

Cultivating creativity for intercultural dialogue

El cultivo de la creatividad para el diálogo intercultural

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Abstract:

The present article analyses how cultivation of creativity underpins the possibility of rational dialogue with people who have different cultural origins by confirming the essentially productive character of human beings and contemplating creativity as a human dimension with intrinsic value, linked to the full realisation of the individual's personality. The phenomenon of creativity is examined as an event that —sometimes dramatically— extracts the subject from the cultural world of mediations formulated within her own tradition that she usually inhabits, thus revealing to her a transcultural reality that manifests itself clearly. Recognising this original reality —which goes beyond the signified constructed by different cultural traditions and from which creative action occurs— is the starting point for a true dialogue between cultures that enables a process of cultural critique, in other words, an examination of the validity of the products or objectivities of one's own culture and the cultures of others.

Keywords: creativity, culture, education, truth, interculturalism.

Resumen:

A través de la constatación del carácter esencialmente productor del ser humano y de la consideración de la creatividad como una dimensión humana valiosa en sí misma, ligada a la realización plena de la personalidad del individuo, se analiza cómo el cultivo de la creatividad *cimenta la posibilidad de diálogo racional con los que tienen orígenes culturales diversos*. Se examina el fenómeno creativo como acontecimiento que saca al sujeto —en ocasiones de manera dramática— del mundo cultural en el que normalmente vive, de meditaciones elaboradas en el seno de la propia tradición, y le descubre una realidad que se manifiesta de manera palmaria y que es *transcultural*. El reconocimiento de esta realidad originaria, más allá de los significados construidos por las diversas tradiciones culturales, y a partir del que la acción creativa tiene precisamente lugar, constituye el punto de partida para un auténtico diálogo entre culturas que posibilite una tarea de crítica cultural, a saber, un examen de la validez de los productos u objetivaciones de la propia cultura y de otras.

Descriptores: creatividad, cultura, educación, verdad, interculturalismo.

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1. The humanity of *poiesis*

Human beings are eminently productive. Their existence involves transforming the natural world they encounter in a way that can be described as *social*, in other words, not only for their own benefit as individuals, but for the species, for others. Marx (1974) said that the essence of humanity is work, something he classifies as shaping the environment the individual inhabits, since for human beings it is natural to change nature, to construct an inhabitable world (Gehlen, 1980).

The issue this raises is to determine what the possibilities of this transformation are and—despite its intrinsically mediated character—whether it can display the originality and immediacy of natural reality and serve as a meeting point for people with different cultures. This question points towards the question of the limits of human artistic expression in the broad sense and its ability to allude to *that which is*, to the real as distinct from the constructed (which is always *culturally* constructed), to the *ens ut ens* in contrast with the *ens ut verum*, to ontological distinctions in contrast with merely logical and linguistic ones, and, consequently, to that which does not depend on humankind: what humankind does not create but rather finds.

The transformative or productive aspect of the human being deserves careful and specifically educational attention, owing to the possibilities this characteristically human activity raises for co-existence in an evidently diverse world.

However, it is also important to note the existence of groups of people whose way of life is characterised by a distinct lack of interest in the world and, consequently, in transforming it. Inciarte (2016) mentions the Aramaic Monophysites, motivated in their way of life by a pure longing for God expressed as a clear disdain for the merely human world and its fleeting products. Their way of life is characterised by activity that aims to be pure action (*praxis*, *doing*) at the margin of producing (*poiesis*, *making*) culture and its rational and artistic expressions. Inciarte draws attention to the insulting simplicity of a such an ascetic existence but, at the same time, he understands the meaning of this type of pure Christian expression, which can also be recognised in everyday existence where, in the hustle and bustle of human activity, the finite suddenly loses all of its importance to be displaced by the diffused fulness of the absolute. This ambivalence of contradictory impulses is typically human, and it is opting for just one of them that causes the author to be perplexed.

