pathological lifestyles do increase.

Multiculturalism considers the deep cultural diversities as incompatible,⁹ and it offers itself as a solution to the potential conflicts between cultures. But, acting like this, it creates a reservoir of potential tensions and clashes, which may be avoided only by forcing the cultural models governing the public sphere to adopt a sort of “genetic mutation.” This mutation consists in emptying the social relations (lived in the public sphere, but affecting the private as well) of any content of transcendental ethical sense. The sacrificial victim of such mutation of common culture is the human being. The ethical and cultural relativism embedded in the ideology of multiculturalism leads right to a further dehumanization of social relations both outside and inside the membership community. Ultimately, it leads to the so-called “trans-human.”

That is when the conflicts do arise, because it is unavoidable, in the social life, for the actors to *judge* practices, uses, values and rules of a particular culture as to the way in which the latter affects society. To express a judgement, it is necessary to have an instrument able to show whether a solution is acceptable or not. This instrument is the “judging knowledge,” made up of science and conscience, namely of scientific and moral reasons.

⁷ See the juridical debate on the introduction of the “cultural defence” “to mitigate punishment, create exemptions from policies, and increase the size of damage awards” (Alison Dundes Rentein 2005). The evidence sought to be adduced is “cultural” as opposed to classically scientific (Currie 2005).

⁸ We refer to the theories of Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Toennies.

⁹ Namely, it considers values and lifestyles not only as opposite realities (as like the physical and the spiritual, which may coexist), but also as excluding one another (as like considering the embryo as a human being or just a clot of cells).

Which is the “judging knowledge” of multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism is an ideology, because it answers the question of knowledge and judgement without putting forward any universal and disinterested reason, excluding even the possibility to do it. Its reasons, both theoretical and practical, are partial and self-interested. When the cultural difference becomes a debating issue, multiculturalism neutralizes the difference, carrying it out in the field of incommunicability. We may say that the judging knowledge of multiculturalism is characterized as follows:

(i) it is based on a form of cultural determinism, because it deterministically subordinates knowledge to culture; in other words, it assumes that every knowledge is completely conditioned by the cultural context and it is valid only referring to it; in doing that, it assumes that cultures are fully homogeneous inside them, and the subjects belonging to a culture have a full mutual comprehension, which is not empirically based (it is a mistake which, in my opinion, is present in the theory of S. Huntington 1996, and has not been sufficiently noticed during the international debate on his work);

(ii) it denies the possibility of giving a moral judgement on cultural patterns, when instead, from a sociological point of view, culture is precisely what a human person needs in order to answer the ethical problems of conscience (when it is necessary to say whether an action or style of life is good or bad).

These assumptions lead multiculturalism to certain consequences, which should be carefully considered. a) First, multiculturalism does not give rise to any mutual learning between cultures, because the claims of the cultural pluralism do legitimate the simple existence (*ex-sistere*, ‘being out’) of the “social fact” of difference. b) Secondly, when multiculturalism reduces the public-political sphere to a neutral arena towards cognitive and moral differences, it gives up the search for an agreement between different instances, which might lead to the building of a common good.

On the whole, we could say that, behind the ideology of multiculturalism, lies an idea of recognition which, going back to Machiavelli, through Hobbes to Nietzsche, does not grant any positive role to morally-founded struggles of social groups—their collective attempt to establish, institutionally and culturally, expanded forms of reciprocal recognition—through which the normatively directional change of societies proceeds. The mainstream idea of multiculturalism is clearly opposed to a theory of recognition as a fight concerning a claim—which can be traced back to Hegel (Honneth 1995)—whose basic assumption is that social struggle (between partial identities that must recognize one another) is the structuring force in the moral development of the society.

Promises and Limits of Multiculturalism

Why the promises of multiculturalism cannot be kept?

As observed by Amartya Sen (2006), after about three decades, the political doctrine of multiculturalism is in crisis almost everywhere. It seems to be clear, by now, that multiculturalism, conceived as an ideology of difference, is not a suitable

answer, neither on the ethical nor on the political basis, to the problem of coexistence between different cultures.

Nevertheless, though the ideology is easily questionable, the collective imagery is much less, because it is supported by mass media and it is culturally homogeneous to the communicative processes of globalization. It is certain, in fact, that the western open liberal societies are not able to treat the causes that transformed multiculturalism into the collective imaginary according to which “all differences are equal.”

The sociological causes of multiculturalism lie on the desertification produced by the liberal societies (ruled by *lib-lab* regimes) in the connective tissue of society, because they tenaciously pursued the aim to immunize the individual *from* the (bonding features of) social relations. In front of the recognition requests of the various cultural identities, the modern Enlightenment Reason is idle. The social tissue cannot be reconstructed basing on the rational forms elaborated by the western liberalism up to today.¹⁰ Therefore, if up to yesterday the modern cultures have been invaded by the western reason, today the very western culture loses its inner integration, because of the fall of “its” Reason. All cultures, both the western and the eastern, lose their identity and are less and less homogeneous inside, they are always more syncretic and half-bred (Tiankui, Sasaki and Peilin eds. 2006).

In brief, multiculturalism, as a sign and a display of the Western crisis, promises a form of civil co-existence that cannot be realized, because it meets with some insurmountable inner problems. The analysis of such limits it useful to understand where to seek some alternative solutions.

There is an endless literature about promises and limits of multiculturalism as moral philosophy and political ideology. Here, I will limit my considerations to a few essential points:

a) The *epistemological* limits of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism promises the *recognition of identities*, but its epistemological relativism cannot provide such performance. In fact, the authentic recognition of an identity needs an assumption on the truth of such identity (Ricoeur 2004).

b) The *ethical* limits of multiculturalism. As a moral philosophy, multiculturalism leads to support an attitude, according to which *what is possible becomes licit*. In front of the moral aberrations rising from such principle, in particular the violations of human rights, multiculturalism must look for remedies built upon some ethical limits. But it is unable to do it, because it should violate its basing principle of ethical relativism. The promise of giving society an ethics of civil coexistence is necessarily disregarded.

c) The *political* limits of multiculturalism. As a political ideology, multiculturalism promises *tolerance*, but in fact it generates intolerance.¹¹ More generally, multicult-

¹⁰ I am conscious, here, to disagree both with Charles Taylor and Jurgen Habermas (Habermas, Taylor 1998). They try to save liberalism reformulating it, the first one in the key of recognition and contribution of rights to minorities, the second one in the key of civic or patriotic constitutionalism.

¹¹ If the liberal tolerance may have been an element of civil progress at the beginning of the modern times, afterwards—with the loss of its traditional (Christian) values—it has become the reason of the decay of the western society (Seligman 1992). As stated by Joseph Ratzinger (2005), “a confused ideology of liberty leads to a dogmatism that is revealing to be more and more hostile to liberty.”

turalism supports a problematic form of citizenship, because its model of political inclusion hides some definite asymmetrical power relations, generating new forms of social exclusion (Mackey 2002). My personal opinion is that, after all, as a political doctrine, multiculturalism could be read as a new formula of that kind of arrangement that the sociology calls “the Hobbesian solution to the problem of social order” (T. Parsons), which is now applied to cultural systems instead of individuals. The principle of political inclusion of the individualist liberalism grants citizenship to minorities, basing on a pluralism devoid of ethical qualification in the public sphere. Consequently, it is unable to develop a “deep” citizenship (Clarke 1996) recognizing a true social pluralism, i.e. a pluralism that is an expression of the positive liberties of inter-human encounter (Donati 2002).

