

Living with Others. Living like Others. An ethical basis for intercultural education

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Abstract. The Other, both guest and stranger, is what undermines the granitic concept of our reassuring identity, questions it, upsets its order and infects it by putting it on its own edge. Exactly like the encounter with the stranger, education opens up the possibility for us to be or not to be an Other, it is the process by which we recognise ourselves as identity stateless individuals. Through the phenomenological analysis of Max Scheler, who, in contrast to every theoreticism of a solitary ego, sets the origin of the Other's existence in the interpersonal sphere of the we (*egoità-tuità*), leading to an ethical re-foundation capable of exalting the emotional dimension in the definition of value (emotional apriorism), an attempt will be made to identify a possible ethical basis for intercultural education.

Keywords. Interculturality, Pedagogy, Ethics, Love, Sympathy

1. Beyond Dialectic: The Dialogal Dialogue

The current cultural climate forces us to face a hardly escapable *practical question*: what kind of *human coexistence* in the time of *pluralism*¹? The possible answers arrange themselves within an ideal space, whose extreme margins lay in *monoculturalism* on one side, in *cultural relativism* on the other². The pedagogical relocation of such a practical question, as well as taking charge, in educational terms, of such an interrogative, which assumes unprecedented forms, imposes an undelayable reflection, capable of confronting the risk of a hasty simplification at all times.

Is it possible to problematize interculturality in pedagogical terms without forming a sort of *critical theory* that could grasp the uncertain, intricate, problematic nature of such a questioning? Moreover, is it possible to orient in this theoretical-practical labyrinth and to substantiate an *ethics of the improper* without confronting the conflictual tension dragged by this construction, which claims to be dialoguing? Can we bypass the problematic nature of a confrontation that deals with a *co-lliding* that has to turn into a *dialogue*?

Addressing the issue of interculturality in pedagogical terms requires a thoughtful pause, capable of going beyond the contingencies, beyond the proclaimed danger of the clash of civilizations.

¹ See R. Panikkar (2002), *Pace e interculturalità*, Jaka Book, Milano.

² *Ibidem*.

It is not possible to introduce, in the pedagogical *linguistic game*, a concept like that of interculture without calling into question the elective paradigms that led and lead the educational practice. This is not about denying the value of those theoretical bearings that oriented the conversion of the pedagogical theorization to the ability to do / to act, it is about rethinking the already answered questions as unresolved, always looking for the next one.

The task we are called to is to inhabit, to cross the spaces of our questioning with a crowbar that allows forcing the rhetoric characterizing some interrogatives, and simultaneously, encourages asking some logical questions.

The perspective of a possible theorization about interculturality imposes radical questions that do not end up in the squared space where we often confine the problem, but it refers to the fertile, dilated horizon of the pedagogical thought/action in all its problematic complexity.

An attempt to respond about the pedagogical implications of the issue of interculturality, avoiding some questions such as identity and alterity, is not possible.

What kind of identity construct should underlie an intercultural pedagogical projectuality: a substantial, unitary, metaphysically meant identity³, or a dissolved, deconstructed, a-founding identity, which is in fragments and problematically open⁴?

What image of the individual shall we freeze in the attempt to found an intercultural pedagogical discursivity: a person-individual, a cogitating conscience-ego that preserves himself unaltered and considers himself as a given thing, or a hermeneutical constructed ego that multiplies, a restless ego wounded by a processing open to individualisation?

Who is the addressee of the educational process we look at through the interculturality lens: the Marcelian *homo viator*, a pilgrim that orients himself using the compass of hope, or the *homo vagans*, a nomad that goes forward with no destination⁵?

The other, guest and stranger at the same time, is what undermines the granitic concept of our reassuring identity, questions it, upsets its order and infects it putting it on its own edge. The other imposes a pause on the monologue thereof, it is a call for being conducted somewhere else, and it is the authentic experience of the *ex-sistentia*. The other saves us from the egological solitude, from unintentionality, and it puts us into the groove of a relational transitivity⁶ that unsettles, upsets and inspects us.