While one of these poles might monopolise the interest of some, on the whole it is not only action but also production or making—of which work is a form, as an effort that leads to a result and whose virtue is laboriousness—that is characteristic of the human way of being in the world. The intimate relationship between life and art in the etymological sense, which contains creativity as one of its possibilities, is understood from this perspective. Creativity is the characteristic that makes human production novel, original, and

also relevant, as novelty is not a sufficient condition for creativity (Cropley, 2004; Runco, 2008). Creative action is necessary in two ways: not just for excellence, for the whims of a fulfilled and satisfied existence, in other words, not just for what is superfluous or excess beyond the merely physical or natural or the fight for survival, but also for the demands of material *living* as this requires strategies discovered imaginatively that can respond more effectively to the challenges of existence. Cropley emphasises the *social* dimension of the creative phenomenon, given that it «does not occur in a vacuum, but in a social context» (2004, p. 13), and so is incomprehensible in the abstract or without relation to the demands of the specific surroundings in which it arises and to the judgements of others. Creative action is also necessary for *human* life, that is, for oneself beyond the merely natural. Human beings are open to the perfection of their natural creative potential and they need this through appropriate educational action. This is why theories of creative *potential* are genuinely relevant in the field of pedagogy, faced with those theories that focus on creative *performance*, even though the concept of creative potential in them is more slippery in terms of identifying and evaluating it, than the one that focusses on products (Runco, 2008). The educational process of developing creative potential allows individuals to discover their most characteristic identity through what they produce and necessarily compares them with others who are also producing subjects, not just those with whom they immediately coexist but also people living in more distant

settings. We will analyse two dimensions of creativity—the identity of the creator and the creative process—and then evaluate the extent to which nurturing creativity through educational actions can lay the foundations for the possibility of a rational dialogue between people of different cultural origins. The need for this and for a solid intercultural education is clear given that «the likelihood of conflict in the case of civilizational, sectarian, linguistic, and civilizational-linguistic diversity is statistically higher ($p < 0.05$) than the likelihood of conflict in a homogenous social setting,» even though «this does not mean that the mere fact of cultural, ethnic, or religious diversity automatically generates confrontation [...], nor that cultural homogeneity is a guarantee of peaceful coexistence» (Álvarez, González, & Fernández, 2012, p. 28).

2. Art and human creativity: current perspectives

There has been very significant growth in literature on creativity as a human characteristic in recent decades, particularly since Guildford's efforts to study it scientifically. This is not just the case from a quantitative viewpoint; studies into creativity have also undergone a qualitative transformation. Traditional disciplines initially approached creativity systematically, applying their own methods to their analysis of it and emphasising elements of it that were ignored by initial studies, which had linked it exclusively to general intelligence. Runco (2004) carried out a review of the development of research into creativity over the previous

thirty years, bringing together the various perspectives from which it had been considered (behavioural, biological, clinical, cognitive, developmental, economic, educational, historical and historiometric, institutional, psychometric, and social). The philosophical approach to creativity doubtless dates back to the beginnings of ancient Greek thought, albeit using other terms, but it is in recent decades that it has been explicitly positioned at the centre of attention of research, forming an area of study with its own substance. As Copley (2004) notes, according to the Nomura Institute, human society is in its fourth era —the era of creativity— having passed through the information era, which followed the industrial and agricultural eras.

In the field of pedagogy, the possibilities for developing creative thought have been well recognised, given their clear usefulness, so much so that teachers have been described as «creativity workers» (Grupo Si(e)te. Educación, 2012, p. 8). This is especially relevant in the current era, characterised as it is by accelerated cultural evolution, the pace of which seems to increase exponentially as the world becomes more complex (Runco, 2004; Urban, 2015). Piirto includes creative and innovative skills in the category of *21st century skills* and classifies them in three types according to whether they relate to individual work, work with others, or the application of ideas of this type. In relation to the second of these categories, she emphasises her belief that creative capacities necessarily involve other people, owing to the importance of communicating and developing these ide-

as in a social way to take into account the perspectives of the other. Therefore, Piirto collects the comments by a group in which particular care was taken of the relationships and attitudes of the members to encourage creativity:

The idea of feeding back —instead of feedback— suggests that we are all nourished by observing the work. Giving food or digested opinion —like comment back to the author—, suggests more of a reciprocal relationship. More of a two way continuum than a dead end street (2011, p. 38).

In addition to a routine element, which is necessary for appropriate performance in practical situations, insofar as all of them have a common basis, López Ruiz (2000) also identifies as a component of the empirical knowledge of good practical professionals, a creative element, which our era requires us to develop with particular care to overcome the eventualities that assail experts in their professional life, imaginatively discovering new and previously unthought of ways of practising their disciplines.