In my opinion, the inner limit of multiculturalism in every perspective (epistemological, moral and political), is *the loss of the relationality between the different cultures*, or, in other words, the fact of institutionalizing the loss of the relational nature of what lies in between the different cultures. Multiculturalism is simply *blind (in an affective, cognitive and moral sense) in front of the relational character of culture (culture as a relational fact)*.¹² The relations between cultures are neutralized or made indifferent by the joint of two principles: the liberal principle of tolerance (*lib*) and the social-democratic principle (*lab*) of political inclusion. Attracted inside such binomial of liberty-equality (*lib-lab*), and used in a functionalist way, multiculturalism completely forgets the meaning of solidarity and brotherhood.

How to fill up the lack of relationality of multiculturalism, lived and acted as an ideology and a collective imaginary?

In my opinion, it should be observed that, in the international debate, there is no analysis of multiculturalism under this light.

The transformation of political multiculturalism into a collective imaginary may be interpreted as an effort to make survive in a new form the *lib-lab* configuration of society,¹³ in order to answer to its inner crisis. The attempt is the one of shaping the cultural communities as *enclaves* based on values (and belongings) innerly strong, but such as to have neutral relations (“impartial” according to Taylor, “dialoguing” according to Habermas) in the public space between them. The attempt, expressed in this way, is destined right to failure.

¹² Culture may rise only by relation, i.e. it is a relational product: written and oral communication, that is sound and symbol, are not such by emission, but by reception, not owing to their “make sense,” but through their “con-sense.” And this latter depends on recognition and sharing (that are relational acts). That is why sociology is empirically relational.

¹³ In my opinion, instead, it is suitable to underline that multiculturalism is inscribed within a definite framework, where philosophical-cultural relativism and multicultural citizenship become synergistic and give a peculiar answer to the crisis of the *lib-lab* outline of the society, which supported the western Countries from the Peace of Westphalia onwards. The *lib-lab* outline, having its far ancestor in Thomas Hobbes, bases on two complementary pillars: from the one side, the proprietary individualism (and the related market liberties) (*lib* side) and, from the other side, a political power that exercises the monopoly of strength, and that rules the society in a way that no one can violate the other’s liberty, and all the individuals have equal opportunities to compete in the market (*lab* side). It is well known that the *lib-lab* outline is in crisis for a long time, finding no alternatives yet (Donati 1999).

The Background Sociological Deficit: a Reductive Theory of Recognition

In its springing reason, multiculturalism expresses the need to search for new ways to recognize the dignity of the human being. As such, it certainly reflects a positive demand. The statement, according to which “the value and dignity of all the citizens, independently from their racial and ethical origins, their language and religion” (*Canadian Heritage*) must be recognized, recalls the Christian conception of laity at the beginning of Christianity (*Letter to Diogneto*). Nevertheless, if on the one side multiculturalism is a spur to rethink the characters, qualities and properties of the recognition of what is actually human, on the other side it does not provide an adequate answer. The multicultural solution is inadequate, because it is unable to fill the gap between *citoyen* and *homme*. To state that the citizen realizes itself in the public sphere through the politics of the human dignity and its corresponding legal rights (the “politics of universalism”), while the human being realizes itself in its own cultural community (the “politics of difference”), leaves a void *between* these two spheres.

Multiculturalism is equivocal and ambivalent because, if from the one side it underlines the uniqueness of the human being, from the other side it makes it incommunicable from the cultural point of view. Nevertheless, its insistence about the radical alterity of the Other (Monceri 2006) pushes us to better understand the difference between the recognition of the human being and the recognition grantable by human beings to not-human beings. The point is that multiculturalism promises a recognition that it cannot realize, because it has a very strict and reductive idea of recognition. In fact, the multicultural recognition is conceived as a one-sided act of a collective mind, which ascribes an identity basing on a self-certification or on a claim of identity, which satisfies neither a veritative nor a gratitude (thankfulness) principle. In the social practice, instead, we see that recognizing the Other (as an individual, but also as an “other culture”) is a human act only if it is a validation act (that sees the Other’s verity), inscribed in a circuit of symbolic exchanges (gifts).

Multiculturalism does satisfy neither of these two requirements. It does not search for the reasons that legitimate the difference; it does not establish that circuit of mutual gifts that is necessary for the social practices and for the experiences of everyday life to realize a human form of recognition. So it does not help to understand the *reasons* why this latter is necessary to produce a human civilization. To make this step, it is necessary that multiculturalism provide itself with a more adequate reflexivity in the processes of recognition.¹⁴

What reflexivity? As from Hobbes, recognition always starts from a violent clash between identities. Fichte underlines, instead, that recognition springs from the subjects’ need to relate one another (this is maybe the closest version to the lay sense of recognition).¹⁵ Hegel formulates a “synthesis” (that still guides the majority of

¹⁴ Under that light, it may be useful to understand reflectivity, both in Margaret S. Archer’s (2003) and in Barry Sandywell’s (1996) meanings.

¹⁵ “No matter who you are—so everyone could say—if you have human features, you too are a member (*Mitglied*) of such a great community; (...) no one exists in vain for me, as long as it shows the mark of

the present theories of recognition), according to which recognition is a dialectical process, which consists of a fight against the Other and a desire to find a new relationship with him at the same time. A formulation that describes history as a sequence of clashes, in peace and war, always as a violence. Yesterday, it was referred to the relation between modernity and pre-modernity; today it explains the so-called *clash of civilizations*.

To go beyond the Hegelian idea, included the most recent revisions (Axel Honneth) and the hermeneutical critics (Paul Ricoeur), we must search for a new model of rationality of the act (and process) of recognition.

Essentially, the failures of multiculturalism represent a drive to search for a new reflexivity of society on to itself. Such reflexivity must be able to express “unity in diversity,” according to post-Hobbesian and post-Hegelian solutions.

A society that thinks itself as multicultural can get some comparative processes going, spurring a deeper understanding of the cultural identities and of their relations. But we need a new paradigm of rationality to manage such novelties.

In Search of Possible Alternatives: Is Interculturality a Solution?

Culture and rationality

The search for alternatives to multiculturalism as an ideology and a collective imaginary should be aimed to solve two big issues. The first one is about the liberty of the human being towards the socio-cultural structures. The other issue is about the need to configure the public sphere, so it will be—at least in some fundamental values—a “common world” to its dwellers.

We point out that these two issues are linked together, because a *shared* public sphere needs *liberty* of people.¹⁶ In its turn, personal liberty leads to the recognition of the principle of moral and juridical equality of people as human beings, and of their related rights of citizenship, to be assured.

The doctrine of multiculturalism, as already said, does not solve these two problems, because it considers the person as *embodied* and *embedded* in its culture of origin, and it does not pursue any common world, but only the respect and tolerance “at a distance” between cultures. Both those lacks refer to the deficit of relationality, proper of multiculturalism. In which direction should the alternatives to multiculturalism be sought?

reason on its face, even if it is a coarse and crude expression” (...) “in any case it is sure, (...) my heart will be united to yours by the most beautiful of the ties, the one of free and mutual share of good” (Fichte 2003, p. 90).

¹⁶ Rightly A. Sen (2006) has called attention to the difference between a public sphere based on freedom and consensus and one based on cultural communities of ascriptive character (the ones transmitting a cultural tradition from one generation to the other, basing on the fact that an individual is born in such culture). But Sen does not clarify how the liberties enjoyed by equal individuals can build up a common public sphere. He criticizes multiculturalism in the name of an open society (according to the *lib-lab* model of institutionalized individualism), which seems to be as imaginary as the multicultural one.

