

THE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE: AN AXIOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE OF THE INTEGRATION PROCESS

Laura CIUBOTARAȘU-PRICOP

Assoc. Prof., PhD, "Al. I. Cuza" University of Iași, Romania
Corresponding author: laura.pricop@gmail.com

Abstract

In this paper we tried to emphasize the theoretical elements that underlie the integration process; to identify control points of the integration process where theory actually finds the possibility to act. The full perspective on the integration process has profound philosophical implications, because it is based on the concept of dialogue, and should discern between the types of relationships that establish a dialogue between participants. On the other hand, at methodological-applied level, we tried to highlight the mechanisms that are naturally triggered in the regional, cultural, ideological, religious process of integration, and the corrective elements where failures occur.

Keywords: *integration, assimilation, intercultural dialogue, dialogical knowledge, reciprocity.*

Integration, perhaps in its most common meaning, also means potting, not only as a simplified picture but also as a "weak metaphor" [1], because this is how identity is perceived, it's as if you put in a pot, with a big almost filled with flour head, a handful of Black flour, and you mix it...The homogenization process inevitably leads to non-recognition, a larger mass of individual incorporated elements, only a fine expert, at a careful consideration, could recognize a harsher flavor of authentic unprocessed wheat fiber. If this metaphor is transferred to social sciences, the image distorts; the mixing can be corrupted, its amount may no longer mean anything... Integration, viewed from this perspective, be it the economic, legislative, socio-cultural or ideological integration reveals a complex process that eludes fixed structure, of what Max Weber, precisely because it was based on sound principles involving compliance, called "axiological neutrality" [2]. The human factor, value judgment, habits, beliefs change a process that initially seems to be safe, as they suppose the simple agglutination of a small quantity into

a significant one. At this socio-cultural level, the integration of individuals in a different societal, cultural, linguistic structure, does not only view the adaptation to some cultural new customs, the compliance with the community law to which it adheres or the assimilation of its language. If integration was limited to these items, we have to deal with genuine integration, but rather it would be assimilation. This process is not unique, cultural history and civilization has also gone such moments. As a relation established among different groups, assimilation assumes power-type relationships, subordination of the weak, constraint, from the part of the strong one, of his language, culture, faith, laws. On the account of the subordination relationship, the weak one will give up partially or totally, to his own language, customs and beliefs constrained by rules imposed by the strong. But, in a society in which the humanistic values, multiculturalism, specificity are on top, integration should be based on "dialogical knowledge" [3] and should rather mean a formal agreement in its different worlds: different individuals, different cultures, different ideologies can all meet in a single area. If we look from this perspective and we start from this premise, integration should take into account the principles of dialogue, for dialogue, when it arrives: "two people meet each other and notify each other something, then, always two worlds, two perspectives on the world and two images of the world are approaching one another somehow" [4]. According to its etymology (from the Greek *dia* – with, together) and *logos* – speech, rational justification) the concept of dialogue finds its confirmation "only through assimilation (word) in the other and by consent of the other" [5]. Gadamer believes that the genuine dialogue

is endangered and that the individual has generally developed an *unfitness* for dialogue [6] that either occurred from: a) the monologization of behavior; b) the scientific-technical way of thinking; c) the experience of alienation and estrangement in the modern; d) the state of refusal to communicate, used as a weapon against the apparent communication that prevails the social life. We found a definitional structure, slightly different from that of Gadamer, in the writings of Leonard Swidler, where dialogue is seen rather as a “conversation on a common theme between two or more people with different opinions, whose main goal is for each participant to learn from others” [7]. If, for Gadamer, the aim of the dialogue, in the open tradition of Plato’s dialogues, is to set on truth, Swidler looks ahead for an attenuated (*soft*) perspective upon dialogue that can be the basis of the integration process, because individuals are no longer centered on the discovery of a single truth. In a dialogue based on conversation, truth is multiplied, and the participants in the dialogue are and shall be linked with other truths. The agreement between the two mentioned positions (Gadamer, Swidler) is found within the concept of conversation. For Gadamer, conversation is distinct from the concept of dialogue and has “a unity and cohesion of its own” [8], being defined as a process that favors a genuine encounter with another, which goes beyond the mere act of communication, of transferring the information, because you meet in the other “something we have not met yet in our own world experience.” On the other hand, Swidler distances himself, in his view, from the implications involved in the debate, when two or more people are conversing / dialoguing on a common theme. In a debate there are losers and winners, the power relations are installing, the position of one of the participants can be so convincing in order to produce changes, and the integration process could mean changing the language, religion, habits with those more persuasive of the social, ideological, economic, cultural actors. Understanding each other and no change is looming as the basic principle of dialogue. To get in the area of agreement, understanding the other, Leonard Swidler proposes a decalogue of the intercultural and interfaith dialogue; ten rules are clearly proposed

