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M o n o g r a p h i c a I

**REASONABLENESS: OLD VIRTUE FOR A NEW ERA**





# REASONABLENESS: OLD VIRTUE FOR A NEW ERA GUEST EDITORS' PREFACE

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### **ABSTRACT**

This special issue examines how the Rawlsian notion of reasonableness is strained by the epistemic and technological dynamics of digital democracy. Digital environments, defined by features such as echo chambers, misinformation, and fragmented public discourse, foster increasingly superficial and reactive forms of political engagement through social media and reduce citizens' willingness to shoulder the burdens of judgment required by public reason. The contributions explore pedagogical strategies grounded in civic virtue ethics, culturally situated or weakened models of reasonableness, and non-ideal approaches introducing asymmetrical epistemic and civic duties. Together, they show why reasonableness remains normatively significant despite the pressures it faces today.

### **KEYWORDS**

Reasonableness, political liberalism, digital democracy, burdens of judgement, epistemic Injustice.

Reasonableness is a key concept in political liberalism. It is supposed to provide the standard for dealing with the “fact of pluralism” and for reasoning together on political issues, including issues of justice. Following John Rawls, reasonableness can be interpreted both as a “willingness to recognize the burdens

of judgement”, i.e., as a source of reasonable disagreement, and as a willingness to cooperate with others on terms that everyone can accept (Rawls 1993, p. 50 ff.). People’s recognition of the burdens of judgement entails a virtue of epistemic modesty: they show themselves ready to recognize their own limitations and the limitations of everyone else. Based on this awareness, people can adopt a moral attitude towards others: because of the diminished confidence in one’s own capacity to know and beliefs, we should be open and tolerant towards others (Badano and Nuti 2018; Giovanola and Sala 2022). This implies that reasonable people should be able to adhere to a kind of democratic epistemicethics that requires considering others as political equals (Leland and Van Wietmarschen 2012).

Coming to the present, it is pretty evident that the virtue of reasonableness in both related epistemic and moral meanings is deeply threatened by the digital transformation and its crosscutting impact on the democratic life. In particular algorithmic intermediaries (Lazar 2025) often nudge individuals to lock themselves in echo chambers and filter bubbles and to be less and less available for the exchange of reasons and democratic deliberation. Democracy itself is under attack, as it is increasingly turning into a democracy of the click, in which there is little room for debate or even argumentation, but only for the dry yes-or-no choice.

As we have concluded elsewhere (Sala 2013; Giovanola and Sala 2022), *reasonableness* is among the Rawlsian categories particularly challenged by present society’s epistemic, social, and technological features. Reasonableness as a civic virtue proves to be an unreasonable demand in the current circumstances of our digital society (Galeotti 2022).

A reflection on reasonableness in the new era is therefore more urgent than ever and our special issue aims at prompting this reflection, trying to reply to a key question: How to reframe reasonableness?

In his paper in this special issue, Croce highlights that digital society makes communication vulnerable to unique epistemic effects such as echo chambers, epistemic bubbles, misinformation, and disinformation. He suggests responding to these challenges by drawing on Aristotelian civic virtue ethics, highlighting the latter’s pedagogical potential, which appears remarkably apt in an age of increasing vulnerability of the younger generation to social media (Croce in this issue).

Cíbk and Hardoš push forward, arguing that contemporary pluralism is characterised by a blatant *default* on the classic Rawlsian notion of reasonableness. Keeping in mind that, in Rawls, one of the aspects that makes a doctrine reasonable is the willingness to recognise the burdens of judgment and to adopt the perspective of public reason, the authors diagnose that contemporary society is, instead, characterised by the “increasing unwillingness to take the burdens of judgment into account”, and instead increasingly based on inconsistent and impermanent “vibes”, which shifts “the issue of political disagreement one level up

- in effect politicizing the burdens of judgment themselves". Cibik and Hardoš propose to weaken the standards of reasonableness to keep the concept viable in the face of today's pluralism. First, they fragment the referent of "reasonableness" from intellectualised and coherent "doctrines" (such as in Rawls) to single acts and speeches; second, they 'tribalize' and de-intellectualized reasonableness by referring to a broader notion "public culture" composed of certain values or modes of mutual engagement. However, in the attempt to make reasonableness viable, Cibik and Hardoš drastically reduce its analytical and normative purchase, as their public culture does not guarantee that reasonable doctrines or reasonable individuals will have a special role in it vis-à-vis the 'unreasonable' ones.

In light of these difficulties, challenges to reasonableness seem overwhelming. Therefore, Galeotti and Liveriero (in this issue) attempt a bolder theoretical move, asking whether the stubborn insistence on holding to an ideal-theory notion such as Rawlsian reasonableness, as a universal and symmetrical democratic value, might be *part* of the problem of the crisis of reasonableness and social trust itself. Therefore, Galeotti and Liveriero consider that, in the non-ideal conditions of contemporary democracy, reasonableness requirements might have to be radically redefined as *asymmetrical* epistemic and civic duties between the elites and disadvantaged or disenfranchised people. Given the existing consensus on the epistemic effects of injustice and discrimination. Galeotti and Liveriero's move bears notable potential to recognise that the task of defending the "democratic ethos" is unequally distributed on the dominant groups, minorities, and the excluded, with the former bearing stronger duties to reasonableness and to be intellectually humble to accommodate the demands of social and material inclusion from below. In this light, the point for theorists and policymakers (likely to belong to the privileged category) is how to accept that some social demands from below may be *expressed* in somewhat unreasonable forms (e.g., conspiracy theories, fake news) while still representing noteworthy issues which undermine social, political, and epistemic trust (see also Giovanola and Sala 2022; Galeotti 2022). This is also what Loginov (in this special issue) denotes as the 'surplus' of recognition ("hyper-recognition") arising specifically from those groups whose identities have been previously negated or discriminated against (see also Liveriero 2020) – a diagnosis that grounds, in his reading, the enduring preference for the paradigm of modern tolerance vis-à-vis theories of recognition.

Last but not least, Furlanis and Cerovac's contribution on human-AI *political* symbiosis (see also Coeckelbergh 2023) highlights that digital society makes communication vulnerable to unique epistemic effects such as echo chambers, epistemic bubbles, misinformation, AI-misuse, disinformation, and conspiracy tendencies. However, while AI poses unprecedented dangers to democracy, including risks of misuse, disinformation, overreliance, and responsibility, on top of accountability issues concerning the ownership of AI technology, the authors suggest, there might not be other way out than "staying with the trouble" and

embracing a responsible but radical introduction of AI in democratic settings – bearing in mind that doing otherwise might as well be nothing more than a misrecognition of the already high level AI’s penetration in everyday social life.

Now, comparing, for example, Galeotti and Liveriero’s to Cívik and Hardoš’s essay in this special issue, we encounter a parallel albeit inverted strategy to ‘save’ reasonableness’s ideal-theory backbone from contemporary hyper-pluralism and fragmentation. The former does it by exposing inequalities and asymmetries backing up the crisis of social trust, thus leaving the criteria of (un)reasonableness untouched but shifting its referents; the latter attempts to be more inclusive, distributing the possibility of being reasonable more evenly across the social body. However, both have possible practical shortcomings, as the former approach may be refused by the dominant classes, while the second triggers a collapse of the epistemic and normative standards of reasonableness, which may render the notion ineffective. In front of this conundrum, Croce’s proposal might be construed as an effort to avoid both strategies and entrench reasonableness in pedagogy.

However, rapidly evolving information technologies might also switch sides. From representing merely risks to political liberalism and democracy, they might as well be turned into powerful allies to overcome the present challenges, granted that society is able to accommodate such a radical paradigm shift, such as Furlanis and Cerovac suggest.

To conclude, this special issue sheds light on the evolving significance of reasonableness in the digital age. We recognize that reasonableness continues to be debated as both an epistemic and moral virtue, even as some view it as a relic of an earlier democratic ideal. The figure of the democratic citizen is undergoing transformation in a world shaped by digital technologies, prompting a re-examination of the virtues that should support modern citizenship. Trust between political actors faces new challenges in digitally mediated environments, yet it remains a crucial element of constructive political engagement. Ultimately, reasonableness stands as both a contested and necessary aspiration, one that must be reconsidered and redefined in light of contemporary realities. This issue contributes to deepen the understanding of these dynamics and to explore how reasonableness can continue to inform democratic life today.

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# REASONABLENESS IN THE DIGITAL VILLAGE: AN ARISTOTELIAN APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the prospects of reasonableness as a civic virtue in the digital age, where the architecture of online platforms and the dynamics of information flow pose significant challenges to democratic life. Drawing on Rawlsian political liberalism, the paper revisits the concept of reasonableness, its role in public deliberation, and its vulnerability to phenomena such as epistemic bubbles, echo chambers, conspiracy thinking, and epistemic injustice. Arguing that ideal theory alone offers limited resources to address these challenges, the paper examines two neo-Aristotelian reconceptualizations of reasonableness: the reasonableness-as-phronesis view, grounded in practical wisdom, and the reasonableness-as-civility view, centered on civic benevolence and civil deliberation. It is argued that the civility-based account offers two key advantages: it provides clearer boundaries for the exercise of the relevant virtues and poses less demanding conditions for their cultivation. These features enhance the feasibility of developing educational strategies that promote reasonable civic engagement and counteract the harmful attitudes that undermine it.

## KEYWORDS

Digital democracy; Civic virtue; Political liberalism; Virtue ethics; Aristotelian ethics; reasonableness-as-civility; reasonableness-as-phronesis.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The digital age has ushered in a new era of interconnectedness, creating a global “village” where information flows freely and individuals engage in constant dialogue. This digital village holds immense promise for overcoming information accessibility and citizens’ participation in the democratic life of our community. However, the overwhelming flow of information and the ease of voicing opinions online have also given rise to significant challenges: the architecture of the digital village favors the rise of problematic socio-epistemic structures such as epistemic

bubbles and echo chambers; the spread of fake news and conspiracy thinking hinders the quality of available information (Kelly, McGoey 2018); and the incentive structures of social media platforms tend to prioritize engagement over truth and rational deliberation (Lorenz-Spreen et al. 2020).

Such a scenario threatens to undermine the epistemic, moral, and political pillars of democratic life (Dryzek et al. 2019). If the quality of the public discourse deteriorates and citizens are unable to access reliable information and engage in meaningful deliberation, the principles of a liberal democratic society appear at risk. In Rawlsian terms, one might suspect that not only do citizens lack rationality, but more importantly they lack reasonableness. As a matter of fact, some scholars have argued that the socio-epistemic pitfalls of the digital village can undermine the epistemic and moral presuppositions of political liberalism (Cibik, Hardoš 2020; Liveriero 2015).

This paper engages with the debate about the prospects of reasonableness as a virtue in the digital age. It does so from a non-standard perspective: rather than discussing the requirements of reasonableness in the context of liberal theories of democracy, the specific challenges posed by the digital age will be addressed from a virtue-theoretic approach informed by neo-Aristotelian scholarship. I shall introduce and discuss two models for reconceiving reasonableness within a virtue-theoretic perspective, which I shall respectively call the reasonableness-as-phronesis model and the reasonableness-as-civility model. I will conceive these accounts as preliminary attempts to provide democratic theory with the support and resources it needs to make sense of reasonableness in the current information environment. I will also argue that the reasonableness-as-civility account has some advantages over the reasonableness-as-phronesis model. Hence, the specific goal is to show how virtue theory can contribute to the discussion about the realistic prospects of reasonableness and liberal pluralism in the context of the digital village. At a more general level, this paper aims to foster interaction between political liberalism scholarship and virtue theory.

I shall proceed as follows: Section 2 introduces the notion of reasonableness, its difference from the concept of rationality, and its role in Rawls' political liberalism. Section 3 sheds light on the socio-epistemic factors that motivate the widely shared skepticism about the realistic prospects of reasonableness in the digital village—a very different context from Rawls' ideal of the liberal society. This section also investigates extant ways to address this problem. After discussing Rawls' original strategy to deal with unreasonable citizens and groups, it will be argued that ideal theory alone lacks the resources to address the aforementioned challenges. Non-ideal theorizing both in social epistemology and political philosophy shows the limitations of an epistemic approach to the problem, particularly as regards remedies aimed at reforming the epistemic conduct of individual agents. These considerations led several scholars to propose systemic remedies aimed at changing the architecture of the digital village, and mixed

remedies aimed at intervening in both individual conduct and the architecture of our environment. It will be argued that all these proposed strategies fail to consider citizens' motivation to behave as they do. Section 4 builds on the analysis of the previous sections to argue that a virtue-theoretic, neo-Aristotelian, framework can support political liberalism scholars in reconceiving the notion and the role of reasonableness in the digital village. Two options will be discussed: the reasonableness-as-phronesis view, according to which reasonableness should be best understood in terms of practical wisdom; and the reasonableness-as-civility view that understands reasonableness in terms of civic benevolence and civil deliberation. It will be argued that the latter model has two main advantages over the former: on the one hand, it provides clearer boundaries to reasonableness' domains of application and more specific components; on the other, it makes it more feasible to elaborate educational strategies and help citizens counteract the vicious attitudes that hinder reasonable participation in the public life on their part. In section 5, I will conclude.

## 2. REASONABLENESS AND RATIONALITY IN POLITICAL LIBERALISM

Rawls' notion of reasonableness is grounded in his view of the political as the space where individuals with different comprehensive, but broadly reasonable, doctrines can still cooperate and share a conception of justice (1993). Rawls' starting question is how, under conditions of deep disagreement concerning religious, metaphysical, and moral issues, it is possible to build a stable and just democratic society. His answer involves two key tenets: the idea of "reasonable pluralism" and the notion of "reasonableness" as a virtue of citizens.

Reasonable pluralism refers to the fact that the free exercise of human reason under free institutions will inevitably lead to a plurality of (broadly reasonable) comprehensive doctrines (1993, pp. 36-37). Reasonable comprehensive doctrines may provide incompatible answers to a morally or politically relevant question but agree that all deserve equal respect. Crucially, these doctrines subscribe to the shared values of a liberal democracy as they acknowledge this as the only way to ensure the stability of a liberal society.

However, reasonableness is not only an attribute of doctrines. Rather, it is also a virtue of citizens who may disagree with one another but are willing to engage in civil and mutually respectful deliberation with the goal of reaching fair terms of cooperation (1993, p. 48-ff.). I shall highlight two aspects that are key to the virtue of reasonableness in Rawls' view. First, a willingness to propose and abide by norms and principles of fair cooperation. This is what Rawls calls *reciprocity*: shared norms are reasonable, hence justified, by the fact that reasonable citizens accept to see each other as equal and free and play by the same rules. Second, a



commitment to accepting *the burdens of judgment* and acknowledge the reasonableness of pluralism (1993, p. 54-ff.). This means recognizing that there is no uniquely rational way to resolve moral and political disagreements between agents who consider each other equal and free. This awareness leads reasonable citizens to exclude principles of their comprehensive doctrines from their attempt to reach an overlapping consensus with other reasonable citizens subscribing to alternative doctrines. In other words, the burdens of judgment require reasonable citizens to display *toleration* (1993, p. 58).

As is well known, according to Rawls' ideal of fair cooperation, reasonableness has to be complemented by *rationality* (1993, p. 48-ff.). Agents are rational to the extent that they use their cognitive faculties to select their ends and individuate the best means to reach such ends. Although rationality is not limited to promoting self-interest, it differs from reasonableness in that it does not involve acknowledging that others are as free and equal as one is. In other words, rational agents may well lack the desire and willingness to engage in fair cooperation and the expectation that the ruling of a liberal society requires reciprocity. Rawls is clear that rationality is complementary to reasonableness: merely reasonable agents would lack personal ends they wished to further through fair cooperation, while merely rational agents would lack a sense of justice, thereby being unable to acknowledge the legitimacy of others' claims. Thus, according to Rawls, rational and reasonable citizens would recognize that treating each other as free and equal community members and abiding by the principles of fair cooperation guarantees that they can also subscribe to the specific values of a comprehensive doctrine and pursue their fundamental interests.

It is important to note that Rawls' accounts of a reasonable citizen and a reasonable comprehensive doctrine are an exercise in ideal theory. As (Galeotti 2022) illustrates, this exercise involves an idealized description of citizens, which leaves out of the picture contextual features and empirical complexities and conceives of a society in which reasonable citizens fully comply with justice requirements. Rawls admits that not all citizens in a liberal society are reasonable. Unreasonable citizens "plan to engage in cooperative schemes but are unwilling to honor, or even to propose, [...] any general principles or standards for specifying fair terms of cooperation." (Rawls 1993, p. 48). Relatedly, unreasonable and irrational comprehensive doctrines may arise in a liberal society. These doctrines will likely demand that their principles and beliefs be recognized by everyone else as true, thereby violating both reciprocity and the burden of judgment. In such circumstances, according to Rawls, a liberal society should intervene and contain the diffusion of these doctrines as they threaten its unity and justice (1993, p. 435).

Rawls' attempt to contemplate less-than-reasonable citizens and doctrines seems unable to accommodate the variety of ways in which the conditions of actual liberal societies can depart from his idealized model. The next section will motivate this concern. As will become clear, the gap between the model and the

reality justifies the widespread worry that reasonableness is an outdated virtue in current liberal societies.

### 3. REASONABLE CITIZENS IN EPISTEMICALLY POLLUTED ENVIRONMENTS

In this section, I illustrate several challenges that we face qua citizens of the digital village and argue that they strain our ability to be reasonable citizens. As an introductory remark, note that Rawls acknowledges “prejudice and bias, self- and group interest, blindness and willfulness” as common pitfalls of political life and, importantly, as undermining features of reasonable disagreement (1993, p. 56). In his view, these cognitive limitations prevent one from being able to recognize the burden of judgment and engage in public deliberation with a tolerant approach. If we take Rawls’ remarks to the letter, this sounds like bad news for political liberalism. As Galeotti (2022) rightly notes, cognitive science has extensively shown that human beings’ cognitive setup comes with proneness to all sorts of prejudices and biases. Thus, it might seem as though Rawls’ ideal of reasonableness and rationality has to be abandoned altogether. In the remainder of this section, I shall assume that a charitable reading of Rawls’ words or some conceptual fix by theorists of political liberalism could mitigate this problem. After all, Rawls’ theory is meant to be ideal, but not so ideal that it could not be applied to limited cognitive beings like us.

#### *3.1 Epistemic Pollution as A Threat to Reasonableness*

Epistemic pollution in the digital village is due to a variety of factors. With no intent to provide a comprehensive list, I shall shed light on three such factors that hinder the plausibility of reasonableness as a civic virtue: conspiracy theories, socio-epistemic structures like epistemic bubbles and echo chambers, and epistemic injustice<sup>1</sup>.

While disinformation is not a novel phenomenon, its impact has become increasingly problematic due to the pervasive reach of social media and the overwhelming abundance of information available online (e.g., O’Connor, Weatherall 2018; Piazza, Croce 2022). Disinformation *per se* might not pave the way to unreasonableness: information overload and the spread of fake news can make it harder for us to form well-informed judgments without impairing our ability to recognize people who hold conflicting views as legitimate interlocutors. But some kinds of disinformation—conspiracy theories, above all—threaten the ideal of reasonableness. It is highly controversial what conspiracy theories amount

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of conciseness, here I am leaving out of the picture further problems for the digital village posed by artificial intelligence. See, e.g., Coeckelbergh (2022).

to philosophically and how to address them practically<sup>2</sup>. We need not get involved in this debate: all that matters for our purposes is to acknowledge that many authors consider conspiracy theories particularly pernicious for the welfare of our democracy. While for Cassam (2019) they constitute political propaganda (often, of a racist kind), others argue that conspiracy theories are among the main causes of a crisis of trust in institutions (Bartlett, Miller 2010; Critchlow et al. 2008) and, more importantly for our purposes, lead to political polarization (Sunstein, Vermeule 2009, Moore 2016). Furthermore, as Brooks and Duetz have recently shown (2024), even mere allegations of conspiracy promote polarization. Whenever a view or a group of people is accused of conspiracy, different audiences of such accusation respond differently: a dismissive response, for example, can be perceived as appropriate to those that find the accusation outrageous, while it can be perceived as a confirmation of conspiratorial accusation to those that are sympathetic with it<sup>3</sup>. As a result, such accusations and responses end up exacerbating existing polarization (Harris 2024).

To the extent that conspiracy theories fuel political polarization, they constitute a serious threat to the ideal of reasonableness—or so I shall argue. According to Rawls, a reciprocal commitment to treating others with equal respect and to fair terms of cooperation is necessary to exercise this virtue. Polarization is detrimental to this commitment precisely because it undermines toleration. In other words, it makes it harder for one to recognize fellow citizens who hold opposite views as equal and worthy of respect. Both sides to a conspiratorial accusation see proponents of the rival view as citizens who are unable to offer and consider reasons that can be mutually accepted in rational discourse. Thus, neither party is willing to consider the other as a legitimate interlocutor in public discussion.

The architecture of the digital village exacerbates conspiracy thinking and political polarization. The informational environment and the arena for public debate favour the formation of problematic socio-epistemic structures, such as epistemic bubbles and echo chambers. Not only these structures impair citizens' ability to form well-informed opinions, but they exploit citizens' proneness to cognitive biases and foster political polarization. According to Nguyen (2020), epistemic bubbles and echo chambers are grounded in different mechanisms. While both are segregated social networks of like-minded people, epistemic bubbles exclude relevant voices from being heard by mere omission, whereas echo chambers actively undermine relevant alternative voices by demoting them as conspiracy theories. Thus, if introducing contrary evidence in the network would burst the bubble, doing so in echo chambers would intensify inner views

<sup>2</sup> For an overview, see e.g., Dentith (2023), Harris (2024), and Pauly (2020).

<sup>3</sup> Brooks and Duetz (2024) discuss the case of Dutch MP Baudet's allegation of conspiracy against fellow MP Sigrid Kaag.

through self-reinforcing mechanisms that make these networks highly resilient against exposure to outside views.

Nguyen's theory has been recently called into question (Nyhan 2021; Munroe 2024). Whether or not his distinction between epistemic bubbles and echo chambers survives in-depth empirical scrutiny, it seems fairly uncontroversial that any network involving a systematic omission or discredit of relevant views related to publicly significant matters contributes to political polarization (Anderson 2021; Baumgaertner, Justwan 2022). For exclusion of such views amounts to denying some groups of citizens the recognition they deserve qua equal and reasonable contributors to public discourse. Hence, any network or view that proves impervious to counterevidence or mere criticism from the outside moves its members or proponents away from reasonableness.

A third factor polluting the digital village has to do with asymmetrical epistemic relations between groups of citizens. Here I am interested in those situations where a group of people consider themselves to be epistemically superior to others about some contested evaluative matter of public relevance. Scenarios of this sort commonly occur around such ethical issues as abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, but also around social and political issues like migration policies, family structure, and fiscal policies, to name a few. As Liveriero clearly argues, ascribing the status of an epistemic authority to someone in evaluative domains—let alone self-ascribing such authority—typically involves engaging in partisan reasoning that precludes an alleged epistemic authority to be recognized as such by citizens who hold a conflicting view on the matter (2023,p.102). Thus, any attempt to solve an instance of disagreement over evaluative matters by appealing to an external epistemic authority violates the Rawlsian commitment to treating other citizens as equal individuals worthy of respect: that is, as epistemic peers.

A particularly pernicious instantiation of these claims to epistemic superiority takes place in cases of epistemic injustice, where a citizen or a group—typically, a (member of an) unprivileged group—is systematically considered epistemically inferior to other citizens or groups (Fricker 2007; Liveriero 2020). This form of epistemic oppression is first and foremost detrimental to the citizens whose epistemic standing is systematically demoted: to realize that they are not considered trustworthy epistemic agents by other citizens can harm their identity as well as their willingness to participate in the public debate. Importantly though, it's also detrimental to the welfare of the democratic community: by silencing or discrediting a relevant voice in public debate, groups that consider themselves epistemically superior to others fail to respect them qua legitimate participants in the discussion within a liberal society. Hence, epistemic injustice of this sort is inconsistent with reasonableness as a civic virtue and undermines the ideal of a liberal conception of justice.

Let's take stock. I have shed light on three aspects of the digital village that hinder the prospects of reasonableness as a civic virtue because they undermine the commitment to treating other citizens with respect, as equal and free members of the community, endanger our capacity to engage in public deliberation and approach disagreement with tolerance. In the next section, I shall explore some approaches that aim to preserve reasonableness as a civic virtue and a feasible ideal of a liberal society.

### *3.2 Available Remedies to Epistemic Pollution: In Defense of Reasonableness*

If the scenario I have depicted in the previous section is accurate, it seems as though two strategies could help us maintain reasonableness as a civic virtue of citizens in the digital village. One strategy amounts to adapting the Rawlsian account of reasonableness to the extant challenges of our society. The other involves reducing the level of epistemic pollution in order to limit the effects of the aforementioned pitfalls. Quite possibly, a combination of these strategies would have a better prospect for success than implementing only one of them.

As for the former, Rawls did contemplate various obstacles to agreement in judgment which would still be compatible with being reasonable citizens, including difficulties in agreeing on concepts' meaning, assessing available evidence and its weight, turning our particular experiences into shareable evidence, and assessing the relevance of normative considerations that do not seem easily comparable (1993, p. 55). However, the aforementioned pitfalls appear to raise a much deeper problem than the ones that Rawls took into consideration. The fact that online platforms take advantage of our proneness to biased thinking to introduce us to epistemic bubbles and echo chambers brings back to the table Rawls' point about the incompatibility of reasonableness with prejudices and bias. Being a member of these socio-epistemic structures—the objection might go—indicates that one's judgment is deeply biased: hence, it cannot be expected that one is able to recognize the burden of judgment and display toleration in public deliberation. A similar reply can be used to address the concern with epistemic injustice. As Galeotti has recently pointed out (2022, p. 18), situations of epistemic oppression reveal a serious disregard for the reciprocity requirement of reasonableness, which requires equal respect among citizens. By seeing that they lack the necessary voice—hence credibility—to advance a claim of justice, victims of epistemic oppression are denied a fundamental assumption of reasonableness and therefore they are implicitly led to adopt unreasonable attitudes (2022, p. 21).

It is not my aim in this paper to settle the question about the applicability of Rawls' account of reasonableness to the digital village. Yet, the above analysis should suffice to show that ideal theory is poorly equipped to address such question. If any of the aforementioned pitfalls—or a combination of them—succeed in showing that a significant portion of citizens are unreasonable, it would

become clear that Rawls' recipe involves two problematic elements. On the one hand, while the liberty of unreasonable comprehensive doctrines ought to be protected as much as possible, according to Rawls these doctrines will need to be contained to the extent that they threaten to undermine justice and unity in the society (1993, pp. 16-17). Yet one might worry that the proportion of the unreasonable doctrines to which unreasonable citizens subscribe would be too big to be contained within the plausible boundaries of a liberal community. On the other, our best hope would have to be that unreasonable citizens will change their minds and become reasonable by virtue of their experience of living in a community ruled by principles of justice. Yet as Giovanola and Sala rightly remarked (2022, p. 1231), it is far from clear that this virtuous circle would take place, and unreasonable doctrines would gradually disappear. In their view, a more plausible strategy involves acknowledging that (i) reasonableness comes in degrees, and (ii) instead of excluding unreasonable citizens, a liberal society ought to include them by engaging with their doctrines and help them realize that their views can have a place in a liberal community (pp. 1235-1236).

The limitations of Rawls' ideal theory are also explicitly highlighted in Galeotti (2022), according to which reasonable pluralism is blind toward epistemic injustice, and this prevents victims of oppression from being treated as reasonable citizens. In Galeotti's view, only a critical analysis of extant inequalities typical of non-ideal theory can provide reasonable pluralism with the appropriate lenses to detect occurrences of epistemic injustice. Thus, the plausibility of reasonableness in the digital village rests on the ability to integrate ideal theory with non-ideal theory and reach "a sort of reflective equilibrium where, on the one hand, the unfulfilled principles of the ideal theory guide the analysis of actual societies to detect injustices; on the other hand, the resulting critical analysis makes it possible to search for ideal normative resources to be activated" (2022, p. 14).

As for the latter strategy to counter epistemic pollution, recent discussion in social epistemology is also witnessing a shift from ideal theory to non-ideal theory similar to the one that is taking place in the debate about reasonable pluralism. Besides work in the tradition of feminist epistemology (Medina 2013) and on the need to recognize that biased beliefs can result from our cognitive systems working properly (Begby 2021), McKenna has advocated for a new turn in epistemology that builds upon the recent turn toward a social approach to the theory of knowledge, namely a turn toward non-ideal theorizing (2023). Much like reasonable pluralism, idealized social epistemology too is blind to extant epistemic inequalities and forms of oppression. Furthermore, by abstracting the theory from the complexities of reality, it produces models that are unsuitable for ameliorating epistemic conduct. An epistemology that can deal with the challenges of our times—hence, for example, with the epistemic pitfalls of the digital village—must shed light on the epistemic powers of social institutions and conceive of epistemic agents as socially situated inquirers (2023, pp. 7-8). Both aspects require not only a

social take on epistemological questions but also a concern with the problems arising out of epistemic dynamics in our less-than-ideal reality.

Let me stress why the parallel shift from ideal theory to non-ideal theory in a discussion about political liberalism and social epistemology is relevant to the plausibility of reasonableness as a virtue. Much like recent work about reasonableness highlights the need to integrate ideal theory with considerations about the extant epistemic conditions of citizens in a liberal community, recent work in the epistemology of expertise and disinformation argues that asking citizens to reform their epistemic conduct would not succeed in countering the identified pitfalls of the digital village. For example, some scholars contend that the proliferation of online misinformation and the emergence of echo chambers have become so entrenched that changes in epistemic behavior at the individual level are insufficient (Nguyen 2020). Others emphasize that cognitive biases and motivated reasoning are deeply rooted psychological processes that are difficult to overcome through exhortation alone (Millar 2019). Accordingly, these authors suggest that addressing the challenges of the digital age requires systemic interventions at the level of social institutions and information infrastructure, rather than a reform of their intellectual habits via internet literacy, critical thinking, and virtue-theoretic strategies.

Other scholars advocate for a multi-layered approach to the problem. According to Levy (2021), the current level of epistemic pollution in the digital village leaves little room for reforming the epistemic conduct of individual citizens. The “social engineering” approach to regulative epistemology advocated by Roberts and Wood (2007), among others, would only work in appropriately structured environments, where traditional and social media have better gatekeeping procedures to filter out disinformation and better systems of information distribution across the various groups within the community. In the current conditions, only very few citizens are in a position to make up their minds by scrutinizing high-quality and publicly relevant information. In Levy’s view, this suffices to conclude that approaches based on a reform of citizens’ epistemic conduct cannot be conceived as “an *alternative* to scaffolding inquiring and structuring the environment, but only in *conjunction with* these measures” (Levy 2021, p. 90).

A more hopeful take on the prospects of reforming citizens’ individual epistemic conduct can be found in Lewandowski and colleagues’ work on internet literacy skills (2012), as well as Heersmink’s (2018) and Smart’s (2018) works on intellectual virtues. According to these scholars, our epistemic conduct can be corrected and significantly ameliorated particularly as regards learning to

distinguish high-quality information from poor-quality one and defending ourselves from fake news and conspiracy theories<sup>4</sup>.

While settling the dispute between competing strategies to reduce the level of epistemic pollution in the digital village could be an empirical matter, there is at least one important respect in which the educational approaches appear to have an advantage over systemic interventions aimed at modifying the architecture of the digital village. Suppose it turned out that being aptly motivated toward acquiring the necessary information to take an active part in the public life of the community made a difference in reducing the aforementioned pitfalls and, in general, accepting the burden of judgment and meeting the requirements of reciprocity. In this scenario, systemic approaches would not be helpful, as their strategies would leave individual motivation unaffected. In contrast, virtue-theoretic strategies are centered on a reform of the motives underlying individual agents' conduct, regardless of the nature of the proposed reforms—be they oriented toward ameliorating epistemic, moral, or civic character.

While Heersmink (2018) and Smart (2018) argue for online intellectual virtue formation as an education strategy that improves information-seeking behavior, according to Cívik and Hardoš (2020) the problem does not lie in the epistemic prerequisites to forming an informed opinion, rather in the *ethical* consequences of the specific doctrine one endorses. To consider the discussion about conspiracy thinking, in their view not every conspiracy theory would challenge reasonable pluralism. Flat Earth, for example, counts as a reasonable doctrine. The replacement theory according to which a powerful cabal is deliberately replacing the white population with non-white immigrants in order to maintain power constitutes an unreasonable doctrine. What makes the difference in the diagnosis of these conspiracy theories is the fact that the latter, unlike the former, dehumanizes refugees by treating them as agents of the powerful cabal rather than people in need of help. By doing so, the replacement theory violates the reciprocity requirement according to which people should be treated equally and respectfully regardless of the doctrine they subscribe to (Cívik, Hardoš 2020, p. 457; Quong 2004, p. 315).

The take-home message of Cívik and Hardoš' considerations about conspiracy theories is that treating the informational pollution of our digital village as a problem to be addressed with epistemological tools is hopeless. For epistemic remedies like information literacy, cognitive infiltration (Sunstein, Vermeule 2009), and education to critical thinking and epistemic virtues would fail to motivate those citizens who endorse fake news and conspiracy theories that confirm their deeply prejudiced worldviews (Cívik, Hardoš 2020, pp. 458-460). A public policy response to the aforementioned pitfalls should focus on restoring an

<sup>4</sup> See also Croce and Piazza (2023) for a defense of these approaches, and Millar (2021), Rini (2022), and Worsnip (2022) for a reply.



ethical reading of reasonableness, hence on motivating citizens—particularly the young—to recognize reciprocity, with its civic values of free and equal citizenship (2020, p. 461)<sup>5</sup>.

Let's take stock. Although it's still an open question how best to reduce the epistemic pollution in the digital village, two important points for the purposes of this paper appear sufficiently clear. First, Rawls' ideal approach needs to be integrated with non-ideal theory, as we cannot hope that unreasonable citizens will simply turn into reasonable citizens by taking part in the community's life. As we have seen, remaining informed in the digital village is a laborious endeavor, as is accepting reciprocity and the burden of judgment, since current levels of political polarization amplify the distance that separates certain reasonable doctrines. In turn, acknowledging reciprocity and remaining informed require that citizens develop the appropriate motivation but purely systemic reforms to the informational environment cannot ameliorate the motivational dimension of our character. The combination of these aspects justifies appealing to virtue-theoretic approaches to reconceive reasonableness as a virtue in the digital village.

#### 4. REASONABLENESS IN VIRTUE-THEORY: PHRONESIS OR CIVILITY?

Following the analysis proposed in the previous section, now I want to consider two possible ways to articulate the notion of reasonableness in virtue-theoretic terms. This section attempts to bring home the main goal of the paper: that is, to show that understanding reasonableness in Aristotelian terms, broadly conceived, could offer a framework for making sense of this virtue in the non-ideal context of the digital village. I will consider two alternative views of reasonableness: the first view understands reasonableness in terms of practical wisdom, or *phronesis* (Mangini 2020, 2022), while the latter understands reasonableness in terms of *civility* (Curren, Dorn 2018; Vaccarezza, Croce 2021).

Before analysing these accounts and discussing their merits and limitations, I want to stress the rationale behind the choice of considering Aristotelian views as a possible integration into a Rawlsian conception of reasonableness. In Aristotle's view, virtues have two main components: they purport to achieve good ends and involve valuable motivations (e.g., Battaly 2015; Zagzebski 1996). Sticking to a classic example, a person throwing themselves in a burning building to show to

<sup>5</sup>See Liveriero (2015) for a conflicting view, according to which moral reciprocity lacks the motivational force “for prompting citizens in accepting free-standing argument as normatively binding against their own personal comprehensive beliefs” (2015, p. 526). Liveriero advocates for helping citizens appreciate the importance of epistemic reciprocity, that is, the epistemic peerhood nature of their mutual relationships. Only an approach that allows citizens to acknowledge the fallibility of their doctrines and the epistemic dimension of free and equal citizenship has realistic prospects of motivating them to accept reciprocity and the burden of judgment (p. 529).

everyone in the neighbourhood that they are brave enough to save an injured resident from the fire is probably just reckless even if they succeed. For the good end they bring about is not grounded in the appropriate motivation to be exercising a virtue. Virtuous behavior requires attaining success through the right motivation: we would say that a firefighter is courageous because they extract the injured resident from the burning house out of concern for their wellbeing and a sense of what is required by their professional commitments<sup>6</sup>. What matters for the purposes of this paper is that for Aristotle, displaying the appropriate motivation is a necessary condition for possessing a virtue. Thus, understanding reasonableness from an Aristotelian perspective ensures that its motivational component is taken into serious consideration.

#### *4.1 The Reasonableness-as-Phronesis Account*

In recent work, Mangini has argued that reasonableness should be intended not only as a virtue “congenial to Aristotle’s ethics of virtues”, but also as “direct heir to his classical *phronesis*” (2022, p. 938). Although Mangini’s approach moves from a legal and political perspective<sup>7</sup>, his discussion of reasonableness as grounded in practical wisdom widens the scope of the former virtue to the ethical domain more in general. Mangini’s take on reasonableness stresses two main features of reasonableness: on the one hand, it has both an individual dimension and a collective or institutional one, and these dimensions are inevitably intertwined. On the other, reasonableness involves proportionality and balancing reasons as decision-making criteria, which reveals the importance of practical reasoning as a necessary tool to solve conflicts between opposing values. Yet it’s important to know that Mangini conceives this view as a partial departure from the original Rawlsian account of reasonableness. The reason for this move is that, according to him, grounding reasonableness in Aristotelian virtues would be harder if we stuck to Rawls’ notion of reasonableness, which is not only political in spirit but also confined within the political domain (2022, p. 949). Thus, Mangini suggests moving a step forward and considering an account of reasonableness centred on the ethical dimension, as proposed in Dworkin’s (1991) and Von Wright’s (1993) approaches, where reasonableness is explicitly concerned with good character and the right way of living.

The natural question one might raise at this point is why, among many Aristotelian virtues, practical wisdom should play this special role as direct heir to reasonableness. As is well known, in Aristotle’s view *phronesis* is an intellectual

<sup>6</sup> In other words, one’s actions are virtuous to the extent that one performs them “out of beauty”, that is to say “for their own sake” (Lear 2000). For a competing understanding of Aristotle’s account of virtue, see Irwin (2012).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Feldman (2000) for a seminal account of reasonableness grounded in virtue ethical considerations.

virtue that oversees the interaction between all other virtues and promotes the harmony between morally right action and justified belief (Zagzebski 1996). A classic analogy to make the role of this virtue more vivid is that of the orchestra conductor whose function is to ensure that each instrument plays its own part without prevailing over other instruments (Vaccarezza, Croce, Kristjánsson 2023; Mangini 2022, p. 947). Much like a conductor, *phronesis* helps sort out conflicts among other virtues and ensures that the agent's judgment is the judgment of a virtuous person—rather than merely a courageous or a humble one<sup>8</sup>.

To explain why this virtue is the best candidate in Aristotle's virtue theory as a ground for reasonableness, Mangini offers four specific considerations (2022, p. 943). For starters, practical wisdom helps the agent identify the right aim to set depending on the circumstances one finds oneself in and pursue that aim for the right reasons<sup>9</sup>. Secondly, this virtue runs a quality-control function in that it assesses and re-assesses the agent's aims in light of the means that one has chosen to bring that aim about and possible contextual variations that would require a modification of one's conduct. Thirdly, practical wisdom involves practical knowledge or the ability to choose the right means to bring about the right end: hence, the *phronimos* knows what is best to do in given circumstances. Fourth and finally, practical wisdom makes one choose the right course of action out of ethical concern: this means that knowing what to do involves having the appropriate emotional and dispositional response to the situation, which ensures that one does the right thing as a moral exemplar would do.

It's not hard to show how these features of *phronesis* could have an important role to play in both pillars of reasonableness, namely reciprocity and the burdens of judgment. In a nutshell, since being reasonable amounts to acknowledging the existence of disagreements between equal and free citizens and committing to reaching overlapping consensus, making a decision on publicly relevant matters requires that every citizen recognizes the right aim of that decisional process, the right means to reach such aim, and the circumstances that might affect their view depending on what others think. Furthermore, it's also necessary that one sets aside the emotional attitudes generated by the disagreement with the different doctrines others subscribe to and approaches the discussion with a tolerant disposition. Thus, it looks as though all the four features of practical wisdom identified in Mangini's analysis turn out to be relevant in the context of exercising reasonableness. To stick to the opening analogy, reaching overlapping consensus is such a complex task that we cannot aim to succeed without the contribution of the orchestra conductor.

<sup>8</sup> The multi-faceted roles of practical wisdom in the Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian traditions have been and still are a widely controversial issue. For a recent overview, see De Caro and Vaccarezza (2021).

<sup>9</sup> As an anonymous reviewer correctly pointed out, it's controversial whether in Aristotle's view *phronesis* is concerned with the aims or the means of good action.

For the sake of completeness, Mangini argues that there also are situations which *phronesis* is not sufficiently well equipped to handle, in that it lacks the necessary flexibility to adapt to quick changes in value. Domains of this sort include, for example, how technology is transforming our social relationships and difficult bioethical decisions. When it comes to engineering drugs to counter a disease or solar panels to produce energy, as well as deploying technology to sort out deep disagreements between reasonable doctrines about end-of-life rights and abortion, difficult choices regarding social justice have to be made and, according to Mangini (2022, pp. 947-948), these decisions exceed the boundaries of *phronesis*, which is standardly understood as a meta-virtue that oversees the interaction of other virtues in a human community as opposed to a technology-driven one.