The exceptional impetus this field of study has experienced has taken shape in the interest shown by educational policies of European, American, Australian, and Asian countries in including promotion of creativity as a central educational objective (Shaheen, 2010), albeit recognising that society and educational systems are *de facto* ambiguous in their tolerance or acceptance of the novelty this entails, thanks to the continued existence of the traditional transmission-based pedagogical model and the tendency to look with

suspicion at anything that deviates from established forms (Cropley, 2004). This may be why creativity as a human phenomenon has largely been considered *in its utilitarian element* (functional or applied creativity) (Cropley, 2004) and, consequently, the existence of the growing number of studies into it justify themselves with the claim that promoting it has beneficial outcomes in practice or can be applied with positive effects in the lives of individuals. The result of research with this focus often leads to strategies that can be implemented in the different areas of human interest (business, political action, educational institutions, etc.) to improve them so that a better fit is achieved between individuals and the settings they inhabit, which, however, is not equivalent to merely fitting in with this setting it but instead demands the critical—ethical—task typical of postconventional thought (Runco, 2008). In the case of the most developed economies, encouraging creativity is starting to be seen as the only way to maintain economic competitiveness, and so the new directions for future studies into it have been identified (including, in the field of artificial intelligence) (Dickhut, 2003). The still-limited attention given to this matter in teacher training programmes is striking (Davies, 2004).

3. A new perspective in the study of creativity: creative action to encourage humanity

It is important to discuss education in creativity as an end in itself, for the full development of the personality of the individual, as it is a quality linked to the pro-

ductive capacity of human beings that is essential to them, so that *their humanity is also in play in the cultivation of this feature*. We intend to examine here the phenomenon of creative production from this focus.

Therefore, we adopt the perspective Regmi (2016) describes as humanistic in his classification of lifelong-learning models. That is, the perspective that regards learning as a task that is not just linked to producing capital and creating the right conditions for it, but that aspires to develop the individual's spiritual capacities all through her life as a means of expressing her individuality and of developing a democratic citizenship as its most valuable possession: a possession which is in one's own hands and not at the mercy of external circumstances. From this perspective, creative action can to some extent be considered *on the margin* of the more or less accomplished products to which it leads, dwelling on the *creative* process itself and the possibilities it provides for the individual.

Consequently, we refer to creativity as a capacity that can be perfected in light of a more complete expression and understanding of the subject and the world around her. This is valid so long as individual differences are taken into account (Gagné, 1991), and, therefore, creative development is understood in proportion to the individual's natural skills, which are the starting point of all education. In any case, it is aimed at realising the latent and hitherto unknown possibilities of the self, something that would undoubt-

edly benefit the social entity. But this is a matter not of focussing on the subsequent *effect*, but of noting its intrinsically valuable character and *its relationship with the aim of human life understood as a process of continuous learning* that starts with comprehensions of the world and the self that feedback and help each other in their relative partiality. On these lines, Piirto considers that «the creative process is also tied with the desire for personal expression», while most studies that consider this essentially concentrate on «the expository, the impersonal, and the evaluative» (2011, p. 4). In other words, they neglect the experiential aspect relating to the body and the emotions. Piirto maintains that this is a simplistic way of analysing the phenomenon of creativity, and so must be expanded.

Consequently, we do not refer to research into creativity that is linked exclusively to high capabilities here. Naturally, it is reasonable and, given that everyone has the right to an education, it can be demanded that specially designed programmes for highly gifted individuals are implemented that offer a level of challenge, pace, and intensity suited for their skills to fully develop their personality, as is tried in the case of other individuals. But it is a mistake to link creativity solely to high capacities, because it is a *human dimension that is present in all areas and is not always linked to the genius of an outstanding or highly-gifted individual*, just as it is not merely related to the narrowest meaning of the arts (Piirto, 2011; Runco, 2008). In this sense everyday creativity has been discussed, and in the

words of Runco, «everyday creativity does not require high-level achievement or expertise» (2014, p. 678). On these lines, education in creativity becomes meaningful as a learning process that occurs in all stages of life. In fact, exploration of the creative possibilities of the adult stage has great possibilities, given that at this stage the subject has greater metacognitive talents and better control of the learning process. In this stage, boosting this natural capacity is fundamental for deliberately revealing previously unexplored aspects of the subject's own personality, which have a direct impact on its development, as well as giving the individual tools that were not previously taken into account and that allow her to resolve social and political problems in everyday life.