Only through the other, we can save us from the completely absorbing risk of an identity principle that ends up engulfing every difference and assimilating everything is strange to it.

According to Mounier, *the first experience of the person is the experience of the second person: you*⁷, but who is this you, how can we open up to this without the risk of understanding it on the basis of that owner act, that property relationship that leads the individual to think according to the identity and to *bring the difference back to its degree*

³ See G. Acone (1997), *Antropologia dell'educazione*, La Scuola, Brescia.

⁴ See F. Cambi (2006), *Abitare il disincanto*, UTET, Torino.

⁵ See G. Marcel (1945), *Homo viator*, Aubier, Paris.

⁶ See E. Lévinas (1979), *Le temps et l'autre*, Fata Morgana, Montpellier.

⁷ See E. Mounier (1949), *Le personalisme*, Univ. de France, Paris.

zero: the *normality*⁸? Is *sympathy*, this original emotional relationship, sufficient to remove the ego from its egoic imperialism?

The most unquiet question concerns the possibility/need to raise such issues by recurring to a dichotomous thought. Probably, the possibility to give an answer, even the most partial one, is strictly connected to the ability to rephrase the questions avoiding the sirenic temptation of reintroducing the spirit of the *classificatory genius of the Western mind*⁹ and, with it, a *neo-colonialism sub specie educationis*. The attempt to reject a dichotomous reflection is closely connected to the need to save the debate on interculturality from an analytical domain, which obeys its synthesis duty, and to lead it along a path capable of not cancelling the differences, thinking them in a *holistic-contemplative constellation*¹⁰.

If, on the one hand, we cannot bypass the partiality of each point of view, including that one trying to live a tension that claims to be global, on the other hand we cannot escape a sort of contagion of visions and perspectives.

We cannot fail to put aside our most personal *monolithic* codification of reality, especially when attempting to plumb a complex epistemic object like interculturality; we cannot fail to try to embrace the prismaticity of the world, its various changing concretions, through other-strange eyes; we cannot fail to leave room for the occurrence of a *metanoia of the sight*. According to Panikkar, the intercultural dialogue is achieved in the conversation between people and not only between individuals, because it is not just an individual dialogue between two human beings released from their substratum and their stories, but also an osmosis between two visions of reality¹¹.

Far from being a mere *dialogue with the neighbour* (intraculturality), interculturality means entering into dialogue with the *stranger*. Yet this *dialogue* cannot be reduced to a dialectical dispute, supported by a *logic mutually accepted as a judge*; it is rather the *encounter (legein) of two dialoguing individuals*, a *dialogal* and a *duological dialogue*. This *encounter* is always a way of inhabiting alterity escaping from the domain of the *logical comprehension*, a way of proceeding without compass nor banister and of standing around the *vital circularity* of the existence disobeying the *principle of Parmenides*, the assertion of the thought primacy over being, the reduction of the other to a modal phenomenon of being and the *epistemology of the hunter* that, as Panikkar warns, turns the other into a plunder.

Pedagogically, we are asked to discard any *monologues* and arrogant *claims to objectivity*, as well as to go beyond a dialectical vision, in order to leave room for Panikkar's *dialogal dialogue*, a dialogue that does not try to convince the other, in other words to defeat the interlocutor dialectically or, at least, to seek together a truth subjugated to dialectic. The dialectical dialogue presumes the acceptance of an impersonal logical field to which we attribute or concede some purely objective validity or jurisdiction. On the contrary, the dialogal dialogue presumes a mutual trust by venturing together into the unknown, since it is impossible both to determine a priori if the participants will understand each other, and to suppose that the human being is an exclusively logical being. The field of the dialogal dialogue is not the logical *arena* for the struggle between diffe-

⁸ See R. Braidotti (2005), *Madri, mostri e macchine*, Manifestolibri, Roma.

⁹ See R. Panikkar (2002), *Pace e interculturalità*, Jaka Book, Milano.

¹⁰ See *Ibidem*.

