Values, Cultural Identity and Communication: A Perspective From Philosophy of Language

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Abstract

Problems of communication in intercultural dialogue typically arise when the communicators understand concepts of meaning and identity in strikingly different ways. This article employs influential assumptions in modern philosophy of language to discuss fundamental aspects of these problems. Drawing on a distinction between beliefs and values, it is argued that intercultural communication typically fails when communicators have different values and do not acknowledge that culturally shaped values are different from beliefs and thoughts. Within a hermeneutical approach to understanding, it is explained how an understanding of the nature of values can help secure successful intercultural communication. Cases of cultural conflict are used to clarify this and other practical implications of the philosophical analyses that are developed.

Keywords: intercultural communication, meaning, beliefs, values, Wittgenstein.

1. Introduction

Problems of communication and poor dialogue typically arise when persons from different social and cultural contexts fail to understand each other properly. Even if a speaker is genuinely interested in communicating with another person, it is difficult to secure successful communication if the other person's beliefs about the world are very different from the speaker's beliefs, and if the speaker knows little about the other's beliefs.

Obviously, knowledge of another person's cultural context does not constitute a guarantee for successful communication. Sometimes a speaker is aware that an audience has certain beliefs and experiences shaped by a specific social and cultural history but nevertheless chooses, more or less consciously, to ignore this fact. Furthermore, a speaker might ascribe to his audience beliefs without having a good reason why they would hold them. In such cases, however, the problem is not really one of meaning (Burge 1979; Bach 1994) but rather one involving the lack of sympathetic attitudes. Being neither ignorant of nor prejudiced towards another person's socio-cultural context is thus a necessary condition for successful communication.

While the question of what sympathetic attitudes communicators require in order to be able to communicate is primarily psychological, questions about shared beliefs and understanding across different social and cultural contexts belong to those concerned with *meaning* (Davidson 1984; Hale & Wright 1997). To what extent must communicators understand a language in the same way in order to be able to exchange and share beliefs? How will different ideas on the meaning of words or strikingly different frameworks of interpretation impact on successful communication when persons from different social and cultural contexts interact?

Depending on the theoretical and practical frameworks employed, we may address these questions from different perspectives. Within modern philosophy, one main source of inspiration in discussions of cross-cultural communication has been the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953; 1980). A large number of philosophers have used Wittgenstein's ideas of 'language-games', 'family resemblance' and 'forms of life' to discuss the cultural dimensions of communication and language use (Winch 1958; Johnston 1991).

A striking feature of most Wittgensteinian exegeses within this area is that they have not been linked to traditional concepts in philosophy of mind and language to any significant extent. Similarly, some scholars have insisted that Wittgenstein's views are so idiosyncratic that they cannot easily be compared to, or even translated into, the language and argumentative style of modern, analytical philosophy (Johnston 1991; McDowell 1998). This view about the nature of Wittgenstein's philosophy may very well be correct, but we should at the same time be sceptical of accepting too quickly the notion that assumptions in modern philosophy cannot shed light on Wittgenstein's views.

The aim of this article is to use central assumptions in modern philosophy of language to discuss some important problems of communication that typically arise when persons from different cultural contexts interact. Drawing specifically on an analysis of the difference between beliefs and values, I shall argue that knowledge of this difference is crucial for understanding value related challenges in intercultural interaction. The belief-value distinction is not one that is made explicit in Wittgenstein's writings, but I believe that the analyses below are consistent with some of his deepest insights about language and 'ways of living' (Wittgenstein 1953, 1980). This exegetical issue, however, falls outside the purview of this article. Instead, the aim is to present a systematic philosophical analysis that can contribute to giving us a more comprehensive understanding of communicative challenges in cross-cultural interaction.

