# The re-enchantment of universal values

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There is nothing new about the idea that there are universal values, nor is its critique. And the idea that these are an invention of the West is one of these self-evident truths which we have been slow to recognize.

Thus the philosopher, François Jullien suggests that there are three separate and convergent historical origins of the Western conception of the universal dating back to: Ancient Greece, for the universal value of reason, or *logos*, which promotes concepts and rational demonstration, or the logical; the Roman Empire in which the juridical concept of the universal linked citizenship and legality; and the Pauline conception of Christianity which promised salvation to all. This amounts to declaring the differences, injustice and inequality which are the lot of mankind on earth null and void in the after-world.[1]

The Enlightenment and Immanuel Kant in particular, are therefore merely one of many in a long line of endeavors to advance the idea of universalism. From this perspective, universal values are presumed to apply, or be able to be applied, to the whole of mankind. They are founded on reason, law and perhaps less obviously, on morals or ethics.

Thus defined, universalism constitutes an explicitly core construction for philosophical and political thinking; critical, even hostile, points of view have opposed this.

1. The classical critique

a) Some – conservatives or reactionaries – reject universal values which they denounce as a threat to the established order and while those in power see therein a source of protest, conflict and possibly revolutionary uprisings. Universal values are said to undermine traditions, subjugate culture and destroy authority. These criticisms locate those who profess them on the side of the Ancients who, since the 17$^{th}$ century have been in conflict with the Moderns.

b) Others stress the characteristics which separate and distinguish human groups rather than those which they share and claim – sometimes in conservative or reactionary terms – sometimes in liberal terms - to adhere to a form of relativism valorizing the particular specificity which each individual or, for example, each national community might have. From a relativist viewpoint, the meanings and values which direct human behavior vary from one society to another, one group to another or one individual to another. None are transcendent.

[1] François Jullien, *De l'universel, de l'uniforme, du commun et du dialogue entre les cultures,* Paris, Fayard, 2008

In the first scenario, values are an inheritance from a past which can go as far back as time immemorial and from there to the intervention of God or of nature – in this case, relativism is a-sociological and even anti-sociological. In a second scenario, values are the outcome of specific historical processes which are unique. They are produced through the action of each society, each group, and each individual on itself. We have no reason here either to envisage the triumph of reason and law. In both cases, absolute relativism leads to an impasse. If we describe a culture as being totally incomprehensible to those who do not belong to it, to do so we have to use categories or criteria of judgment which are universal. We have to use reason, even though relativism excludes the use of this same reason when considering cultures other than those which recognize it.

c) The critique of universalism and universal values also has a long tradition which has been developed on the left, so to speak. In the first instance, it may appear to be an accusation: the universalism of the philosophers is charged with being rather abstract in nature, somewhat remote from concrete realities. On numerous occasions, Karl Marx developed this kind of viewpoint. For example, he demanded that the concept of the individual be replaced by that of the worker.Thus, a concrete universalism would replace the abstract universalism of the law and might result in altering the legal nature of the social rules which contribute to perpetuating oppression and inequalities. [2] Elsewhere Marx denounced the abstract universalism of money,[3] observing that theoretically money creates equality in exchange but that in practice it is a factor of injustice and inequality of wealth; note that on this point Georg Simmel defended a different position, seeing in money an instrument of modernization and emancipation.[4] The fact remains that Karl Marx does not break with universalism, nor even with Immanuel Kant; he simply requests a move from pure philosophical speculation to an examination of the social reality.

As an example, we can take the Marxian criticism of abstract universalism as a basis for an analysis of the French republican model of integration. In France, the Republic ensures the institutional, legal and political transcription of the universal values of law and reason and it is possible to analyze many episodes in the collective life of this country since the mid-1980s as being directed by the increasingly artificial nature of the references to the Republican ideal. If teachers feel they are being given a difficult time with the question of the Islamic scarf in schools at the end of the 1980s, or if there are periodic riots in the 'deprived suburbs', this may be due to the increasing incapacity of the State to ensure that the concrete reality of everyday life corresponds to the abstraction of the republican promise – liberty, equality, fraternity? Resentment and frustration are exacerbated when intellectuals and political authorities advance a republican discourse, accompanied by exhortations to integration even when the material means for this integration are not there. The violence in the deprived peripheral suburbs is closely related to the nature of this discourse; republican values are invoked but access thereto remains closed. This is ultimately unbearable.

