

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

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Summary

The following is an examination of the theory of intercultural dialogue from different disciplinary perspectives, such as science, religion, sociology, psychology and philosophy. It comes at a time of universal concern regarding intolerance towards the other: individual and cultural others, and it has been a subject of discussion at diverse world organizations led by UNESCO and the European Commission. The ultimate aim

of these organizations is to reduce international violence, war and terrorism. In addition, one of their major concerted efforts is to promote a dialogue between cultures with the sole aspiration of achieving intercultural understanding between different cultural and religious communities around the world. This study proposes ways of promoting intercultural dialogue based on historical paradigms like, for instance, the paradigm of medieval Spain.

1. Towards a Definition of Intercultural Dialogue

1.1 Towards a Definition of Dialogue

Dialogue is considered as a rational conversation between two or more persons. The word is derived from the Greek *dialogos*, which in turn comes from *dialegethai* (to converse). *Dialegethai* comes from *dia* (through, across) and *legein* (to speak).

Today the meaning of this concept is perceived, according to J. Tarnowski, as a method, process and social attitude. The method describes patterns of inter-human communication conducted for the sake of mutual understanding, rapprochement and finally – cooperation.

The word *dialogue* as given in the dictionary of Catholic social science describes *dialogue* as conversation aimed at mutual confrontation and understanding of views, and as cooperation in the search for true protection of general human values and work for justice and peace.

Dialogue distinguishes itself from debate because it involves a form of listening that is beyond position or profession. Dialogue is described as a process of exchanging information where participants leave the dialogue with a deeper knowledge level and wider frame of reference than when they approached it. It involves the creation of an expandable context. Dialogue is successful to the extent that all parties to it are permanently stretched beyond their opening views.

Furthermore, dialogue distinguishes itself from debate because negotiation is a discussion in which the participants try to strike a deal or reach an agreement of some kind. In other words, negotiation is the art of *give and take*.

In contrast with the art of negotiation and debate, a dialogue may request from its participants to see each other not as an abstract being, but as a particular individual and the process as one of accepting the other.

1.2 Approaches to Dialogue: Types of Dialogue

Arupa Tesolin proposes the following four stages for approaching dialogue:

- Stage 1: Sharing of terms and views in a cross-disciplinary context.
- Stage 2: Relentless excavation of implicit assumptions
- Stage 3: Stating new assumptions that arise from collective dialogue,
 acknowledging mindful dialogue.

Stage 4: Skillful group dialogue methods, deepening common ground, developing new ideas, recognizing and realizing potential gains

It is clear that intercultural dialogue does not exclusively deal with social and political issues. It also considers the importance of dialogue in the relationship between religion and science due to the diverse religious conflicts around the world caused by a lack of knowledge of the other's culture. In other words, a lack of a worldview. It is important to appreciate a worldview because it serves four important functions for the people of a culture. First and foremost, a worldview performs an explanatory function for the members of a culture; it provides explanations on how and why things got to be as they are and why they will continue to be that way. Second, a worldview performs a psychological reinforcement. A worldview provides ways for people to gain reinforcement for their beliefs in times of anxiety and crisis. This reinforcement may take the form of rituals in which the people participate, or of individual activities that reinforce basic beliefs. Third, a worldview performs an integrating function, systemizing and ordering people's perceptions of reality into an overall design. Finally, a worldview provides an adaptational function for members of a culture.

Pope John Paul II asserted that the church and the scientific community will inevitably interact; their options do not include isolation. Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes. Each can draw the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish. According to his attitude, we need each other to be what we must be, what we are called to be. (Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Director of the Vatican Observatory*, 1.6.1988, in *Papal Addresses*, p. 300).

The most widely used typology in the field, called "Ways of relating science and religion" which was first published in 1988, expanded slightly in 1990 and in 1997, and used to restructure the material from 1990, lists four types of relations, each with subtypes: *conflict* (scientific materialism, biblical literalism); *independence* (contrasting methods, differing languages); *dialogue* (boundary questions, methodological parallels); and *integration* (natural theology, theology of nature, systematic synthesis).

We can also include J. Rutkowiak's three types of dialogue: (a) information dialogue, (b) negotiation exchange dialogue, and (c) dialogue for possible understanding. The first serves to complement and exchange information, which the interlocutors already possess. The second is held in the face of a difference of opinions in order to reach a common point of view and consensus. And finally the third type of dialogue constitutes a condition of possible understanding.

It is also relevant to consider the concept of culture in order to understand one of the two elements of the so-called byword, "intercultural". By definition, culture is always embodied in a specific community – in the way its members feel, think and act; that is, in the way they understand themselves and the world, realize their happiness, express their moral, aesthetic, religious and political values, and establish particular relations as individuals and groups in every sphere of practical living.

Once we have defined the constitutive elements of the concept, we may proceed towards the definition of "intercultural dialogue". At the European Commission in

Brussels in March 2002, Member of the European Parliament José María Gil-Robles considered intercultural dialogue as “es una expresión tautológica, porque la cultura es esencialmente intercambio y diálogo. Ese *humus* fecundo del enriquecimiento mutuo que permite vivir y crecer a las distintas manifestaciones culturales cuando no incurrir en la fatídica tentación de encerrarse en sí mismas (*It is a tautological expression, because culture essentially is interchange and dialogue. The productive humus of mutual enrichment that allows us to live and grow in the different cultural manifestations when they do not occur in the fatidic temptation of locking ourselves in*).