Up to now, the solutions have been sought in two main directions. From the one side, there was the attempt to deal with the cultural difference by cultural means, i.e. adopting a (culturalist) position that searches for the convergence between cultures through new cultural forms. From the other side, there was the attempt to show that the meeting between cultures depends from the rationality of the individual actors. The first position generally suffers from a *hypersocialized* vision of the social actor, the second one of a *hyposocialized* vision of the human being. Let us see them:

(a) The *culturalist* (or conventionalist) *position*, according to which the moral feelings are culturally originated, believes that the solutions should be found in the preservation of cultures and in the building of a conventional common platform, permitting them to coexist, that is to come alongside with each other. The suggestions, somehow or other, consist in elaborating new conventions and pacts between social groups, to the various degrees of cultural conflicts. It is supposed to come to an agreement between the various cultures through “contracts,” on the model of the international conventions. This position suffers from the same problems of multiculturalism, because it considers the actors and their choices to be *necessarily* defined by the cultural context, and that only a conventional consent “from above” could re-orient the single actors. In substance, it has a “holistic” and hypersocialized character. Those who adopt such position will sooner or later contradict themselves, since the idea of “translating” a culture into another so to achieve a full reciprocal understanding comes to be considered as impossible and rejected (Shimada 2006).

(b) The *rationalist position* (Enlightenment, in various versions), instead, is the one according to which the moral feelings have a rational origin (Boudon 2006). Here, reason comes before identity (as claimed by Sen 1999). In this way, the solution to the cultural conflicts should be found in the direction of a dialogue, based on the encounter of the individuals’ “good reasons.” Here is the perspective of interaction models and rules, which may lead to a lowest common denominator between cultures, thanks to the use of reason from the part of those participating in the situation. Such common denominator may be of different kind (it may appeal to human nature, natural law, recognition of the innate rights of persons and peoples or nations, or to something else). For the rationalists, the “common feeling” making cultures coexist must be an expression of the moral feelings of the individuals, and it must lie on individual motives of rational action.

Stated in the right terms, the debate between culturalists and rationalists has made no big steps forward. From the one side, the culturalist position ended, not rarely, in nourishing various forms of anti-Humanism, of trans-Humanism or even fundamentalism. From the other side, modern rationalism, in its various expressions, has not been able to assure dignity to the human being, and to protect the human essence within the socio-cultural context (not only the human essence within the individual).

The search for solutions is stalemate. *It is evident when it comes about the theme of liberty of the human being (agency) towards the socio-cultural structures.* For the culturalists, the person is a product of the society; it is entirely socialized by the society, so that the cultural debate stops in front of the declarations of the different

identities. For the rationalists, the person is a pre-social individual that socializes itself basing on its own internal propensions, so that the cultural debate takes place making the identities nominalistic.

The contemporary human being is needful to leave cultural determinism through reason. But reason at its disposal is insufficient. Multiculturalism undermines all the existing forms of rationalism: instrumental, substantial, procedural and deliberative. The western rationality is put in crisis and cannot find any argument in front of the requests of the ones not recognizing it (that are not only abroad, but also within the West). Should we renounce to reason?

In Search of a Common World: The Theory of Interculturality

Today, there is a possible way out thanks to interculturality. With this term, we generally mean a coexistence way basing on dialogue and the open debate between different cultures, which renounce both to the dominance of one on another (assimilation or colonization) and to the division without mutual communication (balkanization). One appeals to the “intercultural communication”.

Certainly, the intercultural communication has a lot of credits, but also some manifest limits. Its main credit is to affirm that there is an intermediate space between the “full comprehension” within every single culture, and the “complete non-involvement” between cultures. In this way, it avoids the idea that a common world is impossible because of the dualism between the full comprehension (reachable only *within* a single cultural community) and the non-involvement (the complete alterity *between* different cultural communities), as claimed by the cultural relativists. Nonetheless, it meets with the limit of not being able to manage the borders between the three domains (*intra*-cultural, *inter*-cultural and *multi*-cultural), if not as pure communication.

Another credit of the intercultural position is to underline that the debate between cultures may constitute a positive and useful exercise of values’ investigation (an exercise inside people’s ability of axiological research: Touriñan López 2006). But such axiological exercise, which may be considered as a way for persons to give themselves reasons for their lifestyles, does not explain how individuals may find some *common* reasons.

Other Authors underlined the benefits of intercultural integration as “conviviality of differences.” In particular, Stefano Zamagni (2002: 240–266) suggested a quite elaborate model of intercultural integration, based on five principles: 1) *the primacy of the person* as regards both the cultural community and the State; 2) *the recognition that liberty, as self-realization, needs the relation with the other as a value in itself*; 3) *the principle of neutrality as impartiality (not indifference) of the State* towards the cultures “brought” by their dwellers; 4) *the principle of integrating ethno-cultural minorities within a common national culture*, in order to which the (lay) State has to adopt “*a nucleus of inalienable values*” (liberty, human dignity, respect for life, minimum welfare) that, being as such, are valid for all the human beings, no matter for their cultural belonging; 5) the fifth principle is that of a “*conditioned tolerance*”: the State,

in the name of the citizen's rights (that, unlike the human's, have no natural law basis), has to assign resources to the various cultural groups, in proportion to their engagement in making themselves keepers of an integration project, based on the fundamental rights of the human being.

The intercultural model proposed by Zamagni is certainly shareable and full of interesting hints. Nonetheless, it presents some limits. I am pointing out just one of them: it refers the intercultural project to the national culture (its nation-state and its political constitution), while the latter becomes more and more problematic *vis-à-vis* the globalization processes. To be realized, the intercultural model needs a context of sociological reflexivity referred to the cultural globalization. In my language, it exacts a meta-reflexive subject and a new societarian reflexivity.

My purpose is to show that the intercultural solution cannot be understood—as done by someone nowadays—as a sort of “mitigated multiculturalism,” sweet, moderate, which looks for the agreement between cultures, pushing individuals towards common reasons that are just external and not internal to the single cultures.

To be effective, the intercultural solution needs a deeply reflexive reason, able of rooting the ultimate values to a solid and common ground. This is the real problem: where to find this reflexive reason?

Intercultural Comprehension Needs a Relational Interface: The Problem of Boundaries (Semantics of Difference)

Cultures debate today within the public sphere, having no clue on how it is possible to have something in common apart from the mere interest. This happens because the different cultural identities are not able to dialogue between them in terms of identity.

The modern western society invented some devices to treat the clashes of interest through the market, and the clashes of opinion through the rules of the political democracy. But it has not found the instruments to treat the clashes of cultural values. The latter must then be addressed within the framework of the relationships between religion and culture, because this is the context where the instruments to handle the clashes of values should be found.

The problem must be framed considering that, in a democracy, the single religions should be able to distinguish between their internal dogmatics and what they can and must submit to their reciprocal confrontation in the public sphere, namely in the civil society, which legitimates the democratic political system (Donati 2002).

In such a frame, the key-problem is the one of boundaries between the different faiths (religions) and the public sphere. The public sphere needs a common reason, reachable only if the various religions are innerly reflexive enough to distinguish between *reasons* given to interlocutors in the public sphere, and their *faith* (their inner dogmatics).

This is not an exercise up to the individual persons, but it involves religions, thought as cultures. People's inner reflexivity is not enough, it is necessary to make religion reflexive, and so the culture in which it is embodied.

In other words, here there is a process of morphogenesis both of socio-cultural structures (the elaboration of new symbolic and relational patterns) and of *agency* (the self-reflexive activity of people in their free acting), through the interaction of the individuals. The intercultural theory may stand only if it is possible to realize such complex morphogenetic process.

To perform such operation, it is necessary that people put in action a Reason, which no religion (as a culture, not as a faith) can entirely possess all alone, going across them (it is trans-cultural). It is their own reason to exist as religions in the public sphere (i.e. particular systems of values), beyond every single faith that, being a faith, is innerly incomparable.¹⁷ The interstitial area between religious faith and public sphere is the area of religions, meant as cultures that have to be interpreted and acted by the human subjects. Multiculturalism stops on the threshold of this interstitial area. It supposes a coexistence between cultures (religions) without seeing how they can interact one another and act in the public sphere, as to contribute to shape a common reason.

To understand how it is possible, we must observe that, appearing as a culture, the religion depends, from the one side on faith (transcendental reality), from the other side on how the human nature (of the person) expresses itself in the life-world relations. The theory of interculturality may be a solution beyond multiculturalism, only with some assumptions.