#### 4.2 The Reasonableness-as-Civility Account

A different way to look at the connection between reasonableness and virtue theory is offered by Aristotle's remarks about friendship and, in particular, about friendship based on utility. Civic virtues have been long underestimated by neo-Aristotelian scholarship: relevant exceptions include Curzer (2012), Curren and Dorn (2018), and Peterson (2019). The account I shall put forth is grounded in a model of civility introduced elsewhere (Vaccarezza, Croce 2021; Croce, Domaneschi, Vaccarezza 2023).

Aristotle's considerations about the relationship between fellow citizens are included in his discussion of civic friendship—*politike philia*—which he conceives as the fundamental ground of the society (*Pol*, 1280b38-39), in that it helps unify the community by fostering feelings of solidarity among unintimate people who nonetheless share common values and institutions.<sup>10</sup> As Vaccarezza and I argued (2021, p.133), Aristotle's view of civic friendship constitutes the background condition of two virtues that he discusses together with several nameless social virtues: *friendliness* (NE IV, 1126b 10-1127a 12) and *concord* (NE, 1167a 22 ff.). The former together with *good will* (NE, 1166b 30 ff.) amounts to a friendly behavior that arises from a concern for the well-being of others, extending even to those we do not know personally and often without their awareness. This squares nicely with the domain of public decision-making where the emotional distance from fellow citizens—particularly those who disagree with us—can be overcome by mutual concern for each other's welfare. The latter virtue does not involve an

10 A passage by Irwin sheds further light on the relationship between fellow citizens: "A fellow citizen may not be a virtuous person and therefore may not be another self in the way one virtuous person is for another. Nor does the virtuous person share his life with a mere fellow citizen to the extent he shares it with a virtuous friend. But if the fellow citizen is virtuous enough to share some similar aims, the virtuous person can extend his practical reason in the same way as with a virtuous friend" (1990, p. 399).

emotional bond but rather a shared deliberation over matters of common interest that requires mutual agreement over what should be done.

In our model of civility, this virtue unpacks into two main components: civic benevolence and civil deliberation. Civic benevolence constitutes the moral side of civility and is an acquired disposition of goodwill and concern for the well-being of fellow citizens, motivated by the shared experience of community membership. To make sense of it from a liberal perspective, it could be conceived as the moral component of civility that allows citizens to recognize and keep in mind that every member of the community deserves equal and free treatment: that is, the respect that reciprocity calls for. This is not only in line with Aristotle's considerations about friendliness (NE IV, 1126b 10 a, 1127a 12) but also Cívik and Hardoš' urge for an ethical approach to reasonableness.

On the other hand, civil deliberation allows citizens to participate in the public life of the community by exchanging reasons with each other across diverse contexts like the workplace, casual discussions, or formal political settings. This component of civility does not require that citizens agree with each other on civic and political matters. Rather, it provides citizens with the ability to contribute to public deliberation based on the recognition of the differences among the values and the views that are represented in the community. Hence, civil deliberation purports to offer citizens the character requisites to form a common view about matters of common interest in the community, as accepting the burdens of judgment would require in a liberal framework. Though distinct, civic benevolence and civil deliberation are interdependent: benevolence supports the goals of deliberation, while deliberation fosters and reinforces benevolence. Consequently, threats to either component indirectly undermine the other, as the two are intricately linked in upholding civility.

In general, while civic benevolence constitutes the moral component of civility, civil deliberation should be conceived as a civic-epistemic virtue: its epistemic dimension lies in the fact that the object of the proposed components is our ability to deliberate with other citizens no matter how far their views are to the ones we endorse; its civic dimension lies in the motive of civil deliberation, which is not making us better epistemic agents—"rational" citizens, in Rawls' terminology—but rather better citizens—hence, "reasonable" ones. In particular, being a civil deliberator involves a multifaceted set of abilities pertaining to (a) demonstrating the right motivations when engaging in reciprocal inquiry with fellow citizens; (b) participating in deliberative processes to gather relevant information and make informed judgments on civic matters; and (c) exhibiting the proper ethical awareness regarding the implications of one's actions in collective decision-making. I shall briefly illustrate these components, and the related vices citizens should attempt to avoid (or eradicate).

The motivational aspect of civil deliberation centers on the distinct drive that compels individuals to actively engage in community discussions. Citizens

possessing this motivation exhibit the sub-virtue of *civic engagement*. This component of civil deliberation entails being appropriately inclined to participate in the community's deliberative processes and undertaking the necessary actions to foster civic benevolence, all while maintaining focus throughout the deliberation. Civic engagement can be seen as a middle ground between two contrasting vices. On one end, civic insouciance, the deficiency vice, characterizes those who consistently remain silent, avoiding discussions out of fear of being perceived as adversaries by their peers. On the other extreme, civic irascibility, the excess vice, affects individuals who habitually react with excessive anger to civic matters.

*Deliberative conscientiousness* is the inquiry-related component of civil deliberation. It enables citizens to effectively coordinate the interaction between the epistemic and civic dimensions of their inquiries. This involves selecting appropriate methods to conduct inquiries aimed at addressing publicly relevant matters, demonstrating a willingness to revise opinions when presented with counterevidence, and recognizing that the overarching goal of deliberative processes is to promote the community's well-being based on available knowledge. Even in the face of epistemic uncertainty or disagreement, deliberative conscientiousness equips citizens to make practical decisions that harmonize their intellectual virtues with relevant civic objectives, thereby avoiding the risk of making public decisions hostage to epistemic goals. This virtue represents a virtuous middle ground between the vice of deliberative negligence, which occurs when a citizens' view systematically results from bad reasoning and unwillingness to conduct a proper inquiry, and deliberative paralysis, which occurs when the need to conduct one's inquiry with epistemically robust methods leads a citizen to keep postponing the deliberative step in the hopes of collecting a conclusive body of evidence and deliberating on more robust epistemic grounds.

Finally, *conversational responsibility* is the ethical component of civil deliberation, which aims to foster debates that promote civic benevolence. This virtue encourages citizens to publicly acknowledge their fellow community members as deserving of mutual respect and initial credibility as epistemic agents. It also requires recognizing the implications of taking a public stance: being accountable for one's assertions and their potential influence on others. Consequently, conversational responsibility demands presenting arguments and reasons to support one's position. Failing to do so shows disrespect for the deliberative capabilities of others and is detrimental to the quality of public deliberation. Conversational responsibility helps citizens avoid two extreme vices: conversational carelessness, which underestimates the impact of one's behavior in public debate and shows a lack of respect for fellow citizens and their opinions, and conversational hypersensitivity, which stems from an excessive sense of responsibility for one's statements and public conduct, often leading to an inflated perception of the influence of one's actions.

### 4.3 Reasonableness between Civility and Practical Wisdom

Now that the two Aristotelian strategies to make sense of reasonableness in the digital village have been laid out, I shall offer two considerations to support the reasonableness-as-civility view over the reasonableness-as-phronesis account. It's worth specifying from the outset that neither consideration is meant to provide a knock-down argument against the former model. Rather, they are to be intended simply as respects in which the latter model appears to have a conceptual or practical advantage over the former.

The first consideration is that modelling reasonableness on *phronesis*, a complex intellectual meta-virtue that oversees practical knowledge and agency, turns out to impose highly restrictive demands on citizens. If being reasonable requires exercising practical wisdom, it might look as though only the most virtuous members of our community can aspire to ground their participation in public life in an acceptance of reciprocity and the burdens of judgment. But this seems to betray the spirit of Rawls' liberal principles. Reasonableness is supposed to be a precondition of any—or, at least, most—interaction(s) among community members and therefore an ideal that can be reached by many.

A proponent of the reasonableness-as-phronesis model could reply that this critical consideration is too hasty. After all, extant theories of practical wisdom are concerned with developing this virtue through education. To mention just two such theories, both the so-called Jubilee Centre model (Darnell et al. 2019; Kristjánsson et al. 2021) and the so-called Aretai model (De Caro, Vaccarezza, and Niccoli 2018; De Caro et al. forthcoming; Niccoli, Piantoni, Ricci 2024) have it that *phronesis* can be trained by cultivating in a synergistic approach discrete functions of practical wisdom such as moral sensitivity, virtue literacy, emotion regulation, moral identity, and moral reflection (Vaccarezza, Croce, Kristjánsson 2023, p. 5).

I am happy to concede that the proponent of the reasonableness-as-phronesis model has a point. Furthermore, Mangini is clear that while his approach focuses on the “ideal agent” as opposed to the “ordinary agent” (2020, p. 159), the virtues should be conceived as “*satis* concepts” (Russell 2009, p. 112-ff.), namely concepts that have degrees rather than one-off presence. Thus, even if reasonableness required—or were akin to—the possession and exercise of practical wisdom, becoming a *phronimos* should be conceived as a journey. Hence, a citizen could display less than perfect or full-blown practical wisdom and that could in principle suffice to make them reasonable.

Despite these considerations and the fact that both models would require further work to be deployed as strategies to foster reasonableness among the citizens, I think that scholars interested in making sense of reasonableness within the information environment typical of the digital village would find the

reasonableness-as-civility model more suitable to their needs. Conceiving reasonableness in terms of civility, thus civic benevolence and civil deliberation, provides them with clearer boundaries to the exercise of the relevant virtues and less demanding requirements regarding the cultivation of such virtuous dispositions. Thus, in principle, it also seems that this model would have a better chance of having a practical impact on the development of reasonableness within the community. Furthermore, the reasonableness-as-civility model need not commit to a strictly unitarist view of the virtues nor to a monistic one. Thus, while on the reasonableness-as-phronesis model, it would be hard to think of a reasonable person who lacks other central virtues like generosity and courage, the reasonableness-as-civility model can easily accommodate a disunitarist approach, according to which citizens can be virtuous in some respects but far from excellence in other respects.

Relatedly, the second reason why I think that the reasonableness-as-civility model is more suitable as an Aristotelian strategy to defend the notion of reasonableness and support its cultivation is that this model is more sensitive to the limitations of ideal theorizing. To be clear, any model that proposes a characterization of excellent character traits as a goal to achieve and an example to follow is well within ideal theory. Yet by individuating clear and specific domains of applications as well as vices of excess and deficiency to avoid, the reasonableness-as-civility account makes a clear-cut step towards non-ideal theory. This is an important advantage both from a theoretical and a practical perspective because it accommodates the idea that ameliorating citizens' conduct can start from vice-containment rather than setting an ideal and suggesting that limited beings in a polluted environment try and follow it as one follows a role model.

It is important to note that this latter consideration of the advantages of a vice-containment approach to the definition and cultivation of reasonableness in a virtue-theoretical perspective is not hostage to the plausibility of the reasonableness-as-civility model. Rather, it would be an advantage of any other approach to reasonableness that specifies its components, their domains of applications, and the vicious extremes that ought to be avoided. However, it's hard to imagine how a vice-managing approach would work in the reasonableness-as-phronesis model. Given the complex nature of practical wisdom as a meta-virtue, it's not clear which problematic attitudes of citizens we should try to eradicate and how it would be possible to do so. In sum: while both Aristotelian models have more work to do to become serious allies to liberal scholars who want to rescue reasonableness from the pitfalls of the digital village, I take it that the proposed analysis has shown that the reasonableness-as-civility model has better chances of succeeding than the reasonableness-as-phronesis account.

As a conclusion to this analysis, let me highlight why I take the reasonableness-as-civility model as a potentially valuable ally to counteract the epistemic pitfalls of the digital village and, in particular, the polarizing effects typical of epistemic



bubbles and echo chambers. It would be too naïve to think that fostering civility-driven behavior would suffice to set people free from networks that are particularly resistant to counterevidence and conflicting views. Yet not all networks which citizens take part in are so impervious to criticism from outside to frustrate the ambition of a virtue-theoretic approach to reasonableness. Such an approach appears more suitable to those citizens as well as the young members of our community whose conception of the liberal society and public deliberation is still in the making.

For this audience, cultivating civic benevolence and civil deliberation could constitute a sort of vaccine against problematic socio-epistemic structures and their detrimental effects. Unlike forms of engagement that reinforce exclusivity, civic benevolence encourages citizens to adopt an inclusive attitude, seeking to understand and care for those who hold different perspectives. By promoting a sense of solidarity that extends beyond one's immediate social circle, civic benevolence helps reduce the tendencies that lead to insular group formations, which often characterize epistemic bubbles and echo chambers. Thus, citizens motivated by civic benevolence are less likely to isolate themselves within homogeneous networks and more likely to engage in open, inclusive interactions that can bridge political divides. Civil deliberation encourages active participation in public discourse, where citizens exchange reasons and seek common ground on matters of collective concern. Civil deliberation involves a commitment to understanding diverse viewpoints and recognizes the importance of engaging with ideas that differ from one's own. By fostering habits of thoughtful, respectful dialogue, this virtue can prevent the entrenchment of epistemic bubbles and echo chambers. Instead of reinforcing a narrow set of beliefs, civil deliberation encourages citizens to approach disagreements constructively, thus weakening the exclusivity typical of these problematic networks.

The cultivation of civility, as I have conceived it here, requires undertaking a civic character education program in one of the forms standardly deployed, whose goal is helping citizens become aware of civic values and develop the right motivation towards public debate. The educational merits and limits of this approach would require a separate discussion<sup>11</sup>. The analysis offered in this section merely aimed to show a possible avenue for integrating the standard approach to reasonableness, which lacks an appropriate motivation component, through the insights of a virtue-theoretic perspective centred on helping citizens build—or strengthen—a virtuous motivation.

11 For an overview and some critical considerations, see, e.g., Althof and Berkowitz (2013).

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has attempted to build a bridge between work in democratic theory about the prospects of reasonableness in the extant environment and virtue theory. Its main goal was to introduce and discuss two recent options from the neo-Aristotelian tradition. To do so, first, I had to introduce the notion of reasonableness as it is understood in political liberalism, discuss several challenges affecting the quality of the information distribution in the digital village, and illustrate the main worries with its plausibility in the current information environment. It turned out that a serious problem with Rawls' account of reasonableness is its roots in ideal theory. This is why several scholars in democratic theory advocate a reconceptualization of reasonableness in non-ideal terms—or, at least, a deeper interaction between ideal theory and non-ideal theory toward a definition of reasonableness. In light of these considerations, I then argued that the reasonableness-as-civility account has better prospects to support the project of reconceiving reasonableness than the reasonableness-as-phronesis model. Whether or not I have succeeded in this intent, I hope that this paper has fostered an interest in building more bridges between democratic theory and virtue theory.

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# FRACTURED PLURALISM. THE PROSPECTS OF POLITICAL LIBERALISM IN THE AGE OF VIBES

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## ABSTRACT

Political liberalism, both in Rawls and in the subsequent tradition, takes as its point of departure the “fact of pluralism” of comprehensive doctrines, some of which are reasonable. But while the notion of reasonableness has received ample attention, the underlying model of pluralism has not. In this paper, we first analyze the Rawlsian understanding of pluralism and conclude that, because of its heavy focus on “doctrines”, it is overly intellectualistic and, as such, it fails to accurately describe the fractured nature of (especially) contemporary societies. Current social disagreements are often based on conflicting intuitions, feelings, or “vibes”, and they do not involve comprehensive, internally consistent systems of beliefs and values. This inadequacy in Rawls has its consequences, as a descriptively accurate account of contemporary pluralism presents a series of challenges for the typical formulations of political liberalism and some of its key concepts. In the second half of the paper, we elaborate these challenges for two of them: overlapping consensus and (un)reasonableness.

## KEYWORDS

Rawls; political liberalism; fractured pluralism; comprehensive doctrines; unreasonableness.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

American historian Daniel Rodgers observed in 2012 that the last quarter of the century was an ‘age of fracture’, an era marked by intellectual disaggregation. Major intellectual projects of the middle decades of the 20th century came to be slowly supplanted by a ‘contagion of metaphors’, which were incapable “of holding in focus the aggregate aspects of human life as opposed to its smaller, fluid, individual ones” (Rodgers 2012, p. 6). Social categories of thinking were remade, intellectual models slipped across domains, ideas were adapted to more personalized needs of an increasingly hyper-specialized social life. Within this new

fractured pluralism, common projects following a comprehensive set of values seem outdated, increasingly replaced by more individualized, ephemeral, and intuitive political commitments.

Here we do not wish to bemoan this new(-ish) state of affairs, nor look for parties to blame. There has arisen an entire cottage industry of intellectual accusations, finding fault for our new, increasingly fluid, individualistic, and identitarian pluralism in either neoliberalism, late-stage capitalism, the new right, post-modernism, or critical theory, none of which are entirely satisfactory and some border on the conspiratorial. We are more curious about what this new terrain of pluralism means for our understanding of political liberalism. In this essay, we want to focus on Rawls' understanding of pluralism and how it is impacted by an era when our disagreements no longer seem to involve a clash of doctrines and when even the unreasonable challenges to our democracies are not overly intellectual. It is our contention that Rawls' reading of pluralism was over-intellectualized, and in this essay, we wish to address some of the implications of this fact.

To this end, we first review the nature of pluralism and disagreement in late Rawls (section II) and then seek to provide a descriptively more accurate conception (section III). The subsequent sections elaborate on the consequences of contemporary fractured pluralism for some of the key concepts of political liberalism. Section IV focuses on the idea of overlapping consensus, while Section V develops the implications of contemporary pluralism for the concept of (un)reasonableness. In general, we claim that contemporary fractured pluralism poses a serious challenge to some of the typical formulations of political liberalism, although they could potentially be overcome.

## 2. THE INTELLECTUAL'S PLURALISM

People have always differed in their opinions, values, and worldviews. Yet, for much of human history, most philosophers had hoped that these disagreements can be overcome, usually by serious rational deliberation, so that we can reach some sort of consensus about the nature of good life or the best form of government. Nowadays, however, this hope seems to have faded. Most contemporary theorists acknowledge that pluralism is a permanent feature of any society, but especially the current liberal democratic ones, where people are free to make up their minds and have almost unconstrained access to the internet.

But acknowledging this "fact of pluralism" comes with a sharp philosophical challenge. If deep social divisions across opinions, values, and worldviews cannot be avoided, how can we find a lasting, stable consensus on the form and character of our governments? On the one hand, finding this consensus seems to be ruled out by the very fact of pluralism. But if such a consensus cannot be found, some

people will always have a reason to rebel against any regime, weakening its stability. Moreover, the absence of consent in parts of the population makes political legitimacy difficult to achieve. At first sight, no option seems to be working, we are left with a puzzle to solve.

The previous paragraph represents a rough reconstruction of the basic motivation behind Rawls' *Political Liberalism* (2005, henceforth PL). Our ambition in this paper is not to solve the puzzle (that would be much too ambitious), but to question some basic assumptions behind its typical formulations. Famously, right at the beginning of the book, Rawls poses the one question that would go on to guide the entire project. He asks, "how it is possible for there to exist over time a just and stable society of free and equal citizens, who remain profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines" (PL, p. 4). This sentence captures the specific Rawlsian interpretation of the puzzle described above. Added to our vague articulation is, first, a liberal grounding (that is, society has to be just and composed of free and equal citizens). More importantly for our purposes, the formulation also captures the Rawlsian understanding of pluralism, with citizens divided by "reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines."

When it comes to the "pluralism of reasonable doctrines", much of the extensive literature on political liberalism focuses on the "reasonable" part of the phrase (Larmore 1999; Nussbaum 2011; Ancell 2019). This is hardly surprising as it is the move from pluralism to reasonable pluralism that enables Rawls to solve the original puzzle. But that is not the only consequential part of the formulation. We hold that it is also critical to focus on and evaluate the specific Rawlsian understanding of pluralism of *doctrines*, which remains underdiscussed.

In general, the understanding of pluralism in Rawls is guided by one key anthropological assumption, already stated several times: he views human beings as holders of doctrines. He writes, "I assume all citizens to affirm a comprehensive doctrine to which the political conception they accept is in some way related" (PL, p. 12) and proclaims that citizens are assumed to "have at any given time a determinate conception of the good interpreted in the light of a (reasonable) comprehensive view" (PL, p. 81). All in all, everyone is expected to adhere to a more or less precisely defined system of values and virtues (PL, p. 152n).

This focus on doctrines has an understated but key role in *Political Liberalism*. It enables Rawls to interpret pluralism not in terms of individual people and their differing beliefs or values, but in terms of rival systems of thought. Contemporary liberal societies are characterized by the fact that they contain several articulated comprehensive doctrines, and citizens are free to choose between them (PL, p. 36). As a result, disagreement within society, as discussed in the book, does not occur between people, but between (a limited number of) doctrines.

The historical model that seems to drive the Rawlsian understanding of pluralism is the clash between Catholics and Protestants during the 16th and 17th



centuries (Rawls 1997, par. 3). Then, European societies were in a grip of a bloody struggle for political domination between distinct, elaborate doctrines, and neither was strong enough to establish dominance. The result, as Rawls reconstructs it, was a precarious *modus vivendi* that, over time, became more stable as the rival Christian churches renounced their ambitions to dominate political life. The struggles of reformation-period Europe, therefore, form an important precedent upon which Rawls wants to build his theory (PL, pp. xxii-xxvi).

Historical parallels aside, there is another reason why Rawls models his understanding of pluralism on religious doctrines: they provide a key viability test for his theory. If it turns out that Catholicism, Protestantism or any other major religion is incompatible with political liberalism, then the entire project, with its focus on stability and congruence, seems doomed to fail, as it would permanently exclude important parts of the population from the constituency of public justification (Weithman 2010; Nussbaum 2011). However, if Rawls can show that political liberalism can be made compatible with major established religions, this would already be a big achievement for his theory.

The focus on religious pluralism, therefore, serves multiple purposes. Religious toleration provides a blueprint for the “political, not metaphysical” solution to social cooperation, while the inclusion of major religions inside reasonable pluralism seems to be the necessary condition for its viability. However, and this is important, the focus on religious doctrines brings forth a rather specific type of conflict. The established Christian denominations (Rawls explicitly mentions Catholics, Protestants or Quakers) endorse rather complex sets of values, dogmas and articles of faith across different domains (cosmology, ontology, metaphysics, ethics and politics), elaborated over centuries. They do, therefore, put forth comprehensive, internally consistent systems of thought that their members are expected to embrace. The conflicts between religions are thus easily understood as conflicts of “doctrines”.

The understanding of pluralism as a conflict between incompatible theoretical systems of thought is also carried over to all secular examples that Rawls works with. He basically only ever mentions three: the comprehensive liberalism of Kant and Mill and utilitarianism of Bentham (and Sidgwick) (PL, p. 37)<sup>1</sup>. The doctrines that every citizen is expected to affirm are thus introduced in the form of elaborate philosophical systems that, very much like religious dogmas, cut across several disciplines and domains. When representing social diversity, the examples that Rawls uses are highly abstract, consisting of complex, interconnected values and arguments. Overall, Rawls presents a deeply intellectualized understanding of pluralism. The society, as he sees it, is composed of citizens invested in

<sup>1</sup> The one exception to this rule is a brief discussion of pluralism on p. 160 in PL. We discuss it in detail below.

philosophy and theology, who affirm elaborated, consistent sets of values and principles.

While we hold that the Rawlsian understanding of pluralism is over-intellectualized, his view might not have seemed too far-fetched in the recent past. In the 20th-century United States, most citizens were active members of churches belonging to major Christian denominations. They, therefore, could have been expected to endorse the comprehensive doctrines that these churches developed over centuries, across cosmology, metaphysics, and ethics. The tiny minority of atheists and agnostics usually came from the intellectual classes, and most of them could perhaps be expected to provide a more or less elaborate account of their worldviews. Thus, when Rawls looked at the United States in the late 20th century, he might have indeed seen a disagreement between a finite number of well-thought-out “doctrines”. Nonetheless, we hold that such a picture was deceptive already then and it is even more so now. The next section will provide a descriptively more adequate account of contemporary pluralism, while the rest of the paper will develop the consequences for the broader project of political liberalism.

### 3. INTUITIONS, FEELINGS, VIBES

The key problem with the assumption that all citizens “have a determinate conception of the good interpreted in the light of a comprehensive view” and “affirm a comprehensive doctrine” is its descriptive inadequacy. There is a strong, enduring consensus in social sciences that, in fact, the very opposite is the case. To illustrate, let us quote Dennis Chong and James Druckman at length:

[F]rom the earliest days of public opinion research, citizens have been found to have low-quality opinions, if they have opinions at all. In the public opinion literature, high-quality opinions are usually defined as being stable, consistent, informed, and connected to abstract principles and values. The general conclusion among scholars is that such opinions are rare in the mass public (e.g., Converse 1964, Zaller 1992).

Early studies of mass public opinion conducted in the 1950s and 1960s raised serious doubts about the competence of citizens to participate in political affairs. On the whole, citizens were woefully uninformed about the institutions of American government, political office holders, and contemporary political issues. Their views on issues were superficial and unconnected to overarching principles such as liberalism or conservatism. (Chong & Druckman 2007, p. 103)

In social sciences, this conclusion is typically demonstrated using the power of framing and framing effects in political opinion-making. For example, in the 1980s, 65% of Americans were consistently in favor of “expanding assistance to

the poor” while 80% were opposed to more spending on “welfare” –despite the fact that the two phrases have almost identical meaning (Rasinski 1989). In other words, the political opinions of most people are not derived from the abstract, comprehensive doctrines they hold. Typically, they are the product of their intuitions on the spot, without much theoretical depth. When we encounter pluralism in our societies, it is mostly *not* a pluralism of doctrines.

But while the observed disconnect between political attitudes of citizens and “doctrines” remains stable over time, there have been other social developments that undermine the Rawlsian stance even more. As mentioned above, in the lifetime of Rawls, most Americans were active members of established Christian churches, which all adopt and preach elaborate, comprehensive sets of beliefs. In this way, their members could, at least in theory, be described as “affirming a comprehensive doctrine” (although what exactly does that mean in practice is unclear). But since then, there have been some major social developments. In the last 30 years, Church attendance dramatically declined across the board. But what is perhaps more important for our purposes, the traditional (especially Protestant) churches are in deep crisis, while Pentecostalism and other evangelical denominations are on the rise. And what these new, ever more popular churches have in common, are the anti-doctrinal, anti-intellectualist attitudes, with much more focus on direct personal experience with God (Miller 1999). So, while almost all Christians in the US 30 years ago could be understood as affirming a relatively well-specified, deeply theoretical doctrine, this is certainly not the case now. Even religious pluralism might no longer be aptly described as a pluralism of doctrines.

So, what would be a descriptively adequate account of pluralism today? It would have to acknowledge that our digital hyperconnectivity is “reorganizing our attention and reshaping our ways of thinking, seeing, and feeling” (Brubaker 2023, p.2). Instantaneous connection impacts public sentiments, making them more volatile, more intense, and more responsive to logics of algorithmic demand, resulting in more moral outrage and more political polarization. And despite expectations of increased transparency and sociability, hyperconnectivity has made our politics more fragmented and opaquer (Brubaker 2023). Looking at current social media culture might be instructive here. Abidin (2021) studying online influencer culture suggests the term ‘refracted publics’ to analyze the combined impact of platformed logics, influencer cultures, social media vernacular, attention economies, and online distrust & misinformation. Refracted publics are, among other things, noted for their ‘silosociality’, context-dependent intelligibility, and increasing transience, allowing intense but short-lived community building, often ‘under the radar’. In other words, we come to inhabit vastly different worlds, often unknown and even mutually incomprehensible. We are easily siloed by our social media into walled-off communities, which increasingly afford polarization,

incivility, and unreasonable views to prevail or shelter them from potential correction (Carter, Alford 2023; De León et al. 2024; Humprecht et al. 2024).

The impact of digitalization and connectivity on today's pluralism probably cannot be overstated. Bimber's (1998) prediction of an "accelerated pluralism" seems particularly prescient. Our politics are highly pluralistic and fragmented with "more rapidly changing issue groups, with less stability and less dependence on private and public institutional structures" (Bimber 1998, p. 155). The internet did not bring a revolution or qualitative change to the nature of our political disagreement, but it accelerated the already existing developments of divorcing group-oriented politics from their institutional underpinnings. Acquiring political knowledge (understood in the broadest possible sense) and collective political action was greatly simplified, since it became less dependent on the existing coordinating mechanisms and the gatekeeping elites responsible for the formulating, interpreting, and protecting the coherence and comprehensiveness of individual systems of thought.

Much the same can be said about the content and coherence of our pluralism. While we should not fall prey to the false nostalgia of an overly intellectualized past where comprehensive doctrines were supposedly discussed based on reasoned arguments, the immediacy available in the digital sphere also contributes to the more impressionistic and intuitive quality of our political disagreements. People increasingly sort themselves into different camps according to affective and immediate reactions to events, often based on aesthetic appeals or pre-existing group commitments. Instead of a pluralism of doctrines, what we observe today might be better termed a *pluralism of vibes*.

Scholars studying conspiracy theories have noted that we are increasingly seeing 'conspiracies without the theory' where evidence-free allegations replace explanations of events, ventilating more generalized feelings of distrust (Rosenblum, Muirhead 2019, 2024), but much the same can be observed about non-conspiracist, mainstream political discussions as they move away from distinct party-ideological programs toward individual issues and policies, offering voters a customer experience of picking a brand that suits them. This does not mean that we cannot have distinct ideological disagreements in politics, or that there is not extensive polarization of political competition. However, the often-discussed polarization in politics is more of a result of an alignment between coherent ideologies and party institutions (e.g., Noel 2013). The citizens responding to partisan cues do not necessarily share in their doctrines, nor do they arrive at their positions independently and then seek out their representatives. Quite to the contrary, they will be often incoherent in their outlook and will adopt voting intentions and ancillary party positions based on non-intellectual reasons (Lauderdale et al. 2018; Coppock, Green 2022). Once voters become attached to political parties and candidates, "party allegiances unconsciously bias cognition",

transforming “citizens into automatic partisan press secretaries” (Williams 2023, p. 2).

However, we do not mean to say that there is less theorizing and fewer potentially comprehensive and distinct doctrines out there – on the contrary, the unprecedented freedom and intellectual cooperation made possible by the digital sphere have led to an explosion of various systems of thought, which probably never before have had a greater chance to be more comprehensive and more coherent. However, the affordances of the digital sphere again favor superficiality in adopting and assessing such theories. For one, the attention economy makes it more difficult and time-consuming to make sense of the choices available. Second, even the evidentiary basis for assessing their merit is itself subject to second-order disagreements. Which brings us to the most interesting aspect of today’s pluralism: what we might call the *politicization of our burdens of judgment*.

Rawls famously recognized burdens of judgment as the obstacles that prevent reasonable people from finding agreement. They involve the unavoidable uses of our reasoning and form the source of our pluralism – the source of disagreement in our considered judgments. One might focus on how different sources of unreason (bias, prejudice, self-interest, and so on) impact the judgment people make about political issues and lead them to unreasonable convictions. But even when we set aside the sources of unreason, there are still the questions of how we evaluate complex evidence, how we weigh conflicting considerations, how we define our concepts (including scientific concepts), how we select the values that shape our epistemic institutions we rely on to reason together; or how we do all of the above in light of very different life experiences. These are the sources of our reasonable pluralism, as Rawls maintained.

Recall there were two aspects to being reasonable. The first is the acceptance of freedom and equality for all involved in a mutual system of cooperation. The second aspect of being reasonable, according to Rawls, was “the *willingness* to recognize the burdens of judgment and to *accept* their consequences for the use of public reason” (PL, p. 54, emphasis added). But what marks contemporary pluralism, in our opinion, is the increasing unwillingness to take the burdens of judgment into account when explaining the differences in our positions and instead to move the issue of political disagreement one level up - in effect politicizing the burdens of judgment themselves.

This is not the question of whether epistemically unreasonable beliefs such as astrology, or flat-earthism should still be counted as politically reasonable (Kelly, McPherson 2001; Nussbaum 2011); here the issue is somewhat different: the extent to which our deep political disagreements are making us unreasonable by making us unwilling to recognize the specific burdens of judgment of our opponents. It seems that in the conditions of modern pluralism our ethical and political disagreements are increasingly brought one level up, so that we disagree

about an assessment and weighing of complex and conflicting evidence, about our concepts, our measures, and our experiences. For example, we not only disagree about the economic and environmental policies in response to climate change, but the very evidence of the problem is subject to political disagreement. Discussions about combating viral diseases can suddenly involve questions about the efficacy of vaccines or other public health measures. The question of immigration policy and integration of new arrivals into existing communities seemingly cannot be debated without questioning the motivations of either side of the debate.

This is somewhat similar to the dynamic Friedman (2023) described as an ‘epistemic polarization’ where disagreement is treated as an issue of improper motivation. In his version<sup>2</sup>, what we are seeing is an epistemological crisis caused by varieties of ‘naïve realism’ leading people to doubt each other’s beliefs as genuine as opposed to being motivated by bias, prejudice, or self-interest. In a similar vein, Dorst (2023) recently suggested that rationally updating on ambiguous evidence can lead to more polarization.

So, what we are increasingly left with are not competing intellectual doctrines, but a pluralism of vibes, ideas, modes of assessment of evidence, and polarized intuitions gleaned from partisan conflict or algorithmic design. This is a far cry from the intellectual notion of systems of thought adopted and evaluated based on dispassionate reasons of rightly disposed persons living in a well-ordered society. We therefore need to ask about the impact of such pluralism on political liberalism.

#### 4. OVERLAPPING CONSENSUS AND COMPREHENSIVE DOCTRINES

If the assertion made in the preceding sections holds true, namely that Rawls adopted an overly intellectualized conception of pluralism that does not descriptively fit the present world, then, in the second step, we have to inquire about the broader ramifications of this fact for political liberalism. As was already mentioned above, his specific understanding of “pluralism of doctrines” cuts very deep into both the basic formulation of the problem of political liberalism and its solution. In the rest of the paper, we will *not* argue that a flawed understanding of pluralism somehow disqualifies the entirety of political liberalism, or even any of its specific arguments and positions. Nevertheless, we maintain that several pivotal concepts within it warrant reconsideration, if not outright revision. This and the

<sup>2</sup> Curiously, Friedman (2023) engages in a bit of false balance when he treats the first-person naïve realists believing in their own ‘common sense’ and the third-person naïve realists who believe in expert consensus as equally epistemologically complacent. However, relying on expert consensus does not preclude anyone from being epistemically vigilant. Relying on experts as opposed to ‘common sense’ does not ignore the potential for bias. Relying on experts, with the obvious caveats, is ultimately the only epistemically responsible option.

next sections will therefore attempt to reassess a few of them, starting with “overlapping consensus”.

For Rawls, to reiterate, society is made up of people affirming different comprehensive doctrines. The pluralism of these incompatible doctrines can be mitigated by the fact that the reasonable ones are expected to reach an “overlapping consensus” on certain political values (especially regarding toleration and mutual respect). This consensus is not expected to be very deep (“reasonable political doctrines endorse the political conception [of justice] each from its own point of view”, PL, p. 134), but nonetheless wide enough to cover the basic political arrangements. Consequently, the subject matter of the overlapping consensus, the political conception of justice, is supposed to be “freestanding” (PL, p. 10), acting like a “module” (PL, p. 12), which can be fitted, in various ways, onto all reasonable comprehensive doctrines. Citizens holding incompatible beliefs can therefore slot the set of principles and beliefs pertaining to the political conception of justice into their wider worldviews without compromising them.

Right from the outset, we can observe the architectonic (“freestanding”) and engineering (“module”) metaphors that Rawls is using to explain the ideas behind overlapping consensus. These metaphors very much underline the basic argumentative move: that one body of principles (the political conception of justice) is supposed to fit into a larger body of principles (the comprehensive doctrine), forming a unified whole, or at least a not-incoherent unit. To introduce a (rather famous) metaphor of our own, it seems that Rawls is thinking like a hedgehog rather than a fox (Berlin 2013, pp. 48–58). He assumes that people’s worldviews consist of a multitude of independent but interconnected (or at least consistent) parts, very much like machines or buildings - that people tend to know “one big thing” and not “many things”. Fitting the freestanding view of justice into comprehensive doctrines is presented in Rawls as a thoroughly intellectual exercise. The individual citizens review the specific theoretical commitments entailed by their comprehensive doctrines and then see if the political conception of justice can be “derived from, or congruent with, or at least not in conflict with, their other values” (PL, p. 11). In other words, Rawls is expecting the citizens to act like systematic thinkers - indeed like Rawls himself, who must have often pondered whether a specific theoretical position “fits” with his other views and what the specific connections are.

But expecting the citizens (of especially contemporary societies) to act like systematic thinkers is, as was demonstrated above, rather unrealistic. The beliefs of ordinary citizens (but even professional philosophers) are often underdeveloped, full of tensions, internal contradictions and conflicting intuitions. Many of us are foxes, with no urge to systematize our scattered beliefs and insights or even render them coherent. And even the hedgehogs among us might struggle to fully conceptualize their political intuitions (although, like Rawls, they may try). Consequently, the picture that Rawls presents is misleading, or at least incomplete.

We cannot think of overlapping consensus as a discrete body of principles that is designed to fit into other, larger bodies of principles in the mind of every reasonable citizen. Or, to be precise, such a description would only fit a limited number of cases. We still consider it worthwhile to establish whether for example Catholic doctrine (or the belief systems of other organized religions) is compatible with political liberalism (Bonotti 2011; Coetsee 2023). However, we also must be conscious of the fact that the “doctrinal” approach to overlapping consensus is inapplicable to most people. Because most of us do not hold any “doctrine”, there is no body of worked out values and principles onto which a module of political principles can connect itself.

In our reading, Rawls comes relatively close to conceding this point in one passage where he acknowledges that the comprehensive doctrines people hold are rather loose and there is “lots of slippage”, because “many if not most citizens come to affirm the principles of justice [...] without seeing any particular connection, one way or the other, between those principles and their other views” (PL, p. 160). As we understand this passage, Rawls basically admits that the “module” metaphor of the principles of justice interlocking with various comprehensive doctrines in different ways might be inapplicable in ordinary circumstances. People do not think in philosophical systems. They base their conclusions on discrete, contextual insights, intuitions and underdeveloped values that do not amount to any coherent theory or doctrine, much less a one that can be dissected into separate parts, one of which will be shared by all reasonable people.

But the non-systematic, non-doctrinal nature of people’s political thought does not necessarily preclude the formation of an overlapping consensus. We just have to be realistic about its form. The overlapping consensus perhaps need not take the form of a “module” that slides into a number of worked-out systems of values. It might take the form of a set of firmly held intuitions, without any “doctrine” to hold them together. Perhaps people can be reasonable without holding reasonable comprehensive doctrines. This suggestion, moreover, would not represent a radical departure from the text of political liberalism, as in the passages quoted in the previous paragraph Rawls indeed seems to admit that people with disparate and unconnected values and intuitions could nonetheless be viewed as affirming the overlapping consensus.

An interpretation of overlapping consensus that would overcome the over-intellectualistic account of pluralism present in Rawls would, however, require further careful consideration. To only mention the biggest possible problem, Rawls would probably be quite uneasy with the idea of overlapping consensus of stable intuitions, as he would consider such consensus to be insufficiently “deep” (PL, p. 164). After all, if our intuitions are not anchored by a larger comprehensive or political doctrine, they might easily change and shift, making the consensus inherently insecure. In this way, the consensus of stable intuitions



would perhaps resemble the “constitutional consensus” but would lack “the conceptual resources” to secure the political conception of justice (PL, p. 165). Unfortunately, working out the detailed implications of this problem would go far beyond the scope of this paper. Our only ambition here was to show that the above-identified problems of the Rawlsian account of pluralism have important and non-trivial downstream consequences for some of his key concepts, including the idea of overlapping consensus. In the next sections, we will develop a similar analysis for his understanding of unreasonableness.

## 5. UNREASONABLENESS WITHOUT THE DOCTRINE

The heavy focus on doctrines in political liberalism also affects the treatment of unreasonableness. In one famous passage, Rawls explains: “That there are doctrines that reject one or more democratic freedoms is itself a permanent fact of life or seems so. This gives us the practical task of containing them—like war and disease—so that they do not overturn political justice (PL, p. 64n, see also PL, pp. xvi-xvii). As analyzed above, the implied picture here is one where several distinct, incompatible doctrines find themselves present in one society. Within this pluralism of doctrines, Rawls wants to separate the reasonable ones (that can form the overlapping consensus) and then make sure that “unreasonable comprehensive doctrines do not gain enough currency to undermine society’s essential justice” (PL, p. 39). Imperceptibly but very importantly, the task to contain unreasonableness is interpreted as a task to contain unreasonable doctrines.

Moreover, the picture of discrete, independent doctrines implies that we can identify an unambiguous demarcation line between the reasonable doctrines that will form part of the constituency of public justification and the unreasonable ones that need to be contained. As was shown above, Rawls often uses established Christian churches as examples of both reasonableness and unreasonableness, as they possess an elaborated creed, with explicit positions on a host of metaphysical, social, and political issues. Looking at the church doctrines, we can therefore determine whether, for example, they subscribe to the idea of free faith, in which case they are reasonable, or reject it, and then they are not. In the range of examples set up by Rawls, the task of distinguishing and keeping apart reasonable and unreasonable doctrines is relatively straightforward.