¹¹ See *Ibidem*.

rent ideas, but the spiritual agora for the encounter of two entities that talk, listen and, hopefully, are aware of being more than 'thinking machines' or *res cogitans*¹².

On the basis of these premises, one cannot fail to recover, on a pedagogical level, a *narrative* (Bruner) and *mythical* (Panikkar) *thought*, a thought that is universal and, thus, intercultural. One cannot overlook the *intercultural sense* of narration¹³, of a narrative capable of understanding the human kind in its identity-difference, ahead of every logical objectivation.

The attempt to pro-ject, to jet forward, an intercultural education forces us to focus the historical-cultural horizon; however, the success of such a project is probably related to the occurring of a *diplopia*. Only a virtuous circularity between the historical-cultural horizon and the horizon of sense can protect us from any mutilated, distorted visions. Only the search for a possible thread of sense, capable of connecting and overturning any apparently central and peripheral positions, capable of thinking identity in synergic connection with alterity, can give us some more chances to get out of this theoretical labyrinth. How can we overcome the cultural identity solipsism and seek a *relationality* that is not *uniformity*, in a time that obeys the *myth* or *false ideal* of the *transparent society*? Of course, the possible answer is not confinable to a mere fact-finding/heuristic level, it is straight eminently ethical. In fact, it is not possible to resolve these questions without wishing both a *cultural revision* and the coming of a *post-egoic ethics*¹⁴.

The contemporary, post-capitalistic information society, which is intentionally *positive*, ordered to remove everything *negative* by *smoothing* and *levelling* in the name of an alleged *transparent equality*, is a society that, as recently shown by the philosopher Byung-Chul Han, ends up finding an obstacle to the *flat communication of the Identical* in the *alterity*, in the *otherness*. To the *pathos of transparency* the Korean philosopher opposes the *pathos of the distance*, the respect for that alterity that cannot be completely eliminated¹⁵.

In a time when, in every country, the population is – according to Bauman – the *sum of many diasporas*¹⁶, one cannot fail to dethrone individuality/individualism with a view to a global openness of sense, as well as one cannot fail to appeal to a common ethics, capable of transcending any emotivism and utilitarianism.

In a continuing evolution, in the void of the orientation points, we vehicles of the sense of a plural belonging are like *jettted* into an unavoidable globalization and, at the same time, we are inevitably reminded of a *mutual dependence*, a responsibility that has *global dimensions*. We have to open ourselves to the stranger, we have to show ourselves like *Panamanian wasps*: migrant social insects, capable of crossing our boundaries¹⁷.

¹² See *Ibidem*.

¹³ See F. Cambi (2009), *Narrazione e intercultura: un incontro cruciale*, «Studi sulla formazione», 12, 1/2, pp. 261-264.

¹⁴ See G. Acone (2011), *Globalizzazione e formazione della persona*, «Pedagogia e Vita», 69/1, pp. 13-29.

¹⁵ See B. Han (2012), *Transparenzgesellschaft*, Matthes & Seitz, Berlin.

¹⁶ See Z. Bauman (2008), *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?*, Harvard University Press, London.

¹⁷ See *Ibidem*.

2. Living with Others, Living like Others: The Ethics of the Im-Proper

The stranger inhabits us: he is the dark side of our identity, he is the unexpected guest, the place of mirroring and *recognition*, he is the conscientization of our difference; it is the awareness of living with others, but he is also the opening of a chance: living *like others* with no levelling integrations¹⁸.

The stranger, the other, has the Freudian face of the *disquieting strangeness*, he is the *uncanny*, the appalling reemerging of what is familiar, the double, *my (own) unconscious*¹⁹.

The encounter with the other means also experiencing the misplacement that seems to expose us to the risk of a depersonalization, a *deconstruction of the ego*.

The other is presence and absence, something simultaneously proper and im-proper to me, near and distant. But what is proper and what im-proper? Yet, what ethics should underlie an intercultural discursivity, Savater's *ethics of self-love* or a possible ethics of the im-proper?