to be followed: 1) The main purpose of dialogue is to understand, *i.e.* to alter *our* perception and *increase* the perception in knowing reality that then to act according to them; 2) The inter-ideological and interreligious dialogue must be designed in two distinct areas within each religious and ideological communities and between religious and ideological communities. This disjunction highlights a corporate nature of interreligious and inter-ideological dialogue, conformation given by the shared structures of companies; 3) Each participant must enter a dialogue with all honesty and sincerity; and *vice versa*: each participant must assume the same total honesty similar to dialogue partners; 4) In inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue we should not compare our ideals with the practical ideas of our partners, but compare our ideals with those of our partners and our practices with our partners’ practice; 5) Each participant has to define himself. Swidler says that only a Jew can fully define what a Jew is. Others can, from outside, to describe the Jew. Mutually, the interpreted must be able to recognize the interpretation. Swidler calls this rule, the “golden rule of inter-religious hermeneutics” (by Raimundo Panikkar). At the level of dialogue, this means that each participant in the dialogue will try to express his views in relation to the partner’s statements; the partner, in his turn, must be able to recognize himself in this expression; 6) Each participant must enter the dialogue without any rigid assumption (hard-and-fast assumptions) on where issues are controversial; 7) dialogue can take place only between equals or, can *appear as poles* (as the phrase used by representatives of the Council of Vatican II). This rule actually states walking on a line of positivity, the equality between participants in the dialogue: asserting that religion, for example, would be lower entails the same appreciation, just so as a counterpart; the rule requires that there cannot be a dialogue only from one part; 8) Dialogue can only be built on mutual trust. Behind this sentence, as projected by Swidler lies, in fact, on a methodological rule following the Cartesian model (Descartes sees understanding as a kind of mathematical operation: if we have some known elements, clearly and distinctly understood, they must be

removed from the problem and the only things that cannot be understood must remain. The solution occurs only when the issue was reduced to something unknown, as in an equation, the unknown element is related to a known proportion. In Cartesian terms, this process is called comparison: "It should be noted that a comparison is called simple and manifest, whenever the sought and given work equally participate in a certain nature, and that all others need training, just because that nature is not common or equal in each of the two terms of comparison, but shrouded in certain ratios or proportions, and the main part of the human effort is not only to reduce the scale so as to clearly see the equality between the sought thing and the other that is known." [9] Trust, as the foundation that a dialogue develops can be achieved only if participants in dialogue will address at the beginning of the conversation generally accepted problems, so as not to provoke animosity, so that dialogue, with an increasing degree of trust between partners, to develop from the generally accepted problems, known and recognized by both parties, to difficult and controversial issues; 9) Those entering an inter-religious or inter-ideological dialogue must show, even the smallest, self-critical attitude towards them, as well as one's own religious or ideological tradition. The lack of critical analysis of their own religious or ideological traditions would imply that, says Swidler, we would make all the answers right holders, that such an attitude makes the dialogue useless and even impossible. (If, in the inter-ideological and intercultural dialogue the rule might be considered as both the ideological discourse, and the cultural supports changes, increases, decreases when things in the religious discourse have a high complexity degree. The religious speech, in its whole, aims at various structural elements of different beliefs, whatever their nature, which are unchanged. The occurrence of deformation of the faith foundations would, at best, lead to deviations and then another type of discourse would be considered. The religious speech perpetuates problems as they were revealed by divinity; a problem once solved, it no longer accepts an alternative. For a Christian, the problem of the rainbow occurrence on the sky