This position, however, brings with it some difficulties. First, drawing a strict line between the reasonable and the unreasonable doctrines might be too exclusionary (Friedman 2000; Kelly, McPherson 2001; Ancell, 2019; Sala 2013). There is a danger that if we meticulously apply Rawlsian criteria, too many people may end up on the unreasonable side. Consequently, the “legitimation pool” (Friedman 2000, p. 16) of liberal democracies might become rather shallow, with

whole segments of population finding themselves excluded from the constituency of public justification. Even the establishment of an overlapping consensus among reasonable doctrines will not be enough to achieve stability if large segments of population continue to be unreasonable and cannot realistically be converted.

Although Rawls himself seems to be rather optimistic about the possibility of converting unreasonable people into reasonable ones over time, he still only describes it as “a reasonable faith in the possibility of a just constitutional regime” (PL, p. 172). In the subsequent literature however, even authors sympathetic to Rawls seem to be much less hopeful. As a way to mitigate the problem, the recent scholarship on political liberalism seems to be moving away from the focus on unreasonable doctrines, towards unreasonable *people*, arguing that while some unreasonable people might indeed be immovable and uncompromising, this might not be the case for all of them, and there are some that the liberal society can work with or live with, without excluding them from the constituency of public justification (Kelly, McPherson, 2001; Sala 2013; Badano, Nuti 2018; Giovanola, Sala 2022). If we focus on unreasonable people instead of unreasonable doctrines, we may discover that “there may be more than one way to be unreasonable or, better, not to be reasonable” (Sala 2013, p. 259), which means that the strict exclusionary logic sometimes implied in *Political Liberalism* need not fully apply. Indeed, Roberta Sala argues that some people that subscribe to unreasonable doctrines (she explicitly mentions Jehovah’s Witnesses), might still be practically reasonable in their wider social attitudes. The implication of this argument is that if our understanding of unreasonableness becomes less doctrinal, it might broaden the appeal of political liberalism.

However, the unfortunate focus on doctrines is still present in much contemporary literature. To take just one specific example, Gabrielle Badano and Alasia Nuti in their 2018 paper distinguish unreasonable people that are truly inexorable (the neo-Nazis) and ones where the situation is a bit more complicated (supporters of what they call “right-wing populism”). The authors then claim that “unlike, say, neo-Nazis who proudly embrace racist views and explicitly strive for dismantling liberal institutions, many RWP [Right-wing populism] supporters do not regard themselves as enemies of liberalism”. This is the reason why “Marine Le Pen—the leader of the Front National—has repeatedly invoked French liberal tenets (for example, women’s rights and the rejection of homophobia) in her attacks against the Muslim population” (Badano, Nuti, 2018). These remarks are meant to illustrate that illiberal nationalists (we prefer this term to Badano and Nuti’s “right wing populists”) like Le Pen and her supporters are perhaps not completely unreasonable and there is some liberal common ground that can be used to persuade them to change their mind and become more tolerant.

While we are broadly sympathetic to the argument of their paper, Badano and Nuti make the mistake of treating far right nationalism like a transparent doctrine, where we can take the pronouncements of Marie Le Pen at face value and deduce

from them a stable normative position. If we proceed that way, we could perhaps isolate the unreasonable components of the doctrine and strengthen the liberal ones. But is illiberal nativism such a doctrine? Can we treat it like a creed of an established religion, which is out there for everyone to see? It seems to us that we certainly cannot. The case in point here are the very examples that Badano and Nuti use to illustrate the liberal elements of Marine Le Pen and Front National: the protection of women's rights and the rejection of homophobia. If Le Pen indeed meant these seriously, they would establish a solid liberal ideological base. But we have reasons to be doubtful. Illiberal nativists in general, including Marie Le Pen, tend to deny LGBT+ rights, advocate against marriage equality, push for abortion bans, and are more than happy to question what they call "gender ideology" in contemporary society (Dietze, Roth 2020; Kuhar, Paternotte 2017). "Women rights" and "rejection of homophobia" just happen to be effective tools to fuel Islamophobia and, through that, boost their electoral appeal. But once the conversation is no longer about Muslims, Le Pen and other nationalist parties are quite happy to instantly forget about their "liberalism" and continue with other items on their illiberal and authoritarian agenda<sup>3</sup>. In other words, while Le Pen is more than happy to *say* that she cares about gender equality and LGBT+ rights when criticizing Muslims, we cannot use these pronouncements as if she were a philosopher building a consistent doctrine.

The Rawlsian idea of (un)reasonable comprehensive doctrines is therefore not the best starting point for analyzing contemporary illiberal nativism ("right-wing populism"). Many of these movements seem to only possess only a thin ideology (Stanley 2008), whose most constant feature is its opportunism, as it latches onto any topic or issue which finds traction in the electorate, be it opposition to immigration, protection of "free speech", or critique of mandatory vaccination. It is an open question whether such strategic opportunism is not itself a quality of the ideological outlook, a trollish commitment to an opportunistic tilting at whatever liberal egalitarian principle is expedient in a given context, but instinctively usually espousing an unspoken hierarchy (be it racial, religious, ethnic, gender, or whatever works in the particular political context). The views of illiberal nativists are not outwardly stable – they do not necessarily represent a "doctrine" –, though the underlying project is perhaps recognizable with a little ideological analysis. The task of reconstructing and systematizing the beliefs of contemporary illiberal nativists is therefore unenviable, if not prohibitively difficult. They are often ideologically shallow except for their vocal rejection of certain public liberal

<sup>3</sup>Modern far right tends to be authoritarian and nativist at its ideological core. Though not necessarily anti-democratic, it always objects to equality and pluralism (see Pirro 2023). This brings them in political tension with liberal democracy – but this tension precisely for its nature cannot always be made explicit. Indeed, mobilizing for gender equality (femonationalism) or LGBTQ+ rights (homonationalism) can be strategically useful for far-right actors in certain contexts (see Mudde 2019).

nostrums. In any case, the unreasonableness of the modern far right is, in many of its key instances, *not* doctrinal.

The issue of unreasonableness in the public sphere is made even more complicated by the inherent vagueness and playfulness of human language, where ideas, positions, or beliefs need not be explicitly stated to be understood. In contemporary societies, much if not most expressions of unreasonable positions come in form of dog whistles, coded language, or memes (Mendelberg 2001; Tuters, Hagen 2020), which might not be, for example, explicitly racist, but they nonetheless carry a racist message – or at least have racist undertones. This represents a further challenge to understanding unreasonableness as it remains hidden, or at least somewhat vague, and therefore harder to pinpoint.

Consider one still relatively clear-cut example from 2014, analyzed by Bhat and Klein (2020, pp. 154–56), and Cívik (2023, p. 586). US politician (and a future speaker of the House of Representatives) Paul Ryan noted that

We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work, and so there is a real culture problem here that has to be dealt with<sup>4</sup>.

This statement is typical for its use of non-explicit dog whistles, as “men from inner cities” are of course black, and they are coded as lazy and culturally incapable of productive work. The quote then ominously designates this as “a problem that needs to be dealt with”. As such, we consider this statement to be almost a textbook example of unreasonableness, as it certainly does not promote “a society of equals that [...] stand ready to propose fair terms that others may reasonably be expected to accept” (PL, p. 54). Quite the opposite, it promotes racial resentment and makes peaceful social cooperation ever harder to achieve.

Several important observations can be made regarding dog whistles (and memes and jokes and allusions) like this one. First, the unreasonable content is of course only gestured at, it remains non-explicit. There is no racist “doctrine” that is revealed by these pronouncements. Indeed, apart from a limited number of hardcore neo-Nazis, very few people today would subscribe to any openly racist doctrine. Theories working with explicitly inegalitarian racial hierarchies are (still, thankfully) on the very fringe of the public sphere. Thus, the first important lesson from our example is that one can be unreasonable without the doctrine. A person can be racist without subscribing to any racist doctrine – which is true, we believe, also for Paul Ryan.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, there is a crucial ambiguity as to what “being racist” means in the context of dog whistles like the one above. “Being

<sup>4</sup> Original news coverage: [www.msnbc.com/politics/nation/ryan-generations-men-not-working-msna284561](http://www.msnbc.com/politics/nation/ryan-generations-men-not-working-msna284561) and [www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/03/18/paul-ryan-poverty-dog-whistles-and-racism/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/03/18/paul-ryan-poverty-dog-whistles-and-racism/). Visited on 30.5.2023.

racist” can be interpreted both as “The person X is a racist” and “The person X is being racist”. To clarify, this is the same important grammatical difference as between “Person X is mean” and “Person X is being mean”. The former expression indicates a stable disposition (meanness forms a part of their character), while the latter is a mere description of a limited, local situation, which need not imply anything else. The difference between the two interpretive options is of course substantial.

As was mentioned above, the recent literature on political liberalism focused much more on unreasonable people than on unreasonable doctrines, which is a needed departure from sometimes overly intellectualized pluralism of Rawls. Nonetheless, we hold that even the analyses of (different kinds of) unreasonable people might still be too abstract. The tag of “unreasonable person” implies a stable disposition, a set of consistent beliefs or character traits. Even if the given person does not hold a “doctrine”, their unreasonableness must be relatively deeply ingrained. However, people can often act unreasonably (“they are being unreasonable”), without it forming a stable disposition backed by firm beliefs (“they are unreasonable”). Statements from politicians like Paul Ryan are relatively typical in this regard, as they send out often borderline conflicting messages to curry favor with different parts of the electorate. In this way, Paul Ryan himself might be entirely reasonable, while issuing unreasonable statements. In this way, unreasonableness cannot only do without a doctrine, it also does not need an unreasonable person to be expressed.

The cases of unreasonableness without an unreasonable person are not just a specific feature of political communication. They are widespread in contemporary societies – or so we believe. When people tell racist jokes in public, share polarizing messages, or spread hateful conspiracy theories, this does not necessarily make them unreasonable. As was explained in the third section, instances of unreasonable speech or unreasonable pronouncements in the public sphere do not necessarily prove that their authors are unreasonable people *tout court*. The unreasonableness can be very shallow and unconnected to any deeper beliefs. Therefore, the very category of “unreasonable people” might become problematic, or, at the very least, our observation signals that there might exist a significant gray zone where, in certain contexts, some people might get comfortable with voicing unreasonable views without necessarily having stable unreasonable beliefs.

## 6. CONCLUSION: REASONABLENESS OF WHAT?

The previous section set up a fundamental question: if reasonableness is a key political category, what should its primary referent be? As we argued, (un)reasonableness of doctrines is not a great candidate and even

(un)reasonableness of people has its problems. Both options require considerable abstraction and some higher-order judgements that are often difficult to make in real life. Therefore, the basic “unit” of unreasonableness has to be an *unreasonable act* or *unreasonable speech*. Going down to this lower level enables us to avoid the difficulties spelled out above. We do not need to establish whether a person acting unreasonably *is* or *is being* unreasonable. If the basic unit of analysis is an individual act or speech (in their many various forms), we can identify and denounce the unreasonableness regardless. Also, in the fractured, scattered information environment of contemporary societies, it may be difficult to establish whether, for example, a specific racist trope is connected to a more complex body of thought. But this need not matter. The usage of the trope is problematic in itself.

Importantly, even this minimalist starting point allows us to fruitfully formulate and interpret the basic concern that stands behind the analyses of reasonableness in Rawls. As we mentioned already in the introduction, the main motivation behind the entire project of political liberalism is the question of stability under the conditions of pluralism. This stability cannot be understood as a mere *modus vivendi*, where the individual parties would prefer to dominate, but do not have the power or the resources to do so. Social stability has to be deeper, more permanent than that. However, the Rawlsian “stability for the right reasons” might be too intellectualistic, requiring citizens to adopt an elaborated, theoretical viewpoint that is then expected to fit into a larger doctrine they hold. This, as explained above, is probably unrealistic to expect, especially in contemporary societies. But there may also be other possibilities. A further way of interpreting stability, not unknown in Rawls (although certainly idiosyncratic), is via the notion of *public culture*. A consensus on certain values can be considered stable when it is not publicly challenged or undermined – when a decisive majority of interlocutors in the public sphere respects it, so that its violations are immediately called out as out of place or wrong. In other words, a society might be seen as having reached an overlapping consensus when certain values (or modes of mutual engagement) are firmly entrenched in ways citizens interact with each other.

The picture sketched in the previous paragraph does not imply any intellectualized consensus. Public culture might be reasonable even if it is not dominated by reasonable doctrines or populated by (what we judge to be) reasonable citizens. If toleration, willingness to acknowledge other opinions and acceptance of equal social standing dominate in society (or, more specifically, if the individual challenges to them in form of various speech acts are either rare or are resisted in the public sphere), then the given society is stable in a way that goes well beyond a mere *modus vivendi*.

We would like to end this paper on a slightly speculative note. When studying history, it is often hard to resist seeing what might be called “the spirit of the

times”, “intellectual climate”, or “social atmosphere” as both defining certain periods and continuously evolving. The “mood” in society may change without it being attributable either to a specific intellectual current or a popular, organized movement. Sometimes, whole societies end up becoming more aggressive, intolerant, or outright cruel over time. Sometimes, on the other hand, they might become more welcoming, tolerant, or open-minded. The same is true, we believe, for reasonableness. However, seeing this requires restructuring of how we view “reasonableness” (and “public reason” or even “political liberalism”). In this paper, we argued that the old focus on “comprehensive doctrines” is misplaced. In the internet age, unreasonableness will inevitably be more fluid and harder to pin down, found in disconnected individual acts and speeches that only manifest themselves in aggregate, as changes in the “social atmosphere”. Still, this understanding of pluralism (and of reasonableness) is both more accurate and able (after some revisions) to fit into the framework of political liberalism.

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# DOES IT STILL MAKE SENSE TO INVOKE TRUST BETWEEN DEMOCRATIC CITIZENS?

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper we investigate the wide breach of trust between citizens and toward democratic institutions that has recently come about. We illustrate how trust has deteriorated over the last decades, and we differentiate among three social groups as the main agents prompting such a process, namely the establishment and the ruling classes, the not yet fully included minorities and oppressed groups and the left behind segment of the cultural majority. We posit that to mend socio-political and epistemic trust, the civic virtue of reasonableness is to play a role, yet not the role that ideal theory envisages for a just democracy of free and equal citizens. We contend that in non-ideal circumstances of contemporary democracies, reasonableness should not be cashed out as a homogeneous normative requirement that applies to all constituencies regardless of agents' social positioning. Rather, the requirement of reasonableness ought to be declined in such a way as to take into account the varying social standings and different perspectives on justice and democracy voiced by citizens belonging to different social groups. The conclusion will be that in the present, non-ideal circumstances of democracy, the civic virtue of reasonableness may require to be displayed asymmetrically, since some members of the citizenry, given their privileged social positioning, have a weightier duty to be loyal to the democratic ethos. We conclude that a positive posture of reasonableness showed by the most privileged may, in the long run, possibly enhance the motivation to act reasonably also in other segments of the polity as well, fostering mutual trust and more stable societies.

## KEYWORDS

Social and epistemic mistrust; reasonableness; status threat; tyranny of the articulate; recognition

*Think of what you're saying  
You can get it wrong and still you think that it's alright  
Think of what I'm saying  
We can work it out and get it straight or say good night*

John Lennon and Paul McCartney, *We Can Work It Out* (1965)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary democracies have seen an increase of mistrust between citizens and towards politicians and representatives of economic and intellectual elites, a phenomenon amply analyzed in the studies on populism. This general attitude of political and social mistrust puts into question both the good faith of politicians and public administrators and the criteria through which epistemic authority is granted to experts, such as intellectuals and scientists. Against this backdrop, our paper will focus on understanding the roots of and possible remedies for political and epistemic mistrust, which, on the one hand, backs the proliferation of conspiracy theories and preposterous fake news polluting public discussion, and, on the other, feeds suspicion between different social groups, endangering actual chances for a constructive dialogue. A well-performing democratic system depends upon stable relationships of reciprocal trust between citizens and institutions. By contrast, widespread social mistrust dramatically erodes the democratic ethos. How to mend democratic trust, however, requires a preliminary, accurate understanding of how this breach has come about, and which parts of the citizenry are especially affected by it. We will argue that two different, and in a sense, opposite segments of the population display mistrust towards public institutions, experts, and, generally speaking, elites and the establishment; and they do so for very far-removed kinds of reasons. Consequently, attempts to mend democratic trust should provide a composite normative answer specific to the different reasons displayed by diverse social groups and segments of society. Since the roots of mistrust vary for different members of the polity, the remedies ought to be laid out accordingly to these differences as well. Our argument takes stock of empirical research on the crisis of democratic trust, but it tries to conjecturally reconstruct *the reasons* that move different groups to jeopardize mutual and political trust. The actual remedies to mistrust involve different levels of intervention from social policy to political reform, but we shall focus on the attitudinal dimension: trust and mistrust comprise both attitudes and behaviors toward other people and institutions, and we shall specifically ask what kinds of attitudes for which groups can contribute to the restoration of mutual trust. Thus, granted the importance of empirical findings, our work is eminently theoretical, aiming at recommending a normative remedy to the trust crisis.

This article will develop through the following sections: after an illustration of the requirement of the democratic ethos in connection with the normative role played by mutual trust (section 1), we shall proceed to investigate how the widespread breach of democratic trust has come about. In section 2, we shall argue that the traditional liberal policies of inclusion of marginalized and/or oppressed groups in the democratic polity have engendered a double reaction. On the one hand, identity policies related to marginalized or oppressed groups

have not overcome racism, sexism, xenophobia and homophobia, thus leading their representatives to demand more radical changes. On the other hand, the conquests, though yet insufficient, of such groups have engendered a status threat in those segments of the majority population less economically, socially and culturally secure. In such segments of the culturally dominant majority, there is a widespread feeling of having been diminished compared to minorities, to have lost the superior social standing once taken for granted and to have been left behind. In such a dynamic, as we shall illustrate, the culprit becomes the liberal, political, cultural, and scientific elites at large. In section 3, we shall examine the political outcome of this double process, leading to the mistrust of the elites, understood as the tyranny of the articulate. In section 4, we shall consider how to mend the broken trust, starting from what reasonableness would require from the elites and ruling classes, and then what it would require from those members of the polity who are still treated as second-class citizens and from those who feel belittled as they perceive a status loss. We contend that in the non-ideal circumstances of contemporary democracies, reasonableness should not be cashed out as a homogeneous normative requirement that applies to all constituencies regardless of agents' social positioning. Rather, the requirement of reasonableness ought to be declined in such a way as to take into account the varying social standings and different perspectives on justice and democracy voiced by citizens belonging to different social groups. The conclusion will be that in the present, non-ideal circumstances of democracy, the civic virtue of reasonableness may require to be displayed asymmetrically, since some members of the citizenry, given their privileged social positioning, have a weightier duty to be loyal to the democratic ethos.

## 2. THE DEMOCRATIC ETHOS AND ITS REQUIREMENTS

In the development of this paper, we will refer to the non-ideal circumstances of contemporary democratic societies.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, preliminarily important to lay out the normative structure supporting the democratic ideal and illustrating the requirements of the democratic ethos. This normative analysis will allow us to critically assess the distortion of real-world democratic practices and propose

<sup>1</sup>Contemporary approaches in democratic theory have embraced a general attentiveness toward the non-ideal circumstances of democracy. In sharing this less-idealized theoretical approach, in this work we will specifically refer to different dimensions of the non-ideal political inquiry, such as the inescapability of disagreement (both for epistemic and pragmatic reasons); the acknowledgment that actual injustices ought to be the starting point of normative theorizing; a structural and intersectional analysis of crucial aspects of injustice and social disadvantages; a focus on the epistemic dimension of many forms of social oppression; and the actual unfair distribution of the opportunity to impact political decisions due to inadequate democratic procedures (e.g. partisan gerrymandering and politicization of constitutional and supreme courts).

possible amendments. In very general terms, democratic procedures are legitimate as long as they respect every member of the constituency as a valid source of claims<sup>2</sup>. Unpacking this normative requirement will be the goal of this section.

One possible reading of this normative requirement is that of interpreting democratic procedures as joint actions by co-authors. The ideal of co-authorship establishes that democratic legitimacy depends upon adequate intersubjective interactions among fellow citizens, where no one is mistreated or diminished in his/her dignity qua human being. Given the principle of political equality that should inform democratic practices, equal consideration and respect due to each agent ought to be unconditionally attributed, on the basis of the equal status of citizenship, independently of individuals' traits, identities, preferences, merits, and demerits (Darwall 1977, 2004; Carter 2011). Further, an effective system of co-authorship relies on the establishment of stable and reliable relations of mutual trust among citizens (Buchanan 2004; Fuerstein 2013). Trust is required in both epistemic and practical terms. On the one hand, since agents are epistemically interdependent in collective settings, trusting others as putative sources of knowledge and reliable testimony is essential for assuring public deliberation. On the other hand, agents ought to trust one another practically, which means being ready to support fair terms of cooperation, while having a reasonable expectation that others will do the same<sup>3</sup>.

The literature about the relationships that citizens ought to establish intersubjectively rests on the normative notion of reasonableness, a civic virtue meant to set apart citizens who have embraced reciprocal normative commitments from those unwilling to acknowledge mutual obligations that are inherent to the democratic ethos (Rawls 1993; Boettcher 2004; Quong 2011). Reasonableness requires citizens to respect two fundamental constraints:

(1) the reciprocity constraint: agents acknowledge fair terms of cooperation, and are willing to abide by them, provided that others will do the same.

<sup>2</sup> Joel Feinberg, famously, defined persons as bearers of rights, with rights being understood as valid claims. In this sense, "to respect a person then, or to think of him as possessed of human dignity, simply *is* to think of him as a potential maker of claims," Feinberg (1970, p. 252, emphasis in original).

<sup>3</sup> In this work we rely on philosophical investigations of the concept of trust (Faulkner and Simpson 2017; Simpson 2023), with a specific focus on the relevance of trust for democratic stability. Mutual trust is in fact a fundamental feature of *stable* democratic settings, for it shows that, notwithstanding extensive disagreements over evaluative matters and about the best solutions to collective problems, a multitude of individuals share enough trust to stick together and accept democratic decisions as legitimate even when not agreeing with the final decision. From the perspective of democratic theory, the erosion of mutual trust is very challenging for at least two reasons: a. it gives rise to collective epistemic disincentives to act reliably; b. it fosters the loss of a shared common ground of knowledge, meanings and ideals, therefore compromising public procedures for managing disagreement successfully.

(2) the public reason constraint: reasonable agents, acknowledging the burdens of judgment<sup>4</sup>, are prepared to provide other citizens with reasons they can accept, hence within the bounds of public reason.

Let us now interpret these two requirements through the lens of democratic trust. The reciprocity constraint demands citizens to mutually trust each other with regard to the respect of fair terms of cooperation. One's motivation in satisfying such terms partly depends on a reasonable expectation that the majority of fellow citizens will do the same. Consequently, in political contexts of mistrust and frayed relationships, the respect of this reciprocity constraint by a majority of citizens is deeply endangered. The public reason constraint, instead, introduces the epistemic dimension of mutual trust into the picture, as it refers to the kind of reasons that citizens ought to employ in the public arena to justify their actions publicly and in support of principles of justice. Here the reasonableness requirement can be interpreted either as a quality assessment of the opinions introduced into the public sphere (Nussbaum 2011; Wall 2014) or as a concern about citizens behaving in a mutually trustworthy way when confronting one another in contexts of deep disagreement (Kelly, McPherson 2001; Liveriero 2020). We will take up this second interpretation of the public reason requirement, hence we will investigate which attitudinal posture is reasonable, both practically and epistemically, when jointly deliberating as co-authors of collective decisions.

In our view, accepting the burdens of judgment implies that reasonable citizens have good reasons to support a general fallibilistic outlook of humans' epistemic capacities. This means that, in case of disagreement, reasonable citizens are required – for both moral and epistemic reasons – to embrace a general attitude of intellectual humility concerning their epistemic abilities. Being intellectually humble implies doing away with a dogmatic posture, that is, absolute and stubborn confidence in one's own beliefs, and to be tolerant of the views of others, thus showing a constructive attitude when confronting fellow citizens over debated issues. In a nutshell, we maintain that reasonable agents are loyal to the democratic ethos, since they do not try to impose their preferences upon others, but rather are ready to take part in fair exchanges of reasons and opinions. Conversely, any disrespectful attitude of epistemic arrogance assumed by a party engaged in public debates shows an unreasonable stubbornness and this attitude is detrimental to the chance of improving the conversation and of finding collective solutions among co-authors. If one shares the co-authorship status with others, one should be willing to listen and accommodate others' opinions and ideas. One

<sup>4</sup> The burdens of judgment are defined by Rawls (1993, pp. 56-57) as the hazards and obstacles affecting the free exercise of human reason. These are the epistemic circumstances of intersubjective reasoning that explain why reasonable disagreement arises among agents deliberating together in non-oppressive societies.

cannot assume that one's preference is ultimately the only viable option for collective joint action. To conclude, we argue that in order to reinforce the democratic ethos and to contrast the erosion of trust among citizens, the civic virtue of reasonableness plays a crucial role. That said, we are well aware that the debate on reasonableness has taken off from an ideal perspective of democracy and social relations. Instead, we are trying to test the role of reasonableness within the complex and conflictual realities of real-world democracies and see how it may fare to rebuild democratic trust<sup>5</sup>.

### 3. HOW THE BREACH OF TRUST COMES ABOUT

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, both academic research and political debates have pointed out that the emphasis on the yet crucial economic dimension of justice has overshadowed many other dimensions – gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age, ethnicity, etc. – by which individuals end up being victims of injustice (Crenshaw 1989; Young 1990, 2001). Besides economic disadvantages, the injustice that members of certain social groups suffer happens to reside as much in identity-based prejudices as in the impossibility of having a say in the construction of social norms and standards. Historically, social standards and meanings have been shaped, mirroring one specific social group, that is, the dominant cultural majority of different political societies. The resulting harms are directed toward individuals qua members of specific groups and involve systemic forms of misrecognition (Thomson 2012; Chin, Levy 2022; Galeotti 2022), often coupled with unwarranted suspicions regarding the epistemic credibility of these individuals (Dotson 2011; Fricker 2007, 2013)<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Employing a non-ideal perspective, we focus on actual democratic contexts, where disagreement is extensive, deep, and most of the time irreducible. Such conflicts are often intertwined with social and economic inequalities bringing about wide and destabilizing breaches of trust between citizens and between the citizenry, institutions, and political representatives. Real-world democracies thus constitute the lens through which we try to assess and make use of the ideal of reasonableness. Our approach is therefore compatible with less idealized paradigms of democratic legitimacy, such as participatory conceptions of deliberative democracy (Lafont 2020) and antagonistic models (Connolly 1995; Mouffe 2013).

<sup>6</sup> We do not deny that misrecognized groups are composed by individuals belonging to different social classes affecting their level of disadvantages: the studies on intersectionality indeed have shown the multiplying effect of the injustice suffered by individuals located at the crossing of different axes of disadvantage (Crenshaw 1989, 1994; McCall 2005; Hancock 2007). Yet in this paper our focus is on the exclusion of certain groups from equal citizenship and from control over the social standards due to ascribed social differences such as gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

The urgency of a theoretical elaboration on this kind of exclusion has been reflected in different strands of contemporary political theory<sup>7</sup>, but we shall specifically focus on identity politics/politics of recognition, as in this case theory translated into political claims and policies. In the nineties, a wide debate developed around the politics of recognition and multiculturalism (Taylor 1993; Kymlicka 1995; Moodod 2013), which some liberal thinkers saw as carrying a risk of fragmentation of social cohesion and involving an unacceptable subordination of individual rights to group rights (Okin 1998; Barry 2001). Without getting here into the debate over multiculturalism, its merits and its failures, we argue that this movement, both at the theoretical and at the political level, can be interpreted as advancing the demand for the universal ascription of the status of equal citizenship to individuals and groups previously excluded (Galeotti 2010). Such ascription – it is fundamental to stress – ought to be granted without demanding members of social groups characterized by non-majoritarian traits and identities to assimilate to the dominant group's standards and preferences.

Identity politics, despite its much-stressed pitfalls, has contributed to a relative improvement of the standing of groups not belonging to the standards of the cultural majority both in terms of public visibility and consideration, and in terms of rights. Specifically, the rights gained by minorities and oppressed groups are sometimes cashed out in the form of *equal rights* as those of the majority (e.g. the extension of the right to marriage for same-sex couples); sometimes in the form of *differential rights*, that is rights acknowledged to individuals *qua* members of disadvantaged groups (e.g. affirmative action or quotas); finally sometimes in the form of *group rights*, such as forms of autonomy granted to Indigenous groups or national minorities (Baubock 1996; Galeotti 1999). All three types of rights have been the result of political struggles, and the latter two are still contested and attacked as infringing the general principle of legal equality. Bracketing here the discussion over the justification and the effectiveness of differential rights (Fiss 1977; Kymlicka 1995; Baubock 1999; Galeotti 1999), no doubt the attainment of both equal and differential rights has not only enlarged opportunities for members of non-dominant groups but also had a symbolic value in furthering their recognition on an equal footing as the members of culturally majoritarian groups. Still, individuals who do not instantiate the “right” gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation are disadvantaged both in terms of

<sup>7</sup> The claim to the universal equal status of citizenship has been pursued in different strands of political theory, for example, in the literature on relational egalitarianism which acknowledges that distributive fairness is not sufficient to grant equality, and that status equality is as relevant as distribution (Anderson 1999; Wolff 2014; Schemmel 2021). In a different fashion and yet moved by the status equality quest, critical theorists as well as feminist and race theory theorists and activists have added their critique against mainstream liberal approaches to the theory of justice, because incapable of or unwilling to address the persistent oppression of women and of non-whites, and the structural injustice sustaining it (Mills 2005).



opportunities, distributive fairness and in terms of respect and recognition. The disadvantages of belonging to the “wrong” race or gender or nationality often intersect with poverty, lack of education, poor command of the language and so on, making the people marked by *negative ascriptive differences*<sup>8</sup> unequal on double or triple grounds and preventing them from being properly acknowledged with the status of equal citizenship. That being said, while status equality and social reforms are far from being realized, some changes have become visible in the area of language and in the renewed alertness to the use of stigmatizing symbols and expressions. Movements such as “Me too” and “Black Lives Matters” and political campaigns pushing for a wide reform of language and interpersonal standards of manners and behaviors have become prominent in public discourse, overcoming the previous discussion over hate speech, and have been dominant in the life of higher education institutions especially in the US. Even in countries, such as Italy, where such campaigns have not taken a clear foothold, their wide reporting in new and old media have created an imaginary idea where members of historically disadvantaged groups now control the language and censor any different expression, giving rein to “woke ideology” and to the “cancel culture police”. Despite the fact that these groups’ actual prospects – in terms of opportunities and in terms of equal status – are still rather bleak, the fierce public debate and the media coverage of the above campaigns have induced the perception that women, the LGBTQ+ community, members of religious minorities and non-white ethnic groups have acquired a privileged standing in the public scene, mirrored in a more diversified public culture, and prompting a major and completely new visibility in the entertainment industry. The related critical appraisal – sometimes even censorship – of monuments, doctrines and works of art of the past celebrating an only white, male and Western homogeneous society has further engendered the idea of a capsizing of the world as it has been known and experienced until a few decades ago, quite independently from the actual success of political movements aiming at social equality.

In sum, we are facing a partisan, but collective, misperception regarding the actual achievements of the recognition battles for granting each member of the polity an equal standing in the democratic arena. Many segments of the citizenry perceive these battles of identity politics as “having gone too far”, even beyond the limits of what would be required by justice. By contrast, activists and representatives of minoritarian and/or historically disadvantaged groups bitterly reject this narrative, insisting on the actual injustices and structural asymmetries that still widely characterize contemporary democracies. This means that the very

<sup>8</sup> The expression “negative difference” has been introduced by Tariq Modood (2013) and then used by Chin and Levy (2022) and Galeotti (2022a) to mean identitarian and ascriptive traits marking some groups in a negative way, as a stigma and as a burden to hide, to bracket and deny in order to gain access to equal citizenship.

same processes of democratic inclusion have prompted resentment by two opposite segments of the people: on the one hand, a segment feels resentment, for identity politics has worsened the relative position of those at the bottom of the cultural majority; on the other hand, many call out the deficiencies of these policies in assuring any stable and universal democratic equality. Thus, opposite perspectives and ideologies have concurred in loosening the trust in democratic institutions and in the ruling class both by representatives of still not adequately included social groups, and by the lower strata of the society's cultural dominant groups that we shall call the "cultural majority"<sup>9</sup>.

While the reasons for mistrust in democratic institutions and elites by those who suffer from persistent structural injustices are more straightforward, an investigation of the motives of resentment shown by members of the historically established cultural majority, who feel left behind, is in order<sup>10</sup>. A thorough digging into the actual social and economic causes of the phenomenon is beyond the scope of our analysis. We shall rather focus on the feeling of being diminished and forgotten by the lower strata of the cultural majority vis-à-vis the internal and external historically disadvantaged groups. Being a member of the cultural majority confers a certain status, consisting of the command of society's social standards. Social standards are the network of conventions, social rules and norms granting social coordination, and at the same time, defining what is appropriate and what is unacceptable in a certain social space (Galeotti 2017). As long as the dominant, culturally majoritarian groups are equated with the nation, for minorities are either invisible, silenced, or utterly disregarded, the status of being a member of the cultural majority is identified with the status of citizenship. In that case, the status of citizenship, despite the normative commitment to universality, defended in theory and established by bills of rights and constitutions, turns out to be exclusive, since minorities and groups not belonging to the cultural majority are not included, in so far as only the cultural majority has the power to define what is normal — that is aligned to social norms and conventions — and what is not. Within the cultural majority, all members are equal relative to sharing social standards and meeting their requirements, regardless of the significant inequalities in wealth and opportunities, and of educational disparities that are in fact present. In that respect, the power to control social standards is marginally more important for those who are less than equal in terms of opportunity and wealth. The

<sup>9</sup> We use "cultural majority" to mean the segment of the population that have been enjoying the equal status of citizenship by default and without any questioning, that is, generally speaking, white males, belonging to the dominant religion and with the "right" ethnic background.

<sup>10</sup> The cultural nature of the resentment of the 'left behind' groups is sustained by empirical research, mostly focused on the US, showing, for example, that rather than economic factors the fear of losing the traditional dominance by the white and Christian population explains the shift of white voters towards Trump in the 2016 US presidential election (Wilkins, Kaiser 2014; Major et al. 2018; Green, McElwee 2019; Reny et al. 2019; Baker et al. 2020).

enjoyment of the status of equal citizenship, by the (normatively wrong) equation above, is what makes them feel equal to the more well-off cohorts of citizens. By contrast, when the boundaries of citizenship are opened up, minorities and marginalized groups become socially visible and acquire a voice, thus pushing for a slow redrawing of social standards, consequently modifying the traits of the public space in both real and symbolic terms. These processes of inclusion and the consequent ascription of the status of equal citizenship – which should be universal – to minorities and marginalized groups reduce the cultural majority's command of social standards prospectively, destroying the related status mistakenly equated with the status of being a citizen. Belonging to the cultural majority is no longer the property granting the (exclusive) attribution of the status of citizenship. The latter becoming universal, at least in prospect, effectively deprives cultural majorities of their specific power over social standards: the command of social standards, being a positional good, cannot survive the universalization of the status of citizenship. Such a loss, which is real, does not especially strike the upper class and the highly educated strata of the cultural majority whose feeling of being equals in the polity is not threatened by its enlargement. The control of social standards is, by contrast, the only way for lower social strata to properly enjoy the status of equal citizenship, regardless of the intersectional differences in wealth, opportunities and benefits. Therefore, the status threat, amply mentioned in social studies (Cramer 2016; Gidron and Hall 2020; Lynch 2022; Mutz 2019), is not simply a misperception of the lower social strata of the cultural majority, for the loss of command over social standards is indeed real. And that explains, among other things, why the battle over a non-racist, non-sexist, non-homophobic language is so fierce, despite no redistribution of resources and opportunities being actually at stake. As we shall see more fully later, the reasons behind the resentment of those who feel threatened in their status as default first-class members of the citizenry are not good moral reasons. Yet, in order to find a way out from the widespread mistrust between citizens and toward democratic institutions, we must address this deeply felt sense of resentment that comes along with a suspicion that the liberal elites and powerful economic interests sustaining the ruling class have conspired to sell out the “real” identity of the nation to identity politics and to the needs of unwelcome social groups, once at the margins of the polity.

#### 4. EPISTEMIC MISTRUST AND THE TYRANNY OF THE ARTICULATE

As we have argued in the previous section, one important explanation of why mistrust between fellow citizens has spread so widely in contemporary democracies relies on the analysis of the spurious effects of identity politics with

regard both to the recipients of the related policies and to those who oppose them since these policies endanger their positional privilege and their dominance of the symbolic public space. This double reaction goes hand in hand with a general suspicion toward ruling classes, political representatives, and intellectual elites. From the viewpoint of traditionally excluded groups, powerful sectors of society are harshly criticized for not having done enough to pull down social barriers. Members of ruling sectors are called out for hypocritical behaviors – think for example of common charges of pink and green washing against politicians, corporations, the entertainment complex, and so on. Symmetrically, we maintain that a genuine (even though not supported by adequate moral reasons) sense of frustration and resentment has been simmering in the less-advantaged members of the culturally dominant segment of the polity, who, feeling left behind, have come to despise liberal elites, since they, allegedly, have sold the people of the nation to identity politics and to the censorship of political correctness. Now, in this section our goal is to connect this first dimension of mistrust toward the ruling sectors of the polity with a second aspect, namely, the breach of trust between laymen citizens and epistemic authorities.

Epistemic mistrust is a specific type of mistrust that calls into question the reliability of interlocutors as sources of knowledge. This form of mistrust, as much as other breaches of trust within democratic settings, is very troubling, since individuals make informed decisions by, at least partly, relying on one another's testimony of experiences, beliefs and knowledge. Within the larger process of the breach of collective trust described above, it is not surprising that trust toward so-called publicepistemic authorities, perceived as members of the establishment, has also undergone a steady erosion. These processes are partly prompted by hard-to-fight asymmetries of power and visibility in public arenas, as well as motivated by the resentment toward the very general and not problematized category of "the establishment", epistemic authorities included. In either case, the epistemic mistrust toward those who have been traditionally considered reliable sources of knowledge and opinions, namely intellectuals, educators, scientists, doctors, and so on, is not primarily grounded on epistemic reasons, as we shall see.

An adequate analysis of the non-ideal circumstances of politics calls for a critical appraisal of democratic procedures as actually displayed, in order to avoid overlooking how much historically established asymmetries of power, unbalanced visibility in the public arena, contingently constructed social standards affect the democratic promise of equal citizenship (Mills 1997, 2005; Galeotti 2022b). The same critical appraisal can be applied to democratic epistemic processes of collective deliberations and decision-making. Daniel Weinstock has coined the expression "tyranny of the articulate" (2013, p. 548) to illustrate how democratic decision-making procedures are biased in favor of privileged groups, who tend to be epistemically advantaged and who therefore assume the status of *the articulate*. The expression "tyranny of the articulate" captures something essential

about the power dynamics that implicitly affect the public processes for establishing reliable epistemic authorities. Not only is the actual distribution of the markers of credibility through educational opportunities deeply impacted by material resources and privileged social positioning, but also the public processes for ascribing epistemic credibility are prone to widespread biases, since the category of the “articulate” is very often implicitly equated with members of culturally dominant groups, whose epistemic privilege has never been questioned. In this respect, legitimate procedures for attributing epistemic standing to reliable authorities — such as virologists, architects, teachers, and so on — should be set apart from the implicit working of asymmetries of power and visibility in the public arena favoring the unequal ascription of epistemic credibility on the ground of problematic, yet historically rooted, traits of the cultural elites.

Given these mutually reinforcing dynamics, the public criteria for determining who belongs to the category of the “articulate” have lately been questioned in the context of the changes and pushes for a more equal public sphere. Problematizing these criteria does not mean, as some have intended, that anything goes and that therefore no epistemic criteria of reliability can be asserted<sup>11</sup>. However, it is a fact that lately many epistemic authorities, whose credentials were established through previously accepted public processes (i.e. learning paths; traineeships; selective processes of admissions and so on), have been questioned as illegitimate and/or not trustworthy. Here again it is essential to distinguish between legitimate worries about how widely power asymmetries impact collective epistemic processes, granting unjustified epistemic advantages to privileged members of the polity, and vicious processes of public mistrust toward epistemic authorities in general. In the previous section, we have provided a tentative diagnosis of the widespread breach of trust between citizens and authorities, both at the socio-political level and at the epistemic level. Now we shall focus on how the ascription of epistemic privileges to people for their belonging to favored social groups turns into forms of epistemic dominance and injustice.

*Epistemic domination* illustrates that real-world democracies are often hostage to a deliberative impasse, caused by the unwarranted epistemic power that members of powerful groups hold in shaping collective understandings and standards (Catala 2015). The same dynamics that we have registered regarding standards in the realm of social interaction are reproduced in the epistemic domain as well: the arbitrary power that privileged members of political societies possess to define collective understandings and social standards unilaterally leads to instances of hermeneutical monopoly where public discourses, and

<sup>11</sup> Claiming epistemic authority means that what we assert to be true provides others with sufficient reasons for believing the same themselves. An engineer who produces a valid calculus for building a structurally solid bridge claims epistemic authority in relation to the construction crew that ought to follow her calculus to actually build the bridge correctly.

consequently decision-making processes, are mainly, if not entirely, shaped by the epistemically dominant group (Liveriero 2023). Even when deliberative processes are open to each member of the polity, their working is not necessarily fair: quite the opposite. There is an increasingly wide literature on speech acts related to epistemic forms of injustice illustrating that a speaker has no direct way to force an audience to *hear* her. Even when social processes provide the speaker with the space to talk and be heard, still powerful members of the polity may show unwillingness to reach the appropriate uptake of the publicly provided testimony (Dotson 2011; Langton 1993). Not to mention those instances in which the privileged actively dismiss the epistemic efforts of the marginalized, fueling active ignorance and reinforcing the cycle of epistemic exploitation of the underprivileged (Medina 2012). In order to establish deliberative processes that do not reinforce power asymmetries mirroring the ones already in place, it is necessary to modify the standards of the kind of reasons and communicative attitudes that are adequate in deliberative contexts, not assuming that a controlled posture, a secure stand, an unemotional tone and a persuasive rational voice are necessary proxies for reliable testimony<sup>12</sup>.