Fernando Savater insists on the individualistic and *self-affirmative* nature of ethics. Rejecting the possibility of the emergence of an *altruistic ethics*, the Basque philosopher detects the founding principle of every possible *open, temporal, individual* ethics in the *self-love*²⁰.

Ethics, which finds its vital germ in the will and is based neither on the *absolute transhuman* nor on any *impersonal instances* or a supposed *superhuman, divine authority*, is never *disinterested*, it is always *a will or a refusal act*. The *will of itself of the will*, the *will to endure and preserve itself*, is what Savater means by *self-love*.

Morality is then a private matter. For the Spanish philosopher, it exists no other ethical motive but the search and defence of what is more *advantageous*, of what is more convenient; ethics is necessarily and rigorously *self-affirmative*; vices and deviations of morality come from the same roots of virtue; there is nothing, in the laic ethics, that forces us, in some form or another, to *renounce* what we are; every morality tends to the *completion* of what we are. Morality, inasmuch reflective, has an *egoistic humus*²¹.

Whilst Savater's approach renders the difficulty, specific of the 19th century, to produce ethical formations capable of exceeding a subjectivistic and voluntaristic approach, whilst it exemplifies the postmodern tendency to renounce a universal vocation able to guide actions, it is also a theoretical shore that permits us to reflect upon the need to think, in the time of a *value polytheism*, to an ethics alternative to that of the *enlightened egoism*. In the current *Stimmung*, the need to reactualize a *rational foundation of the ethics*, a *normativity of the logos*, is perceived as a matter of urgency. The human action requires a norm, a measure, a *ratio* of the act, in order to be and qualify as such. Without this, the self-foundation of the act would mean locking itself up in the precision and immediacy of an absolute and, therefore, completely overbearing decision and gesture²².

One cannot fail to tend to a harmony between an (own) individual level and a level that is *uncanny other (im-proper)*, familiar in Freudian sense, universally human); one cannot fail to try to substantiate an ethics capable of arresting a normative dimension,

¹⁸ See J. Kristeva (1988), *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris.

¹⁹ See *Ibidem*.

²⁰ See F. Savater (1988), *Ética como amor propio*, Mondadori, Madrid.

²¹ See *Ibidem*.

²² See G. Cantillo (2005), *Fondabilità dell'etica*, in Botturi F., a cura di, *Le ragioni dell'etica*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano, pp. 81-117.

equal to the universality of the proper/im-proper, by claiming a founding instance; in conclusion, one cannot fail to give some breathing room to an ethics that, although it constantly tackles an unescapable perspectivism, does not give up searching the *proper* through the *im-proper* acrobatically, by means of a dialogal torsion.

Pedagogically, is it possible to promote an ethics of the improper, and, if yes, what *moral feeling* does allow us encouraging a more authentic involvement in the *past of others*? Through Max Scheler's phenomenological analysis, an attempt will be made, in the following notes, to find a possible ethical basis for intercultural education.

3. From *We* to *I*: Education and Harmonization

In contrast to every theoreticism of a solitary ego, Max Scheler sets the origin of the existence of the other in the interpersonal sphere of the *we* (*egoità-tuità*), leading to an ethical refoundation capable of exalting the emotional dimension of the definition of value (*emotional apriorism*).

In Scheler's *we-centric* elaboration, feeling plays an important axiological role. All values represent, in fact, gangways capable of connecting what is *sensible* (vital-natural dimension) and what is *supersensible* (spiritual-ethical dimension). There is a real *ethical sense of the emotional life*, and this claims the own autonomy against the conceptual-analytical heuristic domain, disclosing an original way to give sense and value to the occurrences. Proceeding from this premise, *co-feeling* in its various forms (*emotional contagion, unipathy, sympathy, empathy*), not intended as a possible theoretical place to plumb in order to thematize the origin of the human sociability, becomes one of the highly articulate cruces of the experience. The latter develops through the openness to the world and its significances (nature, other human beings, God), thanks to a movement aimed at overcoming the ego boundaries and at receiving, answering, exchanging, participating and sharing what is other.