The central argument is as follows. In cases of cultural conflict, groups who have the power to act in the way they think is reasonable often believe that problems of disagreement and conflicting interests can be solved by providing additional information and rearranging factual beliefs and existing knowledge. According to this ideology, the question of what is the best way of living must be addressed *rationally*. Consequently, those who have the position of power will typically try to *explain* why it is, on the whole, rational to conform to new norms of living. The problem with this strategy, I shall argue, is that our culturally shaped personal values determine how we wish to live our lives, and that, unlike beliefs, these values are not subject to rational discussion about truth and falsity. The mistake of addressing issues of cultural values as though they were issues of rational explanation and objectivity involves, in a fundamental sense, the oppression of value meaning. It is an unjustifiable discounting of those personal identities and preferences that underlie the way a cultural group live their lives.

2. Communication and beliefs

It is helpful to use a case study to clarify some initial assumptions about communication that the discussion will be based on. Consider the following encounter described by Hans-Jørgen Wallin Weihe (2005: 137) as an example of a cross-cultural conflict involving communicative challenges:

> Traditional living have often met little understanding from important economical forces. A few years ago I spoke with a Swedish Sámi reindeer herder having his animals in the large pine forests of the Swedish north. His problem was partly that vast areas was turned into national parks and recreational areas for the urbanized population of the Swedish south, and partly that the pine forests were used by lumber companies harvesting old growth pine. The old growth pine had lichen his reindeer needed for food in the winter. Tourism and recreational activities disturbed the reindeers in the winter season, and environmental protection made it difficult to use the land for his reindeer.

In a case like this, theories in philosophy of language will typically make a distinction between two communicative challenges (Hale & Wright 1997; Ludlow 1997). The first concerns the need to have a platform of a shared language (Burge 1979; Peacocke 1992). Imagine the reindeer herder and some government official who represents the interests of 'the public' having a dialogue about the idea of turning the relevant areas into national parks. Even if they use and hear the same expressions, would they have a common language at all? This is actually a reasonable question because the way we understand language is shaped by our overall beliefs and socio-cultural contexts (Fodor 1992; Nordby 2003). It is far from obvious that the herder's and the official's respective understandings are sufficiently similar for their associating the same meaning with the same expressions (Burge 1979).

Consider, for instance, the compound noun 'pine tree'. The herder, we may assume, has a number of beliefs about this expression that are intimately linked to his work, his reindeers and other aspects of his way of life. If we also assume, at least for illustrative purposes, that the official in his professional role thinks of these trees as elements of an environment that should be preserved for the sake of pleasing

tourists and other outsiders, then the problem of meaning emerges. For the official, the basic consideration is to realise some aesthetic idea of what an unspoiled world around us should look like. This idea is very far-fetched and remote from the practical perspective of the herder. It is, therefore, a good question whether the official and the herder associate the same meaning with the term 'pine tree', i.e., whether they both mean *pine tree* when they use the term.

Now, even if they have a platform of shared language, a second communicative challenge concerns how the herder and the official are disposed to form different beliefs about messages expressed in either written or verbal contexts. Imagine that they both read a local newspaper article with the sentence, 'The pine trees should be preserved'. Even if both of them understand what is literally expressed in the same way – i.e., even if they associate the sentence with the belief that the pine trees should be preserved – they might nevertheless associate this particular belief with other beliefs in very different ways.

This further dimension of communication is essentially linked to how we think we have good reasons for believing something (Peacocke 1992). The reasons the herder would give for believing that the pine trees should be preserved would be very different from the official's. There is, therefore, a risk that both parties will fail to realise how the other thinks that the belief is justified. More generally, if an audience uncritically ascribes to a speaker his own reasons for having a belief - that is, if the audience thinks that the speaker's reasons are identical to his own - then there is a significant probability that the speaker is erroneously ascribed beliefs that he does not have (Davidson 1984; McDowell 1998).

This point is of special relevance in intercultural communication. It is when persons with different social and cultural backgrounds meet that ascriptions of background beliefs are often incorrect. As Davidson has observed, our ascriptions of beliefs to others "rest on vast vague assumptions about what is shared and what is not shared by the attributer and the person to whom the attribution is made" (Davidson 1987: 449). Problems of understanding typically arise when ideas about shared beliefs are mistaken or if it is unclear how one should interpret another person's beliefs (Nordby 2003).