Here are the main ones: first, it must be assumed that the culture does not absorb the human nature (Belardinelli 2002); second, it must be assumed that the citizenship cannot absorb the *homme*: third, it must be assumed that people's living experience in the life worlds may find some forms of agreement (empathy, comprehension: Gomarasca 2004) that, being pre-cultural and pre-political, may modify the cultural expressions (included religion as a culture, not as a faith). So, the faith in transcendental realities becomes a device helping meta-reflexivity (of the individual and the relational context altogether). In this way, the reason's reflexivity may exceed its purely reproductive ("communicative") and decontextualized ("independent") forms.¹⁸

There are two alternatives: either we drop reason as a veritative principle (of recognition), or we should make efforts to "widen the range of reason." The so-called "limited rationality" is an empirical condition (of individuals and functional systems), it is neither the mankind's nor the civilization's destiny. That means that the expansion of reason may be rational, namely it may happen basing on matters related to a *more comprehensive reason*, not basing on dogmatic or extra-rational reasons. I will talk of it in the next passage.

¹⁷ Here, I refer to the well-known distinction between faith and religion proposed by Karl Barth, without accepting his theory of an intrinsic opposition between them. In the perspective of the relational sociology, it does not mean to put them in opposition, but instead to see their inner and necessary relationality.

¹⁸ As for the various forms of reflexivity (communicative, independent, meta-reflexive, fractured or disabled): cf. Archer (2003).

**Secularity Guided by a “Relational Reason” (Relational Anthropology)
as an Alternative to Multiculturalism: in Search of a New “Common World”**

Which Secularity in the Public Sphere?

In North America, multiculturalism serves to justify a public sphere where everyone has the right to appear with its own identity, without relegating it to the private, though no one is legitimated to support it as the only and true identity. In continental Europe (in the Countries with no Anglo-Saxon tradition), instead, multiculturalism is interpreted in a different way, which I would call “statist.” This quite peculiar version of multiculturalism is usually translated into political programs, where the State should assume a “lay” position (i.e. to exercise an active neutrality) in front of the pluralism of values and identities, of the ways to think, to live and to die. The State must not only recognize, meaning to let them enjoy freedom, but also help and support diversities (for instance, concerning the sexual preferences and the subjective identities of gender) through an interventionist welfare state. Paradoxically, to say “multicultural society” means, to many people, not only that cultural identities cannot be neither judged nor compared, i.e. they should make no difference in the public sphere, but, more than that, that they should all be publicly supported by interventions of “equal opportunities.”

Even with different shapes, in front of the conflicts between cultures (sometimes especially within the western modernity, as concerning hetero *vs.* the so-called homosexual marriage) on the two sides of the Atlantic, the State’s secularity is demanded more and more as a decisional principle in the public affairs. But what is “secularity”? What does it mean to assume a “lay position”?

To make it easier, there are two answers. (i) In the original sense (going back to the first Christianity), secularity (laity) means “spirit of distinctions,” providing autonomy to the secular realities towards the supernatural ones, without breaking their relation; like this, secularity leads to rational argumentation and to meeting (not to clash or to mutual denial) between different positions, as between faith and reason. With this meaning, secularity consists in providing public reasons that everyone may understand, even if not necessarily share. (ii) In the modern sense (after Hobbes), secularity means to set aside from a religious point of view. With this meaning, it corresponds to the assumption of an agnostic point of view; secularity becomes secularism, which implies a break between secular and supernatural realities; the breaking of the relation between secular and not-secular realities becomes an ideology in itself, and secularism becomes laicism (as shown by the French case: see the Stasi Commission Report 2003).

In the EU version (where the welfare state is notably stronger and more pervading than in North America), multiculturalism is intended more and more as an ideology supporting the second meaning of secularity, that is the active secularization of the public sphere. Its strength lays on its ability to manage the difference between secular and not-secular (ultimate, i.e. religious) realities, basing on a symbolic binary code, which erases the relational character of their distinction. But this is also its weakness.

Hence, its inner crisis and the inability to solve problems that comes from the cultural conflicts.

In the perspective of a reflexive interculturality, to give a lay answer to cultural pluralism does not mean to put all cultures on the same level, because this solution, with its big wicked effects, is neither theoretically nor practically viable. Secularity does not mean indifference towards cultures, but ability to examine every culture in the light of the human rights, namely the distinctions of a reason that can reach the deepest human truths and, as such, pertains to human beings as such, not just to a part of them. The answer to the mere fact of pluralism (multi-ethnic and pluricultural society) does not consist in avoiding, annulling or equalizing all differences in the public sphere, creating a context (wholly formal and rhetorical) of “equal opportunities,” but in being able to synergically and reciprocally manage the differences. This means to have a lay mentality in dealing with cultural relations. Secularity does not mean to let do everything, on the only condition that the actors do not violate the other’s liberty. Such a principle is self-destroying. Secularity means tolerance, meant not only as a mere “let do,” that is a negative liberty, but instead as assertion of positive principles of mutuality, brotherhood, solidarity towards the neighbour with its legitimate differences, the ones that are an expression of the human. This is just the opposite of secularity, meant as ethical neutrality and breaking of the relation between reason and religion/faith.

The Relational Unity Between Faith and Reason

Joseph Ratzinger (2003, p. 166) wrote that: “The former relational unity, nonetheless never completely indisputed, between rationality and faith has been torn. The farewell to verity can never be definite. The range of reason must widen once again...”. In this expression, so rich in contents and hints, there is—in my opinion—the keystone of the question. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that we are still far from the comprehension of its meaning.¹⁹

I cannot stop here to discuss whether the torn has been caused (before or then, more or less) by reason or faith respectively. The problem, on which I am concentrating, is the following one: *what is meant by “relational unity”* between faith and reason, but also between religion and culture? Certainly, it is the unity of a difference. But how do we conceive this difference?

Semantics of Difference, Relational Reason and Common World

It is necessary to elaborate a new theory of difference (as for personal and social identity), permitting us to understand it and manage it in a relational way.

To observe a difference is to trace, or to map, as I would say, a distinction. To talk of relational unity between two terms implies to see their distance (distinction) as a boundary relation. The boundaries’ management depend on how the differences between terms are conceived and handled. Modern science recognizes two kinds

¹⁹ For a wider setting of the problem, I take the liberty of referring to Donati (1997).

of operations: dialectic and arithmomorphic operations.²⁰ I suggest adding a third kind: distinction as a relational operation, conceiving difference through a relational interface.²¹

Since distinction is a reflexive operation, we should refer to the ways reflexivity surveys and judges differences. I would distinguish between three fundamental ones: *dialogic*, *binary* and *relational* (triangular) reflexivity. These are three semantics of difference (see figure 1), which are three different ways to conceive and manage boundaries (boundary as a point of contact/clash, as separation of two domains, as a relation emerging from the disposed combined of *refero* and *religo*). I put on the side the theories claiming that it should be and must be possible to “cancel boundaries” because, in that case, there would be a central conflation between the two terms.