At the same gathering and in the context of the tense relations between globalization and solidarity, intercultural dialogue was also perceived as a path to conviviality and multiculturalism in which cultures influence each other without destroying themselves or entering into clashes or conflicts. One of the major challenges of the future is to devise dialogues between cultures able to balance unity and solidarity with tolerance and diversity. Between the universalistic (euphoric) rhetoric of the Western culture model and the post-modern discourse of cultural relativism, there is indeed a growing recognition that some forms of open dialogue between peoples and cultures can be appropriate worldwide.

Intercultural dialogue becomes a necessity not only for overcoming conflicts but also for rethinking and responding to global challenges faced by humanity. Ricoeur’s ethical principles, rooted in the personalistic perspective of J. Maritain and E. Mounier, offer a meaningful purpose to the process.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has given the following significance to intercultural dialogue: “Without this dialogue taking place every day among all nations – within and between civilizations, cultures and groups – no peace can be lasting and no prosperity can be secure”. Outlining the value of dialogue between civilizations launched by the United Nations, he stressed that “it helps us draw on the deeper, ancient roots of cultures and civilizations to find what unites us across all boundaries, and [...] perhaps most important [...] helps us to discern the role of culture and civilization in contemporary conflicts, and so to distinguish propaganda and false history from the real cause of war”.

1.3 Aims of Intercultural Dialogue

Earlier assumptions considered dialogue between cultures similar to the dialogue between persons. Others believed that the real purpose of intercultural dialogue was to reduce international violence (war, terrorism), while there were others who thought that the ultimate goal of intercultural dialogue is fostering global economic development.

At this point we may also introduce the concept of the intercultural person, since he or she represents one who has achieved an advanced level in the process of becoming intercultural and whose cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics are not limited, but are open to growth beyond the psychological parameters of any one culture.

Other similar terms such as *international* person, *universal* person, *multicultural* person, and *marginal* person are used to project an essentially similar image, with varying

degrees of descriptive and explanatory value. The term ‘intercultural person’ is preferred since it is more inclusive than the others in portraying the type of person whose psychological makeup transcends any type of group identity including national, racial, ethnic, gender, professional, or other sociological typifications of people.

The intercultural person also possesses an intellectual and emotional commitment to the fundamental unity of all human beings and, at the same time, accepts and appreciates the differences that lie between people of different cultures.

A highly intercultural person possesses the skills to competently perform the roles required by each cultural context, and is able to avoid conflicts that could result from inappropriate switching between cultures.

Due to the affective nature of the process, intercultural dialogue should be not only intellectual (cognitive knowledge) but also sympathetic understanding (affective knowledge/appreciation of the other). An essential element of this understanding is praxis: action. In addition, it is the creation of social attitudes conducive to the understanding, appreciation, and respect of other cultures.

The intercultural dialogue must reveal the transparency of the walls which make cultures self-enclosed or forbidden to others and should seek the bond which unifies them: humanity, seeking to encompass all the cultures of the world, that should be a universal project and cultivate a *culture of dialogue*.

2. Frameworks for Cooperation between Cultural Communities

2.1 Conditions for the Construction of a Conceptual Model for Intercultural Dialogue

The UNESCO program of culture studies deliberately began to tackle intercultural problems as from 1976 in order to give effect to a resolution adopted by the organization’s General Conference. Thenceforward, the prospecting of the transversal axes and the areas where the major regional and sub-regional cultures meet, and an analysis of the characteristics and implications of such a meeting were to be added to research into, and promotion and dissemination of these cultures, which had for a long time constituted –and still do constitute – the basis of this program.

Some scholars propose as a condition for the encounter of a “genuine” intercultural dialogue: the actuality of culture. To be meaningful, intercultural dialogue should reach the intelligentsia as well as the masses. This is based on the assumption that culture exists in the hearts and souls of the masses.

It has been said that intercultural dialogues have been taking place between scholars, officials of non-government organizations, and social, religious, and political leaders. Generally these dialogues revolve around the following topics: discussion of the meaning, possibility, or impossibility of dialogue, the analysis of cases of dialogues, the clarification of issues related to dialogue, and finally the role intercultural dialogue plays in reducing international violence and promoting economic development.

The real aim of intercultural dialogue is considered to be the reduction of international violence: terrorism and war. However, intercultural dialogue implies an understanding that leads to praxis. Therefore dialogue cannot be accomplished merely by holding conferences, but should be built into the very structure of the cultures of the world. Dialogue, in this sense, is a rational conversation between two parties in an atmosphere of freedom, respect, equality, trust, and commitment to truth.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks Formulated for Understanding Intercultural Communication

The intercultural communication theory illustrates some of theoretical frameworks that have been formulated for understanding intercultural communication:

Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM). First developed by Pearce and Cronen (1980). It has been elaborated to help explain the process and demands of intercultural communication. According to the theory, communication is simultaneously regulated by, yet constitutive of, structure. Structure, in the form of relationships, roles, self-image, ritual, and so forth, shapes talk that in turn creates structures. The theory highlights rules that both tell people how to behave and are created through those same behaviors.