[2] With Friedrich Engels in *The German Ideology* (1846)
[3] Cf. his well-known article *On the Jewish question* (1844)
[4] In *Philosophie de l'argent* (1900). In the introduction to the book which I edited, *L'Argent* (éd. Sciences Humaines, Auxerre, 2010), I compare the approaches of Karl Marx and Georg Simmel.

This brings us to the end of the classical criticism of abstract universalism: when universalism is evoked in the public sphere, it is not only ideological. It has a considerable impact by reinforcing the feeling of injustice and incomprehension of those who do not have access, or only very limited access, to the fruits of modernity.

d) Once again on the left, another critique of universalism consists in denouncing the harm, the negative effects and the excesses. At the outset, in the inter-world war years, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, the intellectuals of what would later be known as the Frankfurt School, who were initially strongly influenced by the thinking of Georg Lukacs, placed their hopes in the advance of reason. But with Nazi barbarism and Stalin's Terror, - with also what they thought to be the unlimited capacity of capitalism to develop or of the rise of industrial technology- the Frankfurt School observed that reason, formerly an emancipating force, had become instrumental and dominating, or subjugating and alienating. Similarly, more recently, Zygmunt Bauman has been able to see in the destruction of the Jews by the Nazis an extreme case of the use of reason, resort to technology, science and modern forms of bureaucracy.[5] Reason as a universal value is not entirely rejected by these critical approaches; it is shown to be ambivalent – capable of leading to progress or to catastrophe.

At the height of the major totalitarianisms in the 20th century, in Nazi Germany or in Stalin's Soviet Union, the topmost official ideology established the difference between several conceptions of science. The Nazis for example rejected modern mathematics because it was Jewish, the Soviets opposed bourgeois science to proletarian science, their own. For example, they advanced the theses of Lysenko postulating the heredity of acquired characteristics.

**2. Doubts, suspicions and challenges**

While it is true that various possible criticisms of universalism may long have existed and co-existed over time, it is also true that each historical period has its own particular challenge to universal values.

Thus the end of colonialism and of Empires, even if some authors do speak of post-colonialism, that is of a historical phase which still refers to colonialism while at the same time going beyond it, is also a period when Western thinking could be considered synonymous, at least in part, with universal values. It extends far into a basic constituent of universalism, as it spread from the time of the major discoveries –the universalism described by Etienne Balibar[6] as 'extensive' or 'expansive' universalism. This aspect of universalism with its hegemonic pretentions was mainly the concern of States and the actors accompanying or preceding them in their operations of colonial or imperial domination. It went along with a discourse and projects claiming to deliver a message bearing references to values of progress, salvation, access to reason and participation in modernity. The generous aims in reality concealed practices of domination, exploitation or destruction of peoples and individuals but nevertheless they did exist.

[5] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust,* London, Polity Press, 1989
[6] Etienne Balibar, *Quel universalisme aujourd'hui ?,* Lecture, 3 December 1993, Cercle Gramsci

As from the 1960s and 1970s, as changes occurred affecting them in numerous ways, universal values lost ground - , in the first instance on the home front, or primarily within societies, later as a result of the historical transformations which revolved around supranational or global approaches.

At the time when the Cold War was entering its terminal phase and when decolonization was becoming a reality on a wide scale, various movements in these same societies challenged the resounding universalism of the preceding years from within.

To continue with Etienne Balibar's terminology, these movements were charged with an 'intensive universalism which is not a universalism of expansion but a qualitative form of universalism – one of liberation'. They denounced the universalism of the dominants in the name of whose values the worst forms of barbarism and violence were carried out.

In the United States, for example, various actors began to criticize the way in which the country had been built, by destroying the Indians and establishing slavery, prolonged by anti-Black racism and Jim Crow laws. They then criticized the domination of the Whites over people of colour and that of men over women, exercised in the name of a conception which claimed to be universal. They also denounced the damage wrought by progress, the excesses of science when it is left to its own devices, to the interplay of technocrats or to market forces. The very idea of progress was challenged.

The dimensions of action are often historical since it is a question for the actors of ensuring recognition of the links between present difficulties and the past. They are backed up by memory, that of the groups, victims of dreadful forms of violence in the past, genocide, mass massacres, extermination, or ethnocide which has almost or totally liquidated a culture. To continue with our American example, this has been the situation for the Indians or the Blacks for almost half a century now.

Thus a *universalism from below* concomitant with the social or cultural struggles against oppression, domination, also against the negation of history and the refusal to recognize the existence of specific identities now challenges *universalism from above* which is so closely associated with various forms of domination, the authorities, and established order or its experts and their organic intellectuals, that it has become a pseudo-universalism – an ideology.