The experience opens and consults the individual, and it exposes him to the possibility to ascribe some significance, forcing him to face such processes like *co-joying* and *co-suffering*, which are *co-feeling* forms where the past of the others seems to become immediately 'comprehensible'²³. These *co-feeling* experiences are essentially defined by *participation*. The openness to the other through the participation, which transcends the mere comprehension, puts us in relation with each other. According to Scheler, it does not suffice to grasp the emotional tonality, to understand and re-experience it in order to co-feel authentically: for instance, ethically it has no value to sympathize with one's joy for anything bad, with his suffering the good before him or with one's hate, cruelty and cynical satisfaction²⁴. It is necessary to go beyond the unintentionality of the *contagion*, beyond the *emotional identification (unipathy)*, it is necessary to establish a gap between oneself and the other, to overcome the cognition and leave room for participation, so that an authentic *co-feeling* can take place. *Co-feeling*, in fact, far from representing *people's essence identity* (Schopenhauer, Hartmann), *presumes the pure essence*

²³ See M. Scheler (1923), *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, in Id.(1972), *Gesammelte Werke*, VII, Francke, Bern-München.

²⁴ See *Ibidem*.

distinction. Removing the *solipsistic illusion*, the personal essence, people's *pure being-so in themselves*, lets the action of the *authentic co-feeling* correspond to the grasping of an idea of reality as equal in terms of value of *alter as alter*²⁵. Co-feeling is a *surpassing of the boundaries of the self*; nevertheless, it halts before what is not objectifiable: the *person* and the related undeletable *double transcendence* (specificity of the *emotional states and personal intimacy*). Co-feeling is neither an *instinctive act* nor an *action*, it is a *suffering* and a *reacting* that copes with what, in terms of comprehension, is *essentially trans-intelligible* in humans²⁶.

Far from considering co-feeling as the highest value from which one can deduce some ethically valid behaviours, far from attributing some theoretical validity to those ethics of the sympathy that end up *presuming* what they want to *deduce*, supported as they are by a *relativistic conventionalism*, Scheler demonstrates that ethics cannot be reduced to this original emotive relationship, and he grasps one of the *essential differences* between co-feeling and love: co-feeling, in all its possible forms, is fundamentally *blind to the value*²⁷. Love is what allows us moving towards the others penetrating their intimacy, it always refers to a value; it is a *spiritual act*, an *instinctive, emotional movement*. Love is something that goes beyond *benevolence* and *preferring*, it hides no *desire*; love transcends *fulfilment*, *in no case it means co-feeling*, nor it is a theoretical behaviour, not either an *emotional state*, it is a *movement from the lower value to the higher one*, during which the higher value of an object or a person blinks²⁸.

Love synergically connects us to alterity, it means getting out of egomorphic and anthropomorphic projections, it is what transcends the projecting co-feeling dimension and simultaneously allows the occurrence of the *essence of a stranger individuality*. The love for the other, recognized in its unrepeatability uniqueness, leads us to preserve an *ideal value image* and holds us close to a transforming axiological *movement*. Here love affects and infects that important interpersonal relationship that is education. Especially when it claims to be intercultural, education finds its subsisting principle in the Schelerian love; in fact, *sympathy* does not suffice to let education take place, this needs that *axiological tonality* typical of love. Education is always an attempt to *harmonize what we are and what we have to be*, it tends to encourage the Schelerian *global human being*, the entity whose way of being coincides with the still open decision about what it wants to be and to become²⁹. The extraordinary *plasticity* of the human being and of this *direction of the movement of the universe* causes the latter to embrace every *existential possibility*. To paraphrase Scheler, intercultural education has to tackle the word *harmonization* written on the *front door of our age*: *harmonization* of all racial tensions, *harmonization* of mentalities and self-opinions, of the world and God³⁰. This *harmonization*, which feeds on differentiation, is an *inevitable destiny*; as Scheler warns, the human being cannot choose, he can grope around in the dark thinking he encourages a *specific ideal* of the individual, he can reduce to a sort of second-hand dealer of ancient people (*pagan*,

²⁵ See *Ibidem*.