1) *Dialectic* or *dialogic* semantics: the difference is conceived as a gap, under continuous conflicts or negotiations, being more or less able to find an accord or a synthesis. The idea is the one of an Ego-Alter relation, which identities have a boundary where they meet (and eventually clash), and where they discuss and negotiate their own identities. What is “between” them is a sort of externality for the one or the other. It concerns which of the two terms may take possession of it or, instead, how they may share it or make it a space of input-output (one another) sharing. Between Ego and Alter, there is no sharing of specific identities, but rather an assertion of two identities *comparing with each other*. Reciprocity, meant as a symbolic exchange between Ego and Alter, does not require the recognition of a common identity; it may happen just near their boundaries, but not in their inner identity. Cultural unity is possible only if one may find an Alter-Ego in the other, at least under some aspects (namely, about the co-inciding part along the boundaries). Such is the Habermasian solution, according to which the civic values define the common boundaries between different cultures. The difference is perceived as a problematic experience of an Ego desiring to achieve a commonality with an Alter-Ego, frustrated because of the gap, always rising again, with Alter. The search of a common world takes the shapes of a dialectic, maybe discursive (e.g. the discursive ethics suggested by J. Habermas), which can

²⁰ A *dialectic* concept is a concept which boundaries are *not* strictly defined, because it lays partly with other concepts on their respective boundaries (in a sort of “twilight”). Namely, the concept of democracy may have several partly overlapping meanings. To them, it could not be applied the principle of non-contradiction of the classical logic (according to which B cannot be A and not-A at the same time; instead, if B is a dialectic concept, it can be part of A and not-A at the same time). An *arithmomorphic* concept, instead, is a discrete concept, therefore being strictly definable. For instance, numbers (1, 2, n), symbols (z, y, etc.), the concept of triangle or circle. Computers operate with the most arithmomorphic of the distinctions, the one between zero and one. Their characteristic is to be clearly distinguishable one from the other, because they have no defined boundaries and they are not overlapping. According to the logic positivists, these are the only concepts qualified to operate in the world of science. So it is clear why the positive (technical) reason is basically arithmomorphic.

²¹ The *relational* concepts, unlike the arithmomorphic ones (that are divided by a blank space: “the one or the other”), share with the dialectic ones the fact to have boundaries that overlap and cross with other, even opposite, concepts. But—unlike the dialectic concepts (which boundary is a shady space)—they are characterized by the fact that the space dividing them is made of a relation, with personal and *sui generis* powers and properties, not modifiable at will or by dealing, because such relation is a not-fungible qualification, with the characteristics of an emerging effect (generable only on certain conditions).

find only temporary and situated solutions, because in principle Ego and Alter have a divergent and clashing identities.

Such semantics support the way that reflexivity is meant in the literary field (Sandywell 1996). It prevails in narrative, hermeneutic and semiological social disciplines.

II) *Binary* semantics: the difference is conceived as a discrimination and incommunicability. The boundary between Ego and Alter is a sharp distinction (division); it is a separation, an incompatibility, an impossibility to share mutual inputs and outputs. Distinction is defined as a discrimination between a class of phenomena and the (negative) complement of that class, which can coexist with purposes or not, depending on the kind of system operating the distinction. Division generates asymmetry (i.e. as a logic of the distinction system/environment). Alter is the denial of Ego and cannot be “included” by Ego (and vice versa). These semantics are those supporting the theory of autopoietic and self-referential systems, of mechanist, functional and automatic nature (Luhmann 1984). In such version, culture is a mere by-product of the hypercycles of interactive communication. So, there is no chance for a real common world, but only contingent mutual expectations between Ego and Alter. What they share is only the way of turning the world (their experience of it) into a common problem, in order to try to face the paradoxes of the systemic functional Reason.

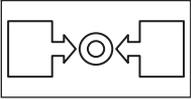
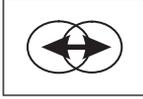
III) *Relational* semantics: the difference (the gap, the space dividing Ego and Alter) is conceived as a relation. Such relation is not an interaction that may be defined as free in the void. It is not mere communication. It is structured. It has a shape that emerges from the properties of the relation’s terms, because it can raise only from them under particular conditions. The relation is constitutive both of Ego and Alter, meaning that Ego’s identity is shaped through the relation to Alter, and viceversa. The boundary is certainly a field of conflict, of clash, of negotiation, but it is also a mutual belonging, a constitutive element of both of them. Hence, the recognition of a *real alterity* (not of an *Alter-Ego*), because relation calls distance, in some aspects even separation, but at the same time it calls sharing between two uniquenesses (and not two reflections), keeping their impenetrability without synthesis. Alterity does not mean irreconcilable contradiction, insofar as Alter is another Self (“the other as myself,” says Ricoeur, not as a same one, but as an *ipse*). If Ego and Alter coincided and were assimilable one another (= *idem*), the relation would fall (disappear). If, on the other side, the relation were completely external and unrelated to Ego and Alter, we would fall on the two former cases (semantics I and II). The cultural debate must look at the relation that, even if in different ways, constitutes Ego and Alter, without conceiving it, as in the latter Hegel, to be destined to a synthesis.

The western culture used, up to today, the first two semantics, wavering between them. I am convinced that, in a globalizing climate, and as provided by the disastrous experience of multiculturalism, a third kind of semantics is emerging.

The third kind of semantics, namely the relational one, points out the cultural differences as they are generated by a “common world” (that “includes” Ego and Alter), which is different and regenerated (re-differentiated) through some forms of relational differentiation—more or less fit to the situation—between Ego and Alter.

Figure 1

Semantics of Difference Between Cultural Identities

I (dialectic semantics)	II (binary semantics)	III (relational semantics)
Difference as a gap (border) between Ego and Alter in which there is at the same time a clash and a sharing between them (Habermas)*	Difference as autopoiesis and incommunicability between Ego and Alter (Luhmann)	Difference as dissimilar way to live a relation, which is constitutive both of Ego and Alter (Donati)
		

* In the book *The inclusion of the other*, Habermas claims that “inclusion does mean neither assimilative engrossing nor narrow-mindedness towards the diverse. Inclusion of the other rather means that *the community’s boundaries are opened to everyone*: even—and above all—to those mutually extraneous and *willing to remain extraneous*.”

The aim to make cultural differences/diversities not only compatible, but also relationally significant, cannot be obtained from dialectic and binary semantics. It needs a relational code. The secularity of the public sphere (and of the State) does not emerge, due to the fact that it is necessary to answer to the growing cultural pluralism brought by migrations. Instead, it corresponds to an original and primary fact, namely the different inflexions of the human reason (on the side of Ego and Alter). Secularity is the same reason for existence of the human being, which builds its own personal and social identity through the cultures it meets. Secularity is the justifying reason of cultural pluralism, when it rises from the very social relations. To analyse thoroughly this point, it is necessary to turn to a relational semantics that permits us to see the unexplored aspects of human rationality: the *relational reason*. What does it consist of?

The Relational Reason: Widening the Human Reason through Social Relations

Understanding the Relational Reason

Relational rationality is the faculty through which the human being sees the reasons (‘good motives’) concerning inter-human social relations (inherent neither in individuals as such, nor in socio-cultural systems). The simultaneous presence of different cultures spurs the widening of the individual rational (axiological) choices within the individual reflexivity. But this is not enough to configure *inter*(culturality) as a social relation. To achieve the “inter” as a common ground, the public sphere needs a rationality able to give account of the differentiation between cultures as a relational one.

In other terms, cultural identities are different because of their different “way” to interpret and live the relation to common values. The way refers to the reason’s instrumental and normative dimensions, while “values” refer to the reason’s axiolog-

ical and purposeful dimensions. The so-called policy of equality of differences, which neutralizes or makes relations indifferent, may only generate new differences, finding no relational solution, but only new forms of dialectic or separation.

The example of marriage is meaningful. If marriage is considered from the point of view of the equality of individual opportunities, gender identities (male and female) are made indifferent, because their relation (the male-female relation) has no peculiar reason to affirm and promote. There is no more need to talk of male (i.e. paternal) and female (i.e. maternal) symbolic codes, because it is just their relation that has been annulled. Similar considerations are worth for the difference between monogamic and polygamic marriage. For the ones supporting the policy of equal opportunity (the *lib-lab* policy, which even A. Sen relies on), these are just two relations, offering different opportunities to the individuals, and nothing more. They do not touch the sense and shape of the marriage relation as such. In the relational perspective, instead, we find human values (and rights) only if we affirm the rights to differences (*of relations!*).