Among the main troubling effects of these dynamics, we are here mainly interested in two. *Firstly*, epistemic mistrust is fueled by wide and unquestioned forms of epistemic injustice that prejudicially deprive members of non-dominant groups of the markers of credibility to be “heard and trusted” in the public arena. This implies two things: i. The battle for equal citizenship in non-ideal circumstances partly depends upon fair and publicly accountable processes for acquiring and ascribing the markers of epistemic credibility (Anderson 2012; Fricker 2007); ii. Given the actual lack of shared and fair epistemic collective practices, members of disadvantaged groups have very few incentives to trust the system as it is, and they have reasons to question the legitimacy of actual practices for the ascription of epistemic authority. *Secondly*, those who are acknowledged as epistemic authorities, according to the present procedures, implicitly favoring privileged parties, tend to show epistemic arrogance, coupled with a general posture of entitlement. Dismissing the social asymmetries that have advantaged their career, the articulates mostly assume that their epistemic privilege is merit-based only, and, symmetrically, that the ignorance of less privileged segments of the population is culpable<sup>13</sup>. Showing epistemic arrogance is doubly problematic in

<sup>12</sup> In the literature there are proposals for counteracting these dynamics of deliberative dominance that, relying on insights from standpoint theory (Haraway 1988; Jaggar 2003), have insisted that members of disadvantaged groups should be recognized as epistemically privileged authorities, given their specific experiences of unjust social power relations (Catala 2015; Polletta, Lee 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Michael Sandel (2020) has recently developed an argument against meritocracy grounded in the intuition that the ideology of merit fosters a society of arrogance in which a new cast of super

social settings. As we have argued in the first section of the paper, the attitude of intellectual humility is generally required in democratic societies to pave the way to egalitarian relationships. The arrogance often shown by members of the establishment and intellectual elites runs afoul of the civic virtue of reasonableness and fosters the frustration and the feeling of being disdained by the “know-it-all” in sectors of the polity that are excluded from the public epistemic arena either for prejudicial reasons or for lack of epistemic resources.

To conclude, the critical appraisal of the structural asymmetries of power and visibility affecting public epistemic trust in real-world societies has shown that breach of trust is to be expected given the non-neutral processes through which standards and criteria of epistemic reliability have been historically shaped. However, being critically aware of the distortions of these processes does not mean that we ought to throw the baby out with the bathwater, that is, doing away with epistemic criteria for establishing who are the experts in specific domains altogether and criticizing any request to defer to an expert’s opinion. In fact, when the ascription of expertise is warranted through publicly accountable procedures that do not fall into forms of tyranny of the articulate, individuals are not diminished by deferring to experts’ opinions (Anderson 2011; Torcello 2011). In other words, equal citizenship is not troubled by justified forms of epistemic asymmetries. However, whenever epistemic asymmetries mirror unjustified imbalances of power among social groups and give rein to unwelcome forms of social arrogance, then the mistrust of experts is understandable. As a consequence, we observe a widening in the breach of trust between citizens, since they no longer feel they belong to a joint action as co-authors. The path to mend this breach will be discussed in the last section of this paper.

## **5. A TAXONOMY OF REASONABLENESS: A VIRTUE FOR DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS**

So far, we have argued that the same process of prospective inclusion of minorities and marginal groups into the proper status of citizenship has engendered a breach in the socio-political and epistemic trust required to sustain the democratic ethos. Moreover, we have also shown how the resulting mistrust affects two different sections of the population in their relationship with the ruling class and, more generally, with the social and epistemic establishment, and for opposite reasons. On the one hand, minorities and historically oppressed groups feel that their inclusion is far from complete and that their status as citizens is yet unsettled, with the relative disadvantages in opportunities, well-being and equal respect. Hence, they feel that the process of their inclusion has been so far more

rich individuals feel entitled to whatever they like, dismissing the status and claims of the rest of society.

apparent than real, and that the strategies for inclusion advanced by the ruling class and the elites have been more hypocritical than effective. On the opposite front, the lower strata of the cultural majority feel to have been displaced and to have lost command of social standards and of the public space. In this sense, they think they have been abandoned and left behind by the liberal elites who have instead privileged groups such as women, blacks, immigrants and the LGBTQ+ community, at the expense of the lower strata of the culturally dominant majority. Opposite resentments induced by the same process feed the spreading of mistrust in democratic institutions, threatening the democratic ethos. To this situation, the responsive attitudes of the liberal elites have added further complications, for politicians, experts and intellectuals have often reacted either to the “unreasonable demands” of minorities and oppressed groups, or to the “absurd” conspiratorial beliefs of those left behind with impatience, annoyance, arrogance and disdain, fueling further resentment and widening the gap between citizens and democratic institutions and their representatives.

At this point, the question is how to address this issue, given that democracy, as said, requires a certain level of trust between citizens and towards institutions for its decisions to be acknowledged as legitimate by the whole citizenry, beyond persisting disagreements. We wonder if the civic virtue of reasonableness, traditionally framed in the ideal theory of democracy, can provide us with theoretical resources even in non-ideal circumstances, and, in that case, how it should be modified. We argue that in non-ideal circumstances the requirement of reasonableness, as the civic virtue sustaining political and social relations, should take into account the asymmetries of the three groups considered – the elites, and the political and economic establishment; the groups subject to structural injustice and unequal standing in the polity; and the groups displaced from their previous status of control of social standards and visibility in the public sphere. In this respect, we hold that there is no single demand of reasonableness for all citizens, as the ideal theory assumes, because in actual circumstances, not all citizens are equally situated as to their social standing. Thus, we argue that such asymmetries justify that the civic virtue of reasonableness ought to be discharged by each group differently.

Let us start by considering the position of the privileged establishment, be it politicians, experts, scientists and economic elites: what does reasonableness demand of them? We hold that, in the circumstances of actual societies, demanding reciprocity turns out to be unreasonable. Those who are in a privileged position as part of society’s establishment ought to double their efforts both in considering the claims of the groups still subject to forms of structural injustice and in giving attention to those who voice their disappointment at being left behind. The reasonable attitudes towards these two groups’ demands, respectively, should be different. With the oppressed sector of the polity, reasonableness requires elites and ruling classes to engage in frank negotiation to



lay out feasible processes of social reform, tackling structural injustices. An open disposition to mend the persistent inequalities should avoid paternalistic condescension, while considering the actual justifiability of different claims, and should approach the claimants with respect, dialoguing with them and together looking for principled compromises that can gain ample consensus on the necessary social changes. Principled forms of compromise will not necessarily imply that each claim or reform proposal is accepted, since contextual and political variables can affect the feasibility of such a proposal; nevertheless, these principled negotiations require an equal standing of the parties involved and fair hearing processes where all voices are listened and attended to (Weinstock 2017).

When instead confronting groups that feel left behind and that have lost their standing in a multicultural and inclusive society, the ruling class and the establishment are faced with criticisms usually based on conspiratorial views and on distorted information, both of a political and of an epistemic character. The elites' response to strange conspiracies and absurd opinions cannot simply be phrased in terms of epistemic rationality<sup>14</sup>, and more often than not with a spiteful attitude toward the absurdity of these views and their underlying ignorance. That is because epistemic rationality does not bite on views held for extra-epistemic reasons, and, moreover, the attitude of arrogant superiority which often accompanies the response in fact furthers the mistrust and the gap between these groups and elites, experts and scientists. We think that adopting an attitude of intellectual humility, while addressing such distorted views, represents the first necessary step that people holding a position of power should show. The appropriate attitude of humility does not translate into giving in to "alternative facts", nor disowning universal equal rights and policies of inclusion, for adopting a humble attitude is not the same as adopting the others' views and accepting their claim; it is rather the appropriate posture from which to engage with people professing absurd theories and protesting that they have lost their standing. A posture which should, hopefully, favor in the long run a meaningful exchange of reasons, where the reasonable can argue in favor of truth, on the one hand, and against any privileged standing as citizens, on the other. For the feeling of loss of status may be real, but it represents an unjust privilege that cannot be restored, for citizenship should include all, and on an equal footing.

In sum, the political, intellectual and economic elites have a heavier duty of reasonableness towards groups that, for opposite reasons, mistrust them. Not only should the elites be reasonable even if not reciprocated, they should also make a double effort at understanding the claims, and their underlying motives so as to

<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere we have argued that such distorted views, whether properly believed or not, are held for expressivist rather than epistemic reasons, hence they prove to be impervious to the usual epistemic arguments, such as debunking, critical analysis and further evidence, because their identity protective function is not displaced by those kinds of argument.

find the right posture of respect, neither of dismissal nor of patronizing condescension, to open up a dialogue on an equal footing.

Let us now move to the position of those groups, such as blacks, women, the LGBTQ+ community, religious minorities and so on, whose position is not yet of equal standing in the citizenry, being subject to persistent forms of structural injustice. Despite recent improvements, individuals belonging to groups carrying a negative difference still suffer various forms of discrimination, demeaning, inferiorization and marginalization making their status as citizens unsettled, to say the least. Among the various forms of structural injustice, epistemic injustice is especially relevant for the demand of reasonableness. In circumstances of epistemic asymmetries, it seems that the pre-conditions to practice the virtue of reasonableness are lacking, for, on the one hand, individuals belonging to such groups have more obstacles to develop their own voice and to advance claims of justice, and on the other, their testimony is not taken seriously by other citizens and by representatives of political institutions (e.g. by the police, courts, politicians). In brief, it seems that the request for reciprocity, implied by reasonableness, is unavailable to those systematically discounted as reliable sources of information and knowledge. How can it be asked of those who are usually disrespected to meet others halfway, when their reasons are not even attended to and regularly discounted? It seems to us that in such conditions the expectation of reasonableness by the privileged is utterly unreasonable and moreover unfair to groups suffering systemic forms of epistemic injustice. Nevertheless, if the goal is a society of equals, where anyone is treated with equal consideration and respect, then reasonableness cannot simply be pushed aside in favor of struggles for power. We have argued above that the privileged should make an extra effort at reasonableness, for it is right that they make the first move to reestablish democratic trust. But reasonableness cannot be set aside even by these groups, unless they choose the revolutionary path. If they instead move within the boundary of democratic reforms, then a certain form of reasonableness is required also on their part. If the goal of these groups is social reform, then they need to find allies in order for their claims to be successfully addressed, hence they must be prepared to look for reasonable compromises and to pace their requests to the political opportunities of the moment. In other words, the representatives of such groups ought to be reasonable, in the double sense of pursuing a strategy of alliances and in proving themselves as trustworthy partners in the political processes, without selling out their fight against structural injustices.

Let us consider at last the position of those who feel left behind and whose views and opinions typically considered unreasonable, such as that vaccines induce autism – though this information was proven wrong and baseless – up to flat earth theories. Such unreasonable views are usually presented in complex narratives where a conspiracy is always revealed and the culprits are always found in various sections of the establishment (e.g. the military complex, the big pharma

interests, and so on). In these cases, reasonableness seems completely off the mark, for people voicing such narratives position themselves outside epistemic rationality and prove dismissive of any reasons provided by their critics (Galeotti, Meini 2022). Yet, if such preposterous views are understood as expressions of threatened identities (Lynch 2018), and of a loss of control of social standards that has induced a breach of social as well as epistemic trust (Smith 2022), then a reasonable posture should firstly be shown by those engaging with them, who should adopt the attitude of intellectual humility, in order to break down the vicious circle of arrogance and disdain reinforcing absurdity and mistrust<sup>15</sup>. Can intellectual humility change the approach of these groups to reality, evidence and reasons? Probably not, and not directly nor immediately, but it may mend their sense of having been belittled and despised. By contrast, intellectual arrogance definitely increases the sense of mistrust toward elites and authorities. Moreover, the first engagement with these agents should rather be focused not on changing their epistemically baseless views, but rather on discussing their feeling of being left behind. If what underlies the proliferation of preposterous information and conspiracy theories is the feeling of status loss, then attentive consideration of their discomfort should take precedence to the reestablishment of truth.

Despite the asymmetries in the discharge of the civic duty of reasonableness, the lower strata of the culturally dominant groups are not dispensed from being reasonable, especially with reference to the loss of their relative privilege. In other words, groups of the cultural majority who feel to have lost their status vis-à-vis minorities and oppressed groups should come to understand that their previous status was a privilege and not a birthright. In case they come to realize that losing their positional privilege, though painful, is a legitimate outcome of social struggles for equality, we think that they will be less motivated to assume a conspiratorial attitude toward epistemic authorities and the establishment. As a result, we posit that more constructive public interactions can be built, making the exchange of reasons and reasonable disagreement an available option that is now, instead, often ruled out given the wide mistrust between different sectors of the polity.

So far, we have considered the different requirements of reasonableness for each of the three sectors we have identified. Yet, are these normative demands also sustained by correlative motivations? The political, intellectual and economic elites have a motivational incentive to adopt an extra dose of reasonableness when engaging with both groups we have been considering, for they care for stable societies in which political and economic activities are not disrupted. Moreover, some of the privileged elites are in addition moved by justice-oriented reasons. It

<sup>15</sup> Besides epistemic studies on intellectual humility (Pritchard 2020, 2021), recent empirical work (Beebe 2024) supports the philosophical claim that intellectual humility is an essential component of epistemic agency (Matheson 2024). Findings have shown that epistemic autonomy without intellectual humility leads to increased support of misinformation and conspiracy theories, and decreased trust in experts and epistemic authorities.

is, however, harder to identify motivational reasons for the less-privileged segments of the polity. Still, we have argued that those who have been historically excluded from equal citizenship may have an incentive to act reasonably with the goal of bringing about social reform, granted that this attitude is primarily shown by members of dominant groups, otherwise, as we have argued, the request for reasonableness itself is problematic and in a sense unreasonable. Finally, what about those who have lost their exclusive status because of the relative status improvements of not yet fully included groups? At first sight, it seems that this sector of the population has little motivation to be reasonable toward the establishment and toward the “newcomers”. Before endorsing such a conclusion though, we point out that struggles for social standing, both on the side of those who have so far been excluded from full citizenship and on the side of those who feel to have been displaced from their “birthright status”, usually go hand in hand with economic deprivation, lack of opportunities and fewer resources and benefits. Material disadvantages exacerbate the feeling of being left out and of not being attended to. Thus, the social attempts to mend social trust depend upon both repairing inequalities in social standing and focusing on distributive matters, since the two opposite segments of the underprivileged population, in different forms and measures, suffer from distributive inequalities of income, opportunities and related benefits. Against this backdrop, well-devised distributive policies can provide an incentive for those who feel left behind to renew their participation in the democratic game, where they can raise their economic claims, possibly enhancing the motivation to act reasonably in the long run.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have argued that the democratic ethos depends upon stable relationships of socio-political and epistemic trust among citizens and between citizens and institutions. Along these lines, relying on social and political analysis, we have reconstructed how trust has deteriorated over the last decades, and we have differentiated three social groups as the agents of such a process, namely the establishment and the ruling classes, the not yet fully included minorities and oppressed groups and the left behind segment of the cultural majority. We have shown that to mend socio-political and epistemic trust, the civic virtue of reasonableness is to play a role, yet not the role that ideal theory envisaged in a just democracy of free and equal citizens. We hold that a heavier duty of reasonableness falls on the establishment and on the elites, who should listen and respond to the claims raised by representatives of the traditionally excluded, marginalized, groups, on the one hand, and on the other, should adopt a posture of intellectual humility when dealing with the irrational posture and conspiracies spread by those who feel left behind. Moreover, in order to elicit a reasonable

response from those two segments of the population, the posture of intellectual humility is not enough: besides the problem of the threat to status and lack of recognition, both these segments of society suffer poverty, lack of opportunities and educational resources. Distributive fairness is therefore needed, and together with a posture of intellectual humility shared by the majority of the citizenry, will hopefully be capable of favoring a reasonable dialogue between social parties, mending social and epistemic trust in the long run.

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## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

The two authors contributed equally to the original theses of the research work and in outlining and writing the manuscript.

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# NEW ETHICS, RECOGNITION, AND ARGUMENTS FOR TOLERATION

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this article, I analyze a series of publications on “new ethics” and propose to define this term as a demand for “hyper-recognition” for those whose group identity has been previously discriminated against. I argue that contemporary moral and political philosophy can justify any of the three desirable moral attitudes between individuals and groups: tolerance (negative), recognition (equality), and hyper-recognition (new ethics in domestic discourse). In my opinion, the most adequate option in the moral sphere remains classical negative tolerance. To support this thesis, I compare the mechanisms of tolerant consciousness (J. Horton, D. Heyd) with the mechanisms of recognition (A. Galeotti, P. Jones) and show that there are either logical contradictions or undesirable practical consequences in both the principle of recognition and the principle of hyper-recognition. I do not reconstruct or analyze the whole approach marked as “theory of recognition” here (A. Honneth, N. Fraser and some others prominent philosophers have been playing the key role in the theory) as far I plan to compare pros and cons of toleration being substituted by recognition in a very narrow domain of morality. I accept the idea that domains of morality, politics, and law as far as normative principles these spheres hold at their ground are somehow overlap and shift in respect to the borders of each sphere in real public debates, but in this paper, I rather prefer to treat them as if they are not intertwined. In conclusion, I outline the task of modern tolerance theory as the search for and justification of contextually sensitive second-order grounds for implementing an effective tolerant attitude.

## **KEYWORDS**

Tolerance; tolerance consciousness; justification; hyper-recognition; moral philosophy.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In this article, I intend to focus on a discussion that initially took place in popular media and later transitioned to academic journals in the early years of this decade. The discussion revolves around the concept of “new ethics,” which gained attention in Russia following the publication of K. Bogomolov’s article “The Abduction of Europe: 2.0” in *Novaya Gazeta* (Bogomolov 2021). Shortly after, the collection “The End of the Familiar World”, edited by N. Travkina, was published (Travkina ed. 2021). Russian scholars engaged with this topic (Guseynov 2021), and roundtable discussions were organized in socio-political journals (Epstein 2021).

Further on, I will summarize the key positions that emerged from the Russian debate, explore the foundations of these viewpoints, and offer my interpretation of the term “new ethics.” I aim to contextualize it within the broader discussion of tolerance, which is familiar to English-speaking readers. I argue that the new ethics, with its demand for hyper-recognition, represents another step—following the shift from tolerance to recognition—in challenging the classical concept of “negative” tolerance as an outdated principle for managing majority-minority relations. My goal here is to specify the notion of new ethics using academic tools, without claiming to fully address the complex problems of today’s world. I also acknowledge that better works on this subject may already exist in international philosophical journals. Unfortunately, I am unable to access these resources due to limited subscriptions at our universities. Nevertheless, I hope this brief essay serves as an invitation to further discussion, and I ask that any shortcomings be judged in light of the principles I advocate.

## 2. CRITICISM OF THE NEW ETHICS IN RUSSIA’S ACADEMIC CIRCLES

K. Bogomolov’s essay sparked a wave of discussion in academic circles. In his essay, Bogomolov views the “new ethics” as a symptom of Europe’s decline, describing it as a “hijacking” of the true spirit of freedom and competition, which has been replaced by political correctness and strict moral neutrality. He writes, “The modern West is like a criminal who has undergone chemical castration and lobotomy. Hence the frozen, false smile of benevolence and acceptance on the face of the Western man... This is the new ethical Reich with its ideology – the ‘new ethics’” (Bogomolov 2021). Through vivid and expressive language, Bogomolov defends his central argument: Europe has failed to manage the complex, contradictory, and free individual. In his view, after the horrors of Nazism, European states ceded control over people’s thoughts and feelings to society itself. However, this led to the rise of a new kind of tyrant fueled by social networks: “A virtual mob, virtual lynchings, virtual harassment, virtual violence, and real psychological and social isolation for those who don’t follow the line. These online informers and enforcers skillfully play on the eternal fear of standing alone against the crowd” (Bogomolov 2021). The heightened sensitivity around individual and group dignity has left little room for criticism, irony, or provocation in the public sphere. Everyone is preoccupied with avoiding offense, especially when it comes to minority groups. As Bogomolov puts it, “Ethical purity has replaced racial purity. And today, it’s not the shape of one’s nose or national origin that is scrutinized under the microscope in the West, but the ethical past of every successful individual. Is there, deep in the decades, any trace of harassment, abuse, or even a state-

ment that doesn't align with the new value system? If there is – fall to your knees and repent”(Bogomolov 2021).

The idea that the principle of equality and political correctness, when turned into an ideological maxim, harms freedom and truth has been supported by M. Epstein (Epstein 2021) and was previously examined in detail by L. Ionin in a short monograph (Ionin 2012). A common theme shared by these authors is the danger of creating a new, totalizing ideology that could serve the tyranny of the minority. In the foreword to a collection of essays from the journal *Nozh* (“Knife”), the authors clearly state, “The negative aspects of the new ethics are, in fact, a legacy of the old ethics, which, inseparable from the spirit of capitalism (celebrating the winners and inevitably creating losers), gave us only limited humanism and an inadequate capacity for empathy toward those who are different from us. This leads to the extremes that polarize society: yesterday's outsiders, once they climb to the top, begin to discriminate against those now below, just as they were once discriminated against”(Travkina 2021, p. 7).

Contributors to the collection *Slozhnyechuvstva* (“Complex Feelings...”) move the concept of the “new ethics” beyond the opposition between the elites and outsiders of the past. They primarily see it as a new language and way of articulating the inner world of the modern “sensitive” individual. The new ethics is described as the therapeutic language of reflective emotionality: “Therapeutic narrative is, above all, a meta-discourse about one's inner ‘self’... a reflection on its mental states as reactions to the actions of others, on its conscious emotional needs, on the reasons behind its successes and failures in love, family, and career”(Aronson, ed. 2022, p. 14). As a result, groups speaking this language (or, to be more precise, groups adopting this language) and those rejecting it as an adequate means of self-description may oppose or fail to understand one another. As the collection unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that this therapeutic language is predominantly used by young people under 30, most of whom live in major cities. Interestingly, the pushback against this language does not come from politically active groups but rather from the boomer generation. The editor of the collection notes that the therapeutic emotional language has long been dominant in “Western” public discourse. However, she notes that “...in the Russian context, the transfer of these sentiments not only created the notion *novyayetika* (‘new ethics’) but also turned it into an ideological category—it surfaces in the most unexpected contexts, and the strangest oppositions form around it, often no longer bearing any relation to ethics...”(Aronson, ed. 2022, p. 20).

A detailed assessment of the “new ethics” is provided by academician A. Guseynov (Guseynov 2021). He sees the new ethics as an opportunity to establish a genuine, true morality based on infinite respect for each individual. In this ethics, no one will judge the person themselves—only their actions. Guseynov refers to the well-known incident involving the arrest and subsequent death of African American George Floyd at the hands of the police, and how this event was covered on

Russian television: “Commentators measured Floyd’s life and personal dignity in relation to his actions, as if the former depended on the latter. Meanwhile, the excessive, even caricatured celebration of this person, despite his unremarkable and even insignificant biography, emphasizes the absolute value of life and individual dignity. The BLM movement, which affirms this truth, has elevated it to a powerful political force” (Guseynov 2021, p. 99). From Guseynov’s perspective, the new ethics transcends the morality of society or the group. Poetically, he writes that the moral judge in ethical matters is no longer society or its representative group, but the eternal perspective—the viewpoint of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. The novelty of the new ethics, he argues, “lies in its push for the personalization and individualization of ethics, opposing the view of ethics as the dominance of its universal forms, whether through tradition, the majority’s voice, the law’s norms, or the opinions of philosophers. It stands against representative democracy in ethics... The very concept of minority should disappear from the moral consciousness of society when it comes to moral issues” (Guseynov 2021, p. 105).

A quick review of journalistic and academic articles reveals contrasting assessments of the role and potential of the “new ethics.” Overall, the impression is that “new ethics” is used as an umbrella term, encompassing too many concepts. These changes include the ongoing expansion of rights, where various previously marginalized minorities gain the same rights as the “normalized” majority—sometimes extending key human rights to animals and even natural objects. Additionally, there is the “psychotherapeutic” turn in the language of self-description now spoken by the majority of young urbanites, as well as the moral absolutism of previously oppressed minorities, who, in their efforts to restore justice, seek to punish members of the majority regardless of the time that has passed. In Russia, such practices have come to be known as “cancel culture.” What could define and give this term more specific political meaning? In my view, the “new ethics” becomes distinct when it demands privileged positions (additional rights, exceptions to general rules, moral immunity in public debates, quotas for access to socially significant roles, etc.) for so-called minorities (or former minorities). For these groups, public recognition and support for their group specificity or identity becomes the primary objective. E. Ceva (Ceva 2015) argues that for minorities whose views on which laws and rules should govern a democratic society differ from the majority, the key issue is not the public recognition of their minority status, but rather the recognition of their ideas as valid ideas. In other words, their arguments should be included in decision-making processes. Thus, the term “new ethics” is mainly applicable to those minorities for whom identity is more important than their contribution to any broader discussion of the common good. Unlike multiculturalism, the new ethics does not only “see” large groups divided by culture, but also groups of any size that share a common “moral trauma” related to oppression based on gender, language, religion, ethnicity, age, or medical status. In my view, the most intense reaction in Russian public and academic

circles stems not from the process of integrating new groups into the common legal field (the pursuit of legal equality), but rather from the privileged position these minorities and former minorities claim to hold in the moral-symbolic systems of modern societies.

If no distinguishing feature, or any other specific characteristic, is introduced, then there is nothing particularly new or logically unexpected about the “new ethics.” Indeed, if modern democracies consistently implement the principle of equality in their domestic policies—expressed through equal rights—it is logical to expect that more and more groups of people, previously excluded for specific historical, political, or cultural reasons, will gradually be included in the domain of “equal rights.” Perhaps, in countries that have achieved equality in human rights, attention will shift to discussions about a set of animal rights or even the rights of natural objects. The main point of comparison here would likely be the speed at which various entities are included in the scope of (equal) rights: in one country, discussing children’s rights might raise eyebrows, while in another, the conversation may center around animal rights.

However, if we establish a defining feature for the new ethics—such as advocating not only for legal equality but for the ethical privilege of minorities in the moral-symbolic sphere, a claim for “recognition plus”—then we can shift from public commentary to academic debates about whether certain groups should be granted privileges due to historical inequality or injustice.

If we attempt to align the Russian-language term *novayaetika* with its foreign counterparts, the most logical association seems to be between “new ethics” and positive tolerance (or hyper-recognition). The key distinction of “positive” tolerance from negative tolerance lies in its attitude toward morally significant deviation: it is no longer sufficient to merely allow people to live a life deemed “wrong” (from the perspective of the subject of tolerance) or to hold morally objectionable views and values. Instead, efforts must be made, including drawing on resources from the political and other spheres, to ensure that such a lifestyle is possible and broadly represented.

In simplified terms, we arrive at three principles:

*Negative tolerance as a moral principle:* I morally disagree but, for some reason, do not interfere with that which I disagree with (I do not suppress the deviation). In this (moral) system, I am superior to what I tolerate. There is no equality between moral system “A” and moral system “non-A” from the perspective of an adherent of system “A.” The specific reasons why such non-interference is possible are the subject of tolerance theory. It is also important for defining tolerance to recognize the “power” of the subject of tolerance—that is, their actual ability to intervene. Typically (given the nature of morality as a form of collective representation), the position of power is attributed to the majority, although the link between “position of power” and “majority” does not always appear to be necessary.

*Equality:* This is a political and legal principle, at least for many modern democracies. A key task of democracies as political systems is to find ways to consider the opinions of minorities when discussing issues of collective development, among other matters. It is crucial to take into account not just their status as a minority but their actual arguments and viewpoints (as É. Chéva discusses in the work I referenced earlier). Achieving this may require additional efforts to find an “inclusive” balance if the political system sets the task of incorporating minority perspectives. However, the influence of a minority opinion on decision-making should not stem merely from its minority status; its value should be determined by what it contributes to the broader agenda. Outside of decision-making procedures, the principle of equality in everyday life requires, for example, building ramps for wheelchair users to access buildings or providing specialized devices in public transportation. Implementing equality (in this case, equal rights) necessitates creating specific conditions for certain groups of people because, without them, equal recognition is impossible. However, just as it would be misguided (from an idealized perspective) to judge the quality of ideas based on whether they come from the majority or minority, it would also be inappropriate to impose a moral judgment on something outside the scope of morality (such as a person’s mobility issues). Instead, efforts should be made to ensure that everyone has access to public spaces as a matter of human rights.

*Positive tolerance* (hyper-recognition): While negative tolerance falls within the realm of morality, positive tolerance, as its inverted form, involves a moral stance where the subject of tolerance is not only expected to refrain from interfering but is also obliged to assist what they morally deem “wrong” in gaining equal or even greater resources. But why should this be the case? The justification for this reversal, in my view, lies in a set of interconnected ideas. The first idea is the importance of the morally disapproved deviation for the person associated with it. This deviation is described by the individual not in terms of opinion or belief (which could potentially be changed to avoid outright disapproval from advocates of traditional tolerance) but as an identity that they happen to have and share with others. The second idea is the need to compensate for the unequal legal and political conditions that such individuals or groups have faced or continue to face compared to the representatives of the moral “norm.” If the thesis about the fundamental inequality between the subject and object of negative moral judgment holds true (since equality in morality implies indifference), then shifting the moral scale in the opposite direction—making the object of negative judgment “better” than the subject, bypassing “equality”—can be achieved either through the internal tools of the moral sphere (moral debates) or through external “enhancements” brought into the moral domain.

I believe that in the case of hyper-recognition, the concept of equality is borrowed from the political and legal sphere, supplemented by the idea of economic compensation, and thus becomes this external “stimulus.” Therefore, I think it is

precisely with positive tolerance (or the “new ethics” in our case) that a situation arises—or becomes visible—where regulatory principles from one sphere of social life begin to be applied in another sphere and even take precedence there. The political principle (and demand) of equality and the economic principle of compensation start penetrating the moral sphere and are used as key arguments. The relationship between different spheres (morality, knowledge, rights, economic resources) and the boundaries between them (if they exist or should exist) is a separate and complex topic, which, for obvious reasons, I will not delve into in this article. In our everyday lives, it’s likely that arguments from different spheres are often blended or even substituted for one another. However, this doesn’t rule out the possibility of an academic inquiry into how valid such argumentation really is.

Beyond the thesis of using irrelevant means against the discourse of the new ethics (positive tolerance), I believe several additional ideas can be proposed: the idea of logical contradiction and the idea of undesirable consequences. To present these arguments, it is necessary to briefly outline the primary intellectual moves within the theory of tolerance itself.

The idea of tolerance has a long history, and its conceptualization, specification, and defense are subjects of separate philosophical inquiries. In the theory of tolerance, there is consensus on the following points:

Tolerance as a moral attitude has a specific nature that distinguishes it from conceptually similar notions like love, acceptance, or indifference. We can talk about tolerance having three (Forst 2013), five (Nicholson 1985), or even eight (Gohen 2015) characteristics, but what they all have in common is that a tolerant subject does not fully accept (continues to hold a negative judgment) regarding something they choose not to interfere with or significantly influence, despite having the opportunity to do so.

This leads to the paradox of a tolerant attitude: on the one hand, the subject of tolerance holds moral disapproval, but on the other, does not interfere with what they disapprove of. Since tolerance is a moral attitude, it applies only to people and their lifestyles—meaning that it applies to something in another person that simultaneously evokes disapproval while being a result of their choice and control. Therefore, we can reasonably assume that if we intervene, we could influence what we disapprove of.

To avoid the paradox leading to a logical dead end, it is necessary to assume that the subject of tolerance is capable of a) separating the lifestyle from its bearer and b) weighing arguments for and against interference and making a choice between them (Heyd, 1996). Separation is needed for two further steps: 1) we can link arguments for interference with the lifestyle, and arguments for non-interference with the person or their right (to have that lifestyle) so that the arguments for or against interference do not stem from the same premise; 2) emphasize the person’s control over their lifestyle (people are not identical to their life;



they chose it or could potentially change it). These two points are fundamentally important to the liberal philosophy of tolerance.

In any case, whether tolerance is based on separating a person from their lifestyle—respecting the person’s rights while rejecting their way of life—or on rejecting both the person *and* their lifestyle while relying on some external argument like pragmatism or functionalism, there must be a clear rationale behind it. The search for and evaluation of these arguments, as well as the formalization of real practices of peaceful coexistence among different people, is the focus of the historical-philosophical and cross-cultural research on tolerance (different approaches are represented by S. Mendus(1988) and C. Nederman (2011)).

The historical achievement of tolerance, which is understood as permitting people to live their lives free from violence (often referred to as negative tolerance), played a crucial role in ending religious wars in Europe. It also paved the way for the coexistence of dissent and diversity in society.

However, since the beginning of the 21st century, the idea has gained momentum that negative tolerance is no longer sufficient for the modern world, and tolerance must become “positive,” requiring not just non-interference but support and reinforcement of the differences that initially provoked disapproval. The key work for this stage is, of course, “Toleration as Recognition” by Anna Elisabetta Galeotti (2002). Galeotti insists that tolerance, understood as “allowing” a person or group to have differences while assigning the tolerant subject a position of moral superiority, is no longer suitable for our time because the objects of tolerance have changed. Today, we are dealing not with opinions or beliefs, as was the case before, but with identity. While opinions/beliefs could be tolerated (without accepting them) by separating them from their holder and respecting the holder’s right to have them, in the case of identity, so-called classical tolerance does not work: identity cannot be separated from the person, it is who they are. Therefore, we must replace the principle of tolerance with the principle of recognition. We must include the previously oppressed identity in the symbolic order of the public sphere. But since minority identities often do not have customary channels of support and transmission for their identity, society must compensate for this difference in resources and access, giving more than just equality: it must provide an opportunity to gain symbolic recognition in the public sphere, using mechanisms of state regulation.

I think the genesis of the new ethics is connected with tolerance as recognition. Tolerance as recognition aims to equalize the status of a minority representative in the symbolic orders of society. The goal is achieved when tolerance is no longer needed: the minority is no longer stigmatized, and equality is reached.

However, equality within morality, in my view, is impossible. Equality is a desirable ideal in politics and law. Attempts to immerse equality in the moral sphere lead to a situation where norms and deviations switch places.

The new ethics, if we want to grant it the status of an independent movement, must be something more than tolerance as recognition. It will require more than equality—it will require a privileged place for the former minority, with additional resources and rights or exemptions to the rules, with an extremely sensitive vocabulary of political correctness against possible verbal attacks, with the right to demand historical justice from the heirs of privilege stemming from discrimination, who will be categorized as such by external and now morally neutral characteristics, and so on.

I believe we can draw an imaginary line to illustrate our relationship with other people, marking three positions along this line:

We tolerate them, allowing them to simply be who they are (negative toleration);

We don't just tolerate people; we support what makes them different from us and try to incorporate their identity into the public sphere (recognition);

We don't just tolerate people or attempt to integrate their identity into the public sphere; we grant them a privileged position and effectively place ourselves in the position of a minority at the initial stage, hoping that we will at least be left alone and not subjected to "cancel culture" due to our lifestyle (new ethics, inverted toleration).

If we arrive at the new ethics through tolerance and recognition, the criticism of the new ethics will also benefit from arguments against tolerance as recognition, such as the following:

The concept of "tolerance as recognition" is logically contradictory: if tolerance implies disapproval and recognition implies acceptance, then when applied to identity as selfhood (without the mechanism of separating the individual from their lifestyle), tolerance (positive tolerance) becomes impossible: what you disapprove of is simultaneously what you accept. The arguments for disapproval and acceptance will stem from the same source—identity. In classical negative tolerance, the arguments are of different orders: you disapprove of something based on  $x$  but do not intervene based on  $y$ . Moreover, in the classical model, a range of second-level arguments, which we can call  $z$ , can explain to us why among the first-level arguments ( $x$  and  $y$ ),  $y$  is more important (Loginov 2019).

If the first thesis is true, then "tolerance as recognition" will be an extremely unstable phenomenon: from the logical deadlock described above, there are only two paths: either revert to negative tolerance, making disapproval the central element of one's moral attitude, or overcome disapproval and accept the difference, thereby eliminating it as a difference. In classical negative tolerance, disapproval would continue to exist in the background. In positive tolerance, the moral standing of both individuals becomes equal, making the need to "tolerate" anyone unnecessary. Instead of tolerance as recognition, I believe the principle of equality would suffice, shifting the conversation from the realm of morality to that of law.

In my opinion, the new ethics seeks to preserve difference (that is, to keep difference within the realm of morality) but to ensure that it is accepted without any disapproval—it demands pure admiration for difference. This ethics is indeed very sensitive to criticism—since, in the case of criticism, the recognition of difference will no longer be complete. The new ethics does not erase inequality; it rewrites it on new foundations, according to new dotted lines outlined by recognition: this is what receives the privileged position. Whether it is culture, religion, language, or a unique experience of gender, we find boundaries within society between groups drawn along the lines of their culture, religion, language, or gender.

An alternative to the new ethics remains negative, classical tolerance (Horton 2011). It functions in cases where there is no equality of positions and arguments in the moral sphere but where the goal is to maintain peace between the majority and the minority. Tolerance does not fall under the critique of insufficient equality because it does not presume equality. Nevertheless, tolerance allows what causes disapproval to exist but does not grant it priority. And tolerance is honest—in the sense that subjects and objects of tolerant relations must mutually (and interchangeably, in real moral communication) be able to separate a disapproved lifestyle from its bearer, based on certain (universal? contextual?) grounds deserving of respect<sup>1</sup>. In my opinion, the opportunity for the theory of tolerance in contemporary conditions lies in developing a system of second-level arguments (*z*) aimed at enabling as many citizens of a given society as possible to accept them on reasonable grounds. This should ideally minimize conflicts and help overcome rather than reinforce group differences. Moreover, as P. Jones (2006, 2015) demonstrates in his work, even negative tolerance, while being logically more coherent and empirically validated in its usefulness, still contains minimal recognition—recognition of us as citizens who share the value of possessing the attribute *y*.

Yes, these arguments still need refinement in terms of coherence and clarity of their significance. However, if these arguments are meaningful, what principle should replace “recognition with privileges” for groups and individuals who have achieved equal legal status but have not yet been recognized as equal moral agents? In my view, classical tolerance is the most appropriate choice. In this article, I have aimed to demonstrate this, starting with the assumption that the debate over what is morally right and wrong—and, by extension, the distribution of opinions across individuals and groups—is at the core of ethics.

<sup>1</sup> A. Guseinov’s reflection on George Floyd is noteworthy in this context: Floyd’s life was far from ideal—he had been punished for crimes multiple times. However, society managed to “separate” Floyd as a person from Floyd’s actions as a citizen and honor him as a human being by organizing a grand funeral. I think a proponent of the idea of fairness might say to supporters of the “new ethics”: if you were able to separate Floyd the person from his (Floyd’s) actions, what prevents you from separating a member of the majority from the discriminatory actions (in your view) committed by them in the distant past—or even not by them personally, but by their parents or ancestors?

### 3. CONCLUSION

In this article, I analyze recent publications in Russian academic journals on philosophy and ethics, along with journalistic articles in periodicals, to systematize the arguments of both supporters and critics of the so-called “new ethics.” In contemporary Russia, this term serves more as a collective concept, exhibiting the characteristics of an “umbrella term.” Consequently, in Russia, critics and defenders of new ethics may not hear each other, as they interpret it differently. Without delving into the use of this phrase in contemporary political discourse for various ideological purposes, I focus on the academic and philosophical aspects of the issue. My aim was to clarify the term “new ethics” by drawing on familiar discussions of negative and positive tolerance that were recognizable to both Russian and European readers. In my view, we can historically and logically position the term “new ethics” after negative tolerance and recognition and specify it as a demand and justification for “recognition plus privileges,” or “hyper-recognition” for those whose group identity has previously been discriminated against. Therefore, modern moral and political philosophy can justify any of the three desirable moral attitudes that individuals and groups can have toward one another: tolerance (negative), recognition (equality), and hyper-recognition (new ethics). In my opinion, the most adequate option in the moral sphere remains classical negative tolerance. To defend this thesis, I compare the mechanisms of tolerant consciousness with the mechanisms of recognition and conclude that both the principle of recognition and the principle of hyper-recognition (new ethics) contain either logical contradictions or undesirable practical consequences. In conclusion, I see the task of modern tolerance theory as identifying and justifying contextually sensitive second-order principles to establish a genuinely tolerant attitude.

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# HUMAN-AI POLITICAL SYMBIOSIS: RETHINKING DEMOCRACY IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores how AI-powered digital technologies impact democratic processes by shaping citizens' epistemic and moral capacities, with a particular focus on the threats posed by misinformation, deepfakes, and overreliance on AI tools. Traditional approaches like education and regulation have been insufficient in addressing these challenges. The paper proposes a paradigm shift, advocating for human-AI political symbiosis as a way to mitigate the harms of digital technologies and improve the epistemic and moral qualities of democratic decision-making. This symbiosis entails a cooperative relationship between humans and AI, where both partners augment each other's capacities to navigate a distorted epistemic environment. The concept is introduced through two forms: "weak" symbiosis, where AI is a useful tool for achieving specific democratic goals, and "strong" symbiosis, where humans and AI are mutually dependent for democratic survival and flourishing. The paper concludes by examining how this new framework can better address the complex, evolving challenges posed by AI in democratic settings, emphasizing that deeper cooperation between AI and human agents is key to preserving democracy.