will never have a scientific significance, despite the existence of another one, but it will represent the covenant sign that the Divinity concludes with people. The Biblical discourse, a complex one, dissolving the elements of philosophical, historical, sociological, anthropological, scientific etc., discourse (the ethical, moral part) may be perceived as a speech prescribing the unissued and undifferentiated form of the most religious discourses for Christianity). 10) Each participant must, finally, try to live "inside" the experience of religion or ideology of his partner. This norm finds expression at inter-religious, intercultural, inter-ideological dialogue levels, in the following example, according to the paradigm offered by Swidler. A European will not fully ever understand an Asian, if he is not in any way, an advocate of the Asian culture, ideology or religion, and reciprocal, no Asian will fully understand a European, unless he somehow becomes European. At a practical level, Swidler refers to three areas where dialogue acts: 1) practical - for humanistic purposes, 2) spiritual - it is trying to live the world experience of the dialogue partner, 3) cognitive - to seek, through dialogue, the understanding and truth. Also, on this level, Swidler noticed the development of the dialogue over three phases: a) mutual knowledge, b) valuing cultural, ideological, religious traditions of all dialogue partners, 3) "together" exploration (dialogic) of the realities or cognitive elements (meaning, truth etc.). Obviously, Swidler's project is ambitious and wants to resolve the conflicts, segregations, the enclaves within the complex societies composed of individuals coming from different religious traditions, with different ideologies etc. An evaluation of the project, taking into account the fact that Swidler places as the ground floor a common language called Esperanto-ecumenical, is difficult to be done. These rules of intercultural, inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue can be considered only if we seize the nature that establishes the relationship between individuals. The power, ordering relations are rejected reports; they are taken outside its presumed structural framework for dialogue. Within the authentic dialogue, the only kind allowed relationship is that of equality.

The question that arises concerns to some extent what happens before they enter a dialogue,

this prior area, the status before equality, what is preparing you to reinforce the dialogue with the one you do not know and who is radically different. The prior condition of entering the relation with the other is described by Martin Buber as “training, waiting, wait”. Buber finds three areas where the world of relationship is established [10]: a) living together with nature. A confused, agitated, speechless relationship: “the creatures are stirring in our presence, but they fail to approach us, and that You strikes the language threshold”: b) living with the people; c) living with the spiritual beings. In this case, the relationship is “without words, but creating language. We do not distinguish here any You, but we feel called, and we answer – making, thinking, acting”.

For Martin Buber, the relationship means *reciprocity* that “You act on me, just as I act on him”. Reciprocity primarily involves the manifestation of the passions. For instance, Descartes speaks of *passion to the subject happening*, and of action *against the one who makes it happen* [11]. In fact, it is about, if we use a geometric representation, of a triangle whose base is formed from a passive subject who receives the passion and another that is active and spreads it, and the passion-action that lies in the third pole. In other words, the nature of the I-You relationship is marked by the presence of passions.

Buber even said that “the one who sees a person as a whole and he is forced to reject it is no longer under the empire of hate, but in that of human inability to speak/utter about You (...) he who hates is directly closer to this relationship than the one without love and without hatred” [12]. The hatred, sadness, anger, disregard, contempt, envy, fear, cowardice are vices that place you outside the authentic I-You relationship, but closer to enter the relationship. While love, desire, joy, all positive passions in general, can project you into the basic I-You relationship and dictate the need to enter into the relationship with each other, to know another. Getting beyond the state of waiting, or wait can be achieved by controlling the passions, which, according to Descartes, are not bad by nature. Virtue is close to Descartes’ education. In fact, in terms of Cartesians, virtues are “habits of heart that predispose to certain thoughts, being so different

of these thoughts” [13]. Virtue basically means learning, rehearsal, the education of the soul and serves to correct deficiencies that we are born and to develop the free will. A virtuous man, according to Descartes, should respect the laws and customs of the country he lives, should remain committed to his religion, should adopt, as opinions, only the most moderate ones provided by those wise people who live in the same area. By developing the free will, determination firmly gets into the soul in relation to ongoing actions.

Descartes defines generosity as a vice, generally seen as a remedy against those passions which have rather negative connotations. The consciousness of the ability to be free in your behavior, to the generous man, means, at the same time, recognizing that other people have the same quality, moreover, others’ interest is above the self-interest. In this way, people get to handle out some passions, desires, jealousy or envy, as Descartes says: “nothing whose acquisition does not depend on them is not worth enough in their eyes to be more desirable; and the hatred towards people because they value all; and fear because they have confidence in their virtue gives them a sense of safety; and, finally, wrath, because placing too little value on everything else that depends on grants never gives the enemies the advantage to recognize themselves of being offended” [14]. Free will is the only one that can provide an answer to the passions; it is the one who decides and takes as a response what imagination supplies for them, or accepts the checked answers given by education or those one shown by the highness of the soul, if the other is recognized as a dialogue partner.

Endnotes

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4. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Gabriel Cerceel and Larisa Dumitru, Gabriel Kohn, Cătălin Petcana, Editura Teora, București, 2001, p. 513.
5. *Ibid*, p. 514.
6. *Ibid*, p. 512.
7. Leonard Swidler, *The Dialogue Decalogue. Ground Rules for Interreligious, Interideological Dialogue* in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 20:1, Winter 1983.
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12. Martin Buber, *I and You*, pp. 41-42.
13. Descartes, *Passions...*, pp. 146-147.
14. *Ibid*, p 142.