²⁶ See *Ibidem*.

²⁷ See *Ibidem*.

²⁸ See *Ibidem*.

²⁹ See M. Scheler (1929), *Der Mensch im Weltalter des Ausgleichs*, in «Politische Wissenschaft», 8, pp. 31-63.

³⁰ See *Ibidem*.

Early Christian, gothic, of the Renaissance, Latin-Catholic), otherwise he can embrace the *overflowing world desire* to restore all the possible stylistic devices of the human being species³¹, and he can *direct, guide* this *harmonization*. According to Scheler, the individual must learn again to grasp the great, invisible mutual *solidarity* that binds all human beings in the global life, and, to do that, he has to reinforce the differences. Education plays a not secondary role, so that this *inevitable destiny* becomes true.

The possibility to say *we*, to educate in being-with, is intimately and problematically connected to the necessity of saying *other*, of letting the other speak. Education is that errant, never ended process that *intentionally* opens itself to an encounter where identity discovers itself through a total alterity; even when it is an attempt to silence the latter, even when it is a distancing, a denial, education always leaves room to that *vicarious consciousness intentionality* that underlays the *original phenomenon of the educational relationship*³².

The educator is a *vicar* because he always assumes the part of the other, now with his *responsible initiative*, now with his 're-presenting' *proposal*, in the educator the vicarious intentionality is thus *consciousness of the other as other*. However, the *vicarious intentionality* is able to express the conscientiality of the learner, actually it is a consciousness of the other *on one's own*, and that is the *you* of the educator, who wants to take an initiative *in place of* the own self. Moreover, the *vicarious intentionality* is the consciousness of the other *of the self*, which is the *horizon of sense* within which the proposal, the actions and the historical-cultural signs, which express and reveal the latter, acquire some concrete sense; just *representing* this horizon of sense, the educator offered as witness³³.

Education always brings alterity into play and redoubles it; education is *alterity*. The micro-world of the educational relationship is always a contamination of faces and cultures capable of expressing themselves through a reflected, acted difference. The entire educational experience is riddled with many continual presences of the other. The educational event is a gallery of 'faces' that barge in our vital space and we respond to in very different forms, to each face we respond, in his way, in a unique absolute form³⁴.

Exactly like the encounter with the stranger, education opens up the possibility for us *to be or not to be other*, it is the process by which we recognise ourselves as identity stateless individuals. Education is a task, an engagement that does not know partial destinations; it is a call for *becoming a person*, an unquiet question, the Deweyan attempt to *give meaning to the things* and to ourselves. It is an acrobatic tension that, generally, does not resolve in a functional way, if it inevitably takes shape in a socio-cultural context, and this concerns the socializing dynamics; on the other side, education is a necessary transcending of what falls within the perspective of *having to be*.

Having to be, a place where datedness and – to borrow from Scheler – an *ideal value image* take shape, constitutes the most appropriate space for the occurrence of the *possibility of being different*.

Education, the ideal space for mediation between the requests for contextualism and

³¹ See *Ibidem*.

³² See A. Bellingreri (2007), *Scienza dell'amore pensoso. Saggi di pedagogia fondamentale*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano.

³³ See *Ibidem*.

³⁴ See A. Nanni (1995), *Educare alla convivialità*, EMI, Bologna.

universalism, which cannot not be ethically founded, is a tension that, far from thinking of itself as substantially placed, is structured around the inevitable category of *reciprocity*. Basing on everyone's uniqueness and unrepeatability, education is always a *humanization of the human being* (Kant, Acone); nevertheless, this necessary personalization can take place only through a dialogal openness, through a relationship capable of silencing the egological word and of *invoking* the other in a Levinasian manner.

The individual, the main character and receiver of each process that claims to be totally educative, is not a being in himself, uncommunicated, on the contrary he is always openness, encounter, as well as pedagogy is always a conscious, critical reflection, so that a *humanism of the we* can exist.

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