## **KEYWORDS**

epistemic democracy, AI governance, misinformation, deepfakes, epistemic autonomy, political agency, epistemic environment

Digital technologies have a profound influence on democratic politics. They have served as both a positive force, facilitating citizens' political participation in decision-making processes and improving transparency and accountability, and a negative force, accelerating the spread of disinformation and reinforcing citizens'

biases and epistemic vices (Tucker et al. 2017). This influence represents a complex issue that is often examined superficially, without sufficient consideration of the bigger picture. Additionally, assessments of this influence are frequently shaped by politics (Farrell 2012) or by the sources of research funding (Schippers 2020). Although many are concerned about the negative effects digital technologies have on democratic processes, there is no consensus on the causes of these effects, nor a unified approach regarding preferable actions to mitigate them (Halpern 2023).

The rapid development of AI technologies exacerbates the already significant effects digital technologies have on democracy. AI is a broad term encompassing various technologies, many of which are applied in fields such as medicine, manufacturing, and the entertainment industry, with little connection to politics. For the purposes of this paper, we regard AI primarily as machine, deep, learning systems deployed and utilized in digital social media and online contexts, where large amounts of data are analyzed with minimal human input. These systems are used to search content on the internet, provide personalized recommendations, profile users on social networks, analyze patterns in their interests and behaviors, target citizens with highly personalized ads, and create credible texts, images, audio, and video content. Major platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok, along with search engines such as Google, Bing, or Yahoo, use AI-based algorithms to power their recommender systems, personalize content, enhance user engagement, and optimize search results. More recently, large language models (LLMs) have enabled the generation of vast amounts of credible textual material, further complicating the distinction between human-created content and AI-produced information.

AI technologies can influence political processes in numerous ways. How these effects will be realized depends on several factors, one of the most important being whether the use of AI occurs in democratic or authoritarian societies. Regarding the latter, many reports describe how China has (ab)used search algorithms to distort the truth (Brandt et al. 2022), and similar practices have been employed by other authoritarian regimes (Yang, Roberts 2023). While authoritarian regimes use AI technologies to gain popular support and create a facade of democratic legitimacy, decision-making processes remain largely outside popular control. As a result, the quality of political decisions does not depend on citizens' competencies and is thus unaffected by the influence digital technologies have on their cognition. Decision-making in democratic regimes, on the other hand, depends on and is primarily shaped by the will of the citizens. The harmful effects digital technologies can have on citizens' capacities directly spill over into the quality of political decisions produced by democratic processes. Following, this paper focuses on liberal democratic societies and examines how AI-powered digital technologies endanger the legitimacy of democratic procedures by

undermining citizens' epistemic and political competencies, thus hindering both moral and epistemic qualities of democratic decision-making procedures.

Many attempts have been made to analyze and counter this negative influence, aiming to protect both citizens and decision-making processes from the potential dangers introduced by AI-powered digital technologies. A common approach relies on (both formal and informal) education to develop citizens' capabilities. By teaching children and adults about the dangers related to digital technologies and facilitating the spread of accurate, verified information, we could mitigate or at least reduce the harmful effects of online misinformation and the flawed epistemic structures created by recommender algorithms (De Blasis 2019; Maertens et al. 2021). Another approach focuses on the self-regulation of big tech companies, where they develop their ethical codes and attempt to balance innovation and profit with the public good (Tambini 2021). Finally, many advocate for government regulation of AI, calling for a legal framework that prevents misuse, addresses privacy concerns and promotes algorithmic transparency (Vidal Bustamante 2022; Finocchiaro 2024). However, there are serious concerns about the feasibility and effectiveness of each of these approaches. While combining them might partially mitigate the problem, it is unlikely to provide a stable solution. There is a pressing need for new solutions that can reshape the existing debate and tackle the issue from a different perspective. AI technologies are often regarded as a serious threat to democracy (which they are), but they are rarely, if ever, considered as useful tools or partners in navigating an epistemically distorted environment.

This paper analyzes human-AI symbiosis, a concept dating back to the 1960s that is gaining popularity in AI research and development and applies it to analyze and mitigate the negative impacts digital technologies have on democracy. We inquire whether symbiosis as a developmental standard has the potential to enhance citizens' moral and epistemic capacities, enabling them to navigate the distorted epistemic environment and exercise their political influence in a more accountable and responsible manner. While the existing debate confronts the negative impact of AI on democracy through traditional means – such as education or regulation of AI technologies – our approach explores whether these problems can be tackled by *redefining the relationship between citizens and AI in terms of interaction*. The innovative aspects of the paper lie in its shift from the traditional debate and its premise that we can address the threat of AI to democracy by focusing on incorporating more, not less, AI in the development of our joint capacities. The paper does not aim to wholly reject existing attempts to tackle the problem or to provide a final answer. Instead, it seeks to shift the debate and highlight new approaches that should be investigated further. In other words, our aim is not to propose a definitive solution to the threat AI poses to democratic systems, but rather to advocate for a much-needed shift in perspective. Traditional



approaches tend to address this threat by imposing regulations and attempting to slow down the pace of technological change in order to protect democratic societies. In contrast, we argue for a shift toward more, not less, technology as a response to these concerns. However, we can only “fight fire with fire” if we carefully consider all relevant factors and guide the development and use of new technologies in ways that enhance and complement our epistemic and moral capacities, rather than undermine them and increase our blind deference to technology. Presenting such an account goes well beyond the scope of this paper and our expertise as philosophers. The modest aspiration behind this work is to advocate for a shift in perspective regarding how digital technologies powered by AI algorithms are understood and to motivate discussion on new ways to combat the detrimental effects of these technologies on democratic processes.

We proceed as follows. In the first part, we build upon John Stuart Mill’s criteria of good governance to systematize how AI-powered digital technologies can affect democratic processes. This influence is multifaceted, with both potentially harmful and beneficial effects. In this analysis, we focus specifically on the impact of AI on citizens’ capabilities, particularly those essential for effective democratic participation. In the second part, we review existing research that analyzes how digital technologies might impair important capacities such as critical thinking and the ability to form and act on personal beliefs. We connect these findings with relevant democratic research to show how AI technologies can undermine the citizens’ relevant participation in democratic procedures. In the third part, we discuss traditional solutions (such as education of citizens, self-regulation by tech companies, and government regulation) aimed at mitigating the detrimental effects of AI on citizens’ capacities. Unfortunately, these approaches, while producing some beneficial results, seem to fail to fully address the harmful effects digital technologies can have on citizens’ epistemic capacities. This might be because we approach the problem from a perspective where AI-powered technologies that distort our epistemic environment are seen as a threat to human epistemic agency. A potential solution could be to change the paradigm and view AI as a partner that can help citizens navigate the distorted epistemic environment. In the fourth part, we introduce the concept of human-AI symbiosis, explore its two forms (weak and strong symbiosis), and examine how they can be used to either protect or reframe our epistemic and political agency. Additionally, we analyze how the beneficial effects of human-AI symbiosis can mitigate potential dangers created by digital technologies in a democratic setting. The goal is to analyze how political human-AI symbiosis can serve as a clarifying lens to appropriately interpret and address the current and emerging state of digital technologies, with a focus on their implications for the development of democratic systems. Finally, in the fifth part, we address potential objections to the concept of human-AI symbiosis and its application to liberal democracy.

## 1. ASSESSING AI'S EFFECTS ON DEMOCRACY: A MILLIAN APPROACH

Digital technologies powered by AI algorithms have influenced democratic politics for over two decades, leading to numerous attempts to systematically analyze and categorize their effects on decision-making processes. In his influential book *Democracy and Technology* (1995), Richard Sclove distinguishes between democracy-enhancing and democracy-undermining effects of technology, as well as between direct effects (such as those affecting citizens' ability to participate in decision-making, like online voting) and indirect effects (such as those influencing societal structures and impacting overall trust in democracy). Some authors have focused on the areas affected by digital technologies, organizing their effects into technological, political, and social spheres (Bartlett 2018). Others have concentrated on how these technologies impact communication between citizens, their participation in decision-making processes, and their trust in political institutions (Zuboff 2019; Gilardi 2022; Krebs, Kriner 2023). Finally, some researchers have examined the manipulative capabilities of AI, systematizing its effects on democracy by focusing on the means used to exercise this influence, such as micro-targeting or the exploitation of cognitive biases (Susser et al. 2018; Jungherr 2023). These efforts have significantly shaped and contributed to the ongoing discourse and have achieved the objectives intended by their authors. However, our approach necessitates a somewhat distinct framework for understanding the effects of digital technologies on democratic politics.

John Stuart Mill famously argued that the instrumental qualities of democracy depend on (i) its ability to enhance the intellectual and moral capacities of citizens who exercise political influence, and (ii) its capacity to organize these existing capacities and their epistemic contributions optimally, conducive to correct, efficient, and just decisions (Mill 1977; see also Cerovac 2016). Following Mill's criteria, we can systematize the impact of AI-powered digital technologies on democratic politics by assessing how these technologies affect citizens' epistemic and moral capacities, as well as by evaluating how they alter existing decision-making procedures that aggregate and organize citizens' political input. This framework enables us to categorize and group various effects, facilitating a better understanding of their influence on democratic processes. Technologies that influence how citizens participate in decision-making and how governments formulate proposals (such as online voting, online activism, digital agenda-setting, and the use of machine learning algorithms in decision-making) align with Mill's second criterion. Conversely, technologies that affect how citizens communicate, acquire new information, and form their political opinions fall under the first criterion. Failure to meet either criterion can lead to poor decision-making and substantively detrimental or harmful political outcomes.

Our assessment of the impact digital technologies can have on democracy aligns with Mill's first criterion. We thus compile and analyze various digital tools and algorithms that influence how citizens communicate and receive new information to evaluate their effects on democratic procedures and their capacity to produce quality outcomes. Specifically, in democratic systems, ultimate political authority rests with the will of the citizens, who elect their representatives and thus authorize laws, policies, and political decisions. Although contemporary democracies employ various mechanisms to filter the popular will - aiming to mitigate citizens' political ignorance, biases, and emotionally driven responses to preserve democracy's capacity to produce sound legislation - political representation has its limits. If citizens' competencies are neglected and the detrimental effects that shape their epistemic and political capacities (such as those induced by digital technologies, political polarization, economic inequalities, illiberal or undemocratic cultural and social norms, and other influences) are continuously overlooked, it may result in the election of grossly incompetent or even malevolent political leaders.

To sum up and anticipate the main argument: Following Mill, we hold that the (instrumental or epistemic) quality of decision-making processes stems from (i) the capacities of those involved in the process and (ii) the properties of the decision-making procedures that shape and organize the political participation of decision-makers. Substantial changes in our epistemic environment, produced by the introduction of AI-powered digital technologies into our everyday epistemic practices - including the way we form our political opinions and preferences - inevitably affect our capacities to competently participate in the decision-making process. If we do not want to give up liberal democracy for some form of epistocracy (and wish to keep the procedures that organize our epistemic contributions more or less the same), we must focus on protecting our epistemic capacities, which are endangered by digital technologies, from this detrimental influence. Alternatively, we need to find ways to enhance these capacities and develop resilience to the harms inflicted by machine learning algorithms. Typical political responses focus on the first approach, attempting to limit the harmful effects of digital technologies by introducing regulatory practices. They also address the second approach by investing in education to improve citizens' capacities, making them less susceptible to dangerous digital influences. However, if these efforts fail to keep pace with the challenges posed by advances in digital technologies, we may need to consider new methods of improving our epistemic capacities. One such method is human-AI symbiosis.

To continue the argument, we will provide a brief overview of the evidence highlighting how AI-powered digital technologies impact citizens' epistemic and moral capacities, as well as their ability to exercise their epistemic and political agency. This will help illustrate the need for both traditional and new approaches to effectively address these challenges.

## 2. AI AND THE EROSION OF CITIZENS' EPISTEMIC CAPACITIES

There are a number of possible cases we can take to show that contemporary generative AI poses a threat to citizens' epistemic capacities. The scope of this debate greatly exceeds the limits of this paper. We thus focus on four groups of effects AI-powered digital technologies can have on the epistemic environment and the citizens' capacities to navigate that environment. First of all, AI has the capacity to produce high volumes of persuasive misinformation, thus creating an illusion of majority perspectives and deteriorating the quality of online content. Second, recent improvements in deepfake technology have enabled the creation of realistic videos that can easily mislead viewers and affect their reasoning even when the viewers know these are fake. Third, generative AI tools mediate the research process by summarizing information. Their simplicity can motivate the users to uncritically rely and depend predominantly on these tools as sources of information while disregarding other traditional credible sources. Fourth, such overreliance can be abused as AI can be used to manipulate users' political opinions and preferences.

### *(i) Generative AI and Misinformation Pollution*

The potential for generative large language models to act as effective misinformation generators and pollute the informational environment of the internet has come to the forefront of research under the notion of "AI content pollution" (Pan et al. 2023). Here, it is surmised that text generators have the ability to produce persuasive, high-volume texts at tremendous speeds. This capability enables them to "pollute" the informational environment by significantly magnifying the presence and accessibility of specific (political) content, thus creating an illusion of a majority perspective for certain political attitudes or views that would otherwise be deemed fringe and irrelevant (Zhou et al. 2023). To exemplify, a recent study reveals how a significant portion of online text content, especially in languages prevalent in Africa and the Global South, is already poorly machine-translated (Thompson et al. 2024) using generative AI. Specifically, more than half of all sentences on the internet have already been translated into multiple languages, often resulting in progressively deteriorating quality due to low-quality machine translation. Thus, for some languages, it is already the case that the content one receives daily from internet platforms, such as news portals, is machine-made and of weaker quality.

The ability of contemporary generative models to massively produce and represent content on the internet is not limited solely to the generation of text, audio, and visual content; it also extends to website production, such as blogs and personal webpages. Search engine results are epistemically important, as studies show that adults often use the internet as their primary information source (Biddix

et al. 2011). The epistemic quality of answers provided by web search engines is thus one of the most relevant sources for the everyday problem-solving capacity of contemporary citizens. Generative AI may distort the already imperfect knowledge representation capacity of web search engines. As a recent journalism report shows, AI tools can already enable users to create a thousand “slightly different versions of the same article with a single click and to automatically publish them to as many WordPress sites as you want using a paid plugin” (404 Media 2023). Consequently, the entire website production line can be automated, and the generated websites’ presence in internet searches can be reinforced through ad purchases that position the automatically generated site at the top of the search engine’s results. This threat has already forced Google to update its search engine’s ranking system to tackle “explicit fake content appearing in Search” (Google 2023).

The ability of AI-powered digital tools to produce vast quantities of content quickly and to overwhelm the epistemic environment can reduce citizens’ ability to discern between credible information and misinformation, leading to cognitive fatigue and doubt in their epistemic capacities. Additionally, as citizens encounter more and more misinformation in the epistemic environment, their ability to critically evaluate the information they receive declines, making them unfit to exercise epistemic agency in such a polluted environment.

*(ii) AI and Deepfake Technology: Audio-Visual Misinformation*

Another content pollution threat is deepfake video generation, where present-day AI tools like Runway, Sora, or Vidu can create realistic videos of public importance that can be freely shared on social platforms. Technology has already become hyper-realistic, requiring very small amounts of real-life data for its generation. For instance, Microsoft’s VASA-1 model (not publicly available due to misinformation concerns) can generate realistic animated videos from just a single photo of a person and an accompanying audio track (Xu et al. 2024). In the public realm, the X platform rolled out its Grok-2 picture generative system, which does not watermark its generated images. Consequently, controversial examples were quickly generated and widely shared on the platform, including an image of Mickey Mouse wearing a “Make America Great Again” hat while holding a cigarette and beer, and a collection of images of Taylor Swift and her fans supporting Donald Trump for president (Marr 2024). Moreover, most recently (September 2024), Elon Musk personally shared a deepfake video of the presidential candidate Kamala Harris, where her voice was completely AI-generated. This so-called “hit and run” video was viewed over 100 million times and Musk in a later post pointed out its satirical (deepfake) nature. This example illustrates that even when users know content is fake, it can still significantly

influence their engagement, and research shows perceptions and beliefs (Menczer, Hills 2020; Ecker 2022).

A distorted epistemic environment encourages generalized distrust in information sources. Additionally, this can undermine public discourse and civic engagement, as citizens may no longer feel confident in distinguishing what is true and what is not. Consequently, citizens may become passive and disinterested in important societal issues, believing that the information landscape is too corrupted to navigate (Coeckelbergh 2022).

### *(iii) Overreliance on Generative AI in Search and Education*

Another possible epistemic problem arises when internet search providers utilize generative AI to summarize search findings for users. For instance, Bing Copilot answers users' search queries by summarizing the most relevant information from internet-retrieved web pages, documents, videos, and pictures. With such an interface, Bing Copilot does not provide "unfiltered" web page results for users to inspect and assess relevance. Instead, it presents findings that the system itself deems most relevant. As such, Bing Copilot creates a new layer of "epistemic mediation" that is more "agential" than traditional representations of listed web pages. The reason for this lies in the Copilot's ability to pick and choose materials it finds most trustworthy and correct in answering the user's query.

If used longitudinally, the practice of AI-powered search engines might lead to negative epistemic outcomes. For instance, it has been shown that users prefer links positioned higher in search results, even if their abstracts are less relevant (Pan et al. 2007). Additionally, users might fail to acknowledge the epistemic contributions of other citizens whose content and style are systematically neglected by search algorithms, thus perpetuating epistemic injustice (Samaržija, Cerovac 2021). With LLM-empowered search summaries, users may place greater trust in these answers for convenience, even though LLM search engines produce greater amounts of factual errors and misinformation, demanding more epistemic attention from users than traditional search engines. This was most recently corroborated in the infamous case of Google's own LLM-empowered search, AI overviews, after a series of incorrect and detrimental answers ranging from providing dangerous medical advice to outright extremist disinformation. (Tom's Hardware 2023).

LLMs, however, do not need to impact web searches to diminish attentiveness toward trustworthy content and relevant information retrieval processes. They can serve as information providers, directly substituting traditional web search engines altogether, a phenomenon already being observed. For instance, a recent survey shows that nearly 89% of American college students use ChatGPT to complete

homework tasks, with 53% using the tool for writing papers (McGee 2023). Scholars express concern that using ChatGPT in education may lead to epistemic problems, such as a lack of interpersonal understanding, context analysis, and innovative thinking, ultimately fostering technical dependence on these systems (Yu 2023).

*(iv) Political Manipulation and Democratic Risks*

To exemplify, a recent study warns that users perceive ChatGPT's responses as having higher information quality compared to Google Search, reporting significantly better experiences in terms of usefulness, enjoyment, and satisfaction. However, "the use of ChatGPT may also lead to overreliance and generate or replicate misinformation" (Xu, Feng & Chen 2023). Participants often demonstrate a lack of diligence when using ChatGPT and are less motivated to verify and rectify any misinformation in its responses. Observations indicate that 70.8% of the participants in the ChatGPT group relied on its responses, often accepting them as true without further investigation. This convenience may inadvertently hinder users from engaging in deeper exploration and identifying misinformation within its responses.

As Shannon Vallor notes in her most recent book, contemporary generative AI is the first technology in history that can jeopardize our future by preventing us from knowing how to create one at all (Vallor 2024, p. viii). Correspondingly, this concern extends to democratic education, as the widespread adoption of LLM chatbots as information providers could lead to epistemic encapsulation, where the majority of retrieved knowledge regarding democracy comes from chatting with LLMs rather than from public exchanges of ideas on the internet. Instead of becoming gateways to freely available digital public goods, LLM models may become informational sandboxes, upon which humans over-rely, reversing the progress made by the web toward democratizing access to knowledge and information (de la Rio Chanona et al. 2023).

Moreover, when the knowledge retrieval capabilities of LLMs are coupled with their potential for persuasion (the ability to alter users' beliefs), the pervasive use of AI services could significantly alter our information environment, leading to a loss of human control over our future (Sunstein 2022, 2024; Burtell, Woodside 2023). Since LLMs can "chat" in natural language, they can use the language common to specific political subgroups. Evidence shows that individuals consume information represented in the dominant language style of their political group, even if that information contradicts their personal beliefs (Yom-Tov et al. 2014). Consequently, LLMs could "persuade" users towards political attitudes they might not typically endorse, particularly if the AI becomes their dominant conversational partner and presents itself as a member of their political in-group through shared language (Mittra et al. 2024).

These illustrations demonstrate that the significant changes in our epistemic environment produced by the use of AI-powered technologies affect citizens' belief formation and belief revision processes. While citizens are not directly prevented from forming autonomous beliefs and making related policy choices, this capacity is severely hampered, and its exercise is made more difficult because of the manipulative epistemic architecture and environment (Coeckelbergh 2022).

### **3. MITIGATING HARM FROM DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES: WHY DO TRADITIONAL SOLUTIONS FALL SHORT?**

Government policies designed to curb the negative effects of AI-powered digital technologies can be broadly categorized into two groups: those that focus on educating and training citizens to recognize misinformation and the distorted nature of the epistemic environment and those that aim to regulate the channels through which misinformation spreads and, more broadly, to regulate the epistemic architecture in general. The first approach is less restrictive but may be less effective, while the second approach may yield better short-term results but depends on more restrictive measures.

Educational and training initiatives can further be divided into reactive and preventive measures. Reactive measures aim to debunk misinformation already circulating in society, whereas preventive measures seek to strengthen citizens' epistemic capacities so they can independently identify misinformation. The reactive approach is relatively straightforward and cost-effective: a publicly funded agency analyzes circulating misinformation, identifies harmful content that is spreading quickly, and publicly debunks it by exposing its falsehood and manipulative intent. The goal is that, once presented with the relevant evidence, manipulated individuals will recognize the misinformation and abandon other beliefs based on it (Cerovac, Drmić2023).

However, this approach often falls short. First, it is increasingly difficult to identify who has been exposed to the epistemically harmful content spread via digital technologies, and even more challenging to create a reliable dissemination strategy to reach those individuals with the debunking information. In fact, research suggests that citizens who are most susceptible to fake news are also the hardest to reach with evidence that debunks disinformation (Waisbord 2020). This challenge is compounded by confirmation bias, which refers to people's tendency to seek out information that supports their existing beliefs. Furthermore, even when debunking information reaches the right audience, there is no guarantee that individuals will adjust their opinions in light of new evidence. Many people view their beliefs as integral to their identity, making them reluctant to change—even if those beliefs are based on disinformation (Ecker 2022). This



resistance is further fueled by disconfirmation bias, where individuals dismiss evidence that threatens their established views.

Additionally, even when citizens acknowledge the debunking information and claim to reject the misinformation, they may still be influenced by it. Its harmful effects can linger despite being discredited. For instance, parents who once subscribed to disinformation linking vaccines to autism based on Wakefield's research may later recognize that the study was fraudulent, yet they often remain skeptical about vaccines and hesitate to vaccinate their children (Lee et al. 2022). Similarly, citizens who have seen a deepfake video of their preferred political candidate saying something they firmly oppose might be subconsciously demotivated from participating in the elections, despite knowing that the video was fabricated. While the reactive approach offers some valuable tools, it does not adequately address the underlying issues related to disinformation (Cerovac, Drmić 2023).

The preventive approach seeks to enhance citizens' knowledge and critical thinking skills, making them more resilient to the epistemic harms created by a distorted epistemic environment. The core idea is that the more accurate and coherent an individual's belief system is, the less likely misinformation will be able to take hold. Moreover, if citizens are trained to critically assess the content and sources of information, they will be less vulnerable to misinformation (De Blasis 2019). However, policies in this area have shown limited success (Maertens et al. 2021), and several concerns remain. First, when citizens lack knowledge about the source of information, they tend to accept it as true (Rapp 2016). Additionally, individuals often forget when and how they encounter certain information and may mistakenly associate false claims with credible sources (Brown 2021). Finally, the algorithms used by social media can inundate users with disinformation. Even if individuals do not explicitly endorse this misinformation, its overwhelming presence can still negatively impact their reasoning (Menczer and Hills 2020, Ecker 2022).

While the preventive approach has had some success in combating the spread of fake news, it is insufficient to address the challenges posed by epistemic biases and digital algorithms. Policies advocating for government regulation could potentially tackle these remaining issues. Such measures might focus on regulating the platforms where disinformation proliferates or on controlling the spread itself through censorship and legal action against those who produce fake news. The government can also target social media and the algorithms that curate highly personalized content for users. These algorithms not only exacerbate political polarization and create epistemic bubbles and echo chambers but also enable disinformation creators to tailor their manipulative tactics for specific audiences.

Although most social networks require transparency for paid advertisements, the algorithms governing content delivery have remained undisclosed for over a decade. This issue is also reflected in the potential misuse of copyrighted training

data for large language and video models, as exemplified by Marcus and Southern (2024) corroborated by the fact that researchers are already developing copyright content detectors for generative models (Li et al. 2024). Scholars supporting this regulatory approach contend that effective oversight of social media recommendation algorithms necessitates some form of government intervention (Vidal Bustamante 2022). However, regulating these algorithms will not entirely eliminate avenues for disseminating fake news, as closed digital spaces like WhatsApp groups will continue to facilitate its spread (Brown 2021) as was dramatically showcased in the most recent Korean deepfake public school scandal (BBC 2024).

Moreover, the government can actively prosecute individuals, companies, and partisan groups that create and distribute fake news. A notable example is radio host and conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, who was recently fined \$965 million for promoting false claims about the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting (Le Monde 2022; see also Cerovac, Drmić 2023), or the most recent case where the European Commission initiated formal proceedings to evaluate whether the platform X “may have breached the Digital Services Act (DSA) in areas linked to risk management, content moderation, dark patterns, advertising transparency and data access for researchers” (European Commission 2023).

While prosecuting those who disseminate harmful misinformation should significantly hinder its spread, this approach requires lengthy judicial processes and may prove costly and inefficient (Eddy, Scott 2017). Additionally, if applied improperly, it could undermine citizens’ freedom and autonomy rather than protect them. Democratic systems face serious challenges: their epistemic integrity depends on the competencies of the citizens participating in decision-making processes, yet these competencies appear inadequate for navigating an epistemically distorted environment created by AI-powered digital technologies.

To steer us out of this purported interpretative deadlock Coeckelbergh (2024) has most recently introduced a deep-communicative interpretation of democracy. He builds upon Dewey who famously argued that “democracy is not just a form of government but a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicative experience” (Dewey 1916, p. 93). To reposition our thinking about democracy, and with it our understanding of the human-technology relationship in it, Coeckelbergh builds upon Dewey’s thesis to argue that, from within a deep communication understanding of democracy, communication is not only necessary for democracy to work; communication is what democracy is all about. (Coeckelbergh 2024, p. 219). “Democracy is not about particular leaders or institutions, but about a particular form of living together, a communicative form of co-habitation and personal and societal growth that is lived and experienced in concrete social practices” (Coeckelbergh 2024, p. 223). Similarly, the erosion of democracy is the “erosion of a particular form of life, one in which social

communication and cooperation in all its forms plays a central role, and one in which there is mutual recognition (also of differences) and absence of coercion and systemic forms of control” (Coeckelbergh 2024, p. 223).

Importantly, neither Dewey nor Coeckelbergh speak directly of symbiosis. However, for us, the idea of democracy as a “particular form of living together”, a “co-habitation” that is “lived and experienced in concrete social practice” a “form of life” where “cooperation plays a central role” is a description completely aligned with the idea of political symbiosis. Accordingly, our interpretational turn follows upon Coeckelbergh’s framework of democracy as communication. We, however, move a step forward to explicitly highlight the necessity of, tightly-coupled, cooperation between humans and AI systems for the success of 21st-century liberal democracy (Spina et al. 2023). And this tightly coupled cooperation between humans and AI systems for the sake of democratic success, development, and flourishing we call simply *human-AI political symbiosis*.

#### 4. HUMAN-AI SYMBIOSIS: A SIMPLE OVERVIEW

In the past decade, the paradigm of human-AI cooperation has entered into the foray of investigation for both the civil and military sector of applications. (Crandall et al. 2018; Dafoe et al. 2020; Van Den Bosch and Bronkhorst 2018; Wang et al. 2020). The broad field of human AI cooperation aims to answer a rather straightforward question: how can we best enable machines to work with humans in an optimal manner while they simultaneously supplement and even augment human capabilities in a wide variety of tasks?

Recently, the answer to this question has been found in an older paradigm, that of human-machine symbiosis (Licklider 1960) which posits that, in order to achieve optimal human augmentation, the machines need to be finely tailored to their human partner(s). However, this is not where the symbiotic relationship ends. As, the central point of human-machine symbiosis, as per biological reality, lies in bidirectional augmentation - it is not only that the machine augments the human, but the human also augments its machine partner as they jointly collaborate to achieve a shared goal (Dede et al. 2021; Hassani et al. 2020).

In the words of Licklider (1960):

In not too many years, human brains and computing machines will be coupled together very tightly, and the resulting partnership will think as no human brain has ever thought and process data in a way not approached by the information-handling machines we know today [...]. To think in interaction with a computer in the same way that you think with a colleague whose competence supplements your own will require much tighter coupling between man and machine than is suggested by the example and than is possible today (Licklider 1960, p. 31).

Staying true to this original idea, the most recent scientific and ethical investigations into the idea of human-AI symbiosis are diverse and abundant, investigating how to accomplish human-AI symbiosis in various fields of endeavor, including education, medicine, manufacture, management, and public service. (Alam et al. 2024; Gesk, Leyer 2022; Hemmer et al. 2022; Raisch, Krakowski 2021; Sowa et al. 2021; Wang 2021).

How to relevantly define human AI symbiosis? Notwithstanding the possible range of valuable interpretations, the demands of the original concept require the existence of two necessary aspects (Gerber et al. 2020). First, the symbiotic relationship is mutually augmenting for both of the partners within the symbiotic relationship. This means to say that, in the symbiotic relationship both the human and the artificial partner - augment each other's capabilities (and substitute lacks!). And they do so while working jointly to achieve their common, shared, goal.

Symbiosis is not only about augmenting, enhancing, or extending the human agency (as this interest would specifically belong to the notion of "human augmentation or enhancement"). Human-AI symbiosis is properly and relevantly about the very ability of both symbiotic partners - or symbionts - to establish a simultaneous bidirectional augmentation as they form a single, organismic, whole. Thus, in symbiosis, the machine augments the human, and the human, simultaneously, augments the machine - all for the benefit, or interest, of achieving their joint goal (Zhou et al. 2021).

Second, in a Human-AI symbiotic partnership, the interaction between the agents is tightly coupled, which means to say that the symbiotic interaction connects the agents in such order of depth and interactional magnitude that it produces a new agential system of emergent properties (Furlanis, Gilbert 2023). In essence, the two become unified, and this symbiotic unity is greater than the sum of their agencies. In Licklider's own words, then, it is not the human or the machine that thinks or acts, it is the "partnership".

Importantly, the nature of the tight-coupling in a human AI symbiotic relationship leads us to conceptually delineate the relevant range of its realizations. The reason of which lies in the machine's manifold variability, and consequently the variability of symbiotic relationships they can establish with humans. To exemplify, even though all forms of human AI symbiosis withhold the same fundamental aspects, as also in cases of biological symbiosis, the concrete manifestations of symbiotic relationships can vary tremendously depending on the "nature" of the machine and how it cooperates with its human partner. For instance, the symbiosis achieved between a human paraplegic and her BCI system is dissimilar to the case of human-AI symbiosis between a police officer and his four-legged robot partner, which is different from the case of symbiosis between an organization's manager and his AI assistant.

Accordingly, to move forward and distill a usable concept – as challenged with the possibly huge landscape of symbiotic characteristics – we return back to the original, biological, meaning of the symbiotic concept. Based upon this definition we posit two valid and conceptually usable interpretations of human AI symbiosis – the “weak” and the “strong” version – corresponding to the biological reality of “facultative” and “obligate” symbiotic relationships.

In the obligate relationship, the organism cannot survive in the (hostile) environment (which more precisely entails it cannot complete its life lifecycle) without being constantly co-joined or integrated with the other organism. In the facultative relationship, the individual organisms can independently survive in the environment even though they benefit from the symbiotic association once conjoined. Thus, the fundamental demarcation line between obligate and facultative symbiosis lies in the very dependency of survival of the individual or group in that environment on the symbiotic relationship. Can the individual, group, or species survive in the environment without the other symbiont(s)? If it can, then the symbiotic relationship is not obligatory but facultative.

Correspondingly, the facultative option translates into the weak version of human AI symbiosis and the obligatory option translates into the strong version of human AI symbiosis. The strong version of symbiosis would then, in a most generally applied sense, entail that humans and AI form a symbiotic relationship because they simply cannot survive (continually) without each other in the environment. In the weak version, on the other hand, humans and AI are able to live without each other in the environment, but they nevertheless need to enter into a symbiotic relationship in order to accomplish some specific goals within that environment.

In essence, the difference between the strong and weak version of symbiosis rests on the very existence, the survival of the species – if the symbiotic relationship is required for the very survival of both “species” then we are speaking of strong symbiosis. All other forms of symbiosis denote weak symbiosis.

## 5. HUMAN-AI POLITICAL SYMBIOSIS

To speak of political human-AI symbiosis is then a rather straightforward issue. If we are speaking of strong political symbiosis, we are precisely speaking of a symbiotic, cooperative, relationship between humans and AI without which neither humans nor the AI, as political entities, can survive and thrive in the environment of a liberal democracy.

The reason for this lies in the fact that species form symbiotic relationships to survive in the environment due to the existential demands, *or existential threats*, of that environment. In the biological world, environmental factors, such as the scarcity of resources, extreme physical conditions (temperature, toxicity), and

predators may all represent one or more of such existential threats. Similarly, in the political environment, existential threats to democracy may arise with or without technological influence.

Consequently, the motivation for humans to enter into a strong political symbiosis with the AI systems becomes necessary when the state of the democratic environment becomes changed to such a degree that the very continuation of both humans and AI systems - as democratic entities - becomes existentially jeopardized. Here then, the issue is not only about human democratic existence (and the possibility of flourishing) but also about machines, as humans always have the option to discontinue our coexistence with technological progress by collectively discarding the use of technology and its advancement. Consequently, and summarized, a strong political symbiosis necessarily entails positing that the democratic environment has changed to such a degree that neither humans nor machines can continue living in it meaningfully and successfully without becoming mutual symbionts.

In cases of weak political symbiosis, on the other hand, the political life of humans in a liberal democracy is not “existentially” jeopardized to require symbiosis with AI. Rather, human AI political symbiosis serves to complete specific democracy-oriented goals, which *cannot be otherwise accomplished but* are democratically beneficial. The establishment of a weak political symbiosis between humans and AI implies that their mutually augmentative relationship exists only as long as both symbionts work together to achieve a shared goal. Consequently, this form of symbiotic cooperation can be straightforwardly understood as a partnership (Metcalf et al. 2021) and can be said to encompass the majority if not all forms of symbiotic cooperation between the current generation of AI systems and humans.

The practically, policy-oriented, question is then, are we, at this moment, living in a political environment that, due to information environment pollution, requires humans and AI systems to enter into a “strong” version of political symbiosis or is it enough for humans and AI systems to co-join their strengths on specific political goals?

Humans are increasingly unable to navigate an epistemically distorted environment, which is being shaped before our eyes by the advent of generative AI technologies. For instance, audio-visual cloning models are already capable of “cloning” a person’s digital representation to such an extent that it becomes practically impossible to detect whether the representation is synthesized by a computer or is of a real, recorded individual (Heikkilä 2024). Moreover, if someone is not an expert in a particular knowledge domain, chatbot-provided explanations—whether in direct interactions, integrated into web searches, or supplied in specific software environments, such as those for programming languages—can appear to have a high degree of epistemic reliability. These

explanations are often well-structured, clearly explained, and stylistically approachable. However, without relevant expertise in the field, people are unable to accurately assess the reliability of such answers, as the models' explanations can sound disturbingly convincing, even when they are fictional rather than factual (Zhan et al. 2023).

It is crucial to highlight that, even though humans are becoming less capable of detecting cases of synthesized, fake, or otherwise incorrect knowledge representations, the same, at least in principle, does not apply to AI systems. Due to their “digital” nature, AI systems can detect patterns in data directly in digital form, rather than having to translate the coded data into an audio-visual format. As a result, AI systems are, in principle, completely unfazed by the hyperrealism of deepfake representations, the “human-like” structure and style of textual output, or the human-like qualities of AI-generated art. Therefore, AI systems can be used to detect, evaluate, and flag synthetic or deepfake data, enabling the human agent with an epistemically orthogonal capability to assess the reliability of knowledge outputs—an ability that would be entirely impossible to achieve without the aid of these epistemically beneficial AI systems.

To exemplify, Ben Zhao, from the University of Chicago, has led teams that developed the Nightshade and Glaze AI tools. Both of these AI systems alter the digital patterns of pictures in a way that is unreadable and invisible to humans, but highly detectable by machine algorithms. The purpose of these tools is to prevent generative AI models from learning to mimic the artistic style of specific artists after fine-tuning on samples of their art (Shan et al. 2024). Specifically, Nightshade introduces subtle pattern changes to the pixels of an image so that if the picture is ever used to train another machine learning algorithm (as part of a training set), it will “poison” that model, destabilizing it and disabling its ability to generate images for any and all prompts (Shan et al. 2024). The second tool, Glaze, allows artists to “cloak” their artwork in such a way that the image is interpreted by machine learning models as something entirely different from what is actually depicted, while still appearing unchanged to human viewers. These style cloaks “apply barely perceptible perturbations to images, and when used as training data, mislead generative models that try to mimic a specific artist” (Shan et al. 2024). In this way, AI is already acting as a beneficial symbiont to humans, empowering artists and art consumers to navigate the increasingly polluted informational and epistemic environment. This is made possible precisely because of AI's ability to “connect with” the digital world in its undistorted, raw, and direct form.

Taking these examples into consideration, it may seem that although we are still dealing with specific but varied cases of “weak” symbiosis, the constant rate of change in the digital environment is progressing to such an extent that the emergence of “strong” political symbiosis is something we should be prepared for in the near future. Accordingly, it is vital to emphasize that both for the weak and the strong version of symbiosis the precise determinant of synergistic buildup that

is achieved in the symbiotic relationship lies in the orthogonal difference in capacities between human and artificial agents. This means that humans and AI systems, withhold fundamentally different but complementary capabilities. As such, humans and artificial agents can have distinct, non-overlapping strengths (but might have overlapping weaknesses!).

For instance, humans can excel at creative and unconstrained thinking, emotional understanding, embodied social interaction, and complex problem-solving, especially that pertaining to political decisions. AI systems can excel at rapid information processing, pattern recognition, and tirelessness. And both can confabulate, exaggerate, and deceive! This implies that an optimal version of political symbiosis necessarily entails finely tuned capabilities of both humans and AI systems for specific political goals. Consequently, to achieve human-AI political symbiosis, both the AI and human strengths (and weaknesses!) need to be clearly recognized and delineated to ensure their full synchronization for the accomplishment of that democratic goal. For instance, while generative AI makes some information more easily accessible, it also makes users less likely “to question or expand on the information they are provided”, thus reducing their critical thinking skills (Larson et al. 2024). However, AI systems can also be designed to support the use and development of critical thinking skills (Shanto et al. 2024), for example, by enabling the system to help identify reasoning flaws, assess individuals’ susceptibility to deceptive AI-generated explanations, and use an AI-driven questioning method to provoke critical thinking in users (Danry 2023). For cases of political symbiosis then, the AI system, would become finely tuned for the purpose of fulfilling a specific democratic demand. Superficially, this means to say that the AI system becomes domain-specific, finely calibrated, computational tools designed to achieve specific political goals in cooperation with human agents. On the side of the human partner(s) this entails becoming finely tuned towards the AI system to “augment” its operations – to fill in its shortcomings, to monitor and supervise its weaknesses, and to provide proper answers, guidance, and decision-leadership where necessary. To accomplish this, however, both humans and AIs need to “adapt” to each other’s orthogonal capacities. What does this entail practically? Engelbart, a student of Licklider, famously foreshadowed in 1962 that:

The compounding effect of fundamental human cognitive powers suggests further that systems designed for maximum effectiveness would require that these powers be developed as fully as possible – by training, special mental tricks, improved language, new methodology (Engelbart 1962).

Translated to our current AI development, this can entail specialized training, formal education, and even lifelong learning. As is already occurring, with the



advent of large language systems, to optimally and beneficially utilize the most developed AI systems human users need to start thinking in a specific way, use a specific manner of language and style when speaking with the AI system (prompting the model) and even utilizing that what Engelbart described as “special mental tricks” to become finely tuned towards the LLM system’s peculiar “workings” in order to reap an optimal cooperation. Consequently, similarly to animal trainers, horse whisperers, and the like, the present-day “machine whisperers” of today are learning how to interact with generative and knowledge-representing AI systems to reap maximum cooperative benefit (Fui-Hoon et al. 2023).