To make social relations in-different, taking away the differential reasons pertaining to each genus, means to cancel what is unique and specific to that kind (or form) of relation. It means to annihilate its value as a *sui generis* reality. For instance, in what pertains to the marriage example, to speak of a “unisex marriage” does cancel the nuptial value inherent in the relation of marriage (and its consequences), since two persons of the same sex cannot have the same relation that exists between a man and a woman (George and Elstain eds. 2006). In relational terms, the unisex relation does not constitute a “couple” able to give birth to a family, properly speaking, insofar as it is another kind of relation with *different relational reasons* (they may be reasons of friendship, mutual aid, eroticism, and so on).

The reasons of the human relations are those which correspond to the dignity of the human being. Such reasons are latent, and they may develop a criticism of the cultural drifts, both of anti-humanism, of trans-humanism and of traditionalist fundamentalism.

In order to support an interculturality able to create consensus on the basic human values, it is necessary to adopt a relational paradigm able to see and *articulate the reasons* shaping the inter-human, what is “between” the subjects. The field of bioethics offers several examples: the embryo’s right to life, the child’s right to a family, the right of an education fit for a human being, and so on. These are all relational rights, because these are rights to relations (neither to things nor to services). Relations have *their* reasons, which the individuals may not know in an explicit (discursive, linguistic) way, but which they understand depending on the kind and level of their reflexivity, insofar as they can see the reasons of relations implied by the fact of being human, in the natural realm sooner than within culture.

The so-mentioned cultural mediation can overcome the obstacles of prejudice and intolerance, only if people are able to relationally combine values, giving them some relational reasons.

Relational reason is able to value cultural differences without hiding them; this is why it is able to overcome the forms of distinction between cultures, which have been dominant in the past (i.e. the segmentary differentiation in primitive societies,

the stratification of cultures by social stratum/status in premodern societies, the functionalist differentiation in the first modernity). These are all forms of differentiation unable to reach a shared public reason within a globalized society.

Relational reason shows us the alternative of the relational differentiation, namely the creation of a religiously qualified public sphere, where religions might play the role of defining the public reason, since they steer people into a reflexive comprehension of their cultural elaboration within the vital worlds.

Such reflexive understanding relies upon an expansion of reason, feeding and increasing it. Therefore, it is possible to go beyond modern western rationality, which is still standing at the distinction between *instrumental* and *substantial* rationality.²² According to this distinction, the relation to cultural values is not-rational. It may just be affective or traditionalist, because the very values are not-rational. *Relational reason comes to tell us that just the opposite is true.* It shows the different modalities through which Ego can relate with values, besides as with the Other, not basing on feelings, moods, emotions, irrational preferences or acquired uses, but basing on reasons that do not consist of “things,” but of goods (values) linked to properties and qualities of the present and future relations. These are the *relational goods*.

Here I suggest to revise the theory of rationality as it was formulated by Max Weber.

Human rationality cannot be reduced to the two types theorized by Weber, i.e. *Zweckrationalität* and *Wertrationalität*, at least as they have been interpreted by the social sciences during the last century. These two concepts are full of ambiguities. As a matter of fact they have led to innumerable confusions. *Zweckrationalität* refers to the calculation of the means useful to achieve a goal/target, but the goal can be seen also as a means, so that the observer cannot distinguish between what is a means and what is a goal. Therefore the concept becomes useless. *Wertrationalität* refers to the value as it is subjectively understood by the social actor/agent, but the value can be either an objective good, valuable in itself, or a mere subjective choice or preference. The concept does not allow any distinction between the two. That is why the reformulations of the Weberian theory of rationality made by many authors (such as Talcott Parsons and Jeffrey C. Alexander, who have translated them into the couple *instrumental rationality vs normative rationality*) proves to be wholly unsatisfactory and misleading.

In order to overcome these shortcomings, I propose a redefinition of rationality as a faculty of human agency constituted by four components or dimensions (which must be interpreted within the relational version of AGIL).

1. The component of *instrumental rationality*, which refers to the requisite of efficiency; it concerns the means; and, as such, it is the adaptive dimension (A) of thought

²² ‘Instrumental rationality’ is conceived as the one that, given certain aims, focuses on the means to realize them; the means are technical instruments to achieve ‘values’ which, by their nature, are indisputable and incommunicable (Max Weber’s polytheism of values). The instrumental reason searches for convenience, utility, efficiency, while ‘substantial rationality’ is the one that focuses on values as *ultimate concerns* subjectively defined by the agent/actor.

and action; its analytical correlate is the economic dimension of rationality, while its empirical macrostructural correlate is the economic market.

2. The component of *goal oriented rationality*, which refers to the situated goals; it concerns the achievement of definite targets (efficacy), and therefore it is the *goal-attainment* dimension (G) of rationality; its analytical correlate is the political power, while the empirical macrostructural correlate is the political system (the state).

3. The integrative dimension of rationality, which refers to the dimension that links the other three dimensions of the human reason; it is the normative dimension I in the AGIL scheme; it decides about the internal morality of rationality and preserves its autonomy towards its environment; it is the rationality of the relation in itself; that is why I call it *relational rationality* (or, in German, *Beziehungsrationalität*) which means that it is the *nomos building* dimension of rationality.²³ In other words, social relations do possess reasons that do not pertain either to the individuals or to the social systems. Individuals and systems may not know these reasons, and certainly they do not possess them. The dimension of relational reasons has as its analytical correlate the social bond, while its empirical macrostructural correlate is civil society defined as an associational world.

4. The value dimension of rationality corresponds to the L dimension, i.e. the directive distinction that guides human agency towards what has a value in itself (what is an end in itself, what has a dignity in itself, or what lies behind the actor's *ultimate concerns*, at the border with the *ultimate realities*). This is the component of *value rationality*, or *axiological rationality* (or, in German, *Würderationalität*), the rationality of what has a true worth, what is worthy and good in itself. One should be well aware that value rationality refers not to a situated goal (the *Wert*, which has or can have a price, as it is in the Weberian *Wertrationalität*), but to a value which has no price, that no price can buy.²⁴ Axiological rationality is not contingent upon the situation. It inheres to the dignity of what deserves unconditional respect and recognition (*Würde*) in so far as it is distinctive of what is human (*vs* what is non-human or inhuman). Therefore it concerns first of all the human person as such (not the individual's behaviour).²⁵ Its analytical correlate is a value *per se*, i.e. a symbolic reference to what is not negotiable, what is distinctive of a person or a good in respect to other realities. Its empirical macrostructural correlate is the religious

²³ The moral norm is what, at the same time, binds (connects) the other three dimensions (A, G, L) and distinguishes the relative autonomy of any social relation from other kinds of social relations (according to MINV/ESAG scheme: Donati 2006). For example, the relational rationality of the family as a social relation consists in connecting its human dignity (L) with its situated goals (G) and the instrumental means to achieve them (A). So that the autonomy of the relation-family is configured as distinct from other types of social relations which are not family. although they can have some dimensions in common with it.

