

Political Correctness: Its Concept and Some of its Implications in the XXIst Century

Ioanna Kuçuradi

Correctness, including political correctness, is an important personal characteristic, it is a virtue.

First of all, it denotes the characteristic of a person who decides and acts in *every and all* situations he/she has to face, determined by value knowledge –and not by interests of all kinds, which lead to compromises–, who does what ethical value knowledge obliges in each given situation *without zig zags*.

Thus political correctness would mean such a consistent acting in public affairs –when we act as citizens, world citizens, decision makers etc.

Is political correctness in this sense possible? Here I wish to submit to your consideration, what, I think, are the intellectual and ethical conditions of its possibility.

I think, its most basic condition is the awareness of our *human identity* which is the only common identity of all human beings. It is the awareness of human dignity.

What we call ‘human dignity’ denotes the *awareness of the value of the human being*, i.e. its special place in the universe. It is this value that makes every human being worthy (*digne* in French) to be treated so as he or she has the possibility to actualize certain potentialities of the human being –i.e. to be treated, well as treat other human beings, in accordance with the demands of human rights– and be in peace with himself or herself. It is the subjective correlative of the objective value of the human being.

Human dignity consists in the philosophical/anthropological knowledge of the value of the human species, i.e. the knowledge of certain of its specificities and of its achievements in history, resulting from these specificities, and which secure its special place in the universe. This knowledge makes necessary for all those who possess it, to treat all human beings – whatever their other natural and contingent specificities might be– in accordance with this value –even those who ignore it. Political correctness implies such a treatment for everyone in public life, i.e. it implies the will to act consistently so that human rights be protected in every situation or be as little damaged as possible.

It is also this knowledge of the value of the human being that helps an individual to become conscious of being first of all a *human* being, to become aware of his or her *human* identity, whatever all his or her other identities might be.

Political correctness presupposes the will to act so as human rights be protected in the given situations. But it also presupposes the capacity to make right evaluation of the cases in which we have to act, and to be determined by ethical value knowledge in public life, i.e. to be able to put in connection value knowledge with the given situation and to find its implications for action –what it obliges to do. It presupposes to possess the intellectual virtue which Aristotle calls φρόνησις.

For this we have to rethink the goals, as well as the content of education. We need an education promising to lead a great number of those who undergo it, to contribute to the creation of what the Director General of UNESCO, Ms Irina Bokova, called “new humanism in the 21st Century”, i.e. “to build a lasting universal human community, drawing on the fundamental values of humanity, and first and foremost on the resources of the mind”.

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It is not possible to say a priori what is politically correct in a given situation. It is necessary to evaluate each situation and case for itself. But keeping in mind certain world problems, it is possible to give examples of what is politically correct to do at present, because it is a practical implication of human rights:

- Positive discrimination of women is politically correct. Why? Because it is an implication of human rights.
- To abolish death penalty and to work for its abolition is politically correct, because it is a practical implication of the right to life.

We can give many other examples of what must be done in the present situation of our world. But instead of doing this, I wish to take this opportunity to inform you about the recent establishment of an International Commission Against Death Penalty. This Commission which consists for the moment of 11 members and is chaired by Federico Mayor, former Director-General of UNESCO, is supported, for the moment, by Argentina, Dominic Republic, France, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Mongolia, Philippines, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, and Turkey. It is noteworthy that among these countries there is Mongolia, in whose law there is still death penalty. This is an indirect expression of the political will to abolish this penalty. There are 93 countries which retain in their law death penalty, but only 45 had executed this penalty in the past few years.

The objectives of establishing this Commission, as they are worded in the Declaration we issued on October 7, are the following:

- To obtain the universal abolition of death penalty: In this perspective, promote the abolition of the death penalty in those countries carefully considered, particularly in the legislation of the countries that apply a de facto moratorium on the use of death penalty.
- To promote the establishment of a moratorium on the use and the imposition of death penalty in all regions of the world, allowing the most widespread and effective

implementation of a universal moratorium on the horizon of 2015, with a view to its total abolition.

- To solicit the end of executions, especially in cases where International Law prohibits or restricts explicitly its application.

I think that it is politically correct for all of us philosophers, especially the philosophers in whose countries death penalty still exists, to think of what will be the most appropriate strategies which can contribute to change the minds of those in power and of the public, as well as to follow these strategies.