The demands thus expressed by historical, cultural and social movements challenge national narratives and official history and are interpreted by some political thinkers and actors as a challenge which does result in the imposition of a degree of relativism. Do these not challenge the State, weaken the nation, itself identified with the universal, and disrupt the unity and coherence of the social corpus to the advantage of one specificity or another?

The movements which appeared at the turn of the 1970s cannot be reduced uniquely to their positive aspects. They usually also have a negative side to them; they may be attracted by secession, by withdrawal into themselves, the rejection of alterity, closure and thence communitarianism, which also implies the domination of the group over individuals. These movements then tend toward relativism, not to oppose the universalism of the dominators in

the name of a universalism from below, but each in the name of furthering an autonomous existence, indifferent and even hostile to anything which might challenge their specificity. In the same historical context, we also witness the formation of xenophobic and racist nationalisms.

Thus, as from the beginning of the 1960s, the classical universalism, inherited from the Enlightenment was attacked on two fronts. The criticism targeted knowledge and the idea of progress on one hand and on the other, the rise of specific identities and withdrawals into nationalism. It was ambivalent for in both cases it included on one hand an appeal to another conception of universal values and, on the other, a pure and simple rejection of the very idea of universalism. The discussion was then conducted around two sets of pairs: top down universalism / bottom up universalism and universalism / relativism.

However, it is usually limited to one set of oppositions. Thus, when two major questions began to be discussed, one concerning multiculturalism and the other, positive discrimination, the two partly overlapping, the idea began to take shape that a choice had to be made between one of the alternatives. In the English-speaking world the choice was between being a 'liberal' or a 'communitarian' and in France, the words used were 'republican' or 'democrat'.

The social sciences did not play a leading role in this discussion, being content instead to follow political philosophy, adopting its categories and analyzing the problems or events individually as they arose. These were often associated with Islam and immigration – for example in France, the issue of the headscarf or '*foulard*', then more recently the '*burqa*',– in the United Kingdom, the mobilization related to the Fatwa aimed at the writer Salman Rushdie for his book *The Satanic Verses* and critical of 'Londonistan'.

As from the 1960s and 1970s the social sciences were also affected by the rise in importance of relativism, while American functionalism, so strongly identified with universal values, was on the wane; throughout the world we witnessed the beginning of criticisms of science and progress expressed in particular by the environmental or ecological movements.

At this point, an idea gained ground, first in English-language sociological thinking and then elsewhere; the best formulation is that set out by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann.[7] For these authors, what is social is constructed; social phenomena are constructions, the production of society, and once in existence, they can in the last resort be reproduced. From this point of view, values are also social constructions; they are shaped through cognitive stances and are the outcome of historical processes. They therefore cannot be explained objectively as being the triumph of reason. Pushed to the extreme, constructivism or a constructionist approach is a form of sociological relativism and if it is applied to science, it means that science is also permeated by it, as in the orientations which direct the research of the sociologist of science, Bruno Latour. There is then no absolute scientific truth or method specific only to scientists, of autonomy of at least part of their work with respect to social life.

[7] Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality,* New York, Doubleday, 1966

All scientific statements must be considered in the context in which they were produced, or set in the history which is considered in reality to have fashioned them.

**3. Decolonization, globalization and migratory phenomena**

Decolonization and the entry into an era which many call postcolonial, followed by globalization challenged the conceptions which the West had of itself and its values, and of its capacity to apply or impose them throughout the world; at the same time we saw the beginnings of what the German sociologist, Ulrich Beck, has called methodological nationalism. The nation-state can no longer be synonymous with universal values- as when, for example, France was described as a universal nation. This would require considerable intellectual acrobatics. France is simply one nation amongst others.

Decolonization is inseparable from the many declarations which in one way or another challenge Western arrogance and the idea of universal values. In reality this idea masks the disregard for peoples till then colonized, and brings in its wake the racist vision of the Whites on individuals of colour, that of the imperialist powers who successfully imposed their political power. In the words of countless actors taking up the cause of decolonization, activists, intellectuals and politicians, the concept of the universal went hand in hand with colonization and legitimated colonial domination. It is a Western-centered value and therefore ethnocentric, of which multiple expressions in the present, post-colonial era can still be found.

Thus, many voices now criticize the way in which colonization has been presented as a sort of gift to the colonized peoples who are said to have been provided with economic progress, education, health and who, theoretically, were enabled to accede fully to modernity. Didn't children, in the colonies of the French Empire, used to chant in class that two thousand years ago, their ancestors were the Gauls?