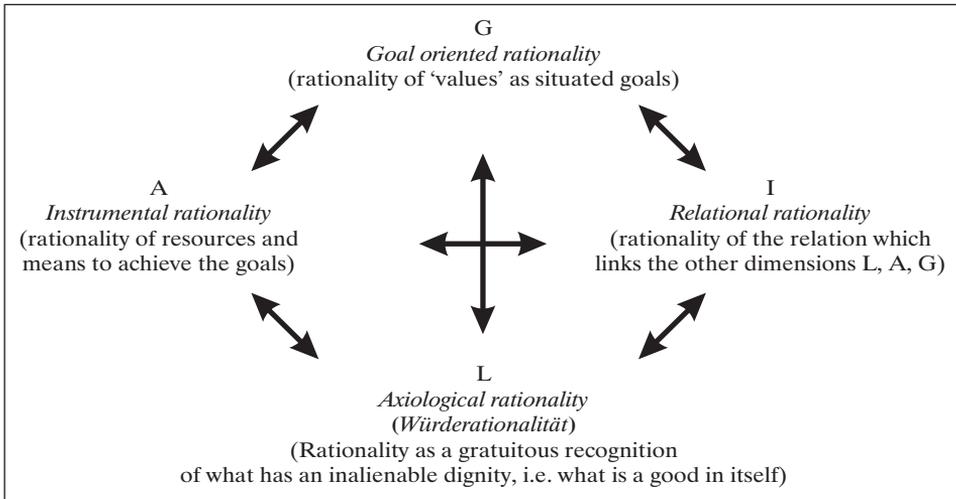
²⁴ Vittorio Mathieu (2004) rightly suggests to distinguish between *Wert* (the value of what has a price or monetary equivalent) and *Würde* (the value which has no price, i.e. anything that cannot be treated as a means and no money can buy). Anyway, he does not see the value of the inter-human relation, and therefore he fails in indicating the *relational reason* which links (mediates) the value in itself (axiological reason) and the other dimensions of rationality.

²⁵ The *value rationality* (or axiological rationality) is inherent to the process of recognition properly understood in its three aspects: 1) as a cognitive identification of an object; 2) as a validation of the truth it bears with it; 3) as gratitude or thanks giving. On these semantics see Donati (2007).

system, whereas religion must be understood as a cultural phenomenon different from the religious faith (which is transcendent in respect to culture, since faith transcends human action and marks the border between L as a culture and the supernatural world).

Figure 2

The “Complex of Reason” (or: The Human Reason as a Complex Faculty)



The four dimensions of the Reason (instrumental, goal oriented, relational, and value oriented to what is worthy in itself) are the constitutive dimensions of what I call the “complex of the (human) reason.” Or, if you like it, the reason as a complex human faculty. I synthesize this way to understand the human reason in a scheme (figure 2) that must be read and interpreted in the light of the relational paradigm (Donati 2006). Within this paradigm, every component is essential in order to have the emergence of a full human reason, both as a theoretic and practical faculty. The recognition, understanding, explanation and implementation of what is ‘rational’ are outcomes of that complex faculty which we call reason as seen from a relational standpoint.

From the sociological point of view, the human reason is a social emergent phenomenon. As a matter of fact, a purely ‘individualistic’ reason does not exist. Rationality cannot be a faculty operating outside social relations. Reason is a faculty which emerges from the operation of its constitutive abilities and potentialities. The latter have their own different properties. Reason is a faculty which comes out as an emergent effect from the combination, interaction and interchange among the four fundamental dimensions which constitute it (figure 2).

Those forms which we call “procedural rationality” and “deliberative rationality” are expressions of particular combinations among the above four dimensions (figure 2). Here I cannot comment upon these (and other) forms of rationality for lack of space.

How does Relational Reason Operate?

Relational reason is that human faculty that operates:

(i) *with relations* (namely, in the perspective of relations, not of individuals or systems), in a contextualized way, in the perspective of culture as an expression of a community; it is made of relations that are put into practice or could be practiced basing on the values of such culture;

(ii) *for relations* (namely, in view of improving relations that promote some definite values of such culture);

(iii) *in relations* (namely, through relations, acting—practically and analytically—on existing relations, in order to create new ones).

On the whole, *relational reason comes into existence every time that the reason for action includes the good of common action.*

Relational reason is therefore the reason of a cultural mediation, intended not yet as “betrayal” (F. Crespi) or “paradoxicality” (the paranoia of Jacques Derrida and Niklas Luhmann) of people’s free natural acting, but as the expression of the need of the human living experience to be *naturaliter* contextualized within a relation, to be directed towards a mediation, to operate through a mediation.

Relational reason is that faculty, proceeding through four components (aims, means, rules, values), relating them inside and with their “environments.” We may distinguish the relational reason when it operates inside (theoretical reason = intentions, means, rules, values) and outside (practical reason = heteronomy, instrumentality, autonomy, gratuitousness) (Donati 2006).

In such a framework, values are necessarily on the border between reason and its transcendental environment (faith). On such border, reason, culture and faith necessarily interact. Values should be seen not as models to maintain and preserve (in an inertial vision of the social system, as done by Talcott Parsons), but as *propellers* of social relations. Cultural values are not only bonds and limits (with zero energy and maximum function of control), but also resources and perspectives of sense (having a proper energy, often more entropic than negentropic).

With his theory of incompleteness of formal systems, Gödel taught us two things: (i) each system needs to relate to an other than oneself, to find a situational and formal completeness [in the formulation of this Author, the formal needs the informal (intuition, creativity)]; (ii) the “total completeness” comes from the relation between all the systems (or rather, it lays on the relations between the systems’ relations). This is worth also for reason, when considered as a system oriented to knowledge and practical action.

If we conceive of reason as a reflexive faculty of the human being, consisting on the ability of one’s *I* to converse with its *Self* on its own *I* and the world, then to expand reason means to expand such reflexive ability (choosing aims, means, rules and values) through relations implied with the *Self* and the world, through its own *Self*. Thus permitting the person to root its own cultural identity inside its own human nature, expanding outside it in the culture, and inter-

acting with it in the various spheres of life, where the I becomes Me, We, and You.²⁶

The Greek *Logos* says: “know yourself,” as it was written in the front of the temple of Apollo at Delphi. The exhortation *nosce te ipsum* (Saint Augustine) has become the focus of introspection in the Christian spirituality. Relational reason observes that such self-reflexive precept risks to fail and to fall off into subjectivism. It makes us understand that, without the Other, the I cannot know itself in a fully human way. Therefore, the *Logos* should make itself relational and recognize that: “*without You, who are Other than Myself, I cannot know myself*” (where You is *both* the Other human being at the level of the immanent existence—horizontally—and God at the transcendental level—vertically). Relational reason shows that there is no opposition between Me as the Other (*Idem*) and Me as a sole and unique being (*Ipse*), as claimed by some philosophers; instead, there is synergy, because the singleness of the person (ipseity) emerges from the background of what is common (sameness).

To talk of relational reason is to enter the reflected thought (reflexivity). It requires changing the observational point of view, being no more the one of the single terms or of a presumed “system,” but that of a relationship. It means to enter into another order of knowledge (the order of relationality).

Relational reason offers good reasons, *autonomally* understandable by everyone irrespectively of his/her specific religious faith, because they refer to the development of the human nature as a reality provided with *own* properties and powers as regards culture, even if culture should combine with nature.²⁷ What makes “good” the agent/actor’s reasons is their relational character as referred to the human, where “human” stands for what can be only an end in itself, never a means to other than itself, because it refers to the species-specific quality of the human person, perceivable and recognizable by everyone.

Relational Reason Offers the Necessary Mediations for a Veritative Recognition of the Cultural Identities

The citizenship we need must allow people, families, social groups and communities, belonging to it, to combine their own culture (and religion) with a growing differentiation of the individual (due to the various circles of identities intersecting in him/her). Thus, the individual should be put in the position to identify its own belongings and to determine the hierarchy of his/her ultimate concerns.

If everybody, whatever his/her culture/religion, may identify in the slightest of a common world, this world cannot consist neither of a state citizenship neutralizing social relations, nor of a multicultural citizenship making the relations between culture indifferent, because identity depends on relations.

²⁶ *Me* as a social agent in primary relations, *We* as a corporate identity, and *You* as an individual actor in a social role (cf. Archer 2003).

²⁷ In the Catholic doctrine, these are the so-called *preambula fidei*.

The common world is the necessary mediation elaborated by the reason (commonly shared by the human beings), so that every single person may live in the public sphere, even being of different religion or faith. Only in the interface of the inter-subjective relation, reason recognizes the reasons of faith, and faith recognizes the reasons of Reason. Only through their relational values, Reason may open to faith and vice versa.