If we turn to an example from the field of education, we could refer to academic freedom, which contains the possibility of creativity in teaching activity. Teachers create starting conditions — shaped by their individual personalities and, therefore, more or less creative— that involve adequate preparation for students to experience the desired comprehension, something that is always an activity of individual autonomy. This creative task should not be regarded as a pure medium, neither when considering the teacher's life or the student's life, but rather as part of a plan for personal realisation, in the teacher's case as a teacher and it is a model for action and can also become a model for personal identification, in an exemplary originality, for the student. As Kant (1999) observed, a geni-

us's masterpiece is a work that provides a model from which its creator cannot formulate rules, but which is an example to follow. Teaching as a creative action can, undoubtedly, be put forward as a model to be imitated by those inspired by the words, works, and character of the person who teaches.

This facet of the creative phenomenon—its essentially *persuasive* way of being (Runco, 2008)—has been added to the traditional ways of approaching it that often stand out in studies on creativity: the creative *process*, the *product* obtained, the creative *personality*, and the influences or *environmental pressures*, following Rhodes (Piiro, 2011; Runco, 2004). Our approach to it fundamentally relates to two of the above mentioned approaches: the creator's personality, examining what happens in this act of production that is characteristic of her and gives rise to culture as the humanity of the individual, and the environmental factors that influence her, with the aim of determining the transcendent scope of the creative action, its valuable character for interpersonal relationships, beyond studying it exclusively in relation to the material or physical needs of natural existence. We will examine both matters more closely.

4. The creator's identity

Creativity has often been defined as a sign of the absolute in the individual, of her character which is in a way divine or, at least, resembles the divine. As Piiro (2011) notes, the start of a creative process often involves a certain *personal*

transformation, which, to use Inciarte's (2016) terms, rather than being a change in content, in the *whats* of one's life, is a way of being, the acquisition of an innovative *how* for one's existence. Therefore, an explanation of creativity that is limited to the strictly intellectual level and disregards the body will unavoidably be simplistic and must be expanded on, given that it inevitably relates to emotional and experiential aspects of the subject.

Without a sufficiently strong impulse to disturb the normality of ordinary life, a creative task with chances of success is unlikely to come into being. The will must be involved. Piiro (2011) refers to a sting which acts as a catalyst for creative action and so is present as its *beginning* and *principle*, encouraging the individual to embark on it as though it were acting like a magnet that irresistibly attracts. Consequently, a *tension* is uncovered in the individual, which can be expressed as a sort of lament without solace, since, as Kierkegaard said, the sighs and cries of the poet sound like beautiful music for others, but are experienced by him as torment. This can be seen in the experience of some artists who, in part, desire a more comfortable and simpler life, a life removed from the challenge and fear of creation, which Piiro recognises as such, since it is often linked to failure. In this regard, Piiro says the creative process must be understood as a spiral, «a long-term, cyclical process of small successes and frequent mistakes» (2011, p. 1). Setting out on the path of divergent thinking, a necessary condition for creativity to be possible,

involves taking risks, reviewing what one already knows in a new way in order to move beyond it, faced with the search for the correct response based on what one already knows.

Lassitude, laziness, inertia—all operate in preventing us from creating—. Rejection, indifference, and criticism from others also thwart creativity. Fear of creating also has a place in obstructing the creative process. (Piiro, 2011, p. 8-9).

Despite this, the impetus to creative action is overriding (Piiro, 2011), as though it were a need, and so the individual appears not to be in control of her own free will and the creative decision. This was Plato's position in the *Apology*, *Ion*, and *Phaedrus*; the Muse takes over the poet and uses her to express art, without the poet being able to explain what she says, thus confirming its divine origins.