These times have gone. We have entered an age of economic and cultural globalization, as well as one of a multi-polar world. China, India and Brazil, and the new emerging countries like Indonesia are putting an end to the intellectual, political and economic hegemony of the West.

In the first instance, as from the end of the 1960s, there has been an intensification of the highly charged image of a division between universalism as conceived of in the framework of the nation-states, and universal values which could have a global or planetary impact.This is particularly true for those who advocated a right to intervene while, at the same time, pleading for human rights. Classically, the framework of the nation state and international relations implies that States only deal with what happens in their jurisdictions; states do not intervene in the affairs of others except by means of diplomatic relations, international agreements, conventions, etc. But if human rights are seriously infringed, is there not a duty to intervene despite the State which is complicit, passive or powerless, despite also international rules and agreements? In 1967, the 'French Doctors' opened a breach in this model during the dramatic events in Biafra, asserting the primacy of human rights over reasons of State and agreements between States. Thus, universalism began to go beyond the framework of the Nation-States

and, thereafter, this trend was expressed by the ever-increasing and sometimes very powerful NGOS. The universal of human rights – a term preferable to the rights of man to avoid any misunderstanding concerning women – is global and knows no frontiers.

In this context of globalization and the rising importance of human rights, migratory movements have contributed to the unavoidable obligation now forced upon us to once again question the very idea of universal values.

This is not the place to describe and analyze these movements in depth. Let us simply say that they assume various forms, putting an end to the idea of a single model in which migrants leave a society of origin and, in one or two generations, become integrated into what is known as a host society. Migrations may concern the whole planet, in many and various spatial and temporal modes. They produce new networks, and new modes of cultural life. Migrants invite us, through the way in which they take up the challenges of their lives, to adopt a 'cosmopolitan outlook', to use the words of Ulrich Beck, who distinguishes five constitutive principles:

> i)The principle of the experience of crisis in world society: the awareness of interdependence … which overcomes the boundaries between internal and external'; ii) the 'recognition of cosmopolitan differences' in global society; iii) the principle of 'cosmopolitan empathy and of perspective-taking'; iv) the 'principle of the impossibility of living in a world society without borders'; v) 'the *mélange* principle … local, national, ethnic, religious and cosmopolitan cultures and traditions interpenetrate … cosmopolitanism without provincialism is empty, provincialism without cosmopolitanism is blind'.[8]

What Ulrich Beck refers to as 'cosmopolitanism' is nothing more than a variant of the idea of universal values – furthermore, the thinkers of the Enlightenment, beginning with Kant, stressed the notion of cosmopolitism at the same time as they were endeavoring to conceive of the universal. But is there not a risk that the cosmopolitical ideal might become one form of abstract universalism? This is what comes to mind for example, on reading a recent book by Elijah Anderson who demonstrates that it is pleasant to live under the protection of the 'cosmopolitan canopy'; this space is harmonious because it is cosmopolitan and convivial. But there is nothing to prevent the emergence of racism within it, the 'nigger moment', the instant in which the Black person is suddenly reminded of the colour of his or her skin.[9]

## 4. Rethinking the universal. Four paths.

Should we henceforth abandon the idea of universal value; can we not instead endeavor to renew the concept?

[8] Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision,* Cambridge, Polity Press, 2006, p.7
[9] Elijah Anderson, *The Cosmopolitan Canopy. Race and Civility in Everyday Life,* New York, Norton, 2012

a. As far back as the 1950s the philosopher Merleau-Ponty, being interested in the work of social anthropologists and therefore in the analysis of what were at the time, distant, societies observed that the traditional conceptions of the universal were no longer very operational. Since their formulation the division of labour within the social sciences had become less marked, and social anthropologists now studied social life at the heart of the Western world. He noted:

> 'Now experience in anthropology is our insertion as social subjects into a whole in which the synthesis our intelligence laboriously looks for has already been effected, since we live in the unity of one single life all the systems our culture is composed of. We gain some knowledge from this synthesis which is ourselves. Furthermore the equipment of our social being can be dismantled and reconstructed by the voyage, as we are able to learn to speak other languages. This provides a second way to the universal: no longer the overarching universal of a strictly objective method, but a sort of lateral universal which we acquire through ethnological experience and its incessant testing of the self through the other person and the other person through the self.'[10]