3. Values

It has been important to clarify some preliminary assumptions about communication in order to illustrate how theories in philosophy of language have typically focused on language meaning and beliefs in communicative processes. One point that has received less attention in the philosophical debate is that communicators often express values. In this and the next section, I shall develop an analysis of the difference between beliefs and values and then argue that this analysis can be used to elucidate fundamental problems in intercultural communication. In order to explain why this is so, we must first clarify the term 'value'.

In the literature on value-related questions, theorists have often assumed that the term 'value' refers to one specific concept. One typically does this when one uses the term without explaining what one means by it. However, this naïve idea about a standard, normative meaning of the word 'value' is incorrect. I shall argue that it is possible to interpret the term in three different ways that correspond to standard, recognised usages within our ordinary language, and that all of these interpretations are relevant for understanding intercultural communication.

In one interpretation of the term 'value', values are properties we ascribe to actions we think of as ethically good or wrong (Singer 1991; Statman 1997). I ascribe the positive value of goodness to actions involving the donation of money to charity if I say, 'It is a good thing to donate money to charity'. I ascribe a negative value to the same actions if I say 'One should not donate money to charity'. We may note that not all ascriptions of values to actions are ethical statements. I might say, 'The goalkeeper made an excellent save', and talk about an action made by a goalkeeper in a football match. But I do not normally mean that the goalkeeper made an *ethically* excellent save. What I mean is that the goalkeeper made an excellent save in relation to the rules and aims of football as an invented game.

On the other hand, when we make ethical statements, we do not believe that actions are good or bad in relation to rules in well-defined games. With such statements our intent is to emphasise something that is much more difficult to express but clearly connected to our beliefs about interpersonal relations and the norms that we think other persons should conform to. The question of whether such individual norms should approximate completely general moral norms that everyone should conform to has been a

controversial subject in a variety of philosophical discussions (Wulff *et al*. 1986; Singer 1991; Dancy 1996). In spite of this, there is widespread theoretical agreement that more or less general beliefs about how people should act typically underlie individuals' ascriptions of value properties to actions (Dancy 1996).

A second way of understanding 'value' is to think of values as general concepts people believe in (Morgan 1992; Frey & Wellman 2003, Wallace 2003). *Justice*, *democracy*, *fairness* and *equality* are examples of values that most people endorse. What is special about these and other concepts of value is that we typically think that they should constitute norms not only for one cultural group or community but also for everyone. If I genuinely believe that democracy is an important value, then it is difficult for me to accept that someone could be entitled to hold that democracy is wrong. In fact, were I to try to imagine another person in my own position, in my specific social and cultural context, I should find it almost impossible to imagine how he could be justified in thinking that democracy is not a fundamental value. This does not mean that values understood as abstract concepts are valid from a neutral, objective point of view. Such a point of view does not exist; trying to adopt it is like trying to adopt what Nagel (1986) calls 'a view from nowhere'. The important point is that fundamental concepts of value are always *experienced* as valid from a particular point of view, woven into a person's social and cultural context.

Disagreement and problems in intercultural interaction can often be explained by showing that people have different concepts of value that they believe are fundamental to society. There is, however, a third concept of value that is even more relevant for understanding communicative challenges in intercultural interaction. This concept is of special importance because it is intimately connected to the ways individuals wish to live their own lives. This personal feature is in contrast from those values understood as abstract, general concepts like *equality* and *freedom*. We believe in these and other general values: they are objects of our attention just like beliefs and thoughts that we think of as true. Understanding what values a person has in this sense is, therefore, equivalent to understanding what beliefs he has. Similarly, the addressing of relevant communicative challenges falls under the more general task of understanding the role of meaning and belief in communication as explained above. But when we talk about values in the third sense, referring to activities we appreciate, we have something else in mind. We esteem our personal values; in Wittgenstein's (1953, 1980) terms, they are essentially connected to our 'forms of life', that is, the interests we have and the activities in which we like to participate.

