

## Raúl Fornet-Betancourt

### Introduction

Since the beginning, in 1995, and according to their proposed tasks, the International Congresses for Intercultural Philosophy have dealt with problems that have appeared to be pivotal in order to propel an intercultural transformation of philosophy, as well as to develop the contextualization of the philosophical task in the historical conditions of a world threatened with the totalitarianism of an hegemonic civilization whose supremacy signals a growing decrease and exclusion of diversity.

In this light, we have discussed problems related to intercultural communication in philosophy<sup>1</sup>, for example, or of methodology and hermeneutics in the process of constituting an intercultural philosophy<sup>2</sup>; we have also approached contextual and broader issues such as the dialectic between tradition and innovation within cultures<sup>3</sup>, the relationship between power and cultures<sup>4</sup>, the link between gender, education and interculturality<sup>5</sup> or the dominance of cultures in the context of the globalization of neoliberalism.<sup>6</sup>

It is however possible, that without denying the importance of the problems we have mentioned, the core topic that we have chosen for the debate in this VII Congress, is precisely a topic that poses the most complex challenge and the broadest scope of all we have faced up to the moment. The topic: “Conceptions of Human Beings and Interculturality. Cultures of humanization and recognition” is a topic that, on one hand, obliges us to pose an anthropological inquiry and, to pose it as a question that not only involves other questions – let us remember Kant, for example<sup>7</sup> – but also as an inquiry that presents questions that we cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. The Minutes of the First Congress in: Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (Ed.), *Kulturen der Philosophie*, Aachen 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. The Minutes of the Second Congress in: Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (Ed.), *Unterwegs zur interkulturellen Philosophie*, Frankfurt/M. 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. The Minutes of the Third Congress in: Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (Ed.), *Kulturen zwischen Tradition und Innovation*, Frankfurt/M. 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. The Minutes of the Fourth Congress in: Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (Ed.), *Interaction and Asymmetry between Cultures in the Context of Globalisation*, Frankfurt/M. 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. The Minutes of the Fifth Congress in: Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (Ed.), *Interculturality, Gender and Education*, Frankfurt/M. 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. The Minutes of the Sixth Congress in: Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Dominanz der Kulturen und Interkulturalität*, Frankfurt/M. 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Logik* in: *Werke*, Volume VI/2, Frankfurt/M. 1968, page 448. As you may remember these are the paragraphs with the lessons on logic where Kant summarizes the whole field of philosophy (*in sensu cosmico*) with the famous questions: “What can I

ask with personal tranquility or cultural equilibrium. Because in asking any of the questions that are being posed within the anthropological inquiry – whether cosmological, epistemological, religious, political or social – we are in fact asking questions that question us, and question us in our history, present and future. There is a whole constellation of humanity that is shaken to its core when the human being, from Augustine of Hippo on forward must confess before himself and the “other”: “mihi quaestio factus sum” (“*I have become a question to myself*”)<sup>8</sup> and recognize that the “grande profundum” (“*the great abyss*”)<sup>9</sup> where we find ourselves in the history of humanity also implies the experience that reveals that we are a question that surpasses us in everything that we have attained or fulfilled. In other words, it is greater than our past, because in the past, everything that could have been did not in fact “occur”. But also, it is greater than that which we are able to put forward in our own historical present. It is a question that comes from questions that have remained unanswered and that have continued unanswered from generation to generation.

In the horizon of this anthropological question, the possible answers appear to be more like “footnotes” with certain comments that serve as guidelines to interpret the questions that we have inherited regarding the human, as well as for deciding on what and how to transmit that legacy.

The conceptions of the human being that we are about to discuss here, are, in my opinion, part of that *inquiring* history that we are writing with those questions regarding our humanity that make us human in a certain manner, insofar as we ask them as questions that deal with what we are, and with the meanings ascribed to all the relationships we are in. In them we can re-read, therefore, how we have asked about the “human”, from what vantage point have we asked, towards which nucleus were we pointing to with that particular manner of inquiry about the human, what history of achievements and failures, of goodness or evilness, what horizon of hope or ruin have we considered, why is it generated within a specific cultural learning in a particular manner and not another, or which are the anthropological and cultural consequences of a specific form of inquiry about “the human”.

In bringing the conceptions of human being to the intercultural dialogue, as is our intention with this congress, we bring together the histories of the inquiries about the human; it involves the crossing of trajectories of questions formulated in their respective cultural manner but, not in order to add up answers or knowledges to soothe us and return us to an equilibrium, but rather to reconsider our

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know?”, “What should I do?”, “What may I hope?” and “What is the Human Being?”; and to point out that the anthropological question is the end reference for the others.