Remarks of this sort denote an interesting stance, that of the modesty associated with the acquisition of a real-life knowledge of alterity. Above all, they point to a first possible path for those who intend to re-launch universal values. Here we have the idea of refusing a pre-defined universality formulated prior to any application to a concrete situation. Merleau Ponty suggests that universal values are not imperative categories which compel recognition from the outset, arbitrarily, in an unquestionable and non-negotiable fashion with neither nuance nor limit, and which have been determined by a philosopher, then to be tacked on everywhere. On the contrary, or in any event very differently, they may be an unfinished construction, work in progress so to speak which is transformed, by opening up to other cultures and other horizons. But Merleau Ponty's remarks are almost overtaken by present-day changes. Thus as a result of the phenomena of migration in particular, but also with the contribution of the new technologies of communication, what was exotic yesterday because remote is now present at the very heart of Western societies and, for example, of the global cities described by Saskia Sassen.[11] And symmetrically, the former colonies, the field-work areas *par excellence* of social anthropologists are not only independent States, but above all are capable of producing a completely up-to-date form of reflexivity and of analyzing the world of today with all the tools which the former colonizers had, including those of the social sciences.

We also find Merleau Ponty's intuition in François Jullien's work when he distinguishes between the universalizable and the universalizing: :

> 'The universalizable is what makes a claim to the quality of universality, as a statement of truth [...] As for *universalising*, it is indemnified from this problem of

[10] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, chapter « De Mauss à Claude Lévi-Strauss », *Signes,* Folio Essai, 1960, p. 193. ***SIGNS*** ,Merleau Ponty translated by Richard McLeary, Evanston, Northwestern Press, 1964.

[11] Saskia Sassen, *The Global City : New York, London, Tokyo,* Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 2001

> legitimacy: since it is what causes the universal to arise (by default and in an operative way), it does not claim but creates; and its value is measured by the power and intensity of this effect. Let's thus say that human rights are a strong or effective *universalising'*. [12]

b. Would it not instead be possible to universalize universal values, to re-enchant them, by showing that their invention is not the monopoly of the Greek, Roman or Christian West and by seeking the sources of an update in other intellectual, moral and political traditions? We find the elements of an approach of this type developed in two separate points in the work of the Nobel Prize for Economics, Amartya Sen, The first refers to the idea of democracy, which is part of classical universalism; there is no law or reason other than instrumental in authoritarian regimes, dictatorships or totalitarian systems, even if they assert the contrary. Now Amartya Sen shows that the invention of the democratic idea is not uniquely the monopoly of a progression which starts with the Greece of Antiquity, with Cleisthenes and Solon, continues in Rome and then, from there, into what is known as the West: there are also elements of democratic life in India, or in Africa, for example with the palaver or discussion. The second point of interest to us here in Amartya Sen's thinking is his ideas on justice. In opposition to John Rawls, with whom he maintains a superb discussion post mortem, the Nobel Economics prizewinner requests that in exercising justice, we take into consideration the culture within which it is to be administered. Consideration should be given to what is compatible with a specific state of the law, and in particular with the forms of justice which, from the Western point of view are new, or have been updated –those referred to as 'restorative', or yet again, with the principles of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.[13]

In the social sciences, the idea that there are universal values has long been associated with the image of a one and only way leading societies onto the rails of modernity. Amartya Sen tells us that it may be that these universal values have been invented elsewhere, encouraging us to enlarge the moral and intellectual space within which the universal can be considered – one is tempted to say, he globalizes it.

c. The sociologist, Schmuel Eisenstadt, who died recently, made another proposal: he says there are several modernities, all open to universal values, but these differ for historical reasons and depend in particular on the way in which societies other than Western - for Eisenstadt in the first instance, Japan – first came into contact with the West. It is in fact the evolutionism of the 'one best way' that Eisenstadt challenges, the idea that the modernization

[12] « Quel absolu pour les droits de l'homme », p.113. – *De l'universel, de l'uniforme, du commun et du dialogue entre les cultures*, 263 p., Fayard, Paris, 2008 ; rééd. « Points », Seuil, 2010, p. 186**.** Forthcoming in English, 2013