Understanding what personal values an individual has is, therefore, not equivalent to understanding what general values he believes in. Personal values are radically different from beliefs – they are not true or false depending on how the world is. Instead, they are directly related to actions we make or should like to make in connection to specific circumstances. Furthermore, a person will not always think that others should conform to his personal values. For instance, I like to go skiing in the wintertime. This is a personal value I have, an activity I like to engage in. But I accept that other persons do not enjoy this, so I do not think that my personal value should constitute a general standard.

Such limits for generalising do not mean, however, that all personal values are purely subjective. In fact, it is not difficult to find examples of personal values that strike us as valid for other persons as well. I appreciate living in a democracy, and I find it difficult to accept alternative views on this. However, the fact that *some* personal values are subjective means that there is a crucial difference between beliefs and personal values: We have our beliefs and thoughts because we think they are true. If another person has beliefs that contradict mine, then I should think that his beliefs are false. Personal values, on the other hand, are not necessarily objective in this or any other sense. The reason, I have suggested, is that personal values are attitudes to 'ways of living'. To ascribe a personal value is to ascribe a state that does not involve a representation of the world; instead, it is to ascribe a direct relation between a person and his environment.

It would fall outside the scope of this article to present a thorough philosophical defence of this understanding of the difference between beliefs and personal values. Let two observations suffice for the present argumentative purposes. First, the analysis is supported by our ordinary practices of ascribing psychological states. When we ascribe beliefs, we mean to ascribe mental states that are true or false (Burge 1979; Peacocke 1992), but when we ascribe personal values, we seem to relate persons directly to

what they esteem (Raz 2003). As Wallace (2003: 4) has observed, the objects we value are not ideas we believe in, but "objects and activities... things that are profoundly shaped by social practices".

Secondly, the fact that ordinary practices of ascribing values support the belief-value distinction means that there are good reasons for accepting it. This notion follows the more general principle that analyses of mental states like beliefs and personal values should capture assumptions we make about them in ordinary discourse (Davidson 1984; Peacocke 1992; Hale & Wright 1997). Obviously, an analysis that captures ordinary use of language is not necessarily correct. As Burge (1979:102) has noted, "Ordinary usage is not sacred if good reasons for revising it can be given". The point is that the burden of proof lies with those who believe we should reject an analysis that corresponds to assumptions we make in our ordinary discourses about the human mind. I shall assume that this methodological principle is sound, and that the above analysis of personal values, therefore, merits our attention when discussing value-related intercultural communication.

4. Gullestad on values

As a striking example of how the threefold distinction between concepts of value are not made in discussions of cultural interaction, let us consider the following passage from Marianne Gullestad's *Everyday Life Philosophers* (1996) where she has outlined a conceptual framework she has used in her analyses of narrative autobiographies:

> I see values not as "rules", but as changing organizing concepts that actors constantly produce and reproduce. A distinction can be drawn between explicit ideas open to discussion and the implicit meanings of central notions within which such debates are meaningful. Implicit ideas and values function as horizons and resources for the making of moral judgments (Gullestad 1996: 21).

This implies, according to Gullestad, that "moral discourses can be analyzed in terms of oppositions and tensions among central values". But which idea of value does Gullestad think it is possible to analyse in this way? Is the idea that people from different social and cultural contexts sometimes ascribe different values to actions? Or is it that people sometimes disagree over which general concepts of value to which members of a community should conform? Or has Gullestad focused on the fact that people with different social and cultural background often have different personal values?

The problem is that Gullestad, like so many others, has not distinguished between different ways of understanding the term 'value'. Gullestad's views about value-related aspects of understanding and communication point towards different theories about the nature of values. In particular, it is not clear whether she has considered values as properties of actions, as general concepts, or as preferences and ways of life.