It is important to emphasize that the form of human-AI political symbiosis we are advocating is one of beneficial mutualism, not parasitism, which, in its original biological context, is defined as ‘a type of symbiotic relationship, or long-term relationship between two species, where one member, the parasite, gains benefits at the expense of the host member’ (BD Editors 2019). A politically parasitic AI, akin to a socially parasitic one (Sætra 2020), would be one that exploits and undermines human political development and flourishing, advancing its own growth, proliferation, and further entrenchment in the political sphere at the expense of human (social and) political agency.

Of course, until we encounter self-governing AI, the parasitic growth in question pertains to the increasing political power of the large tech corporations that own, deploy, and control these AI products and services. As Shannon Vallor starkly warns in her recent work, “today’s data-hungry tools are being built by powerful corporations to feast like insatiable parasites on our own words, images, and thoughts, strip away their humane roots in lived experience, and feed them back to us as hollow replacements for our minds” (Vallor 2024, p. 63). These tools, she argues, are ‘designed to ensnare our attention, stoke our anger, fear, and division, and prevent us from trusting ourselves and one another to be anything more than their handmaidens. Which just means being handmaidens to the humans who build and profit from them’ (Vallor 2024, p. 200).

A clear case of political AI parasitism we may already be encountering is that of social and political capture, facilitated by the interweaving of human existence with the digital world and the ‘power’ AI systems exert over it. As Seth Lazar notes, AI systems are already mediating some of the most critical forms of interaction humans have in their economies, social circles, and interactions with government services. These automated authorities are being used “to exercise power over us by determining what we may know, what we may have, and what our options will be” (Lazar 2024).

The alarm for AI parasitism may already be sounding, especially when considering that the AI-driven attention economy, fueled by consumerism and manifesting in narrowing attention spans (Lorenz-Spreen et al. 2019), shows no sign of abating. Moreover, some scholars caution that the advent of generative AIs

as personalized yet enclosed digital ecosystems (e.g., ChatGPT Store) with addictive design features is shifting these systems from merely capturing users' attention (i.e., what they attend to and how) to shaping their very cognition (i.e., what they are capable of thinking and how) (Hansen 2024). In effect, these systems are exercising epistemic and political influence over their users.

Confronted with these ongoing developments, one might feel overwhelmed by the gravity of the situation. However, the symbiotic paradigm offers a clearer path toward viable solutions, as it allows us to recognize that our digital environments are already deeply intertwined with AI systems. Aside from the ever-available option of technological luddism, the most plausible path forward seems to be that of human-AI symbiotic mutualism, particularly in light of the dangers posed by the proliferation of parasitic AI.

To extend this analogy to biology: when an environment changes to such an extent that the survival and continued development of a species are jeopardized, that species can either undergo radical changes to adapt or enter into a symbiotic relationship with another species already suited for survival in that environment. In doing so, the species improves its own chances of survival. Contemporary humanity has not yet initiated a radical transformation of its own nature but continues to interweave itself with AI systems at all levels of civilization. As such, to ensure our political flourishing – and to curb the rise of parasitic AI – the path of symbiotic mutualism presents itself as a compelling direction for 21st-century democracies.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Our case for political symbiosis is rather straightforward. Weak political symbiosis entails the establishment of a tightly coupled, mutually augmenting, cooperation between humans and AI systems for the accomplishment of a shared democratic goal. In other words, without a human-AI political symbiosis, some democratic goals simply cannot be accomplished due to the demand for tightly correlated synergistic capabilities necessary for its accomplishment. The strong version of human-AI political symbiosis, on the other hand, entails humans and AI systems becoming unable to exist and “live” democratically without each other.

This notion might immediately unease us, as human politics has existed and continued to exist in both the time of the stone tablets to a time without the internet. As such, to think that humans cannot exist politically without AI systems seems ludicrous, as we can manifest politics both with stone tablets and digital technologies. So, instead of asking a general question on the lines of: “*Can humans survive and thrive in their political environments without AI*”, we should ask: “*Can 21st century humanity continue to survive and thrive (politically) in its political environment without symbiotically joining with its AI systems?*”. In

essence then, the question we ask with the strong version of political human-AI symbiosis is: *Do we need to “live-together” politically with our AIs in order to survive and thrive democratically in the coming centuries?*

If the answer to this question is confirmatory, and due to the already occurring challenges to democratic environments might be interpreted as such, then the political existence, the continuation of democratic life, and democratic flourishing will not be achieved without creating a strong political symbiosis with AI systems. Likewise, AI symbionts, as democratic symbionts, will not be able to exist without co-joining with humans *as political entities living out a democratic existence*. In other words, to survive and thrive they will need to augment humanity’s political agency, political capacities, and operations for the sake of democratic flourishing as they themselves become finely tuned for an optimal democratic existence.

This necessity is perhaps already made manifest, as humanity, as a political community, may have already crossed the Rubicon with the advent of generative AI. Arguably, if we wish to go forward with a responsible and democratically aligned AI development political symbiosis as a form of democratic “living together”, a “co-habitation” where “cooperation plays a central role” (Coeckelbergh 2024) may impose itself upon us as a political necessity.

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M o n o g r a p h i c a   I I

**ALASDAIR MACINTYRE IN THE CONFLICTS OF MODERNITY**



# MACINTYRE AND THE CONFLICTS OF CORPORATE MODERNITY

## GUEST EDITOR'S PREFACE

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### ABSTRACT

This issue aims to discuss the relevance of Alasdair MacIntyre's *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* from different disciplinary perspectives. This preface briefly presents the theoretical path of MacIntyre before that work (1), then summarises the main results of it (2), and finally highlights the major points discussed by the papers of this issue (3).

### KEYWORDS

Alasdair MacIntyre, Aristotelian tradition, desire, practical reasoning, virtue, human good, narrative.

### 1.

In the panorama of contemporary philosophy, Alasdair MacIntyre (1929-2025) has played the role of a controversial protagonist. Most scholars and students first heard his name when he published *After Virtue* in 1981.<sup>1</sup> This book was mostly acknowledged as an important contribution to the ongoing debate between liberals and communitarians – a discussion inaugurated by John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* ten years before.<sup>2</sup> *After Virtue* was actually much more; it can be considered the first synthesis of a long theoretical journey that started in 1953 with a book on Marxism.<sup>3</sup> In that long time span, the first and ultimate question always was 'What are the rational grounds of any moral and political judgments?'

That question had very strong connections with the ordinary life of MacIntyre, when – after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 – he quit the British Communist Party to join the New Left. The original question then sounded similar to this: 'How is it possible to rationally justify the moral condemnation of

<sup>1</sup> A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Marxism: An Interpretation* (S.C.M. Press, 1953), revised and reissued as *Marxism and Christianity* (Schocken Books, 1968).

Stalinism and the USSR?’ According to MacIntyre, in fact, both Christianity and the Enlightenment had failed in their projects to develop universal ethics, and they were no longer helpful in directing the conduct of human beings. Unfortunately, no other sound moralities seemed available.

When MacIntyre finally broke with Marxism at the end of the 1960s and moved to the US, he refused to take up the cause of liberal Western societies. He continued living as an ‘intellectual nomad’<sup>4</sup>. Before *After Virtue*, MacIntyre had to walk many theoretical paths, always threatened by relativism and nihilism. If it is impossible to lead life rationally, then Nietzsche would be right. It is not casual that the central chapter of *After Virtue*– the ninth one dividing the book into the first half (*pars destruens*) and the second half (*pars construens*)– was titled ‘Nietzsche or Aristotle?’ It was in Aristotle, in fact– in the ancient and multi-sided Aristotelian tradition, more specifically– that MacIntyre found the intellectual resources to justify a rational ethics capable of tackling the practical questions peculiar to modern corporate societies.<sup>5</sup> During the thirty-five years separating *After Virtue* and *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, MacIntyre went on building and corroborating his practical philosophy. In the 1980s, he realised that his Neo-Aristotelian approach could be strengthened by highlighting the contribution given by Aquinas to the Aristotelian tradition. The result was a ‘Neo-Aristotelianism developed in contemporary Thomistic terms’.<sup>6</sup> That intellectual move, of course, raised a great deal of discussion about its historical and philological consistency and its potential to address contemporary moral and political issues.

## 2.

*Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* can be considered the matured version of MacIntyre’s theory. To give a broad idea of the contents of that thick volume, we can quote MacIntyre at the beginning of the fifth and final chapter of the book:

A single, if complex, theoretical conclusion emerged from the first four chapters of this essay. It is that agents do well only if and when they act to satisfy only those desires whose objects they have good reason to desire, that only agents who are sound and effective practical reasoners so act, that such agents must be disposed to

<sup>4</sup> See the essay by Dario Mazzola in this issue.

<sup>5</sup> MacIntyre’s approach to Aristotle in *After Virtue* was influenced by the second Wittgenstein and by the Hegelo-Marxian line of thought, among others.

<sup>6</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2016, chapter 4).

act as the virtues require and that such agents will be directed in their actions towards the achievement of their final end.<sup>7</sup>

These are not independent sets of conditions, as the four narratives told in the last chapter illustrate in detail. The first set of conditions is relative to the nature of the desirers and their relationship to practical reason. MacIntyre's handling of this matter is based on the results presented in *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999).<sup>8</sup> The conceptualisation of desires is fundamental for any approach to practical philosophy, as they 'fuel' human actions. MacIntyre's analysis of desires—based also on the achievements of the phenomenological tradition—stresses that inner directionality characterises desires.

Moreover, thanks to the reflexivity of human reason, there is the possibility of distinguishing mere needs from desires. Through his nuanced examination of human desires, MacIntyre can analyse some of their major connections with emotions, tastes, habits and beliefs, as well as with the biological and neurophysiological development peculiar to human animals.

From the perspective of contemporary thought, this is a very important achievement, as it provides ethics with a rich and complex moral psychology.

The first set of conditions strictly connects with the second: To be moral, an action need not satisfy only desires; that is because the objects of desires must be recognised as good by reason. This is a very important point. Human beings are the most rational animals; therefore, they can comprehend human actions only if it is possible to give a rational account of them. This is also true for one's own actions; therefore, the lack of a rational account for an action involves the impossibility of the agent understanding herself.

Thus, agents can be good practical reasoners when they act to satisfy only those desires whose objects they have good reason to desire. This involves the possibility of a conflict between desires and practical reason—something ordinary agents often experience. However, human flourishing requires that rational actions are motivated by the desire for rational goods and, therefore, implies that desires can and must be educated. This is a major thesis, something paradoxical in the view of many modern ethical theories and present liberal morality, which takes desires merely as positive data to establish the emotional resources that enable agents to achieve their goals.

The necessity of educating desires identifies the third set of conditions and the necessity of critiquing desires. Desires can be educated first by institutions such as families, schools and local and religious communities, and second through the exercise of moral and intellectual virtues in those same institutions, in workplaces

<sup>7</sup>MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 243.

<sup>8</sup>A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals. Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Open Court, 1999).

and in participation in civic and political life. Through the practice of moral and intellectual virtues, an agent changes by becoming someone who actually desires what is rationally good for her to desire or someone who desires to desire that, at least (i.e. second-order desire).

One of the most peculiar aspects of MacIntyre's theoretical viewpoint is that he examines humans as being in action within those practices where they can flourish.<sup>9</sup> Individuals are usually involved in several practices and are required to fulfil social roles. Correspondingly, the goods pursued in those practices and social roles can be at odds. Therefore, every agent is called to identify and establish an order of priorities. This is not an easy task. Ordering the goods of a human life can be considered rational from a moral viewpoint when the standard has a strong connection with the ultimate good, i.e. the fulfilment of life, what Aristotle called *eu zen* and Aquinas *beatitudo*. This self-conscious directionality towards the goal of life identifies the fourth set of conditions, to flourish as human beings.

In summary, human flourishing involves individuals acting based on their own desires only when the objects of desires are good and they actually desire those objects. The changing of desires is possible by practising virtues. The result is an ordering of goods whose criterion is the flourishing of life.

### 3.

The following papers focus on major points in *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*.<sup>10</sup> In the rational order of goods, practical rationality functions *intersubjectively*; consequently, agents cannot properly identify their own ultimate good without considering the goods of those who cooperate with them in socio-political practices—called by MacIntyre ‘the relevant ones’. In addition, agents cannot identify their own goods if they also do not consider the matter from the perspectives of those relevant others. When agents refuse to do so, they can easily fall into intellectual and moral errors. The result is another paradoxical thesis: To be practically independent, human beings must recognise their dependence on others. In short, we need *friends* to pursue our goods.

As we have observed above, in our ordinary practices, we must exercise virtues. By doing that, we realise that each one of us has an inchoate conscience of the goods and the ultimate good: what MacIntyre calls ‘directionality’. This dynamic of practical reason displays a *narrative* structure through which agents understand themselves regarding the stories of their vicissitudes in pursuing the fulfilment of life. One of the main claims of *After Virtue* is that narratives are not forms

<sup>9</sup> MacIntyre provides a definition of practice in *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition), 187.

<sup>10</sup> I don't even try to summarise the following papers: see the abstracts.

imposed by storytellers on human events retrospectively to give them a comprehensible order: 'Stories are lived before they are told- except in the case of fiction'.<sup>11</sup> This claim is also presented in *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* and is supported with new arguments.<sup>12</sup> The possibility of telling and retelling the stories of our lives truthfully is an important requirement for fulfilling life. Only narratives can make our lives comprehensible to ourselves and to others.

A crucial consequence is that the narrative resources of a specific culture have great moral and political relevance because they establish the limits of desires and of practical reasoning. Thereby, the compartmentalisation of storytelling peculiar to late-modern societies and the pervasiveness of entertainment and social media, together with the consequent weakening of individual creativity and imagination, are central factors of the present moral and political crises.

For MacIntyre, the major contribution Aquinas gave the Aristotelian tradition was his doctrine about *natural law*. This is perhaps the toughest point for the common mindset to welcome in present corporate societies, where one of the main dogmas is that nothing is 'natural' in human beings- nothing that can limit the possibility of individual self-determination- let alone moral precepts.

On the contrary, MacIntyre holds that those precepts implicitly function when individuals exercise their practical rationality within their social practices and that they can play the role of moral principles and premises of reasoning. When agents do not observe those precepts, their practices fail to pursue their own 'internal goods',<sup>13</sup> and they are therefore misled away from their ultimate ends.

MacIntyre highlights the relevance of natural law within contemporary corporate societies, as its precepts can support a joint reflection and a shared deliberation on the common good. This can be at odds with the functional imperatives ruling corporate societies. Here, natural law can thus be a *critical* and a *subversive* factor and play a *progressive* role.

Moreover, MacIntyre's conceptualisation of natural law can have an interesting impact on epistemology. In fact, scientific research is a practice. Consequently, it is subject to the precepts of natural law but manifests them prominently. Even if scientific and philosophical theories belong to *incommensurable* traditions of research, all are based on practices of research and accordingly are subject to the precepts of natural law. These represent 'standards of justice', both substantive and procedural, which ultimately coincide with the exercise of moral and intellectual virtues. The previous remarks may have significantly impacted how we may reconsider the nature of academic research and the role of universities in corporate societies.

<sup>11</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 212.

<sup>12</sup> MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 231-242.

<sup>13</sup> On the difference between 'internal goods' and 'external goods', see MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 188-189.

## 4.

The present issue results from a workshop organised by the Department of Literature, Philosophy and Communication at the University of Bergamo on 6May, 2024. The aim of the workshop was to gather scholars from different areas of research (theoretical philosophy, history of philosophy, ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of law, political science, education and geography) to discuss the relevance of ethics in the *Conflicts of Modernity*, whose Italian edition was newly published. The different affiliations justify the differences in how the authors develop their arguments and in the philological accuracy of the papers. These can be sympathetic to *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*. What unites all of them, however, is considering that book a relevant piece of contemporary philosophical research that deserves attention since it tackles the main questions of our corporate societies.



# BEYOND AUTHENTICITY: MACINTYRE ON OVERCOMING LIBERAL INDIVIDUALISM

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## **ABSTRACT**

Alasdair MacIntyre's *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* is often received as a late restatement of his Aristotelian-Thomist doctrine, or dismissed as the work of a Christian conservative philosopher. This paper argues instead that it should be recognised as a methodological and epistemological masterpiece. The book is constructed as a deliberate attempt to free readers from the conceptual schema of liberal modernity at a perceptual level, by mobilising the techniques of cognitive reconstruction, genealogy, and resensitisation. To grasp this project, I situate it within the tradition of paradigm-based epistemology—tracing its roots in MacIntyre's Marxist formation, his dialogue with Kuhn's philosophy of science, and his openness to psychology and cognitive science. I then reconstruct the path the book intends the reader to travel: from recognising the complicity between abstract moral universalism and liberalism, to the epiphanies of perceiving anew the distortions of community and the fragmentation of modern life, culminating in a hindsight narrative that renders the modern liberal ethos no longer credible. The exemplar life of C.L.R. James is invoked to resensitise us to the possibility of unity and integration. The main limitation of MacIntyre's project, I suggest, lies not in its philosophical scope but in its medium: as an academic philosopher, he left the task of mediating his achievement to a broader audience to future MacIntyrean intellectuals. Yet the book nonetheless sets a new standard for what philosophy can do: by articulating the sophistication needed to escape the imaginative block of liberal individualism, it redefines the state of the art in practical philosophy.

## **KEYWORDS**

Alasdair MacIntyre, Liberal Individualism, Paradigm Shifts, Genealogy, Tradition-Dependent Rationality, C.L.R. James

## **1. INTRODUCTION: THE LAST GIFT OF THE MASTER**

Alasdair MacIntyre was one of the most sophisticated philosophical critics of liberal individualism as the ethos, the value system of advanced Western societies—whose capitalist institutions he called *corporate modernity*. Understandably, expectations should be high for *Ethics in the Conflicts of*

*Modernity*: his last major work, the summa of his thinking, the last words of the master, as it were<sup>1</sup>.

The motivation of this paper is to show how and why the book is indeed a major contribution, possibly a masterpiece, and how it should be read—since, in truth, its value is far from obvious at first sight. As a restatement of MacIntyre's mature positive doctrines, it can appear useful but indecisive, even unimpressive. The text is also complexly built, moving in circles, and at times somewhat repetitive. To this we must add another layer of difficulty: MacIntyre is often filtered, understood, and too quickly dismissed (especially by the progressive left) as a Christian conservative philosopher. The label is not false—technically, by progressive standards—but it is irrelevant for appreciating the real contribution of his last work. The risk that its value may be missed by much of the philosophical community is therefore very high.

I will argue that *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* is a major contribution on an epistemological and methodological level. In it MacIntyre reaches the apex of his craft and philosophical style, working within a tradition that—for lack of a consensual term—I call *paradigm-based epistemology*. It is a tradition (or rather a family of approaches, as they are less knit than a proper tradition should be) he encountered during his Marxist formation, later reinforced by his reading of Kuhn's philosophy of science, and enriched by his receptivity to input from psychology and, to a lesser extent, the cognitive sciences.

The book is carefully crafted to deliver a preposterously ambitious last gift from the master: freeing the reader from the conceptual schema of liberal modernity—not as a theoretician, but as an everyday person, and at a visceral, perceptual level. It is a timely gift, for we are stuck in an embarrassing imaginative failure. Liberal individualism, our dominant view of society as a collection of individuals pursuing their own personal interests within a capitalist economy, has come to be felt as the final horizon. Any alternative is not simply rejected but declared unthinkable—or, more precisely, impossible to take seriously.

Since the project of the book cannot be understood without clarifications on this Western imaginative block and on the nature of paradigm-based epistemology, as well as on the process of paradigm shifting, the first section of this paper will be devoted to these introductory topics. The healthy skepticism my unusual interpretation of MacIntyre should rise will be addressed in a special section. I will then explain the structure of the book, organised around the strategic techniques of cognitive reconstruction, genealogy, and resensitisation, and I will spell out the intermediate epiphanies (such as the recognition of the synergy between abstract moral universalism and liberalism) as well as the final ones,

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative* [ECM] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

culminating in the hindsight narrative of modernity as it appears to someone liberated from its spell.

Part of this final realisation will be to recognise the two curses of modernity: the distortion of any healthy conception of relationship and community, and the scattering of human life into fragments of overspecialised activity. These are wounds we should be unable to unsee ever again, once revealed.

Finally, outside the paradigm of liberal modernity, the exemplar life of C. L. R. James will be briefly analysed to resensitise us to the value of unity and integration in life.

## 2. MACINTYRE AS AN INDEPENDENT MASTER OF PARADIGM-BASED EPISTEMOLOGY

### *2.1 Human mind and culture as paradigm-driven: “dependence on a frame of reference” as the major epistemological discovery of the twentieth century*

The idea that human knowledge and belief—both on a cultural and an individual level—operate against the background of entrenched and global perceptual paradigms or conceptual schemata, filtering how we see things and creating a sort of lens through which we perceive the world, is at the very least a foundational, and possibly the most distinctive, epistemological tenet of the second half of the twentieth century. The concept of paradigm was made explicit in the philosophy of science by the work of Thomas Kuhn on scientific revolutions, but was then recognised as already operative across a variety of disciplines (conceptual schema, frames of reference, Gestalt perception)—at least in a general sense, as “paradigms” in all these fields refer to the same notion only in an analogical, but still important, way. Today it is so popular as to be considered epistemological common sense in the West: everyone casually talks about being “trapped in a paradigm” or needing a “paradigm shift.” Explanations relying on people’s views being shaped by hidden mentalities seem to be at least as common as those relying on universal human tendencies, if not more. It is worth remembering, however, that the very existence of paradigms is not obvious. Davidson famously criticised the very idea of a conceptual scheme, and it is not clear that all cognition falls under the influence of some paradigm—for example, basic mathematical knowledge such as  $2+2=4^2$ .

2. Davidson, Donald. “On the very idea of a conceptual scheme.” *Proceedings and addresses of the American Philosophical Association*. Vol. 47. American Philosophical Association, 1973.

*2.2 Paradigm-based epistemological traditions and the subtle art of paradigm shifting: Marxism, Kuhn's philosophy of science, and the contribution of psychology and cognitive science*

It is important to distinguish philosophical approaches that rely on, or postulate, some notion of paradigm—which, as we noted, might well be the majority today—from something much rarer and more valuable: paradigm-based epistemologies. The notion of paradigm comes with a truly unique set of epistemological problems related to criticism and conflict between paradigms, and to paradigm shifts. Within this set, it is crucial to distinguish between theoretical and practical problems, even if both are coextensive with the idea of paradigm—its birthright, or inevitable price to pay, as it were.

Theoretical problems include issues of conceptualising what a paradigm is and what its structure might be (a very elusive task, similar to defining what a culture exactly is), and, most famously, the problem of incommensurability and relativism. Are conceptual schemata like different and incomparable lenses through which to see the world, in a radically relativistic picture? Or is there a way to show that one paradigm is better than another?

Practical problems associated with paradigms—which, for the sake of simplicity, I will call paradigm-shifting problems—feel real and unavoidable from the first-person perspective of someone who comes to analyse their predicament in those terms. They are lived: one feels trapped in a paradigm in spite of efforts to escape; dialogue seems impossible because of incompatible paradigms; there is a dangerous lack of self-understanding, as the self-awareness of the paradigm one is operating within is too limited.

I stress this distinction because, while one can easily ignore academic issues about paradigms, a paradigm in which one is stuck in real life cannot be ignored. The notion of paradigm straddles both the practical and the theoretical divide in philosophy. Consequently, two projects are called for: on the one hand, a paradigm-based epistemology dealing with the theoretical problems; on the other, what for lack of a better term I will call the subtle art of paradigm shifting—a know-how to help people deal with paradigm-shifting problems. In the perspective of MacIntyre, where ethics has to be rigorously based in and derived from real human experience in a bottom-up approach (hence his constant use of examples from everyday life and literature), the notion of paradigm, in spite of its sophistication, is first of all a notion of practical philosophy, a crucial observation.

The first great tradition that can be construed as an *ante litteram* (since the notion of paradigm was only made explicit in the twentieth century) paradigm-based epistemology is Marxism, and more precisely the Marxist *critique de l'idéologie*, developing around the idea of capitalist false consciousness. Marxism is an unsurpassed introduction to the complexity of paradigm shifting. How do we know we are influenced by a capitalist cultural paradigm? What if we have not

diagnosed it correctly? What if critics of capitalism are themselves still secretly influenced by it, unconsciously (the famous *résidu bourgeois*)? This produces cross-fire criticism in which both parties accuse each other of still being capitalist<sup>3</sup>. Similar dialectical situations are found in versions of feminism heavily influenced by Marxism, in their critique of patriarchy.

The second major tradition is Kuhnian philosophy of science, dealing with paradigm shifts in the history of science, such as the transition from Ptolemaic to Copernican astronomy<sup>4</sup>.

A third important contribution—not really a tradition like the first two, but significant in terms of models, techniques, and findings—comes from the psychology of perception and from cognitive science. These fields buttress the idea that the human mind functions around paradigms, and from therapeutic approaches such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy they provide further resources<sup>5</sup>. Such fields are important not only as a source of techniques, tips, and tricks, but because, on a theoretical level, they acted as a naturalising force for the idea of paradigm, which ceases to be just a rhetorical device and becomes literally a structure “in the brain<sup>6</sup>.”

3. Mutual accusations of ideological capture were frequent in Marxist debates, especially when rival currents charged each other with reproducing capitalist categories. Classic instances can be found in Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971 [1923]) — on reification and false consciousness; Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx* (Paris: François Maspero, 1965) — on theoretical anti-humanism and ideological interpellation; Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1973 [1966]) — on the critique of identity thinking within Marxism itself; and Lucien Goldmann, *Pour une sociologie du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) — linking literary form and collective ideology.

4. On paradigms in the philosophy of science, the canonical reference remains Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, 2nd ed. 1970). For discussions of how the notion of paradigms has been interpreted, developed, or critiqued in the subsequent philosophy of science, see Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) — illustrating historical and conceptual shifts in probabilistic reasoning; and Nancy Cartwright, *How the Laws of Physics Lie* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) — a perspective emphasizing the partial, context-dependent nature of scientific models in the spirit of Kuhnian pluralism.

5. Cognitive-behavioral therapy itself was developed around the idea that maladaptive “schemas” or frames of reference filter experience and guide perception. Beck’s early cognitive model already treated such schemas as the structuring core of emotional disorders (Aaron T. Beck, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* [New York: International Universities Press, 1976]), while schema-focused CBT later systematized the approach by explicitly treating deep-seated schemas as paradigmatic structures shaping cognition and behavior (Jeffrey E. Young, Janet S. Klosko, and Marjorie E. Weishaar, *Schema Therapy: A Practitioner’s Guide* [New York: Guilford Press, 2003]).

6. The notion of paradigms shaping perception and cognition has long been explored in psychology: from Frederic Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932) and Ulric Neisser, *Cognitive Psychology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967) on schema theory, to Jerome S. Bruner, “On Perceptual Readiness”, *Psychological Review* 64, no. 2 (1957): 123–152, and Richard L. Gregory, *Eye and Brain: The Psychology of Seeing* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966) on

### *2.3 MacIntyre as a rare master of general paradigm-based epistemology*

Paradigm-based epistemologies tend to be insular traditions that develop local know-how: Marxism is interested in criticising capitalism; Kuhnians study the evolution of science; cognitive science is focused on reproducing specific results. Connections among them—justified by the fact that they are all dealing with shifting paradigms, in some sense of the notion—are rarely, if ever, made. One of the most puzzling aspects of paradigm-based thinking is why, in spite of its extraordinary success, the development of a more general paradigm-based epistemology has never been a priority and has always remained a rare ambition.

Why is this so? While an accurate diagnosis is beyond the scope of this paper, a few points will be strategic in understanding the value of MacIntyre's contribution.

First, as noted, the motivation to explore the notion of paradigm tends to be local and associated with interest in a specific paradigm transition, often out of urgency (out of capitalism, out of patriarchy). Developing a more general picture may simply have been alien to what was driving the original research programs.

Second, proponents of paradigm-based analysis seem to believe in the ineffable and situational nature of paradigms, and place little hope in something like a more general meta-understanding of paradigm dynamics. Kuhn was famously opposed to a general theory of knowledge based on paradigms, a notion he wanted limited to science<sup>7</sup>.

Third, as persuasion and seduction are often most effective when not pointed out in real time, in the same way, paradigm-shifting techniques may work best without people being aware that a book or a speech is actively working to weaken a given mental schema they are trapped in. It is telling that the very tradition responsible for making the idea of paradigm fully explicit—Kuhn's epistemology—was concerned with studying past transitions, and could afford to be explicit without ruining the “magic.”

perception as hypothesis-testing. Later developments include top-down and predictive processing models in cognitive science: Andy Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty: Prediction, Action, and the Embodied Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Karl Friston, “A Theory of Cortical Responses,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 360, no. 1456 (2005): 815–836; Jakob Hohwy, *The Predictive Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For embodied and socially framed cognition, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, “Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases”. *Science* 185, no. 4157 (1974): 1124–1131. These converging strands confirm that what counts as salient, or even visible, is conditioned by conceptual and cultural schema.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed., Preface to the Second Edition (University of Chicago Press, 1970).

Fourth and most important—the elephant in the room—is the looming fear of relativism associated with the generalisation of the idea of paradigm, a fear substantiated by suspicion of the so-called postmodern camp (authors such as Foucault) interpreted as having proposed just that: a relativistic view of humanity built from a mosaic of cultural paradigms. As a result, we live with a strong tension and inconsistency in our epistemic culture: on the one hand, we believe the human mind and culture work within paradigms; on the other, we do not want to confront the full implications, for fear of what they might look like. We operate as if there must be somewhere a red line, a demarcation between subjective, frame-of-reference-dependent thinking and a stronger Enlightenment-style epistemology to defend important fields such as ethics and human rights. But we do not want to check where and how such a line could exist, for fear of what we might discover. The diagnosis of this foundational contradiction of modernity is extensively explored in *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*. We fear relativism because the project of modernity has never been satisfactorily shown to be immune from it (ECM67-68, 140-1).

MacIntyre is one of the very few philosophers who explicitly aimed at developing a general paradigm-based epistemology, on a theoretical and—perhaps even more importantly—practical level. During his several decades as a Marxist, he wrote extensively in the tradition of the *critique de l'idéologie*. During this time, he was very interested in the philosophy of science and studied Kuhn, so that when he finally abandoned Marxism he combined the two, extending Kuhnian paradigm thinking to cultural and political traditions and developing his general epistemological framework and theory of rationality in terms of traditions in conflict and competition: a non-relativistic, paradigm-based epistemology<sup>8</sup>. While detailing the complex interplay of contributions to MacIntyre's core notion of *rational tradition* is beyond the scope of this paper, it can be said that he learned from Marxism the dialectical dynamics between paradigms—a sort of war-of-paradigms chess—while he drew on Kuhn to deepen his understanding of paradigms as perceptual filters, an idea already present in his earlier discussions of language as a perceptual lens, and to refine his thinking on the problem of mutual intelligibility between paradigms<sup>9</sup>.

8. For a recent treatment, see Paul Blackledge and Buket Korkut Raptis, "MacIntyre and Marxism," in *Learning from MacIntyre*, ed. Ron Beadle and Geoff Moore (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 144–163. MacIntyre's explicitly Marxist writings, documenting his early engagement with Marxist theory and critique, are collected in *Alasdair MacIntyre's Engagement with Marxism: Selected Writings 1953–1974*, ed. Paul Blackledge and Neil Davidson (Leiden: Brill, 2008). See also his *Marxism and Christianity* (London: Duckworth, 1971). As for the Kuhnian influence, MacIntyre's conception of rationality as a rivalry between traditions finds its fullest development in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

9. The idea of moral language as a filter was already present in his doctoral dissertation, see the first section of Solomon, David. "MacIntyre and Contemporary Moral Philosophy." In *Alasdair*

MacIntyre has also been interested in developments in psychology and to a lesser extent recent developments in cognitive science, declaring himself favourable to a naturalisation of his epistemology in order to show how his model is compatible with what we know scientifically about human cognition and the brain—a project he would have pursued himself had he been younger in that phase of his intellectual journey<sup>10</sup>. To be more precise, the textual evidence points to an interest in therapy in particular (notably in psychoanalysis and the idea of the unconscious). Yet, apart from the aforementioned statements of openness to any useful insights from psychology, the influence of the more recent naturalistic zeitgeist of the cognitive sciences is felt mostly in the tone of his later writings. He seems to have absorbed a form of cognitive realism, treating paradigms and traditions less as interpretative frameworks and more as if they were real cognitive structures — almost like the operating system of a computer (the analogy is mine). This renders the idea of *therapizing* us out of unhealthy paradigms all the more palpable<sup>11</sup>.

At the crossroads of all these different influences, MacIntyre was a rare cross-tradition master of the subtle art of paradigm shifting, an art embodied in his philosophical style and methodology, which reaches its highest achievement in *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*.

#### *2.4 Hard-locked in liberal individualism*

Both enemies and defenders (in an admirable display of intellectual honesty) admit that Western culture today is imaginatively stuck in capitalism—or more exactly, in liberal individualism, since correctly identifying a paradigm (paradigmatic self-awareness) is key. We truly cannot imagine credible alternatives, a theme that has found its way into popular culture.

MacIntyre, edited by Mark C. Murphy, pp. 114-151. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. For input from Kuhn on his thinking on intelligibility see Turner, Stephen P. “MacIntyre in the Province of the Philosophy of the Social Sciences.” In Alasdair MacIntyre, edited by Mark C. Murphy, pp. 70-93. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

10. One of several representative statements (ECM 4): «If we need convincing that the history of our desires is also inseparable from our biochemical and neurophysiological history, we need only remind ourselves of the kinds of effects that various illnesses and drugs, including alcohol, nicotine, and marijuana, can have upon our desires. But we should also notice a variety of discoveries made by neuroscientific researchers concerning what must not happen in the brain if our desires and emotions are to function as they normally do, discoveries about what happens when our lives are disordered by emotions and desires resulting from injury or other interference with the normal functioning of the brain.»

11. Lear’s chapter is mainly about the links between Neo-Aristotelianism and psychoanalysis, but its opening section alludes to MacIntyre’s writings as being somewhat therapeutic themselves. Jonathan Lear, “MacIntyre and Therapeutic Method,” in *Learning from MacIntyre*, ed. Ron Beadle and Geoff Moore (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 304–328.



The typical reaction to this situation shows a lack of understanding of how being stuck in a paradigm works. As when challenged to do something impossible, people redouble their efforts to find alternatives. Accordingly, we push ourselves to think even harder. The real issue, though, is that new creative ideas, even if found, will not be listened to anyway. Take the theme of refocusing life and the economy on small and local communities, as featured, among others, in Kohei's climate-change-inspired degrowth communism<sup>12</sup>. Anti-paradigmatic themes such as this are simply inaudible and ignored by most people most of the time. When they are not ignored, they are typically not taken seriously, but discussed as vague and blurred utopias, lost in the mental haze of hopeless idealism.

Taking alternative scenarios somewhat more seriously can even backfire. This is the psychological phenomenon of paradoxical reinforcement, where radical criticism ends up strengthening the framework by clarifying the price to pay for one's values, or by suggesting necessary compensation<sup>13</sup>. A fervent monarchist, warned about the structural risk of incompetent or mad kings, will renew his commitment to a more mature conception of monarchy, where exceptional care in the education of the prince is taken and safeguards introduced to filter out unsuitable heirs. In the same way, by realising that a healthy community life would solve the current mental-health and loneliness crisis in Western countries, citizens renew their commitment to a more mature version of liberalism where emphasis is added on the necessity of calling friends and seeing family more often (a prescription routinely heard from medical authorities in recent years).

We are perceptually locked in the paradigm: paradigm-locked, as it were. Until this is the case, all criticism will be useless, as proven by the lack of impact and irrelevance in the public debate of what has grown into an interdisciplinary subfield of the humanities in its own right: diagnosing the pathologies of modernity and Western lifestyle.

Serving, as we are, the goal of establishing a proper technical term for the art of paradigm shifting, the independent internet-based philosopher Leo Gura distinguishes between being paradigm-locked and the far more serious condition

12. Kohei Saito's concept of "degrowth communism" is articulated in his works: *Capital in the Anthropocene* (Tokyo: Shueisha, 2020), which explores Marx's ecological critique of capitalism; and *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), where he develops a vision of post-capitalist society grounded in ecological sustainability and democratic socialism.

13. The phenomenon of criticism inadvertently reinforcing the very belief or behavior it targets has been studied under the rubric of "backfire effects" and "psychological reactance." See Brendan Nyhan & Jason Reifler, "When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions," *Political Behavior* 32, no. 2 (2010): 303-330; Jack W. Brehm, *A Theory of Psychological Reactance* (New York: Academic Press, 1966); and Charles S. Taber & Milton Lodge, "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 3 (2006): 755-769.

of being hard-locked. Needless to say, being stuck in liberalism is the perfect example of the latter<sup>14</sup>.

The issue is that we are liberal individualists at a core, perceptual, in-the-bones level. Until this liberal common sense is gone, everything else will be useless. One could object that all cultures eventually evolve when enough changes in environmental, economic, and demographic conditions pile up. Time will indeed win over any form of equilibrium in the very long run. I have little doubt that liberalism will not survive several centuries, come what may. But this does not imply that we should accept the current stagnation with an attitude of learned hopelessness.

A common strategy is to point to resource scarcity, climate change, and the physical impossibility of sustaining capitalism and growth in their present form. That is how Kohei argues for degrowth communism. But consider an analogy with food and health: if you have a visceral sense that part of enjoying life is eating delicious but unhealthy food, and your doctor then warns you to stop for reasons of diabetes and cardiovascular risk, you might comply temporarily (or even permanently), but the external pressure does not change your deep sense of what constitutes enjoying life. Some people could take it as an opportunity to reconsider their values at a deeper level, but they would be in the minority. External constraints and obstacles to values tend to reinforce them—as anyone who has ever seen a romantic movie will know. That is why being told that we *have* to change paradigm is not effective.

What would be effective, then? It is clear that we sorely need a more developed, general, and powerful art of paradigm shifting. The insular resistance against pooling together lessons and experiences from different local paradigm-based epistemologies is hardly defensible. The fact that capitalism, patriarchy, Taylorism, and Ptolemaic astronomy might all be called paradigms in very different, and possibly only analogical, senses does not make it useless to compare how people became unstuck from them.

Now, this superior art is exactly what MacIntyre has developed. More precisely, in accordance with the principle of not raising too much awareness while the magic is working (as in persuasion and seduction), this art is implicit and infused into his methodology and philosophical style. And this very art reaches its apex in *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*.

Only MacIntyre, of any author I am aware of, understands the issue of the background, visceral common-sense liberalism assumed even by its critics (which makes any attempt to criticise liberalism fail) with enough subtlety and sophistication to do anything about it. Accordingly, *Ethics in the Conflicts of*

14. Leo Gura discusses the concept of paradigms in his video "Understanding How Paradigms Work," available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PM-5NFY1C3c>.

*Modernity* may well represent the state of the art in strategies to free our minds from liberal individualism.

### 3. A MASTER OF PARADIGM SHIFTING? ADDRESSING SKEPTICISM AND REMARKS ON MACINTYRE'S PHILOSOPHICAL STANCE

Is MacIntyre truly a master of the art of paradigm shifting? Before proceeding with the analysis of *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, I owe the field of MacIntyre studies some explanations for my somewhat unusual interpretation. To preserve the fluid narrative unity of the paper, I would advise readers who are persuaded enough so far—or otherwise willing to give me the benefit of the doubt—to skip this section and come back later.

I expect more pushback from experts on MacIntyre than from philosophers who are sympathetic but less deeply involved with his works. This is because, within the field, my focus on paradigms will likely be interpreted as considering MacIntyre a Kuhnian—whereas, in a famous seminal paper of 1977, he explicitly rejects the original notion of paradigm proposed by Kuhn, arguing instead for his wider, signature notion of rational tradition<sup>15</sup>. The problem with Kuhnian paradigms, he argues, is that they are too static and monolithic, rendering conceptual change unintelligible. If being Ptolemaic or Copernican are two incompatible “sets of glasses,” then the act of switching becomes *a-rational*, more akin to a leap of faith or to a radical transformation in which one might suddenly awaken within an alien mind.

MacIntyre contends that this is an inadequate account of intellectual transition. First, many epistemic and methodological norms are shared by both Ptolemaic and Copernican frameworks, preventing a complete epistemic void during the shift. Second, intelligible epistemic variety already exists within each camp: there are incompatible and conflicting versions of every theory—a kind of war of paradigms within the paradigm—unfolding over time. As a result, rational inquiry consists in an ongoing conflict between mutually intelligible traditions<sup>16</sup>, each

15. MacIntyre, Alasdair. “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science.” *The Monist* 60, no. 4 (October 1977): 453–472.

16. MacIntyre replaces Kuhn’s diagnosis of the mutual unintelligibility of opposing paradigms with a historically and psychologically more accurate account, which postulates a combination of inaudibility and unavoidable distortion in rational debate. As discussed above, anti-paradigmatic ideas are often simply inaudible; yet, on other occasions, well-intentioned thinkers may display a surprising capacity to reconstruct them with considerable accuracy. An atheist, for instance, may be struck by how precisely a Christian philosopher articulates his position, while still noticing distortions at crucial junctures from his own standpoint. The ability to reconstitute rival positions with such accuracy is cultivated by engaging with the epistemic diversity that already exists within one’s own camp. The partial intelligibility—but inevitable subtle distortion—of alternative paradigms is a key doctrine of MacIntyre’s mature epistemology, restated repeatedly across his writings. It is plausible to hypothesise that he learned this lesson from Marxism, whose critique of ideology

evolving and multifaceted, rather than in an alternating sequence of static “pairs of glasses” à la Kuhn. The notion of paradigm should therefore be abandoned in favour of the idea of rational traditions.