From outside, the behaviour of an individual who constantly complains about what she is doing but continues to do it without backing her words with consequent actions, seems incoherent, but this tension is a reaction to the experience often lived by the creator. The ambivalence of the inclinations that affect her is an expression of the fundamental human paradox, which resides in the fact that, in recognising its facticity and contingency, in the experience of the boundary one encounters when confronting frequent failures, which are experienced in physical tiredness, definitively, in the experience of finitude, the deepest elements of the self are discovered, elements that comprise the *striving for the absolute, the desire for the*

infinite, and the aspiration to transcendence. This inclination leads her to a tireless movement of the will, which does not rest, is not completed by or satisfied with passing situations. The artist experiences this trench in the most acute way, finding her hypersensitivity wounded in the crossfire of heaven with its eternal promises and the world, which attracts and seduces with passing illusions. The artist is also flesh and blood. But, as Piiro notes, «often, the thorn, the passion that wounds, also saves» (2011, p. 8).

The perils of this dangerous path, which the creator follows, are clear, but she recognises that this is the only authentic path. Anything else means settling for false entertainments that do not allow her to reach her own limits. Hoping that the process of creation will be free from difficulties is as false as thinking that a path to learning will be a bed of roses, in line with a romantic nature in which the teacher entertains those who participate in her lessons in an idyllic way and makes them happy, eliminating any obstacle and without disturbing their calm. This promise is typical of the market sector, but not of any sensible pedagogical plan (Revengea, 2005). Effort and a certain disquiet are inevitable, as it is always easier to remain where one is. Uncertainty about where this process will lead means taking a leap, but the effort becomes more bearable if one knows one is accompanied by a teacher (Steiner, 2011).

The cultural character of humankind is experienced in this tension, which becomes ever more complex when confirm-

ing the existing cultural diversity, the many —and sometimes contradictory— ways of expressing one's deepest identity.

5. Time, dedicated practice, and freedom as pre-conditions for creativity

Before considering the relationship between educational encouraging creativity and the broad possibilities of cultural critique (owing to the post-conventional phase of development of thought implied by both), we will examine some pre-conditions for creative action from a perspective that sees this not just as a useful output, but also as valuable for life. These conditions can be summarised as some that act as root factors, making creative expression possible.

Firstly, restating creative capacity involves a process of *allowing oneself to be*, escaping from pressure and abandoning strong or close external control over one's own actions to allow an atmosphere of *freedom* that provides sufficient room for manoeuvre for the original idea to be able to arise (Davis, 2004). This is an aesthetic idea as representation of the creative imagination, which awakens thoughts, vitalises the powers of knowledge, and makes one think beyond concepts that are not fully adequate (Kant, 1999). Therefore, the prerequisites for it are the openness and flexibility necessary for exploring various possibilities or courses of thought and action, the possibility of divergence that means not being bounded by the narrow limits of a rigid proceduralism. As Kant said, «though we like to call the product

that bees make a work of art [...] we do so only by virtue of an analogy» (1999, p. 257) as a requirement for art is the will guided by rational reflection. In the midst of this openness, the level of abstraction appropriate to achieving the ideational fluidity necessary for the creative event is favoured. Spontaneity and experimental play were also identified by Nietzsche as features of creative will.

Creative action takes shape as a response to a stimulus, which invites it without causing it, that is, without us being able to say that the stimulus deterministically causes the creative action. This is a markedly individual approach in view of a component of the context that radically invokes the individual and is linked to an element of tension, surprise, awe, and disquiet. In this sense, it not only entails openness to the environment in which the individual finds herself, but also, secondly, that of the subject herself, in other words, an attitude of observation and exploration, maximally active receptiveness, and a spirit attentive to details and to detecting changes in context, which also involves a capacity for improvisation when facing them, flexibility, suspension of rash judgement, and naiveté (Piiro, 2011). Indeed, Heller (2004) considers that process and causal analyses are fundamental to measure the creativity of a talented individual, and that only analysing the product is insufficient, something common in tests linked to psychometric status.