Communicative Resourcefulness. This theory focuses exclusively on coordination between interlocutor *identities*, by defining competent intercultural communication as effective identity negotiation.

Communicative Theory of Ethnic Identity. Developed by Hecht, Collier, and Ribeau (1993), it defines competence as the successful enactment of identity and is based upon a reflexive relationship between communication and structure. Unlike CMM, however, structure in this theory centers on identity and not rules. Identity is a way of understanding and behaving that simultaneously prescribes modes of conduct and arises out of them. The emphasis of this theory is on differentiating and integrating four frames of identity: personal, enacted, relational and communal.

Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation. Developed by Kim (1998a, in press-a). According to the theory, when people enter environments in which they no longer function effectively, they will attempt to change through a process of stress-adaptation and growth. This occurs entirely through communication. During intercultural interaction, interlocutors who recognize themselves to be outside their environment will become stressed with the experience of confusing and ineffective communication. Consequently, they will try to adapt by learning new elements of the host culture that will allow them to communicate like people from that culture while, simultaneously, unlearning the respective elements from their own culture.

Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory (AUM). Developed by Gudykunst. According to this theory, effective communication has two basic causes: anxiety and uncertainty. Anxiety is an affective response, a feeling of being uneasy, whereas uncertainty is a cognitive state describing one's inability to predict and explain people's

behavior. Both anxiety and uncertainty must be maintained within certain limits if effective communication is to occur.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). This theory contributes to our understanding of interactions like these by focusing attention on the language, nonverbal behavior, and paralinguistic used by interlocutors to realize moves of speech *convergence* and *divergence*, that is, linguistic moves to decrease communicative distance. CAT comes directly from the work begun by Giles (1973).

3. Intercultural Dialogue for the Promotion of Social Attitudes Conducive to the Understanding, Appreciation, and Respect of Other Cultures

3.1 Cognitive and Affective Understanding

As mentioned earlier, intercultural dialogue should include intellectual and sympathetic understanding of other cultures. The first creates the conditions of knowing, or knowing about, the other cultures; the second creates the conditions for experiencing elements of other cultures: e.g. art, social practices, religious ceremonies, etc. The first is cognitive and the second affective.

The content of the first is idea, while the content of the second is value. It is not enough to know the other culture; it is equally important to cultivate a feeling for it. Both types of communication are needed to create an attitude of welcoming and appreciating the other cultures.

The point of intercultural dialogue is not to immerse every person, or the whole community, in the totality of another culture or all the cultures of the world, but to undergo enough experiences to develop a sense of appreciation and respect for other cultures – to view them as human cultures, to consider their contributions to human civilizations as a possible source of self-enrichment, and to recognize that they have the legitimate right to assert their existence and flourish.

Cognitively, our ability to complexly process information, the rigidity of our attitudes, and the degree to which we monitor our behavior, affect our anxiety and uncertainty. Affectively, our ability to tolerate ambiguity and our empathy influence whether we experience anxiety and can make accurate predictions about strangers' behavior.

Cognitively complex people form impressions of others that are more extensive and differentiated, and better represent the behavioral variability of others, than cognitively simple people.

With regard to cognitive understanding, Schuetz (1944,1963) claims that the cultural pattern of the approached group is to the stranger not a shelter, but a field of adventure, not a matter of course but a questionable topic of investigation, not an instrument for disentangling problematic situations but a problematic situation itself and one hard to master.

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A leading figure in the research of Hispano-Hebrew literature and of cultural interactions between Christians, Moslems and Jews in Medieval Spain. A pioneer in the study of the affinities between the Hispano-Hebrew and the Spanish-Christian literatures in the 13th century.

Among her publications: *Yehuda ha-Levi Repercusion de su obra*, Riopiedras Ediciones, Barcelona, (Spanish); *Todros ha-Levi Abulafia, Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain*, Dvir Publishing House (Hebrew); *Yehuda ha-Levi – Estudios Literarios – Akfaguara-clasicos*, Madrid; *The Heritage of the Jews of Spain*-editor - Tel Aviv, (Hebrew, Spanish and English); *Encuentros & Desencuentros Spanish-Jewish Cultural Interaction Throughout History* – co-editor – Tel-Aviv University Press (Spanish and English).

Books of her Original Poetry have been published in Israel and in Spain.

Has been a visiting professor at several major universities, including: Complutense University, Madrid and Harvard University, U.S.A; She has given lectures in many of the universities and academic centers in Spain, U.S.A., England, France, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Egypt, Jordan and Morocco.

Has initiated and directed special projects aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue. (Israel, U.S.A, Spain)

Prof. Doron has been awarded an honorary title from *H.M. Juan Carlos I, the king of Spain: The Medal of Honor*, the "Lazo de Dama del Mérito Civil"(1998)