[13] Amartya Sen, La démocratie des autres. Pourquoi la liberté n'est pas une invention de l'Occident, Paris, Payot, 2005 ; L'Idée de justice, Flammarion, 2010 (*Democracy and its Global Roots*, in *The New Republic*, 6 October 2003)

of societies is a homogenous, or homogenizing, process which must lead to societies converging into a single model. This approach, which is central to functionalism and more precisely to the work of Talcott Parsons, and which has given rise to ridiculous formulations, as in the work of the American sociologist, Daniel Lerner,[14] is hotly contested by Eisenstadt. He considers that present changes, which at global level are extremely diverse, are set in approaches which are themselves modern and diversified. These produce conceptions of modernity which are distinct – what he calls 'multiple modernities'. This is the contrary of Parsons for whom there was only one, single form of modernity to which all societies tended as they gradually progressed. In a way, Eisenstadt tried to reconcile the acknowledgement of a diversity of cultural, social and political models and the oneness of universal values and he opened up a very interesting discussion.[15]For the classical social sciences, modernity is indeed a mode of organization of society which differs radically from those which preceded it. We have access to it and it is shaped through modernization which is a set of processes possibly including approaches of structural differentiation, rationalization and increasing individualism. In Parsons' work, modernization is based on the changes which affect the system of the personality – individuals become concerned with *achievement* and no longer with *ascription* - ; the cultural system with its norms and its rules which are part of rationalization, and lastly, the social system which is functionally differentiated. These processes also apply to the economy (modernization also implies growth and development), politics (with citizenship), education, which becomes mass education, science, which becomes the object of institutions specialized in its production, the law which must be the same for all, the media which is duty-bound to inform everyone and rapidly, etc. On the contrary, Eisenstadt wonders whether we should not envisage several types of modernity; thus opposing an image of divergence in contrast to the Parsonian thesis of convergence. Should we not break up the uniform concept of modernity and admit, for example, that the modernity of Japan differs from that of Europe and that it is not getting any closer?

In the controversy which Schmuel Eisenstadt's proposals aroused, various arguments have been advanced to save, if not the thesis of convergence, at least that of a unicity of modernity. Some stressed that in its classical forms, modernity was open to a degree of variety, that the model did not postulate uniformity, as we observe if we compare various Western societies empirically. Others have argued in a more theoretical or abstract fashion: what is the concept of modernity worth, whatever its formulation, if one says it is multiple, but that a single word must serve to define it? How can the two terms of the formula popularized by Eisenstadt – *multiple* and *modernity* – be reconciled? One answer would be to distinguish between *modernity* – the outcome – and *modernization* – the model, the process leading to modernity. From this point of view there is only one possible definition of modernity, but several if we are referring to modernization. Consequently, modern universalism is confirmed in its theoretical unicity and in its capacity to be articulated with cultural, economic, moral or

[14] Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Societies : Modernizing the Middle East,* The Free Press, 1958
[15] Cf. Volker H. Schmidt, «Modernity and diversity: reflections on the controversy between modernization theory and multiple modernists», *Social Science Information,* 0539-0184, vol.49(4): 511-538, n°4, Dec. 2010

political projects or aims which vary considerably: universal values become flexible; they adapt to diversity without being entirely dissolved therein.

d. Finally, a fourth path can be taken on the basis of the distinction between expansion and liberation proposed by Etienne Balibar to which we referred above. In this perspective, universal values only in keeping with their conception if they are associated with an aim of liberation and not, or no longer, with one of expansion. This joins up with the path suggested by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in so far as it does not make of universal values an imperative more or less imposed from the outset, nor an order issued to those who might refuse to conform thereto or, quite simply, to become acquainted with them, but the source of a process of personal or collective emancipation. Consequently universal values find a strong principle of legitimation in the support which they provide to demands for rights and for democracy. In Hannah Arendt's well-known expression, they refer to the right to have rights and the democratic conditions which enable their practice.

If we combine the best of the four preceding proposals, the re-enchanted universal values are not principles ensuring the theoretical inclusion of all, in one and the same world of rules and norms, but values which allow for individual subjectivation and collective discovery of new possibilities and new horizons (Merleau-Ponty, François Jullien). They combine this possibility with taking other contributions into consideration (Amartya Sen); they do not prevent allowing for historical and cultural diversity (Eisenstadt). And they present an emancipating and liberating contribution which puts them at the service of the excluded, the dominated and those who campaign to end various forms of domination, oppression, rejection or denial (Balibar).

The re-enchantment of universal values is a challenge launched within what are known as Western societies where new issues call for new rights in response, in particular cultural rights, and where henceforth it is a question of articulating the absolute respect for reason and the law with the recognition of collective differences. It also constitutes a challenge on a global scale, if only to prevent many societies other than Western from having to choose between two predicaments: that of the risk of seeing their community culture gradually disappear into the homogeneous culture which is on offer by the West, and that of withdrawal into regional (for example, Asianism), nationalist or provincial rationales which rapidly tend towards closure, withdrawal or violence.