Thirdly, *time* has been recognised as a fundamental element in achieving products of this type, not just because their

creation, the productive task itself, requires it, but also because incubating the idea does too (Davis, 2004; Runco, 2004). This does not entail reducing one iota the importance of sustained *work* and self-discipline for *deliberate and continuous practice* that sometimes leads to outstanding results. The human key to creativity lies in it, and so striving for culture requires hard work and is pitiful and laborious while the gods attend banquets and hold parties (Plato, 1871). Piirto speaks of the «ten-year rule», according to which «one should have studied a domain for about ten years before one can make an original contribution» (2011, p. 10), and also states that 10,000 repetitions are needed before an accomplished creative work can be achieved, as a degree of automation and formal study of the field the creative action is part of is required. Art involves following and applying rules that must be internalised in order to be able to break them at will since, without them, «the spirit, which must be free in art, and which alone animates the work, would have nobody at all and would entirely evaporate» (Kant, 1999, p. 43). But it is vital to note that the «creator creates» (Piirto, 2011, p. 15); she creates *something*, and so the effort of creative work cannot be avoided or replaced.

It is from this perspective that numerous studies intended to determine the factors that intervene in the development of creative projects achieve their results. These studies are divided depending on whether they refer to the personal characteristics of the individual or to features of the context or environment she inhab-

its: the individual's trust in the group, fear of criticisms by others, autonomy, the availability of good models and resources, stimulation of originality, the presence of stressful elements or pressures, competitiveness and family variables (Runco, 2004). Piirto (2011), who focusses her attention on the creative individual and her creative process, identifies five core attitudes that must be developed: self-discipline, naiveté (or openness to experiences), risk-taking, tolerance for ambiguity, and group trust.

6. The possibility of transcultural truth: from creative production to unproduced reality

The cultivation of human creativity is vital for recognising one's own identity and the identity of others, since it allows exploration of the expressive possibilities of the subject. Art as the creative production of what is useful and beautiful can be regarded as the *locus of presence*, where: firstly, the subject reveals itself to itself and to others; secondly, others reveal themselves to the subject; thirdly, the world and its effective limits are revealed—as Piirto (2011) states, creativity requires understanding the real limits of the world—; and, finally, it is the place where transcendence can also be possible.

The multitude of human products and forms of expression manifested by cultural diversity raise the challenge of establishing an *adequate model for understanding and managing it* in societies that are increasingly heterogeneous and

at the same time globalised. Each culture exhibits its products and expresses creative action differently, in line with its particular sensitivity, thus underlining the situational nature of the human being. This reality confronts us with the question about *the human possibility of attaining the universal through the individual*, in other words, transcending concrete experience, talking about «truth», even if human reasoning and the perceptions this performs can never be understood as «pure», in other words, as realities on the margin of any perspective, of the singularities of the body in which they are incarnated, or of the historical and social needs of the specific life from which they depart. Inciarte asks whether truth depends on culture or, on the contrary, if there is truth beside it on which all cultures can agree: «Is the truth a human function or is humanity a function of the truth?» (Inciarte, 2016, p. 192).

The possibility of a dialogue combined with the chance of agreement only occurs if there is *something in common, universal, or transcultural that we share*. That is to say, the pre-conditions for dialogue are that we are all speaking about the same thing (on which we agree, even if it is just one signified), even if we then have different opinions about it. In other words, as Inciarte notes (2004), it is necessary to distinguish «what is spoken about» from «what is said about it», the subject from the predicate, from the ways of being with which it is displayed. If we really can do more than just speak and understand each other, it is because we are referring to the same thing. The *intercultural*

model is convinced of this. This model, in this way, goes beyond *multiculturalism*, which stops when faced with the realisation of the growing human plurality, and regards different cultural groups as separate spheres between which there is no authentic rational interchange, so that they coexist in a merely external fashion, as they live in physical proximity. In this case there is a fundamental discontinuity between their ways of being and living (Inciarte, 2016), and as they do not have shared signifieds, there is no common subject of reference.

Inciarte (2016) relates multiculturalism to a *nominalism* according to which realities exist for the human being or for a group because their culture has the word, or the concept—in the conceptualist form—for them. Consequently, it also displays a logical connection with *idealism*, in that it makes the existence of the outside world depend on the representations of our conscience. However, faced with this, Inciarte maintains that «one way or another, beneath or behind the words and concepts, there is reality in the most primitive and common meaning of the words» (2016, p. 198):

Regardless of whether we call this thing before us «mountain» or a «mountvalley» or do not call it anything, and regardless of whether the respective concepts depend on the word, or vice versa, nobody [...] doubts that, whatever it may be, this is a reality and is not a fiction in the ordinary sense of the word; nobody doubts that there is something there with an existence independent of ours.