The lack of relational mediation puts all religions, and not only Christianity, into crisis. We may see it through the growing entropy of all the world's religions. Christianity is certainly the one that has absorbed and expressed the most the spirit of distinctions, thus the most differentiated inside as regards the use of reason. It is inside, and not outside Christianity, that anti-Humanism and trans-Humanism do generate (for the eastern religions, these terms have little or no sense).

The differentiating reason of western modernity produced multiculturalism as an ideology. Only relational reason may cure the consequent pathologies, drifts, deviations and implosions.

The common world is secularity inside the natural law, but it may be caught only updating the notion of natural law by means of relational reason. The attempts to redefine the natural law by means of orders of recognition of the past, as the ancient ones of narrative feature and the modern ones of proceduralism (Ferry 1991), are no more suitable.

Secularity needed by multicultural societies consists of a *new spirit of distinctions*, which does treat social relations neither as dialectic oppositions, nor as binary ways to discriminate human persons. Such a spirit must transform social relations in an experience of recognition within a complex circuit of mutual gifts. This is a relational spirit, because it uses relational semantics of distinctions, as actions inspired by the rule of reciprocity. In this way, it generates a secularity, which is a recognition of the relation between different identities, as a free act of gift and acceptance of its responsibility (in fact, the gift is an answer to former gifts, and it leads to a reciprocation).

The question of the recognition of different cultures implies three steps, related between them: the attribution of an identity, its validation and a sense of gratitude (thankfulness) for its existence. These three steps represent the gift circuit that, differently from the animal realm, is a constituent of the human's sociability. Human recognition would not be possible if the identity was not a relational one, and if the common world was not relationally constituted.

Finally, it is clear that the biggest and more specific performance of the relational reason is the one of solving the inner difficulty of multiculturalism (namely, the problem of recognition), through the relational observation and action: recognition is observed and acted as a gift circuit.

The relational expansion of reason can be understood by all cultures, included the eastern ones. It assumes a particular meaning when it is deeply rooted to the Christian idea of human life and of the existence in general, because of its specific trinitary symbolism.

The adoption of this perspective allows society to exceed the limits of liberal tolerance. While liberal tolerance is without relations, the Christian one passes through

relations. The Christian one is able to understand the sense of all faiths and religions, and of the relations that they can create between them by means of the human (lay) reason. Its reason lies on the fact that a principled tolerance may be flexible about means; it is a form of rationality able to combine value with differentiated rules and instruments. This is, in fact, the relational reason.

The route of the relational reason does not assert neither a monistic uni-verse, nor a multi-verse without any order, nor an undifferentiated pluri-verse, but an ordered *inter-verse*, a world of diversities oriented one another, on the standard of a reciprocal rationality, fit for a convergence on common experiences and practices, which are independent from the single culture as a symbolic product (included the language).

Synthesis and Perspectives

The vicissitudes of multiculturalism show that we live in a world, in which the Hobbesian solution of the social order is no more suitable. Institutionalized individualism (individualistic liberalism), assessed by the Hobbesian solution, falls into crisis. There is no more a political power (Leviathan) that may guarantee individual liberties, neutralizing the cultural (and religious) conflicts within the public sphere. The ideology of multiculturalism is not a solution to the ethical void which widens in proportion to the fall of the Hobbesian national State. Which are the alternatives?

A “universal culture” is not thinkable as a *world culture* (corresponding to the *world system*) in a functionalist meaning. The current debate on the difficulties to achieve a theoretical universalism in culture (Browning ed. 2006) clearly demonstrates it. The Christian thought may certainly propose its own vision of universalism, basing on its social doctrine (Crepaldi 2006). But, without a relational interface, the Christian vision is inevitably perceived as particularistic. A universal culture is possible, instead, as the spirit of an ethically qualified secularity, constituted as a common world, which may be drawn through the relational reason, in relationally differentiated social spheres.

Beyond the deficits of multiculturalism, the solution could be provided by a renewed secular sense of culture, as a common learning space through practices of daily life, where mutual recognition sets aside from the world of signs and cultural traditions, in order to grasp the primary experiential sense of the inter-human. In such a situation, the lay character could assume the connotation of an independent reason, looking at the sense of human relations, without depending on justifications based on the sole faith (namely, committed to dogmatics inside the single religion). In order to let such a secularity emerge, it is necessary that people and cultures learn to operate differences, no more in a dialectic or binary way, but through a relational symbolic code, according to which the autonomy of subjects is not a separation (or continuous clash between them), but a *choice of the “environment” to depend on*. Relational reason should have the task to avoid every kind of *conflation* in the cultural conflicts: top-down conflations (as in the case of Jacobin assimilationism), bottom-up conflations (as in the theory of an unlimited community of discourse), and central

conflations (peculiar of the relationism that we find in the pragmatics of a coexistence understood as a conflation or hybridization of cultures).

When relationally intended, secularity promises a new coexistence between cultures, not based on the waiver to their content of civilization, but on its renewal, through the recognition that one's own identity is relationally constituted through the relation to the Other. This idea is the backdrop of what I call *societal constitutionalism*.

Today, many people are willing to recognize that, to say it in the words of Joseph Ratzinger (2005), the self-limitation of the "positivist reason" (even adapted to the technical ambit) implies a mutilation of the human being. Non-believer laymen, atheists and agnostics claim it too. Everyone, today, put the evils of a globalized society down to the technical reason, and to the domination of an economy pushed forward by a science without ethics. Certainly, the positivist reason is neither universal, nor complete, nor sufficient to itself. The roots of reason are wider ones. It is shown by the fact that the globalization is stimulating new "local" cultures.

To see these roots, dipping in the man's nature, it is necessary to produce what has been called by Max Weber "cultural breakthrough." Christianity has done it during two millennia, getting done a qualitative leap of the world's process of rationalization. But today it is frozen. This is because the couple faith-reason is no more able to demythicize false idols. To do it, it should structure the unity of such difference in a relational way, through the relational reason. That is the only way for reason, which grew on the Judaic-Greek-Christian roots, to operate a new cultural breakthrough.

We need *new* roots to survive. We must find a new imagination, which is together sociological and transcendental, in order to support a meeting between cultures, being able to get to the root of man's dignity, namely God himself. The project to give back Christian roots to Enlightenment has no possibility, if we do not look to the reasons of the social relations. To think of reason as a Logos may be helpful to the individual to provide a new access to culture, and to the intercultural debate, but it cannot be closed inside the religion of the Book. It must open up to historically contextualized human relations. It has to learn from everyday life practices in so far as they are enlightened by a reflexive reason fully relational.

There is a lot to learn from a reason able to expand itself towards those ultimate realities that cannot be reckoned, that are not technical-scientific, bringing inside them the deepest sense of the human. We should be aware that this target requires a relational development of reason. Social relations contain the reasons that operate the mediation between the religious faith and the public reason.

Not willing to exceed the limits of my sociological competences, I tried to argument here the theory, according to which the way we observe the relation between man and God, mediated by the *Logos*, needs a renewal. It is the *connection* (relation!) between the mankind (perfect) and the divinity (perfect) of Jesus Christ that must be inquired again, since these are neither two juxtaposed realities, nor immediately coinciding with the only Person.²⁸ To understand such relation, which is the keystone of the

²⁸ It is worth while noticing that Joseph Ratzinger has claimed that Christ's identity is fully relational. I quote: "Jesus is entirely 'relational', in his whole being he is but a relationship with his Father (...). The

co-existence of so many and different “reasons” (cultures), it is necessary to resort to a reflexive semantics of difference (between the human reason and its supernatural environment, as between cultural reasons), which is a relational semantics. This is the meaning of the claim according to which religious faith can and shall liberate reason from its blind spots.

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‘I am who I am’ lies wholly within the relation between Father and Son” (*Gesù di Nazaret*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2007, p. 399).

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