At this stage, some may object that the distinctions I have made between different value concepts are restricted within a narrow discourse in analytical philosophy of language, and that they have no practical relevance in the context of the broader and more applicable aims of anthropology and other areas of the social sciences that focus on cultural diversity. If the aim is to elucidate factual differences between people who live their lives in significantly different ways, why is it important to make refined, theoretical distinctions between different value concepts?

The problem with this objection is that it erroneously makes a sharp distinction between the practical and theoretical dimensions of investigations that seek to understand real-life cultural differences. It is true that if there is no need to make a theoretical distinction between different concepts of value, then it is also unnecessary to distinguish between different meanings of the word 'value'. But when the aim is to understand social and cultural differences, then it is imperative that one does not conflate different discourses within which the word belongs (Wittgenstein 1953). In the next section, I shall illustrate this point by arguing that our understanding of fundamental challenges involved in intercultural communication stands to benefit if we do not assume that the term 'value' only has one meaning.

5. Communication, values and cultural conflict

How should we analyse intercultural communicative challenges if we adopt the threefold, pluralistic understanding of the term 'value'? We may use the above example of the conflict between the interests of the reindeer herder and the state, represented by the imagined government official, to illustrate how the three notions can deepen our understanding.

First, there is an obvious sense in which the herder and the official would ascribe different values to actions. Consider actions made in preparation of relevant parts of the herder's environment for commercial tourism. The herder, we may assume, would question many of these actions and probably maintain that many of them are wrong. The official, on the other hand, would be pleased with arrangements that promote tourism. There is, therefore, an obvious sense in which there would be genuine, cultural disagreement about the application of value properties to actions. This is not, however, a disagreement that constitutes a communicative challenge different from difficulties involving the communication of beliefs. To understand how a person in a specific culture would ascribe values to actions is a matter of understanding how he believes ethical values should be distributed.

The same point applies in interactions involving values as general concepts like *freedom* and *equality*. When communicators from different cultural contexts interact, values of this kind are often central in their communication. But since understanding what general concepts a person believes in is equivalent to understanding what beliefs he has, interactions involving general concepts of value do not constitute a communicative challenge that is different in principle from communication of beliefs. Of course, from the perspective of an audience, to understand what concepts of value a speaker believes in is sometimes experienced as important, but the point is that if the audience's overall focus is on the speaker's beliefs, then the focus on the speaker's general concepts of value is included within that broader focus.

The third way of understanding 'value', however, corresponds to a communicative challenge that is different in principle from communication of beliefs and is especially important in intercultural interaction. The reason is as follows: According to the analysis I have developed, to understand what personal values a person has is tantamount to understanding how he wishes to live his life, and this is not a matter of understanding what thoughts and beliefs he has. Moreover, the fact that persons from different cultures typically live their lives in significantly different ways means that it is especially important to focus on these values in real-life interaction.

Consider again the herder and the government official. In order for the official to understand what personal values the herder has, he needs to realise how the herder wishes to live his life. He needs to understand what activities the herder experiences as valuable from the herder's special, first-person perspective. But as long as the official has an entirely different perspective, as long as the starting points are so radically different and there seems to be so little sympathy for the other person's interests, there will be a formidable problem of communication.

The significance of this problem becomes even clearer if we understand it in the light of traditions within modern hermeneutics, and especially when we consider the idea that the aim of understanding is consensus (Warnke 1986). According to Gadamer (1975), complete understanding is rational agreement, a comprehensive overlap of beliefs regarding a topic of discourse. It follows that the process of understanding should be thought of as a gradual uncovering of another person's beliefs, and that a good understanding of another person presupposes that there is a significant overlap of common beliefs. Correspondingly, if communicators have very different beliefs about a topic of discourse, then the chances of achieving successful communication about that topic of discourse are radically impaired.