In other words, the fundamental, original, raw reality demands to be recognised. Although in the era of virtual reality, it is harder to believe that *not all realities can be constructed*. Of course, the signifieds have a cultural component, as what comes to be called «mountain» is to some extent relative because reality is continuous and our concepts are necessarily discontinuous, and, in addition, one's experiences, on the basis of which concepts are founded, differ depending on the needs of the various cultures and the different categories languages show. These are the fruit of a more or less contingent human production, although they can, of course, be regarded as well founded. Even with concepts that put us in direct contact with the real in a much clearer way than judgements as human expression —connections or separations— there is a certain degree of construction that should not be ignored, and in consequence the possibility that they are perfectible and can take shape as in abstractions that are ever closer to the real. Hegel describes as unreal this moment of separation that thought performs, and says that «the action of separating the elements is the exercise of the force of understanding, the most astonishing and greatest of all powers, or rather the absolute power» (2006, p. 136).

With the passage of time and growing cultural development, the things we make tend to become increasingly complex, so that what corresponds to the aspect of human construction is ever greater. Human products inundate everything and display a tendency to become self-referential.

This tendency can make us lose sight of authentic presences, the presence of reality at the margin of conscience. There is only truth if the independent reality of the consciousness is recognised, in other words, something that can be shared, and it is therefore possible to compare and examine cultural products deriving from different traditions. Only then does the task of continually refining our concepts so that they give an account of reality in the best way make sense. Few things are as effective for this as cultural interchange, which makes us take note of approaches to reality that we have not previously taken into account, and presupposes a willingness to review one's own thoughts (Nussbaum, 2005). The journey is the possibility of a deliberate change in attitude towards the receptivity of the other, precisely because it is other, but which can be taken on because it has a common basis with the individual: the same reality that manifests itself to both and affects them at the margin of subjective control.

7. The problems of meaning in an opaque culture

The reality that most clearly demands recognition and leads us to recognise it as something shared but experienced personally, is the reality of death, the fact that we will all die. This, the possibility which is the end of all possibilities, and its constant possibility throughout life — which means that life is never entirely removed from death— can act as a starting point for the truth that passes through all cultural products. Death radically invokes

the individuality of the subject, as *the person who can die is, strictly speaking, only one*. The death of others is dramatic and calls for individual action (*drao*) by the person contemplating it, but it continues to be surrounded by culture, in other words, it is constructed. It is enough to consider the culture surrounding the death of others.

The extent to which cultural products make one see, beyond oneself, this reality which imposes itself, signifies how close it is to the real. The largest problem leading to cultural relativism, which closes humankind in on itself and blinds it to other cultures, occurs when one's own culture, which is in some way all-encompassing and includes and covers everything, in addition becomes opaque, and does not allow people to see beyond it, or, to put it another way, it becomes a mirror on itself and does not transcend, setting itself up as the only absolute. It only wants itself. In this immanent structure, the subject becomes trapped in her own construction that she herself has crafted, and then a play of reference to signs occurs, all of them medial, written in a language or code that only individuals from the same culture can decipher, directed for pure self-love, which forms the essence of a holistic metaphysical conception. In the end, a *problem of meaning* appears, as these signs only refer to other signs of the same type and language, other *whats* cut from the same cloth. There is no leap to acquire something else that is not constructed content, something that could give meaning to all of the relative presences that these mediations bring,

in other words, that is the source of their meaning. Contact is lost with the original reality, with the crude fact of death and contingent human reality, and people instead focus solely on their own constructs, to the point that they find it hard to take note of their own distinction in relation to them, as individuals also become the objects of their own productive activity, guided by ways of making dictated by the tradition they inhabit.

Life is full of things we have produced, things so complex that it can be difficult to take note of our distinction of them (the very fact that the question of whether machines can think is asked is a sign of this). If the human being comprehends itself in this sense, it must accordingly understand that whatever is sufficient to satisfy it are also things, perhaps in greater numbers or better quality, even things that are more subtle like certain cultural products in this opaque sense purport to be, which are consumed in museums, the new temples that are packed with people on Sundays. But only giving humankind human things, is to fail to know it.