<sup>8</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confesiones*, X, 33.50. Also see: X, 34.51

<sup>9</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confesiones*, IV, 1.22

questions regarding the human. In other words, we wish to deal with the issue of whether we know how to ask the questions regarding the human being.

What can we learn from the question of being human in its multiple cultural variations? Is it through this dialogue that we can ensure that we learn to pluralize the accesses to what is being inquired about in the anthropological issue, and to understand that the ensuing possible inculturalization of the anthropological issue, would signify a radical change of our relationship with the human and its traditions?

On the other hand, however, the topic of this VII International Congress of Intercultural Philosophy – as we can infer from the second part of the title – calls us together to search for the humanizing alternatives of being human within cultures; that is, to find the ways with which they strive to care and develop the human.

As a suggestion for our dialogue, allow me to point out that the Western philosophical tradition, of which Latin American Philosophy is an heir and a continuation<sup>10</sup>, has at least two key cores for reflection that serve as guides for the search of humanizing cultures within cultural traditions.

The first of these cores relies, succinctly speaking, on the thesis that states that there is no humanization without improvement, of what Marx called the inhuman conditions of life.<sup>11</sup> This vision in my opinion is important because in the context of an intercultural dialogue it can serve as a corrective measure of the tendency to cultivate only the dimension that could be summed up (employing a concept of the Western tradition) with the ideal of the “*homo interior*”, frequently prioritized by other cultures.

And the second core, also formulated succinctly, is represented by the maximization of the ideal of human perfection that during many centuries has been central to the development of the strong anthropological nucleus of the Western culture, exemplified by the fact that it is at the base of processes so diverse as the ideal of Christian holiness<sup>12</sup>, Feuerbach’s thesis<sup>13</sup> and Marx<sup>14</sup> that the human being is the supreme being for the human being, or Sartre’s aphorism that says that the human being is a useless passion<sup>15</sup>, not to forget

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<sup>10</sup> I point out here “Latin American Philosophy”, because of the location for the celebration of our congress.

<sup>11</sup> Carlos Marx, “En torno a la crítica de la filosofía del derecho, de Hegel”, in: Carlos Marx/ Federico Engels, *La Sagrada Familia y otros ensayos*, México 1962, P. 3 and following.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to the classical mystical works and ascetic theology works, see for example: Antonio Rollo Marín, *Teología de la perfección cristiana*, Madrid 2002; Joseph Ignasi Sarayana (Coord.), *El camino histórico de la santidad cristiana*, Pamplona 2004; or Jean Zurcher, *La perfección cristiana*, Madrid 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *La esencia del cristianismo*, Buenos Aires 1961.

<sup>14</sup> Carlos Marx, Op. cit.; P. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *El ser y la nada*, Volume III, Buenos Aires 1961. Page. 272.

Nietzsche's super-man.<sup>16</sup> I am referring, as you may well imagine, to the maximization of the human that stems from the principle that *God made himself a man*, understood not in the sense of an article of faith, or a religious belief but as an anthropological event.<sup>17</sup>

It is possible that many of the deep traumas that have been detected in the Western culture, as well as the drama that the models of humanism reveal, could reach back to this idea of incarnation of God and its anthropological consequences. But, even if this interpretation were true, it cannot be denied that, precisely this idea, has fed the continuous search for (the ethical) perfection of the human being in the Western world, making it possible that its cultural history makes it a place for spiritual resistance against any intent of the shrinking of the human, or if you allow me the expression, against the "pocketbook editions" of human beings content with but a minimum of humanity.

The debate that this congress wishes to promote, not only pretends to pluralize the way the anthropological question is posed. It also wants to deepen the knowledge we already have regarding the possible alternatives for humanization of the human condition that the cultures preserve in their memories of humanization practices. However in our intercultural interchange on this decisive issue, for us and the course of our time, we wish to search for something else. The interculturalization of the anthropological inquiry, evidently including the aspect of delving into the memory reserves of a humanization that humanity can still count on, should allow us to rehearse human conceptions and practices ever more universal, that is, purified by the critical contrast shared by solidary relationships. The question at the core of the last session of this congress points to that issue, and therefore it should help us to outline perspectives for mutual anthropological enrichment.

To end, I would like to extend a deep appreciation to Dina Picotti and to the team of the General Sarmiento National University (*Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento*) for their commitment and hospitality; and also a word of "exhortation" for a positive debate on the transcendental issue that occupies our attention.

(Translated by Barbara Sweet Hansen)

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<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Así habló Zaratustra*, in: *Obras Completas*, Volume 3, Buenos Aires 1961. Pages 244 and following.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Franz J. Hinkelammert, *Crítica de la razón mítica*, San José, particularly pages 12 and following.