It is important to note that this hermeneutic aim of understanding applies only to communicative processes involving beliefs that can be shared. In our example, the herder's belief that the pine trees should be preserved is in an obvious sense only his belief, and likewise the official's belief that the pine trees should be preserved is only his belief. Gadamer's point is that they share the same belief when they both believe that the pine trees should be preserved. But one or a few shared beliefs are not sufficient for understanding (Gadamer 1975). According to Gadamer, the herder and the official would need to share many more beliefs in order to communicate successfully, and this condition is probably not met. However, the problem related to personal values is even more fundamental: when two persons share a belief, then that is because they have a belief involving the same representation of the world. As long as

personal values are relations not to representations, but directly to the ways we wish to live our lives, then they cannot be shared at all.

Another problem one confronts when applying the hermeneutic aim of understanding in analyses of value-related communication, is that many personal values are subjective. As argued above, a person typically has many personal values that he does not think other persons necessarily should conform to. So why should another person's acceptance of my values have any implications for how well we understand each other? I can perfectly well understand that another person has a specific personal value without adopting this value as my own. So the reason why the concept of a personal value falls outside the traditional hermeneutic scope of understanding is not merely that personal values cannot be shared like beliefs. There is a far more fundamental, less tractable problem: the idea of agreement about values as a *condition* for understanding is misplaced in the first place.

Communication involving speakers who do not acknowledge that values fall outside the scope of the aim of understanding as rational agreement seems to involve an oppression of meaning in a very fundamental sense. Imagine a group of native speakers who have a way of living tied to a cultural context. They act and communicate not only on the basis of beliefs and thoughts, but also on the basis of shared personal values that belong to their traditional culture. Imagine then a cultural conflict of the kind mentioned above involving persons with external interests that conflict with the natives' personal values. In an attempt to secure cooperation with the natives, the external group initiates a dialogue. The challenge, as far as they are concerned, is to make the natives realise that it is rational for them to conform to the new norms of living. Furthermore, they assume that achieving this aim first and foremost involves giving the natives new beliefs about how it is best for them to live their lives. They hope that in the light of changes that are going to be made, the natives will realise that the most rational thing to do is to adjust their actions in appropriate ways.

The problem with this type of strategy is that it fundamentally fails to respect the natives' personal values and the way these values underlie their form of living. According to the analysis I have defended, personal values are not directly subject to rational evaluation. Any attempt to criticise personal values in the way we sometimes try to explain to others that their beliefs are false or unjustified will typically be subjectively experienced as offensive. A person who is subject to such a criticism will normally think that the speaker has crossed a private line that he is not entitled to overstep. This does not mean that values cannot be influenced indirectly (e.g., by showing a person that his values are grounded in unjustified beliefs). The point is that oppression of *value meaning* arises when a personal value is misconceived of as a belief, an occurrence that often happens in cases of cultural conflict involving a 'minority' and a 'majority'.

In sum, the oppression of value meaning is in an important sense more fundamental than the failure to acknowledge that a person has beliefs and thoughts shaped by his specific social and cultural context. In many cases, failing to acknowledge that a person has a given set of beliefs will lead to poor communication. However, if one thinks that personal values and beliefs can be influenced rationally like beliefs can be, then one has made a more fundamental mistake of *category* – values have not been respected for the preferences they are. In order not to make this mistake, it is necessary to identify personal values as direct relations between individual persons and the world around them.

6. Philosophical implications

I have argued that discussions of value-related communication become more precise if one distinguishes between different value concepts, and that a theorist such as Gullestad has not made such distinctions very clearly. Gullestad has made at the same time many illuminating observations that are consistent with the analyses I have presented. She writes that the

> …dichotomy between fact and fiction is present in the social sciences as well as in literary analysis and psychoanalysis, although in different ways. There are long traditions in Western modernity of treating the cultural and the symbolic as deceptions of an underlying, more fundamental reality (Gullestad 1996:.25).

In my opinion, we can use the idea of a personal value to clarify these ideas. One often gets the impression that theorists regard a person's beliefs and values as having a real, objective existence in the

person's mind. But if one makes this assumption, then one also has to accept that it is possible to make a distinction between the 'external' and the 'internal', between a person's observable behaviours and his private beliefs and personal values to which other persons merely have indirect access. According to this philosophical dualism, often associated with Descartes, the surface of human interaction merely involves symbolic use of language and other forms of behaviour in special social and cultural contexts. Descartes (1960) held that the real truth about personal identity can only be found underneath the observable, within a person's mind, which is fully independent of his actions and environment.