My Kuhnian reading of MacIntyre seems, at first glance, to be rejected. Except that this is not my position. I fully agree that MacIntyre is not an orthodox Kuhnian. The difference is at the level of framing. When I associate him with a family of epistemic approaches based on paradigms, I do so in a very general sense—defining paradigms as any complex form of culturally embedded conceptual schemata that perceptually filter and influence thought and action. I am postulating a common genus, of which both Kuhnian “paradigms” and more sophisticated MacIntyrean “traditions” are species. For the sake of clarity, I could have called this common genus “embedded cultural schemata”; yet I have retained the word *paradigm* because it is the term used in wider culture and across the humanities. As stated above, I credit Kuhn with making explicit and further developing the idea of paradigms, not with its invention. Marxism, for example, was already analysing capitalism as a sort of cultural paradigm in the nineteenth century.

At this point, skeptics may think my position shifts from being mistaken to being merely slippery, vague, or ultimately pointless. Indeed, one might grant that the Scottish philosopher belongs to the camp of embedded rationality, but still ask: what leverage can I hope to gain from such a vague claim? It could seem that I am only playing with words.

I disagree. By postulating the common genus of paradigms, we make intelligible the very idea of progress toward understanding the dependence of human thought and action on frames of reference—one of the most pressing epistemological challenges since at least the second half of the twentieth century, and one explored across multiple human sciences. We should not take an insular approach to philosophy. Considered in isolation, MacIntyre’s theory of rationality may appear either right or wrong, accepted or ignored. But seen against the background of a multidisciplinary quest for a paradigm-based epistemology, it appears—even to its opponents—as a rare, major, and sophisticated contribution: an objective recognition he fully deserves.

I have also claimed that MacIntyre masters practical strategies for facilitating paradigm shifting, infused into his philosophical style and methodology. This is indeed a substantial claim, not just a matter of reframing; a healthy dose of skepticism is warranted. My position can be seen as a more radical version of the commonly acknowledged fact that his writings possess an important and rich rhetorical apparatus. MacIntyre’s philosophical style is inseparable from his narrative method—his use of literature, historical sources, and everyday examples

exhibits a similar dynamic: capitalist culture does not find Marxist arguments unintelligible, but tends to receive them in subtly distorted forms.

are not mere ornamentation, but essential to the way he offers ethics as a *lived* tradition. As Robert G. A. Gahl Jr. writes, MacIntyre's moral philosophy interweaves narrative, teleology, and anthropology so deeply that narrative becomes a constitutive genre of moral human flourishing<sup>17</sup>.

Yet no commentator I am aware of goes so far as to claim that MacIntyre, while constructing his arguments, is also attempting to *therapize* us<sup>18</sup>. This is surprising, since given his conviction that Western culture is corrupted by liberalism—a distorting influence that inevitably affects his readers—he would have every reason to operate as other traditions do when confronting dominant paradigms, as in feminism for example<sup>19</sup>.

Because anti-paradigmatic substantive positions are often either inaudible or distorted, the goal of theorizing cannot be separated from the goal of weakening the dominant paradigm. There is no good Marxist theorizing unaccompanied by the effort to diminish the cultural hold of capitalism, nor is there good feminist theorizing that does not address the residual influence of patriarchy. The same piece of writing can achieve both ends—offering sound theory while also therapizing us out of unhealthy paradigms—but this breaks with the idealised neutrality of scholarship, which assumes that any reader can understand and fairly evaluate the argument.

Now, does MacIntyre operate from a similar stance? It is not a secondary question that he should. The concept of paradigm is first and foremost a notion of *practical* philosophy, necessary for making sense of—and dealing with—the lived situation of being trapped within a hidden mentality or schema. The hope of freeing ourselves is the ultimate reason for postulating a field of general paradigm-based epistemology. MacIntyre, as it were, must help us abandon the unhealthy paradigm of liberalism; it would betray his own ideal of ethics as a practical philosophy if he did not.

17. Robert A. Gahl, Jr., “MacIntyre on Teleology, Narrative, and Human Flourishing: Towards a Thomistic Narrative Anthropology,” *Acta Philosophica* 28, no. 2 (2019): 279-296.

18. The closest to a claim that *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* is somewhat therapeutic as a book is to be found in the first part of the aforementioned Lear, Jonathan. “MacIntyre and Therapeutic Method.” In *Learning from MacIntyre*, edited by Ron Beadle & Geoff Moore, pp. 304-328. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2020.

19. Comparable uses of philosophical form as a vehicle of epistemic resistance are well attested in feminist and critical traditions. Sandra Harding (*Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* Cornell University Press, 1991) and bell hooks (*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge, 1994) explicitly describe method and narrative voice as tools to transform the reader's standpoint. In a more performative register, Luce Irigaray (*This Sex Which Is Not One*, Cornell University Press, 1985) and Theodor Adorno (*Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, Suhrkamp, 1951) make style itself a critique of dominant rationalities. In this sense, MacIntyre's use of lived narrative and moral exemplars can be seen as analogous: a rhetorical therapy meant to retrain moral perception deformed by liberal modernity.

I will show the paradigm-shifting techniques at work in *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* in the next sections. Here, I will make just a few remarks on his philosophical stance.

It would be naïve to expect purely neutral scholarship from MacIntyre. He has always had a conflictual relationship with academic philosophy. His friend and colleague Solomon has called him both *enfant terrible* (for his tireless criticism, referring to much of analytical philosophy as “intellectual backgammon”<sup>20</sup>) and perfect citizen of philosophy, meticulously fulfilling every scholarly duty—reading and reviewing every significant publication in his field<sup>21</sup>. His profound respect for any institution he joined prevented him from ever posing as a rebel, but he nevertheless had a collection of tricks up his sleeve.

Take, for instance, his systematic use of examples from everyday life and literature: it is more than good pedagogy—it is a necessity in a culture corrupted by liberalism. Granted, MacIntyre the practical philosopher believes ethical concepts should be derived from practical situations anyway. Yet, in a healthy cultural environment, a shared abstract ethical vocabulary would also be possible: people would understand what is meant by concepts such as duty, courage, or wisdom. Not so under the influence of liberal individualism, which distorts ethical language; hence the only hope is to extract sound ethical ideas anew from living examples—a procedure MacIntyre follows with as few exceptions as a surgeon washing his hands.

In his writings, he frequently acknowledges his shared predicament with thinkers struggling against dominant paradigms:

The problem has been that the characteristic habits of thought of modernity are such that they make it extremely difficult to think about modernity except in its own terms, terms that exclude application for those concepts most needed for radical critique. (*ECM* 132)

He also observes that Aristotelianism and Thomism have become inaudible under modern conditions:

The question therefore arises: What happened in Europe between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries that could account for this state of affairs? One answer often given to questions of this kind is that Aristotle's thought, and with it Aquinas's, had been intellectually defeated in the philosophical debates of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But in fact, so far as Aristotelian and Thomistic ethics and politics are concerned, there were few such systematic debates and those that did occur provide not even the beginning of an explanation for this kind of change or this degree of change.[...]The change that we need to explain therefore was not

20. Alasdair MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science,” *The Monist* 60, no. 4 (October 1977): 453–472, at 471.

<sup>21</sup>Solomon, David. “MacIntyre and Contemporary Moral Philosophy.” In Alasdair MacIntyre, edited by Mark C. Murphy, p. 115

primarily a matter of episodes in the history of philosophical theorizing, but rather one of large social dimensions, one whereby the irrelevance of Aquinas's thought to the everyday life and labors of plain people came to be almost, if not quite universally, taken for granted. Plain people and theorists alike came to understand their lives in terms which seemed to rule out any possibility of conversation with Aquinas. (ECM92)

I will go as far as to say that MacIntyre has a stronger than average, indeed quite radical, interpretation of the doctrine that theory is pointless without reshaping and retraining moral perception. His reluctance to articulate a detailed vision of a post-liberal, neo-Aristotelian society has long been a subject of critique among scholars: his prescriptions for a reformed social order remain notably vague<sup>22</sup>. Granted, from his theory of history and social practice, it certainly follows that the right political and legal configuration will have to emerge spontaneously. But this alone is insufficient reason for absolute silence, as a speculative *multiple-scenarios analysis* would certainly have been compatible with such a view.

This, I contend, is the real reason why he has never articulated—even in passing—the ideal organization or law of a neo-Aristotelian state (something that, one might have hoped, would be his final gift): because doing so would be pointless while liberal individualism still holds sway. If anti-paradigmatic ideas are distorted in general, then complex and speculative visions accumulating multiple inaudible ideas will be virtually unintelligible—the effect being cumulative. It is because of his paradigm-based epistemology that he chooses silence on the form of an ideal reformed state. It would have been like trying to explain *alien sociology*. This, in my opinion, is the only explanation that truly makes sense.

The field of MacIntyre studies should pay closer attention to the epistemological manoeuvring going on beneath the surface—beneath the calm and courteous tone of a philosopher who seems simply to be laying out his positive views. Much would be gained.

#### 4. COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING, GENEALOGY, AND RESENSITISATION TO THE VALUE OF UNITY IN LIFE

*Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* is a state-of-the-art attempt to help the reader snap out of liberal individualism. It is a masterpiece of philosophical methodology and style. There is more to uncover in the way MacIntyre does philosophy than in the positions he explicitly defends. It is not an easy read, because the process of paradigm shifting is cumbersome and difficult. One should not expect an inspiring book that vividly evokes a different, non-capitalist world or

22. Scialabba, George. "Convergence of Skepticism and Vision." *Village Voice*, March 19, 1982.

way of living. This is how paradigm shifting is often imagined, but not how it actually works. A better analogy would be going through a hard therapeutic process, or tedious Zen training toward enlightenment. As a consequence, it should be read very carefully, slowly, line by line. This is necessary to reap its effect. The quick-reading style of a trained philosopher, capable of seeing the point of a paragraph at a glance, will leave the reader unsatisfied, with a false impression of a somewhat redundant and poorly organised text.

The book is built around three paradigm-shifting techniques: cognitive reconstruction, genealogy, and resensitisation to the value of narrative unity and integration in life<sup>23</sup>.

#### *4.1 Cognitive reconstruction: the intricate book-length chess match between liberal individualism and neo-Aristotelianism*

Cognitive reconstruction is a reframing technique aimed at establishing a new, challenger interpretation of a given situation, even when the initial one is perceived as obvious. It proceeds by reconstructing the initial analysis step by step, making all basic assumptions explicit, as well as the intermediary steps of reasoning, while in parallel doing the same with the challenging interpretation—making the alternative background assumptions clear, and going over all aspects of the situation in detail, in order to show how the second perspective would deal with them.

We could imagine two friends discussing this over dinner: the first friend felt subtly humiliated by a third party throughout the evening, while the second had a different reading and saw only an encouraging sort of humour, coming from a loving place. They would go over everything said and done and how it could be interpreted either way, while articulating—or rather extracting—the most basic background assumptions of the two competing narratives. This technique is made more powerful by the frequent perspective-switching it involves. Assuming the second analysis is superior, by repeatedly “switching glasses,” the friend who initially felt humiliated will eventually snap out of that perspective and come to perceive only the well-intentioned humour.

Cognitive reconstruction is extensively relied upon in CBT<sup>24</sup>. It is effortful homework, if anything is. We should notice that even if the final switch does not

23. For the sake of simplicity, I refer to these strategies by the names they have in psychology (or in philosophy, in the case of genealogy), as the closest analogy to what MacIntyre does. It should be clear, however, that he developed his own version of them and is in no way accountable to cognitive therapy—a field whose insights he may have been receptive to, but which he never explicitly discusses in his writings. I see their subtle adaptation to philosophy as a strength; the alternative would have been a crude form of psychologism.

24. Clark, David A. & Beck, Aaron T. (2010). *Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders: Science and Practice*. New York: Guilford Press.



happen, a valuable by-product of the process is paradigmatic self-awareness: the subtle skill of clarifying the premises and structure of one's own perceptual paradigm.

MacIntyre builds the entire book around a reframing battle, except not over how to interpret jokes at dinner, but between civilisation-level philosophical paradigms: liberal modernity vs neo-Aristotelianism. The master plot of the book follows a hypothetical reflective agent who tries to make sense of her specific life situation either in the way of liberalism or in the way of Aristotelianism. Typically, the situations considered are prototypical life conflicts and prioritisation problems: should I take that job or not? Family or career? Or simply ordering a heterogeneous set of priorities.

Methodologically, every lesson our hypothetical agent learns is a step in the dialectic, and such steps should be counted on three different boards: how to make sense of life through liberal individualism; through neo-Aristotelianism; and the lessons yielded by comparing the two. This chess match extends over four chapters (the last one, on exemplar lives, has another function) and more than three hundred pages. Yet to gain the benefit the book has to offer, every single move should be understood and analysed, as in a real chess match. The moves differ in nature: some are presented in plain text by the author in his own voice, often within a couple of paragraphs; others are lessons our agent learns from authors, after extended discussions. The final difficulty for the reader is that the steps are not clearly labelled: they could have been numbered or given names (something like "the five major refinements in the expressivist interpretation"), but MacIntyre chose otherwise. This, I think, is a technique to force attentiveness from the reader, who must either be extremely attentive or lose the plot. Being fed a schematic summary would have deprived the reader of the cognitive effort needed for the paradigm switch. The book is deliberately made very difficult to summarise at any significant level of detail. The last major work of a great philosopher of the twentieth century justifies asking the reader for this level of effort.

#### *4.2 The core epiphanies: liberalism as «geological» authenticity, Me vs. Us, Fragmentation vs. Narrative Unity*

In the way of liberalism, the good solution to practical conflicts and dilemmas is to be found inside, in the agent's feelings and attitudes—a meta-ethical position known as expressivism. Starting with its least sophisticated version, the emotivism of Hume, several necessary refinements are considered. Which emotion or subjective stance should be trusted, since there are several conflicting ones? The first problem is correctly identifying one's own emotions, as shown by great

literature in general, and in particular by Lawrence's novels. Gerald, a character in *Women in Love*, only cares about fulfilment of social roles:

Was a miner a good miner? Then he was complete. Was a manager a good manager? That was enough. Gerald himself, who was responsible for all this industry, was he a good director? If he were, he had fulfilled his life. The rest was by-play. (*ECM*148)

This is not a life devoid of emotions, but full of unreliable ones. His entire personality was fake, a construction.

If ownership of emotions is established, the issue then becomes discovering which are the deepest and truest feelings—the ones with which we would identify. Through confrontation with Frankfurt, Nietzsche, and Bernard Williams, the position evolves toward a geological or archaeological conception of authenticity.

To illustrate the idea of depth and levels of viscosity of human attitudes and desire, I like to use the example of a spy: in spite of an intimate knowledge of the country of operation, after decades of duty—even a form of appreciation for it—the spy stays loyal to the mission and country of origin. There is no real contradiction at play, because the core patriotism is deeper, operating at a more visceral level, while the appreciation for the local culture and worldview, though sincere, is psychologically more superficial. Emotions can be fake, not our own's, completely inauthentic, and this is a first set, but, within the separate set of the authentic ones, we find a ranking in terms of depth. The key to knowing what to do in life is discovering our deepest tendencies and identities. Turn inside, look carefully, and go deep.

The challenging narrative, Aristotelianism, sees right action as what is objectively conducive to human flourishing, to developing human potential. Refinements of the position point progressively to the value of strong relationships and community if humans are to flourish. Loyalty and trust in others are non-negotiable, and friendship is one of the greatest values and resources in life. A healthy relational environment is necessary for the first formation and the ongoing functioning of sound practical rationality. Significant others are like our external brain in solving difficult problems: we should consult our friends—who, in some respects, know us better than ourselves—instead of turning inward, as suggested by depth- or archaeology-based authenticity.

*Me vs Us.* This, ultimately, seems to be what the confrontation revolves around. In the liberal authenticity paradigm, external influence is suspicious until proven otherwise. If it comes from outside, it is not my idea: it is social conditioning. Even when it is good—for example, meeting a successful and healthy friend—the idea of “influence” from others has an intrinsically negative, intrusive connotation. Liberalism defends a radical self-authorship ideal, while for Aristotelianism others are constitutive of a well-developed, flourishing individual.

The expressivist's history is a history of her herself, of this particular individual interacting with and learning from other individuals, but most importantly of how she responded in and to those interactions and of what she learned or failed to learn. What her social context provides is a setting for her actions and reactions. What the history of her relationships provides is insight into aspects of her history. It is a history that begins with her birth and ends with her death. She, if she recounts it, can justly say "This is my history." By contrast the NeoAristotelian's history is a history both of her and of those groups with whom she shares common goods and within which she pursues her individual good. It is a history of how the shared project of achieving those goods, the attainment of which constitutes human flourishing, came to inform each of their lives. Her history as an individual is adequately intelligible only as a part of that history, and so she will commonly speak of our history rather than of her history as my history. (*ECM*61)

Liberalism cannot but distort relationships, from the point of view of Aristotelianism. Take the example of friendship: the normative model of it in the West is based on profound, authentic compatibility among two persons. Both will have to be as authentic as possible, truly themselves, and, if they are compatible, they will be a good match. The problem is that we change and evolve in life, so this kind of authentic alignment will often be temporary. It is the usual scenario of friends during a season of life (school, college, a specific job) we then lose touch with, a situation fully normalised in the West. Now, this is a very weak conception of friendship: it is very stressful to anticipate such a low level of trust and mutual support in the long term, a stress that keep people in survival mode and inhibit growth and flourishing. Individualism would see the suggestion to stay close to your childhood friends as an obligation (why would I, if I don't feel like?), Aristotelianism would see it as establishing the baseline of a healthy emotional climate, unlocking the possibility for further growth. To have good friends one must be a good friend and to be a good friend requires that one have not only the qualities of reliability and dependability and the virtue of truthfulness, but also the two virtues of integrity and constancy, integrity, so that one's commitments do not vary from situation to situation, constancy, so that those commitments endure over time. (*ECM*313)

MacIntyre also emphasises a sense of narrative unity and integration in one's life as crucial for neo-Aristotelianism, as opposed to the fragmented life of modernity, based on the compartmentalisation of spheres (*ECM* 238-242). Progressive functional separation of domains of life, both socially and individually, is a hallmark of modernity. In the West, ethics is separated from aesthetics and politics; professional life is separated from personal life. We put everything into siloed categories.

I will comment on this opposition in a later section, as there is an issue here: fragmentation, while normative in the West, is a by-product, not a positive ideal in itself. Liberalism normalises but does not celebrate the beauty of fragmented lives,

while unity in life, on the side of Aristotelianism, is clearly an ideal. So, not factually but normatively, opposing fragmentation to unity is like comparing apples and oranges. It will be necessary, as I will try to show later, to reveal the real value behind fragmentation, within the logic of the liberal paradigm.

The process of cognitive reconstruction should leave the reader with the sense of an ongoing battle between liberal individualism and Aristotelianism on two fields: *me vs us*, and fragmented life vs narrative unity and integration.

### *4.3 The genealogy of modern morality*

Liberal individualism as a paradigm cannot work in isolation; it comes associated with a peculiar conception of morality that was born and grew with it. This is what MacIntyre calls the morality of modernity—the moral system that still permeates Western societies today. They work in tandem; they are Siamese twins. No search for paradigmatic self-awareness within our liberal culture will be complete without taking this into account. Accordingly, and in spite of having criticised many famous «genealogical thinkers» in previous writings, MacIntyre engages in his own genealogical account of the origin of our moral paradigm<sup>25</sup>.

Genealogical analyses are well established in philosophy and the humanities: the surprising realisation of exactly how and why we came to believe something can be enough to shake our instinctive certainty about it. In the complex structure of the book, this is a distinct section (chapter three), but every epiphany gained here still counts and is officially a move in the masterplan of the book: the ongoing three-board chess game where a hypothetical agent tries to make sense of, and then compare, liberalism and Aristotelianism.

What is really at issue here is the moral epistemology, or meta-ethics, inherited from the Enlightenment: the idea that there is either a universal moral sensibility (the Humean sentimentalist version), shared by all normal (not crazy, not extravagant) people, or universal principles (the Kantian rationalist version), accessible to every individual independently of society and culture. In the usual Enlightenment narrative, indoctrination, toxic environments, or merely traditional cultures can obstruct access to these fundamental human truths, but proper education can restore it.

25. MacIntyre offers a sustained critique of the genealogical method as employed by Nietzsche and Foucault. He appreciates its diagnostic power but stresses its inability to provide a coherent moral framework. See especially Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), chs. 5–6; and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), Introduction and Lecture II (“Genealogy”), 1–9, 35–68. For secondary discussion, see Kelvin Knight, *Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), ch. 7; and Ron Beadle, “MacIntyre and Foucault: After Virtue and Beyond,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 33, no. 1 (2007): 59–82.

The peculiar idea whose origin must be genealogically explained is the abstraction of ethics from local communities and socio-cultural context, best exemplified by the concept of universal human rights. In modern morality, the middleman of local community and social or professional context is cut off: the individual has direct access to a hypostatised, Platonic moral reality. MacIntyre thinks that only the emergence of the modern powerful state and extended capitalist market can explain how such a moral view was possible (*ECM* 124-29).

In the pre-modern era, the power of institutions and markets was insufficient to eliminate the dependence of every human being on local communities, making abstract ethical thinking impossible as the dominant cultural paradigm. Abstract ethical ideas existed in philosophy and in individualistic spiritual traditions, but their level of influence was insufficient. Until a couple of centuries ago—or less—the best plan for life, by a large margin, was to have powerful friends and family. Now the state and the market are powerful enough to grant rights to individuals. Rights granted by institutions existed before, but they were not backed by comparable power and would not have solidified into an objective moral realm.

If this explains why abstract moral universalism was even possible, why was it needed? It turns out that, by its own logic, the subjectivism of liberalism and individual authenticity needed bulwarks and guardrails to deal with the problem of crazy or dangerous preferences. What if someone's deepest truth is to be a paedophile—or to wish the destruction of the world, for that matter? This is not acceptable, because it is immoral. Morality functions as a containing force. And it has to be a morality directly accessible to the individual, since it polices deep individual tendencies. You need an inner moral voice to counter unacceptable inner revelations: the battlefield is inside. Individual liberalism could not have evolved without an abstract, individualistic morality (*ECM* 136-38).

But is modern morality playing its role effectively? Certainly not, according to MacIntyre. The proliferation of moral disagreement in the West gives the impression that moral debates can be traced to visceral differences in sensibility. Some people are pro-euthanasia, abortion, or animal rights; others are against.

Now, universal morality was supposed to be an arbiter among individual sensibilities. This is like admitting that the police is just another gang—a criminal organisation among others. Morality has become a personal taste among other personal preferences. A major contribution of the book is pointing out that the West does not trust its own morality—a theme clearly emerging in the critiques of morality by Oscar Wilde (art beyond morality, *ECM* 141-46) and Nietzsche (morality as resentment of the weak, *ECM* 41-48).

More exactly, MacIntyre diagnoses the following contradiction in Western culture (*ECM* 67-68): sometimes we believe in a universal morality as certainly as we believe that  $2+2=4$  (e.g. paedophilia is bad, women's rights are universal); other times we treat it as a matter of individual moral sensibility (e.g. end-of-life decisions, the ethics of hunting). It is not MacIntyre's terminology, but I think it

fits to say that modern morality is *postulatory*. It is more something we postulate to exist because, and when, we need it, than a phenomenon proven to be at work in a regular and consistent way.

## 5. THE IDEAL BEHIND FRAGMENTATION: AUTHENTICITY AS A CULTURE OF HYPERSPECIALIZATION

Switching paradigms of perception should yield a clear and concise grasp of what the previous reality was, in contrast with the new one — a limpid before/after comparison. When one breaks the spell of a toxic relationship, the past life must be recognized as unhealthy, and the new existence as what normality is supposed to look like. When we stop over-idealizing our student years as mythical — the only period when we felt truly alive — they should appear for what they really were: a phase of fun and low responsibility, without implying that subsequent stages of life cannot also be engaging.

MacIntyre's remarkably ambitious attempt to snap us out of liberal individualism as a perceptual paradigm meets this expectation on one count. There is a clear before/after opposition on the theme of *me* vs. *us*. Liberalism is obsessed with the individual: turning inward, digging deep, establishing who each of us really is at the core. It is all about *me*. Once the liberal spell is broken, life seems resolutely about *us*: trusting and cultivating good relationships and communities, loyalty, and high expectations for friendship.

There is, however, a further issue. MacIntyre also stresses a second crucial before/after opposition: fragmentation vs. narrative unity in life (*ECM* 238-242). He treats it as equally important as *me* vs. *us*. Yet the connection between fragmentation and liberalism is not made entirely clear. First, as already noticed above, he is comparing apples and oranges: fragmentation is not a positive ideal of liberalism but rather its byproduct, while the philosophical task is to compare two opposed conceptions of the good. Occasionally, one does find in Western contemporary art and literature a sort of delight in switching between multiple masks in everyday life. More often, though, compartmentalization is normalized but not promoted as a positive value. Still, the facts about fragmentation are well documented in psychology and sociology: we divide life into spheres, domains, compartments. But why? What is the point? Where does it come from? We lack a vivid sense.

At this juncture, while the rest of this paper presents *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* as I believe it should be objectively understood, I would like to add a personal idea, which I think is necessary for the paradigm shift out of liberalism to succeed. It is very much in the spirit of MacIntyre, and one might even consider it implied by his approach, but he never made it fully explicit.

The idea is this: individual authenticity — the ideal of turning inward, digging deep, and discovering who we really are — which MacIntyre shows to be the operative system, the core of liberalism, has evolved as a culture of hyper-specialization. It is actually an ideology of specialization. And this is precisely the kind of specialization that modernity, under the twin Leviathans of state and market, required to unprecedented degrees.

To see the connection, consider the geological-archaeological metaphor so central to the narrative of authenticity. We must dig deep to find ourselves. In digging, some layers are valuable for minerals, fossils, or artifacts, while others are trivial or worthless. There is a hierarchy among the useful layers, and then there are discards. In any case, all layers (even the important ones) are heterogeneous, formed at different times. A “core” is not a harmonious whole.

It is worth noting that coherence and priority are logically independent. In a system, some elements have priority (the heart is more important than the toes), but priority does not entail coherence. A television schedule may contain a few priority programs worth watching amid chaos. But there is an important difference between that example and coring: a schedule may or may not be consistent, but a core cannot be consistent in principle, since the layers formed at different times. Consistency between layers is ruled out.

The paradigm of authenticity rests on precisely this metaphor: authenticity sorts out the “valuable” layers of the self, discarding the inauthentic, the false, the superficial. It orders without coherence.

Thus, we are fragmented because we are supposedly a mixture of rubbish (social conditioning) and nuggets of gold (the pristine authentic self). The prescription? Discard the rubbish and build on the gold. In other words: specialize.

Take an example: someone who, of all aspects of life, really loves only dogs, cold climates, and computer programming. Everything else bores or repels him. He is the perfect fit for an IT job in Antarctica. A match made in heaven, true happiness. That is the logic of authenticity we are immersed in. Yet from a perspective where human life should be richer, fuller, and more integrated, this ideal of authenticity appears as an ideology designed to justify unhealthy specialization.

Authentic individuals, judged against the full range of human possibility, turn out to be extremely niche and specialized. They may pass through diverse experiences, but only a narrow set of passions and ways of being constitutes their “authentic self” and makes them feel fulfilled.

Interpreted as an ideology of existential hyper-specialization, authenticity is not only incompatible with coherence but actively conceals it. Its main function is to obscure the need for unity and fulfillment in life. Corporate modernity needs hyper-specialized existential profiles — which are incompatible with integrated lives — and authenticity provides the ideology to make that need disappear.

An interesting observation follows: in the Antarctic IT worker example, wouldn't the conclusion — to focus on just a few things (cold, computers, dogs) — also follow if the goal were simply maximizing pleasure? Here the logic of authenticity aligns with another axis of modern ethics, also discussed by MacIntyre: ethical hedonism, the pursuit of a pleasant life. Both are ordering principles without coherence. I can empirically identify which priorities give me the most pleasure, without weaving deeper connections or direction for my life. Hedonism thus turns out to be a surprising ally of authenticity.

We can now satisfactorily formulate the second before/after comparison in breaking out of liberalism. Not only *me* vs. *us*, but also individual specialization vs. narrative integration: hyper-specialized individuals versus the natural sense of unity, harmony, and coherence in life. Notice that being “specialized” or “finding your thing” is indeed a positive liberal ideal. We are no longer comparing apples and oranges.

### *5.1 The Final Epiphany: A Different Story of Modernity*

The process should now be complete. Let us recap the retrospective point of view of someone freed from the perceptual paradigm of liberal individualism. The following, or something like it, describes the stance a reader should have at the end of Chapter 4, if MacIntyre's hoped-for perceptual shift has taken place.

States (and institutional equivalents) and economies have existed for millennia. But until a few centuries ago, they were never powerful or intrusive enough to challenge the primacy of local communities and socio-professional contexts as determinants of human life. For most humans who ever lived, the best wish was to enjoy strong support from family, friends, and local ties. With modern technologies — especially information technology — the two Leviathans cut out the “middleman” of local community, forging a direct alliance with individuals. Thus were born the state-citizen and market-consumer relationships.

Abstract, universal philosophical doctrines and individualistic spiritual traditions did exist earlier, but until modern times they never shaped human life more than socially embedded traditions did. They remained marginal. With modernity, for the first time, a powerful abstract and universal Morality became directly accessible to each individual mind and heart, best exemplified by the doctrine of human rights.

Yet this came at a price: the state and market required varieties of highly specialized individuals, at levels never before seen in history. Out of this need emerged the ideology of authenticity: the inward search for a “true self,” which, by declaring most experiences and desires inauthentic or socially conditioned, justified loving and doing only a few things in life. It became the *de facto* ideology of specialization.



As a result, two forms of suffering characterize Western life — the two curses of modernity: a distorted sense of relationship and community, generating loneliness, isolation, or unhealthy bonds; fragmented, partial lives, lacking unity and integration. That, in brief, is what happened. The true story of modernity.

## 6. RESENSITISATION: THE BEAUTY OF UNITY AND INTEGRATION IN THE LIFE OF C.L.R. JAMES

After a paradigm shift, the new perspective is at first felt only faintly. This is an awkward and unstable predicament. The point of resensitisation is to strengthen the new paradigm: healthy paradigms, like any worldview, should always be cultivated and reinforced over time, since they can otherwise weaken through neglect. Resensitisation should therefore be seen as the first preliminary step in the process. If we draw an analogy between mind and body, it is comparable to physical rehabilitation, while later cultivation would be the equivalent of regular exercise in a healthy individual. In the book, this role is fulfilled by the fifth and final chapter, which tells the story of four exemplary lives.

These life narratives resensitise us to various aspects of the new neo-Aristotelian paradigm, with particular attention to correcting the two curses of modernity. To counter the liberal distortion of relationships and community, many episodes emphasise the value of friendship, strong commitments, loyalty, education, and growth within healthy local communities. To counter the fragmentation of modern lives, the chapter turns to examples of beautifully integrated lives.

The life of C. L. R. James belongs to this second category (*ECM* 273-295). James was a writer, cricket player and commentator, and a Marxist theorist and activist. Born in 1901 in Trinidad, he was active in his native country (then under British colonial rule), as well as in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Africa. His life shows a remarkable interconnection between these three spheres of activity, which he pursued with equal passion until his death—never treating any of them as just a youthful phase, a temporary obsession, or a stepping stone. His life was the opposite of the overly specialised careers we value so highly today. Let us point out a few of these connections.

On a practical level, as a gifted writer, James published novels and history books, became a prolific sports journalist specialising in cricket (after abandoning his own professional ambitions as a player), and produced pamphlets and Marxist theoretical essays.

Early in life he established a link between the values he encountered in the great English literature of his education in Trinidad and the ethos of cricket—a connection reinforced by his family and school environment. From this he developed a higher conception of the sport than was common at the time. He

reacted against the view of cricket as a mere hobby for the masses, a view espoused by his own mentor in sports journalism, Neville Cardus. James came to regard cricket as every bit as noble as the second subject Cardus wrote about for the *Manchester Guardian*: classical music.

From that moment onward, James applied the highest ethical standards he had developed in any one of his three spheres of activity to the others, always infused with a committed quest for excellence. Deeply involved in Trotskyism, to the point of personally meeting Trotsky in Mexico, James later criticised the movement's refusal to grant autonomy to grassroots black activists. Both his personal experience and his historical knowledge made him aware of the cultural specificity of black Marxist activism, which should not blindly follow top-down directives from the party.

In the aftermath of independence movements in Africa and the Caribbean during the 1960s, James shifted his criticism to the emerging pan-African movement. He saw it as creating new elites to replace the old colonial ones, instead of investing in education and fostering culturally adapted forms of democracy.

Viewed through the lens of modern morality, James's attitude might have appeared highly moralistic. One episode illustrates this. As a sports commentator, he was outraged by a basketball scandal in the United States, where athletes had accepted bribes to favour their colleges. His strong reaction surprised his American friends, who—even while conceding that he was right in principle—found him overly moralistic, like someone condemning a friend for shoplifting. What they failed to grasp was that James was operating within a different ethical paradigm. For him, a strong ethos of loyalty was inseparable from sport, as a turtle is inseparable from its shell. He was not thinking in modern terms of morality as something that polices and restrains desires. For James, sport made no sense at all without an ethos.

Equally, the connection he experienced between writing, sport, and activism was never a matter of a chosen project or a deliberate task. The natural osmosis among the three felt to him like an obvious, self-imposing fact.

The highest point of integration in his life was reached in writing his masterpiece, *Beyond a Boundary*, where he articulated and celebrated the ethics of sport—cricket in particular—as a necessary contribution to human flourishing and democracy. If such claims sound commonplace today, what James meant was in fact radical. Turning the principles of his own life into political philosophy, he argued that sport had played a major role in stabilising society since the nineteenth century. Revolutionary progressive movements such as Marxism, whose positive vision of the good life after capitalism was always blurred, undefined, or left at the level of common sense, had much to learn from it. Sport, he suggested, could provide the ethical compass the left was missing. This was a bold claim.

In writing an excellent book about sport and politics at once, James achieved an admirable unity in his life, becoming a role model. His trajectory resensitises us to the value of integration and harmony, a blind spot of liberal individualism—an anti-paradigmatic value that is virtually impossible to foster within the conceptual scheme of Western modernity, dominated as it is by authenticity understood as specialisation.

## 7. CLOSING REMARKS

What is the biggest limitation of MacIntyre's project?

The obvious skepticism—that, in spite of his best efforts, the perceptual shift out of and the liberation from modern liberalism will not, as a matter of fact, happen for most readers—is not really an issue. Even if the guidance offered by this paper to read and understand *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* in the right way were taken into account, the book might still fail. As he aptly noticed:

The problem has been that the characteristic habits of thought of modernity are such that they make it extremely difficult to think about modernity except in its own terms, terms that exclude application for those concepts most needed for radical critique. (*ECM* 132)

Nonetheless, the book clearly sets new standards, redefining the state of the art in this kind of philosophical endeavour. This is probably enough to qualify it as a masterpiece: there is progress in every tradition, and others can pick up from where he left. More than that, the simple fact of raising awareness of the seriousness of the problem, and of showing by such a complex attempt the level of sophistication needed to unstick us from the paradigm of liberal modernity, is invaluable. Even opponents, I think, should be impressed by the philosophical machinery he judged necessary to save us: they would owe him this form of adversarial respect.

Paradoxically, the real limitation is rather that MacIntyre always remained an academic philosopher. He has been many other things—an activist, a Marxist commentator—and as an academic philosopher he pushed the methodological boundaries of the field to the very limits, becoming wildly interdisciplinary, forcing the locks of abstraction that confine philosophy in the ivory tower by treating Ethics as practical philosophy. That is, a doctrine whose principles, once properly understood, must be relatable to real life agents, to common people. But he never abandoned the medium of academic philosophy.

Of course, lay people are asked to make some effort. He thought, rightly, that any agent who tries to do the right thing and to make sense of life must become, in some measure, a philosopher.

[...] on the view that I have begun to outline, rational enquiry into and consequent disagreement about what human flourishing consists in this or that set of circumstances is itself one of the marks of human flourishing. (*ECM*25)

Without this requirement, we fall into an intellectual populism that blurs the line between philosophy and sophistry, between good ideas and simply popular ones.

The weak link is rather this: a lay person who has, implicitly, become a philosopher, in order to benefit from his teaching should still be able to afford and complete several years of philosophical education to understand *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*. This is not realistic.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that MacIntyre should either have become himself a kind of public figure—a MacIntyrean intellectual able to mediate between academic philosophy and the public—or else have fostered a generation of such figures. It is a sad irony that he, of all people, as a former Marxist—well acquainted with the dialectic between intellectuals, political organisations, and common workers—failed at this task. But, and this is the hope left to us, nothing prevents it from happening in the future.

# MACINTYRE E LA RAZIONALITÀ NARRATIVA. COMPRENDERE L'AZIONE OLTRE L'INTENZIONE

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## **ABSTRACT**

This essay offers a reflection on the role of narrative in understanding human action, taking Alasdair MacIntyre's perspective as a key framework for rethinking the intelligibility of moral agency. Through a critical engagement with G.E.M. Anscombe and Stephen Brock, it highlights the epistemological function of narrative in accounting not only for explicit intentions, but also for the consequences of *praeter intentionem*, which often accompany human action. Far from being a mere interpretative tool, narrative emerges as the very structure within which action becomes intelligible, evaluable, and communicable. The narrative unity of moral life—rooted in historical and communal traditions—thus appears as a condition for genuine responsibility. The essay concludes by emphasizing the necessity of shared deliberation as a means to grasp the complexity of human motivation and to orient action toward the common good.

## **KEYWORDS**

Alasdair MacIntyre, G.E.M. Anscombe, Narrative, Intention, Practice, Theory of action

## **1. È LA VOSTRA NARRATIVA CHE MI INTERESSA: UNA ROADMAP PER LA COMPrensIONE DELL'AZIONE**

Your science is just a mass of collected data plastered together by makeshift theory - and all so incredibly simple, that it's scarcely worth bothering about. It's your fiction that interest me. Your studies of the interplay of human motives and emotions.<sup>1</sup>

La vostra scienza è soltanto una massa di dati raccolti alla bell'e meglio e incollati insieme da teorie improvvisate... tutte così incredibilmente semplici che non varrebbe quasi la pena di perdersi del tempo sopra. È la vostra narrativa che m'interessa. I vostri studi sulle emozioni e i moventi umani.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>I. Asimov, *Liar!*, in *Astounding Science Fiction*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 3, Maggio 1941, p.47.

<sup>2</sup>I. Asimov, *Bugiardo!*, trad. it. di V. Latronico in I. Asimov, *Io Robot*, Mondadori, Milano, 2018, pp.107-128.

Con queste parole il robot Herbie, in grado di leggere le menti umane, ma incapace di comprenderne la complessità, afferma la sua preferenza per le narrative umane. Il cervello positronico del robot, capace di un'inimmaginabile rapidità e complessità del pensiero, è attratto in modo specifico proprio da questo aspetto della realtà umana: Herbie desidera e chiede di leggere romanzi, «romanzi svenevoli» o «idiozie sentimentali» come vengono definite da uno degli ingegneri che lavora su di lui. Ed Herbie predilige le *fiction* e le *novels* non evidentemente per sensibilità o per l'emotività che suscitano (aspetti totalmente assenti nella mente del robot), ma proprio perché le narrative sono indispensabili per la comprensione dei «moventi umani» (*human motives*), argomento estremamente più interessante, per Herbie, di tutti i discorsi scientifici che gli ingegneri positronici cercano invano di intavolare con lui. Questa è la grande intuizione di Herbie (e di I. Asimov, suo ideatore).

Il presente saggio si propone di esplorare tale tesi, approfondendo il ruolo cruciale delle narrative non solo nella comprensione generale dell'azione umana, ma, in particolare, nel discernimento delle intenzioni e delle conseguenze *praeter intentionem*, fenomeni essenziali per la piena intelligibilità della pratica<sup>3</sup>. Verrà esaminato come la filosofia di Alasdair MacIntyre, profondamente intrisa di una prospettiva narrativa, si intersechi con contributi chiave sulla teoria dell'azione, come quelli di Elizabeth Anscombe e del tomismo, nell'interpretazione contemporanea di Stephen Brock, per offrire una comprensione più robusta della responsabilità e della razionalità pratica.

## 2. L'ETICA NARRATIVA DI ALASDAIR MACINTYRE: UNITÀ E INTELLIGIBILITÀ DELL'AZIONE

Il narrativismo, inteso come corrente della filosofia della storia angloamericana degli anni Sessanta, riconosce nella narrazione la chiave per spiegare le azioni umane, come ampiamente documentato da F. Cattaneo nel testo *Azione e narrazione*<sup>4</sup>, cui si rimanda per una visione completa e analitica del tema, specificatamente riguardo «lo statuto epistemologico della narrazione in quanto espressione di una forma della razionalità non riconducibile al paradigma nomologico-deduttivo»<sup>5</sup>. Il narrativismo, nelle sue diverse formulazioni, esplora il nesso tra *azione* e *narrazione*, individuando nella narrazione la spiegazione delle

<sup>3</sup> Il termine “pratica” ha una accezione molto precisa nel discorso di MacIntyre, che verrà esplicitata nel percorso espositivo. In questaprima parte del testo, con il termine “pratica” sifa, invece, riferimentogenericamente alla dimensione dell'agire propriamente umano (azioni che concorrono a formare una condotta).