8. Education for creativity and cultural critique

Creativity and cultural diversity are two poles that feedback to each other: not just the multitude of ways of living and being activates this feature through the interchange of the characteristic elements of each culture (*The Guardian*, 23 February 2005), but encouraging creativity through education as a qualitatively valuable product also turns out to be valuable

in a setting with marked diversity because creative action *can bridge the gaps between diverse cultures*. This is the case because *it draws its initial impulse from the stark recognition of the originally existent reality, so that it can find the measure common to all of the diverse whats that comprise different cultural traditions*, in other words: the reality that runs through all of these contents. Creative work has the potential to approach or expose immediacy, so that it works in a particular way, cancelling itself as a construct or as the mediation it is in itself.

The productive imagination involved in this artistic creation is not an eidetic, colourist, reproductive imagination governed by empirically determined laws of association that immediately link it to the sensibility to catch directly what is presented in one's particular lived tradition. The more the created image resembles the objects of the sensibility, the less it is *intentionally* like them and, therefore, the less cognitive power it has. It is more a case of the *symbolic imagination*, which finds a common measure between what can immediately be perceived in one's own tradition and what is purely intelligible that acts as a point of confluence for different cultures and seeks expression here.

The implementation of this creative imagination takes place through the realisation that the human being is not just another thing among the things, it is not used up in the particular *whats* it constructs itself nor, in other words, is it merely the child of the culture in which it

is born. Consequently, its actions do not dissolve in response to stimuli received in accordance with the laws of socialisation that have been operative in it, as happens with technical procedures or material transformations, but instead it is also capable of transcending them, of escaping from the singularity of what it produces in order to focus on the immediate reality common to the different human worlds. Plato situated the mission of human life in comprehending this peculiar way of being, which, while it does necessarily refer to what is not merely particular, only acquires meaning in contact with it.

In this sense, a task of *cultural critique* that passes through several moments is identified as being necessary. Firstly, it is necessary to examine the elements and the works that characterise one's own culture to determine *which components are authentically characteristic, essential, or defining of it and which are not, even if it appears they are*. We often find that secondary aspects of a culture are regarded as basic pillars of a group's identity when, on closer inspection or after a historical review, it is apparent that they are not, and so each one must be given the weighting it deserves (Ibáñez-Martín & Fuentes, 2012). This is, of course, a difficult and sometimes controversial task, as it is hard to set limits and formulate distinctions in a continuum like a group and such distinctions are, to some extent, contingent, even if they are well-founded.

Secondly, it is necessary to consider how appropriate these basic elements of one's own culture are for natural human

tendencies, which are the basis, root, or principal of their volitional dimension and serve to determine actions in accordance with the dignity of the subject (Lewis, 2012). Only through this task of examining the elements that comprise one's own culture on the basis of identifying shared natural tendencies, can it be taken seriously. *Thirdly*, the possibility of establishing real contact with other cultures beyond naïve assimilationist or relativist attitudes. This is so because it is the only way the contact can be based on real dialogue or a rational conversation, given that recognising this objective natural order of human inclinations is a shared starting point from which differences can be analysed. Discussion with the other must start from these *substantial moral commitments*, going beyond a proceduralism satisfied with achieving an ostensibly peaceful coexistence between equals. This proceduralism is static or resistant to change, in that it does not question the elements of one's own identity and is unwilling to examine others' identities beyond complying with the mechanisms of liberal justice.

9. Conclusion

By confirming the essentially productive character of human beings and regarding creativity as a human dimension with intrinsic value, linked to the full realisation of the individual's personality, we have analysed how educational cultivation of this feature contributes to the possibility of authentic dialogue with people from different cultural origins.

Given that creative action is a radically individual form of expression, it serves for one's own knowledge, which in turn acts as the basis for understanding the other. This is because the understanding from which creative action starts, which entails a rupture or break with superficial everyday existence, puts us in touch with the *shared reality* which is shown beyond purely human constructs. In other words, given that the creative process derives from or gains momentum from the recognition of an *original transcultural reality*—which on occasions manifests itself dramatically—it can provide the basis of dialogue between cultures. This shared reality that is common to the different forms of expression or different human worlds is the starting point for a process of cultural critique, which is vital to achieve a committed peace in a culturally diverse world.

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