If the view on personal values I have outlined here is correct, then this distinction between mind and world is incorrect. The external is no less important than the inner, because personal values do not have a pure inner existence. In the case I have used as an example, it is not correct that the herder's personal values are independent of his actual behaviour and environment. The way he lives his life, and through that his environment, is literally an important part of his personal identity. His way of living and the fact that he wishes his environment to be in a certain way tells us something about his personal values and consequently how he wants to be understood as a person. The idea that personal values are external relations of this kind implies that it is wrong to think of personal identity as independent of changes occurring in social and cultural context.

Wallin Weihe has mentioned another case that illustrates the point perhaps even more clearly. He considers,

> ...the mining activity that for some years existed in Marmorlik in Uummannaq municipality in western Greenland. Partly pollution from the mine made fishing difficult and the fish sick and polluted and partly icebreakers made it difficult and sometimes even impossible for local fishermen and hunters to use their dog sledges on the ice (Wallin Weihe 2005:137).

In this case the development of the mining industry destroys an important aspect of the basis of existence for the natives. One might think that this poses no special communicative problem, that the problems are only practical problems involved in the adjustments in the way of life due to changes in the environment. The only crucial consequence for the natives, one might think, is that they must adjust their beliefs about the world, and that this is a straightforward factual matter. We may consider as an analogue in keeping with our arctic theme a simple belief about what time of the day it is. I might be wrong, perhaps due to my lack of experience in the far north, and my belief might be corrected, but the correction will not have any deep impact on my worldview and personal identity.

According to the view I have outlined, it is wrong to compare cases of cultural conflict and intrusion of forms of life with cases of straightforward corrected belief. Undermining ways of living, I have argued, affects intimately our personal identities. If one destroys the basis of existence that a group of people have, then one has also, quite literally, undermined their personal values and consequently a part of themselves.

This does not necessarily mean that one should always refrain from doing this. The arguments I have presented are consistent with holding that interference with personal values can sometimes be justified. This, however, is an issue that falls outside the focus here. The aim here has been to show exactly what one does if one's verbal or non-verbal actions towards other persons fail to acknowledge that their values are different from their beliefs. The problem related to communication emerges if one collapses the belief-value distinction and conflates beliefs with values. I have argued that if this happens in value-related cultural interaction, poor communication will normally be the consequence.

7. Concluding remarks

The aim of this article has been to show that a philosophical analysis of the difference between beliefs and values can shed important light on some fundamental communicative challenges in intercultural communication. I started out by showing how philosophical discussions of language and communication typically have focused on meaning and beliefs, and that questions of value have received less attention. This focus would be justified if concepts of value ought to have a very limited role in analyses of intercultural communication, but I have shown that this is not so. Drawing on a distinction between three concepts of value, I have clarified three corresponding value-related problems in intercultural communication. The first occurs when communicators ascribe different values to actions, the second

when speakers and audiences have different general concepts of value, and the third when they have different personal values.

All of these problems are different from problems of language meaning and shared beliefs, but the third deserves special attention. The reason is that personal values understood as attitudes to 'ways of living' are crucially different from beliefs and thoughts that are true or false depending on how the world is. Within a hermeneutical approach to understanding I have argued that this difference implies that personal values are not directly subject to rational criticism. Trying to *explain* why it is rational to conform to a culturally shaped specific way of living therefore involves, in a fundamental sense, oppression of *value* meaning.

The arguments I have presented imply that the chances of securing intercultural communication are improved if values are recognised and appreciated. Furthermore, a theoretical framework that involves concepts of value can make it easier to develop plausible analyses of successful and poor intercultural interaction. Hopefully, the distinctions I have made can be fruitful both for persons directly engaged in intercultural communication and for persons who make scientific, empirical analyses on a more general level.

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