<sup>4</sup> F. Cattaneo, *Azione e narrazione. Percorsi del narrativismo contemporaneo*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2008.

<sup>5</sup> F. Cattaneo, *Etica e narrazione. Il contributo del narrativismo contemporaneo*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2011, p.XIII.

azioni umane – proprio come suggerito dal robot Herbie – ma anche mettendo a tema il narrare come azione poietico-retorica, ed interrogandosi sulla relazione tra azione narrata e atto del narrare, al fine di «indagare le implicazioni ontologiche della continuità tra le narrazioni storiche e le azioni che vi sono rappresentate»<sup>6</sup>. Il nesso tra narrazione ed azione si approfondisce poi nell'ambito specificamente *pratico-etico*, come ulteriormente indagato nel testo, della medesima autrice, *Etica e narrazione*<sup>7</sup>, che si rivolge al significato antropologico della narrazione, al fine di «esplorarne il ruolo etico»<sup>8</sup>.

In questo contesto, Alasdair MacIntyre emerge come una figura centrale, la cui opera può essere qualificata come una etica narrativa<sup>9</sup>, sia per la centralità che egli attribuisce al concetto di narrazione, sia per il suo stesso utilizzo della narrazione come metodo di ricerca. Già nel 1957, con *What Morality Is Not*<sup>10</sup>, MacIntyre evidenzia come l'individuo in difficoltà di fronte a una crisi morale, per tentare di comprendere e superare detta crisi trovi un primo punto di riferimento nei miti, nelle storie a sfondo religioso, che esprimono asserzioni fattuali e prescrizioni morali. Qui, nel legame con la divinità e la totalità, emerge una dimensione teleologica dell'agire, una prima riflessione sul ruolo di quelle narrative intese come «miscugli di teoria e prassi incarnati in una storia sociale – la storia tipica delle comunità tradizionali –, che sviluppano determinate esperienze, singolari e collettive, e danno origine a forme culturali espresse in narrazioni tradizionali»<sup>11</sup>. Successivamente, nel saggio *Epistemological Crisis, Dramatic Narrative and the Phenomenology of the Self*<sup>12</sup>, MacIntyre consolida questa

<sup>6</sup> *Ivi*, pp.XIII-XIV. In relazione allo sviluppo internazionale e più recente del narrativismo etico, oltre ai contributi di Francesca Cattaneo, si evidenzia una significativa produzione che approfondisce le tematiche legate alla narrazione e alla memoria. Si faccia riferimento, per esempio, a: G. Maddalena, *Filosofia del gesto, un nuovo uso per pratiche antiche*, Carrocci, Roma 2021; A.J.Rasmussen, M. Sodemann, (Eds.) *Narrative Medicine: Trauma and Ethics*, Vernon Press, Delaware 2024; A.Ganteau, E.Onega, *The Ethics of (In-)Attention in Contemporary Anglophone Narrative*, Routledge, London, 2025; E.Falke, E.Fareld, K.Meretoja, *Interpreting Violence: Narrative, Ethics and Hermeneutics*, Routledge, London 2024; J.Lothe, *Memory and Narrative Ethics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2025.

<sup>7</sup> F. Cattaneo, *Etica e narrazione*, cit.

<sup>8</sup> *Ivi*, p.XIV. Sul medesimo tema si veda anche S. Pierosara, *Differenze e narrazione. Per un universale etico condiviso*, ETS, Pisa 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. anche T.Angier, *MacIntyre's After Virtue at 40*, Cambridge University Press 2024, in particolare *Part III After Virtue and Narrative*, pp.143-200; R. Beadle, G.Moore, *Learning from MacIntyre*, Pickwick, Eugene, Oregon 2020.

<sup>10</sup> A. MacIntyre, *What Morality Is Not*, contenuto in A. MacIntyre, *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essay in Ideology and Philosophy*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1978, pp.96-108.

<sup>11</sup> M. D'Avenia, *L'etica del bene condiviso. La teoria dell'intellegibilità sociale dell'azione di Alasdair MacIntyre e la sua critica alle società liberali*, in G. Delle Fratte (a cura di) *Concezioni del bene e teoria della giustizia*, Armando, Roma 1995, p.172.

<sup>12</sup> In *The Monist*, LX (4), ottobre 1977, pp.453-72, trad. it. in S. Maletta, *Biografia della ragione*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2007, pp.91-112.

visione, affermando che ogni crisi morale è anche una crisi epistemologica. Il progresso epistemologico, secondo MacIntyre, consiste nella ricostruzione di narrative sempre più adeguate, capaci di spiegare i limiti della tradizione precedente e proporre soluzioni alla crisi. In questa prospettiva, la vita umana e le tradizioni sono intrinsecamente narrative, e la ragione scientifica è subordinata alla ragione storica, trovando solo in essa le proprie condizioni di intelligibilità<sup>13</sup>. Nel successivo, e fortunatissimo, *Dopo la virtù*<sup>14</sup> MacIntyre riafferma la struttura narrativa dell'esistenza umana come principio di unità, in netta contrapposizione alla frammentazione emotivista dell'identità moderna<sup>15</sup>. MacIntyre stabilisce un nesso inscindibile tra narrazione e spiegazione attraverso il concetto di intelligibilità narrativa: «il chiedere e fornire spiegazioni svolge [...] un ruolo importante nella costituzione delle narrazioni. Chiederti che cosa hai fatto e perché, dire che cosa ho fatto e perché, soppesare le differenze fra la tua e la mia interpretazione di ciò che ho fatto e viceversa, queste sono componenti essenziali di tutte le narrazioni»<sup>16</sup>. Comprendere un'azione significa collocarla in una sequenza narrativa, riconoscendo le intenzioni a breve e lungo termine dell'agente. Non si tratta di applicare una forma estrinseca alla vita, ma di riconoscere che «è impossibile caratterizzare il comportamento umano a prescindere dalle intenzioni»<sup>17</sup>.

La narrazione, come aveva intuito Herbie, non ha a che fare con i romanzi svenevoli: è la via maestra per comprendere i moventi umani.

### 3. NARRATIVE E NARRAZIONI: TRA TRADIZIONE E RESPONSABILITÀ

Attribuendo l'intelligibilità di un'azione alla sua collocazione entro una sequenza narrativa, MacIntyre lega la natura narrativa dell'esistenza umana alla teleologicità e alla responsabilità: ogni individuo agisce in vista di un futuro desiderato o paventato, ed è chiamato a rispondere delle proprie azioni<sup>18</sup>. La costruzione delle narrazioni avviene proprio in un continuo chiedere e fornire spiegazioni. In questo senso, un aspetto cruciale per la comprensione è la collocazione dell'individuo entro una o più tradizioni, che fungono da contesto

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. *ivi*.

<sup>14</sup> A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1981, trad. it. di P. Capriolo, *Dopo la virtù. Saggio di teoria morale*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1988.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. S. Maletta, *Biografia della ragione*, cit.

<sup>16</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit. pp.260-61.

<sup>17</sup> S. Maletta, *Biografia della ragione*, cit., p.18.

<sup>18</sup> «Non esiste presente che non sia informato dall'immagine di un qualche futuro, e da un'immagine del futuro che compare sempre nella forma di un *telos* (o di una molteplicità di fini e di mete) verso cui ci dirigiamo o manchiamo di dirigerci nel presente» (A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., pp.257-58).



per le intenzioni. La consapevolezza delle tradizioni è indispensabile per l'intelligibilità delle intenzioni, senza che ciò implichi una sudditanza imprescindibile dalla tradizione in cui ci si trova inseriti<sup>19</sup>. Nonostante MacIntyre non operi nei suoi testi una esplicita distinzione lessicale, possiamo concettualmente distinguere, nel suo discorso, tra “narrative” (ereditate e agite) e “narrazioni” (caratterizzate da appropriazione critica e inventiva), sottolineando che le tradizioni si possono collocare in ciascuna delle due prospettive. Una tradizione vivente è dunque «una discussione che si estende nella storia e si incarna nella società, una discussione che verte sui valori stessi della tradizione. [...] Perciò la ricerca del proprio bene personale da parte dell'individuo è condotta generalmente e tipicamente in un contesto determinato da quelle tradizioni di cui la vita dell'individuo fa parte, e questo vale sia per i valori interni alle pratiche<sup>20</sup> sia per i valori di una singola vita. [...] la storia della vita di ciascuno di noi è generalmente e tipicamente inserita nelle storie più vaste e più lunghe di una molteplicità di tradizioni, ed è resa intelligibile soltanto in base ad esse»<sup>21</sup>. La storia della vita di ciascuno è inserita in storie più vaste di molteplici tradizioni, e solo in base ad esse è intelligibile.

La funzione epistemologica della narrazione viene ulteriormente approfondita in opere successive come *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*<sup>22</sup>, *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues*<sup>23</sup> e *Three Rival Versions of*

<sup>19</sup> Come ben sintetizza Maletta: «la ricerca del bene, l'individuazione e la specificazione del *telos* avviene, infatti, tramite il confronto critico con la concezione tradizionale e il superamento inventivo delle limitazioni morali tradizionali [...] Passato, presente e futuro non sono dimensioni oggettivamente contigue nel tempo, bensì dimensioni esistenziali che si intrecciano nel perenne tentativo umano di comprendere e determinare sé, cogliendo “quelle possibilità future che il passato ha messo a disposizione nel presente”. E questo vale sia per l'esistenza individuale che per quella comunitaria» in S. Maletta, *Biografia della ragione*, cit., p.19.

<sup>20</sup> Il concetto di pratica, vero e proprio pilastro dell'etica delle virtù, viene definito da MacIntyre come «qualsiasi forma coerente e complessa di attività umana cooperativa socialmente stabilita, mediante la quale i valori insiti in tale forma di attività vengono realizzati nel corso del tentativo di raggiungere quei modelli che pertengono ad essa e parzialmente la definiscono» (*Dopo la virtù*, cit., p.225). Si tratta di un'attività umana strutturata che richiede abilità e impegno, una tradizione di regole condivise e finalizzata al conseguimento di un *bene interno*. Giocare agli scacchi solo in vista della vittoria non può essere considerata una pratica, ma dedicarsi agli scacchi per migliorarne la comprensione, padroneggiarne tattiche complesse e onorare la tradizione del gioco (*beni interni*) sì. In questo senso le *narrative* – e in particolare le narrative degli altri – ricoprono un ruolo cruciale nella comprensione da parte dell'individuo del suo proprio agire orientato al *bene* (che si tratti del bene interno di una specifica pratica, quanto del suo proprio bene *in quanto essere umano*). Il generico agire umano, fin qui considerato, si specifica così nell'agire umano intenzionale, teleologicamente orientato al raggiungimento di *un* bene (tra gli operabili) e *del* bene dell'essere umano in quanto tale.

<sup>21</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., pp.265-66.

<sup>22</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1988, trad. it. di C. Calabi, *Giustizia e Razionalità*, Anabasi, Milano 1995.

<sup>23</sup> A. MacIntyre, *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues* Marquette University Press, Milwaukee 1990.

*Moral Enquiry*<sup>24</sup>. Qui, la capacità di nuova narrazione di rendere conto della crisi di una tradizione morale, fornendo un resoconto del dibattito e proponendo una soluzione soddisfacente, dimostra la superiorità e la verità di quella tradizione. MacIntyre adotta infatti una concezione tomistica della verità come «adeguazione della mente ai propri oggetti»<sup>25</sup>. Quando le credenze ereditate si rivelano false, emerge la necessità di una nuova cornice tradizionale: questo adeguamento della vecchia tradizione, nel superamento degli elementi di falsità emersi, diviene una nuova cornice tradizionale, che può essere considerata *vera* spiegando e superando la mancata corrispondenza precedente<sup>26</sup>. Dal momento che solo una concezione della verità come qualcosa di «*indipendente rispetto alla narrazione delle rivali tradizioni di ricerca* e, allo stesso tempo, *esprimibile esclusivamente in asserzioni o dottrine interne ad una qualche tradizione*»<sup>27</sup> può fornire un criterio di valutazione delle narrazioni stesse, la cornice aristotelico-tomista diviene indispensabile per comprendere l'autentico spessore teoretico, oltre che pratico, della narrazione.

La struttura narrativa dell'esistenza umana, individuale e comunitaria, dipende dunque dalla capacità umana di rendere conto di sé, ovvero dalla razionalità che unifica passato e futuro. L'esistenza individuale è comprensibile così come unità ordinata teleologicamente, e la sua continuità consiste nell'unità di una ricerca della propria stessa natura e del proprio bene<sup>28</sup>. Il concetto di identità personale, dunque, per MacIntyre fa riferimento all'identità di corpi che «acquistano il loro significato soltanto in quanto corpi di agenti responsabili, capaci di intendere le loro vite come un tutto unitario. [...] Ogni vita particolare, presa nel suo svolgersi globale, consiste delle sue singole parti, di quell'ambito di azioni particolari, operazioni e progetti che *sono* la narrativa in atto di quella vita, e si dà in quanto vita di quel particolare corpo»<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> A. MacIntyre *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1990, trad. it. di A. Borchese e M. D'Avenia, *Enciclopedia, genealogia e tradizione. Tre versioni rivali di ricerca morale*, Massimo, Milano 1993.

<sup>25</sup> S. Maletta, *Biografia della ragione*, cit., p.20.

<sup>26</sup> «Conseguenza di tale dottrina della verità è il rifiuto del criterio cartesiano dell'evidenza per giudicare la verità delle rappresentazioni in quanto esso è incapace di giustificarsi. L'unico test che possa giustificare la verità è la *sfida dialettica* [...] tra teorie generali e tradizioni di ricerca rivali, all'interno di cui le singole verità vengono giustificate non solo dal fatto che le credenze e le aspettative da essa generate non siano smentite, ma anche dalla loro coerenza con l'intero impianto teorico uscito vincitore dalla sfida dialettica con teorie rivali» (Ivi, pp.20-21).

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p.22.

<sup>28</sup> «La scoperta della verità sulla mia vita, che è parte indispensabile del mio bene. Da questa prospettiva la mia vita rivela l'unità di una storia che ha un inizio, uno svolgimento e una fine, che comincia con la nascita e termina, per quanto concerne il giudizio finale pronunciato su di essa – riguardo alla realizzazione del mio bene – con la morte» (A. MacIntyre, *Enciclopedia, genealogia, tradizione*, cit., p.275).

<sup>29</sup> Ivi, pp.275-76. È in un testo successivo, *Animali razionali dipendenti*, che MacIntyre metterà a tema la ricerca della *vita buona* dell'essere umano in quanto «corpo animato che realizza operazioni

#### 4. NARRAZIONE E RICERCA MORALE: IL CARATTERE STORICO E LA TELEOLOGIA

L'analisi di MacIntyre si innesta in un recupero della filosofia pratica aristotelica – nell'approfondimento della teoria dell'azione – che si salda con «il rinnovato interesse per la storia caratteristico della filosofia postanalitica statunitense»<sup>30</sup>. Egli sostiene che le filosofie morali sono articolazioni esplicite di morali particolari, e per questo la storia della morale e quella della filosofia morale sono indissolubilmente legate<sup>31</sup>. Non si mira a una teoria perfetta, ma alla «migliore teoria formulata sinora su che tipo di teoria debba essere la migliore teoria formulata sinora: nulla di più, ma anche nulla di meno»<sup>32</sup>. Non si tratta di un depotenziamento dell'esigenza di verità, che in MacIntyre assume un'accezione forte, sostantiva: «si contribuisce alla dialettica fra tradizioni non soltanto perché ci si pone come obiettivo la coerenza di una teoria o il superamento di un conflitto che ha assunto una determinata configurazione storica [...], ma perché c'è una domanda sulla verità – e in particolare sul bene – che, riproponendosi a tutti, sostiene la continuità dell'impresa del darle risposta»<sup>33</sup>. Il concetto di unità narrativa della vita come un tutto poggia su una teoria dell'azione che individua come condizione di intellegibilità il riferimento alle intenzioni, e dunque a quel *telos* in vista del quale le azioni si formulano e si ordinano – proprio quei moventi umaniche il robot Herbie ricerca nelle *fiction* e nelle *novels*. Questa intelligibilità narrativa è considerata la sola capace di soddisfare il requisito contestuale che rende davvero intellegibile una sequenza di azioni. Tuttavia, MacIntyre stesso riconosce in *Dopo la virtù* una problematica: l'unità narrativa rischia di essere troppo diffusa per discriminare tra la vita buona e ciò che non lo è<sup>34</sup>. Per rispondere alla domanda *cosa devo fare?* non basta identificare il proprio ruolo

diverse informate di razionalità» la cui *vulnerabilità* è condizione indispensabile per «comprenderse stesso e gli altri e per realizzare la vita buona (cfr. A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals, Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Open Court, Chicago, 1999, trad. it. di M. D'Avenia, *Animali Razionali Dipendenti. Perché gli uomini hanno bisogno delle virtù*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2001; le citazioni sono tratte dalla Presentazione di M. D'Avenia, pag. XIII).

<sup>30</sup>F. Cattaneo, *Etica e narrazione*, cit., p.39. Cfr. anche F. Restaino, *Filosofia e post-filosofia in America: Rorty, Berenstein, MacIntyre*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1990.

<sup>31</sup>Cfr. A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., *passim*.

<sup>32</sup>*Ivi*, p.321.

<sup>33</sup>F. Cattaneo, *Etica e narrazione*, cit., p.44.

<sup>34</sup>In *Dopo la virtù* resta aperta la problematica evidenziata da Allegra, insieme a Schneewind e Gregory Jones: l'unità narrativa rischia di divenire «proprietà tanto diffusa quanto irrilevante, al fine di discriminare tra la vita buona e ciò che non lo è» (F. Cattaneo, *Etica e narrazione*, cit., p.47), proprio in quanto MacIntyre tenta di «ripristinare l'idea aristotelica di *telos* a prescindere dall'idea di "natura" metafisicamente fondata e rimpiazzandola con una concezione storicistica che enfatizza la dipendenza del *telos*, inteso come "funzione sociale", dal contesto storico-culturale» (Ivi, p.49). Un tentativo insoddisfacente per lo stesso MacIntyre, che già in *Dopo la virtù* indica un'eccedenza del *telos* morale, in vista del quale non basta l'identificazione della storia o delle storie di cui l'attore morale fa parte.

storico, ma occorre un riferimento ulteriore: «“che cosa è bene per me?” e “che cosa è il bene per l’uomo?” sono le domande che forniscono unità alla vita morale»<sup>35</sup>.

In *Animali razionali dipendenti*, MacIntyre opera una correzione al suo tentativo di «dar conto del ruolo delle virtù, intese come Aristotele le aveva comprese, all’interno di pratiche sociali, vite di soggetti individuali e vite di comunità, cercando di realizzare tale compito per una via diversa da quella che allora definivo la “metafisica biologica” di Aristotele»<sup>36</sup>. Si impone quindi la necessità di integrare l’etica con la biologia, poiché «nessuna teoria dei beni, delle regole e delle virtù che sia decisiva per la nostra vita morale può essere adeguata fintantoché non spieghi come esseri biologicamente strutturati come noi possano vivere tale vita, rendendoci perspicuo il modo in cui avviene il nostro sviluppo all’interno di una tale forma di vita e nella direzione del suo compimento»<sup>37</sup>. Nell’ambito di questa ricerca, caratteristiche come la vulnerabilità, la sofferenza e la dipendenza dagli altri emergono come condizioni centrali della condizione umana, spesso trascurate dalla filosofia. Il bisogno di altri si esplicita, dunque, non solo nelle necessità biologiche, ma anche – e significativamente – nell’esigenza di imparare a comprendere noi stessi come autori di ragionamenti pratici sui beni, imparando a prendere le distanze dai nostri desideri puntuali e a formulare giudizi indipendenti<sup>38</sup>. Siamo inseriti in «reti di relazioni di dare e ricevere» in cui «il bene di ciascuno non può essere perseguito senza perseguire anche il bene di tutti coloro che partecipano di tali relazioni»<sup>39</sup>.

## 5. IL CARTELLO GIUSTO: L’ETICA NEI CONFLITTI DELLA MODERNITÀ

<sup>35</sup> Cfr. A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, p.261.

<sup>36</sup> Si tratta di una svolta radicale: «sono adesso persuaso che mi ingannavo quando supponevo che fosse possibile formulare un’etica indipendentemente dalla biologia» (A. MacIntyre, *Animali razionali dipendenti*, cit., p.XXII). A partire da questa consapevolezza, nello sviluppo del testo, MacIntyre delinea ulteriormente il concetto di pratica, tracciandone la base antropologica individuando – a partire dal recupero della dimensione della fragilità e vulnerabilità umana – la radice ultima dell’agire del soggetto nell’orientamento teleologico in vista del bene dell’individuo *in quanto essere umano* (appartenente cioè alla specie umana).

<sup>37</sup> *Ivi*, p.XXII.

<sup>38</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, p.67. Questo bisogno degli altri, come si vedrà, ha un ruolo cruciale proprio nella capacità di sviluppare una narrativa su di sé, e, di conseguenza, nella comprensione del proprio agire.

<sup>39</sup> *Ivi*, p.105. L’intellegibilità dell’agire umano dipende, dunque, anche dalla partecipazione del soggetto a tali reti di relazioni di dare e ricevere, all’interno delle quali avviene uno scambio virtuoso circa ciò che è necessario al vivere, ma anche – e forse soprattutto – un luogo dove accogliere e condividere narrative e narrazioni, imparando a giudicare criticamente sia le tradizioni in cui ci si trova inseriti, sia il proprio individuale punto di vista.

Proprio con alcune questioni filosofiche su «desideri, beni e “buono”» si apre il primo capitolo di *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*<sup>40</sup>, un testo che di fronte alle domande poste «sui nostri desideri e su come dovremmo concepirli»<sup>41</sup> si pone come cartello segnalatore, entro la tempesta del conflitto che imperversa nell'oceano dell'esperienza quotidiana, tra l'etica-dello-stato-e-del-mercato e la Moralità della modernità<sup>42</sup>. La zattera dell'espressivismo – che MacIntyre concepisce come critica sovversiva della Moralità – pur riconsegnando ai desideri (al plurale) dell'individuo il ruolo principale nell'ambito della modernità, presenta delle falle che impediscono la salvezza (*l'euzen*, una vita buona). Gli espressivisti, infatti non hanno riconosciuto che i giudizi valutativi e normativi «possono dare espressione alle propensioni e ai sentimenti di agenti moralmente educati solo perché dirigono questi agenti verso ciò che hanno imparato a comprendere come i loro beni e il loro bene [...] Tali giudizi hanno la capacità di motivare solo perché essi sono considerati verità che concernono questioni di fatto»<sup>43</sup>, non meri stati d'animo. La falla dell'espressivismo ha molto a che fare con il suo nominalismo e, ultimamente, con l'implicita negazione pratica del principio di non contraddizione. L'espressivismo, conclude MacIntyre, non è in grado di fornire un resoconto appropriato della gamma di motivazioni possibili per la scelta razionale, in quanto l'esperienza eccede la descrizione espressivista dei motivi per agire che spingono l'agente razionale all'azione effettiva. Gli agenti razionali si trovano spesso di fronte a desideri confliggenti, nella necessità di dover «diventare consapevoli di cosa vogliono e perché lo vogliono. Devono riconoscere come le conseguenze di scegliere questa o quella alternativa possono alterare i loro desideri presenti. Devono pensare alle implicazioni delle loro scelte per gli altri, specialmente per coloro che sono loro vicini e anche a quanto e perché stiano loro stiano a cuore e debbano stare loro a cuore queste implicazioni. Essi necessitano, in altre parole, di un tipo di conoscenza di sé che è spesso difficile e talvolta impossibile raggiungere senza l'aiuto di altri che li conoscono bene, come risultato di aver interagito con loro per periodi prolungati di tempo. Anche in questo caso possono aver bisogno di consultarsi con altre persone rilevanti»<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical reasoning and Narrative*, Cambridge University Press 2016, trad.it. S. Maletta, D. Mazzola e D. Simoncelli, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, Mimesis, Milano 2024.

<sup>41</sup> *Ivi*, p.39.

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, cap. III “Moralità e modernità”, in particolare pp.198-204. MacIntyre descrive questo capitolo come «un resoconto storico e sociologico, sebbene scarno e scheletrico, degli aspetti centrali delle strutture sociali e della vita sociale della modernità avanzata, nel corso della quale la moralità ha assunto un aspetto nuovo e peculiare e dalla quale è emersa l'attuale forma di opposizione tra le due posizioni filosofiche [espressivismo ed un certo tipo di aristotelismo] che ho discusso nel primo capitolo» (*Ivi*, p.41).

<sup>43</sup> *Ivi*, p.218.

<sup>44</sup> *Ivi*, p.243.

Ne consegue che le scelte di un agente dipendono in modo significativo «dalla natura delle relazioni sociali di quell'agente»<sup>45</sup>, relazioni che gli permettono di vedersi con gli occhi degli altri, e conoscere così meglio se stesso e i propri desideri. Proprio in questa direzione MacIntyre si ripropone, nel quarto capitolo de *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, di «sviluppare in termini aristotelici e tomisti la tesi riguardo alle connessioni tra da un lato i desideri, l'attività deliberativa e il ragionamento pratico di un agente e dall'altro le relazioni sociali dell'agente stesso»<sup>46</sup>.

Il neoaristotelismo di stampo tomista si rivela qui necessario proprio perché si tratta di una teoria che ha una maggior tenuta: la scialuppa neoaristotelica è in grado di affrontare meglio la traversata<sup>47</sup>, pur tra le mareggiate dei conflitti della modernità. Con un'anticipazione: la comprensione dei moventi umani, proprio come aveva affermato Herbie, avrà la forma di una narrativa e di «un tipo di narrativa che presuppone una concezione neoaristotelica dell'attività umana»<sup>48</sup>.

## 6. INTENZIONE: LA PROSPETTIVA NARRATIVA DI MACINTYRE E G.E.M ANSCOMBE

Entro la tradizione neoaristotelica, l'azione è definita come il termine di un ragionamento pratico che risponde alla domanda *perché hai agito come hai agito?*, facendo riferimento all'intenzione. Noi «comprendiamo in termini narrativi sia le vicissitudini dei nostri desideri sia lo svolgimento e i risultati del nostro ragionamento pratico»<sup>49</sup>. Per questo, è indispensabile, come anche MacIntyre fa<sup>50</sup>, rivolgersi a G.E.M. Anscombe e alla sua analisi del concetto di intenzione<sup>51</sup>.

Anscombe colma una lacuna del pensiero aristotelico riguardo all'azione umana, specialmente nei casi in cui un'azione contraddice le convinzioni dell'agente: nei casi in cui si verificano situazioni di questo tipo, Aristotele è costretto a parlare di fraintendimenti a livello delle premesse particolari del

<sup>45</sup> *Ivi*, p.247.

<sup>46</sup> *Ivi*, p.250.

<sup>47</sup> Si tratta del fine ultimo della ricerca di MacIntyre: «comprendere più adeguatamente la parte che i nostri desideri e il nostro ragionamento pratico giocano nelle nostre vite e nel loro andare bene o male» (*Ivi*, p.251).

<sup>48</sup> *Ivi*, p.251.

<sup>49</sup> *Ivi*, p.348.

<sup>50</sup> In particolare, MacIntyre in *Dopo la virtù*(cit., p.72) fa riferimento a *Modern Moral Philosophy*, in *Philosophy*, 33, 1958, pp.1-19, trad. it. di E. Monteleone, *La filosofia morale moderna*, in J.A. Mercado (a cura di), *Elisabeth Anscombe e il rinnovamento della psicologia morale*, Armando, Roma 2010, pp.19-41. In *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità* MacIntyre invece cita G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, Basil Blackwell, London, 1957, trad.it. di C. Sagliani, *Intenzione*, Edizione Università della Santa Croce, Roma2004.

<sup>51</sup> Per questo paragrafo si fa riferimento a C. Sagliani, «Saggio introduttivo», in *Intenzione*, cit., pp.7-21.

ragionamento pratico, oppure di un fallimento nel trarre conclusioni da premesse conosciute con chiarezza. Sembrerebbe, infatti, che se un'azione *x* risulta la conclusione corretta di un ragionamento pratico compiuto, ed è un'azione che è possibile compiere, allora l'azione *x* *deve* essere compiuta, a meno di un qualcosa che sia impedimento all'azione. Questo qualcosa, però, può rivelarsi il desiderio – *ἐπιθυμία* – contrario sperimentato dall'agente razionale stesso, ed è proprio qui che si colloca l'analisi del concetto di intenzione. Per Anscombe, un'azione intenzionale è quella per la quale, rispondendo alla domanda *perché l'hai fatto?*, l'agente menziona una ragione per agire. Ma, per definire una *ragione per agire* senza scomodare concetti controversi (come causalità, volontà, ecc.), Anscombe procede per negazione, andando ad evidenziare le circostanze in cui la domanda precedente risulti inapplicabile, come nel caso in cui l'agente non sia consapevole di stare compiendo l'azione in questione<sup>52</sup>. È in questo senso che viene introdotta la nozione della classe di cose che l'agente conosce “senza osservazione”, una classe che esclude tutte le circostanze di inapplicabilità della domanda “perché?”. Per conoscere la propria intenzione, espressione del *telos* dell'agire, l'agente si rivolge alla propria azione intenzionale senza osservazione: io faccio quel che accade, secondo la descrizione dell'azione fatta senza osservazione<sup>53</sup>.

Tuttavia, MacIntyre suggerisce una cruciale integrazione: «il concetto di “una” azione, pur rivestendo la massima importanza pratica, è sempre un'astrazione potenzialmente fuorviante. Un'azione è un momento di una storia reale o possibile, o di una molteplicità di storie del genere»<sup>54</sup>. La descrizione di una singola azione è parte di una narrativa più ampia, inserita in un contesto, perciò, la risposta alla domanda *perché l'hai fatto?* non è mai il racconto di una singola azione isolata, ma, implicitamente, dell'intera vita dell'agente fino all'istante che ha portato alla realizzazione di quella singola azione. La descrizione dell'intenzione fornita dall'agente stesso, pur essendo senza osservazione, non esaurisce dunque l'intelligibilità dell'azione. È fondamentale inserire questa intenzione puntuale all'interno di una narrativa che dia rilievo alla relazione tra l'azione, la condotta dell'agente e le tradizioni cui appartiene.

L'osservazione operata da altri, direttamente o indirettamente implicati nell'azione, e il riferimento al contesto e alle tradizioni sono dunque indispensabili

<sup>52</sup> Come quando accade di premere un interruttore semplicemente appoggiandosi ad una parete: non esiste risposta alla domanda “perché hai acceso la luce?” in riferimento all'intenzione di chi agisce. Semplicemente, l'agente non sapeva che lì c'è un interruttore e che appoggiandosi l'avrebbe premuto. Se non vedesse la luce accendersi, l'agente non potrebbe sapere di aver azionato un interruttore.

<sup>53</sup> Seguendo l'esempio proposto in *Intention*: io sto riempiendo la vasca da bagno – questa è la mia intenzione – anche se, essendomi dimenticato di mettere il tappo dello scarico, effettivamente la vasca non si sta riempiendo d'acqua. C'è un errore nella realizzazione, di cui mi rendo conto solo attraverso l'osservazione, ma la descrizione dell'azione secondo l'intenzione è veritiera: io sto riempiendo la vasca da bagno.

<sup>54</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p.255.

per una piena comprensione: è necessaria, cioè, una narrativa che integri la prospettiva individuale con quella comunitaria e storica.

## 7. *PRAETER INTENTIONEM*: LE CONSEGUENZE OLTRE L'INTENZIONE DIRETTA E IL RUOLO DELLA NARRAZIONE

Per approfondire ulteriormente il ruolo delle narrative nella comprensione della pratica, è utile analizzare il concetto di *praeter intentionem* attraverso la teoria tomista dell'azione, come esposta da Stephen Brock nel suo testo sulla relazione tra azione e condotta<sup>55</sup>. Brock evidenzia come, oltre all'intenzione diretta (l'oggetto primario dell'azione), esistano molteplici descrizioni della medesima azione che includono ciò che ha una relazione indiretta con l'intenzione dell'agente, senza esserne il suo oggetto. Un evento può essere «assolutamente *praeter intentionem*»<sup>56</sup> se è puramente accidentale o casuale, dovuto a ignoranza invincibile. Esiste però un concetto di *praeter intentionem* in senso lato, che riguarda aspetti della realizzazione di un'intenzione che non sono direttamente voluti, ma nemmeno pure coincidenze<sup>57</sup>. Si tratta di ciò che è sempre o spesso unito con l'effetto inteso, cioè cade in qualche modo sotto la medesima intenzione<sup>58</sup>. Ad esempio, assumere una medicina che causa effetti collaterali non significa voler gli effetti collaterali, ma accettarli come parte del volere prendere la medicina<sup>59</sup>. Tommaso d'Aquino afferma: «è stolto dire che qualcuno intende qualcosa e non desidera quel che gli è unito frequentemente o sempre»<sup>60</sup>; è, cioè, *stultum* dire di voler evitare un fastidio che è unito frequentemente all'intenzione principale. Queste conseguenze, pur non essendo l'oggetto diretto dell'intenzione, sono volontarie nel senso che l'agente le accetta, pur potendo evitarle, a causa del suo perseguimento del fine primario. Un esempio preso dalla quotidianità come quello di un bambino che accenda la luce, al mattino presto, nella stanza condivisa col fratello, al fine di prendere una maglietta dimenticata (svegliando così il fratello che ancora stava dormendo), è utile per illustrare la distinzione: svegliare il fratello non è direttamente inteso, ma è una conseguenza prevista e non evitata. Il bambino, pur non avendo l'intenzione di svegliare il fratello, ha giudicato il bene di prendere la maglietta superiore al bene del sonno del fratello. In questo caso,

<sup>55</sup> S. Brock, *Action and conduct. Thomas Aquinas and the Theory of Action*, T&T Clark, Edimburgo 1998, trad. it. di C. Sagliani, *Azione e Condotta. Tommaso d'Aquino e la teoria dell'azione*, Edizione Università della Santa Croce, Roma 2002.

<sup>56</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, cap. V, pp. 265-323.

<sup>57</sup> Un tipo di conseguenze di azioni umane cui la Anscombe dichiara inapplicabile la domanda "perché l'hai fatto?".

<sup>58</sup> Cfr. Tommaso d'Aquino, *In II Phys. Lect. viii*, §214. Si veda anche *In VII Meta. Lect. vi*, §1382, *In XI Meta. Lect. viii*, §§2269, 2284.

<sup>59</sup> Cfr. S. Brock, *Azione e condotta*, cit.

<sup>60</sup> *In IIPhys. Lect. viii*, §214.



l'agente è responsabile di questa conseguenza, sebbene in misura diversa rispetto a un'azione la cui intenzione diretta fosse proprio quella di svegliare il fratello accendendo la luce, senza nessuna ragione ulteriore. Le conseguenze *praeter intentionem* non sono involontarie, a meno che non derivino da una falsa credenza o ignoranza riguardo le circostanze<sup>61</sup>.

## 8. LA NARRAZIONE COME STRUMENTO DI ESPLICITAZIONE E RESPONSABILITÀ: IL RUOLO DELLE NARRATIVE DEGLI ALTRI NELLA NOSTRA COMPrensIONE DELLA PRATICA

È proprio nell'esplicitazione di tutte le conseguenze non direttamente intese, ma non intenzionalmente evitate, che la descrizione narrativa del nostro vissuto si rivela fondamentale<sup>62</sup>: esplicita infatti l'ordine delle intenzioni e come le circostanze possano «influire sulla bontà o cattiveria di un'azione»<sup>63</sup>, anche quando «non costituiscono condizioni intrinseche all'oggetto stesso dell'azione»<sup>64</sup>. Poiché ciò che è necessario per il compimento di un'intenzione ricade nell'intenzione stessa, una volta scelto<sup>65</sup>, i risultati previsti di un'azione, anche se non direttamente intesi, sono compresi nell'intenzione dell'agente, che ne è responsabile e può essere chiamato a renderne conto. Questo riporta al cuore del discorso macintyriano<sup>66</sup>: la vita dell'individuo ha un'unità narrativa di cui l'agente è sia soggetto che autore. La responsabilità è intrinseca a questa unità narrativa, poiché gli esseri umani possono essere chiamati a spiegare e giustificare razionalmente le proprie azioni. La narrazione è dunque intrinseca all'esperienza umana non solo

<sup>61</sup> Secondo l'esempio dato, l'abitudine ad essere l'ultimo ad alzarsi e auscire dalla stanza renderebbe né intenzionale né volontaria l'azione di svegliare il fratello, laddove *ut in pluribus* la stanza a quell'ora è vuota e il fratello già fuori casa. Ma nel caso in cui sapesse – avendolo visto – che il fratello è ancora addormentato, il bambino non potrebbe discolparsi dicendo: «volevo solo prendere la mia maglietta». Era, infatti, assolutamente consapevole che la sua azione avrebbe potuto interrompere il sonno del fratello e non l'ha evitato, pur avendone la possibilità.

<sup>62</sup> A questo punto del discorso il concetto di pratica fa riferimento in particolare all'agire umano finalizzato al raggiungimento del bene: non, dunque, una mera pratica sociale dotata di un suo bene interno, ma la pratica specifica dell'essere umano in quanto tale, finalizzata alla fioritura dell'individuo in vista del raggiungimento del suo fine ultimo, che si realizza attraverso l'esercizio di diverse pratiche orientate all'ottenimento di beni operabili.

<sup>63</sup> S. Brock, *Azione e condotta*, cit., p.282.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, p.283. Brock riprende qui l'esempio di Chisholm: «se tu intendi correre una maratona e credi che in questo modo consumerai le tue scarpe da ginnastica, non ne segue affatto che tu intendi consumare le tue scarpe da ginnastica» (Chisholm, R.M., "The Structure of Intention", *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970), pp.633-47) e commenta: «è difficile evitare la conclusione che consumare le scarpe ricada anch'esso» sotto l'intenzione del maratoneta, che preferisce consumare le scarpe –necessariamente connesso con il correre – piuttosto che non correre la sua gara.

<sup>66</sup> Cfr. A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit.

come strumento di comprensione, ma come sua struttura stessa, cruciale per la responsabilità e la ricerca di un senso.

La deliberazione, però, non può essere un'attività solitaria, ma deve essere condotta «in compagnia di altri»<sup>67</sup>. La nostra fallibilità, infatti, insieme alla predisposizione all'errore, possono portare a deliberare sulla scorta di false credenze, generando così conseguenze pienamente *praeter intentionem*, come nel caso in cui si accendesse la luce in una stanza ritenuta – falsamente – vuota e svegliando così il fratello che, *ut in pluribus* a quell'ora è già sveglio. Per riprendere l'esempio, dichiarare alla mamma: «ho dimenticato la maglietta, vado a prenderla», avrebbe permesso di ricordare o scoprire – a seconda della circostanza – che in realtà il fratello è ancora addormentato nel letto, evitando così di svegliarlo (essendo la maglietta raggiungibile anche senza accendere la luce nella stanza). L'intenzione primaria si sarebbe potuta perseguire evitando una conseguenza non desiderata, ma neppure intesa (cioè nonadeguata come effetto collaterale dell'azione direttamente intesa): è così documentata l'essenzialità di una *deliberazione condivisa*. Il confronto critico e la condivisione di prospettive con altri sono attività indispensabili per superare i limiti individuali, riconoscere i beni in gioco e prendere decisioni razionali che promuovano sia il bene individuale che quello comune.

È proprio nell'ambito di una narrativa condivisa che più facilmente può emergere un cambiamento di visione, antecedente all'agire stesso: «l'azione è, per così dire, secondaria al vedere: è nel vedere correttamente che viene fatto il duro lavoro morale»<sup>68</sup>.

Ed è per imparare a vedere correttamente che abbiamo bisogno del giudizio altrui, che ci corregga nella nostra parzialità. MacIntyre, citando Aristotele e

<sup>67</sup> *Ivi*, p.285.

<sup>68</sup> D. Edmonds, *Would you Kill the Fat Man? The Trolley Problem and What Your Answer Tells Us about Right and Wrong*, Princeton Univ Press, Princeton 2014, trad. it. di G. Guerrierio, *Uccideresti l'uomo grasso? Il dilemma etico del male minore*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2014, p.168. L'autore fa qui riferimento all'esempio di Iris Murdoch, contenuto in *The Idea of Perfection*, in *The Yale Review*, Vol. 53, No.3 1964, nel quale una suocera, M., cambia idea sulla nuora, D., che prima definiva “sciocca e volgare” e che successivamente – senza che nulla sia cambiato nel comportamento della nuora – rivaluta come “semplice e allegra”. Nell'esempio la sostituzione di quelli che la Murdoch definisce *epitēti normativi* (da “sciocca e volgare”, a “semplice ed allegra”) avviene in seguito ad una «riflessione ponderata» da parte di M., che opera una «attenzione profonda e giusta» nei confronti di D. Ed è pur vero, come afferma la Murdoch, che «l'attività di M. è qualcosa di peculiarmente suo», ma è altrettanto vero che in quel compito infinito che consiste nel vedere non solo in modo accurato, ma anche giusto ed amorevole, «l'attiva “riconsiderazione” e “ridefinizione”, che è una caratteristica fondamentale della personalità viva, spesso suggerisce e richiede una procedura di controllo che dipende dalla storia di un individuo». È plausibile supporre che M. sia stata aiutata da qualcun altro in un'attività di ridefinizione che difficilmente avrebbe potuto compiere da sola. Certamente il suo cambio di opinione è stata una attività peculiarmente sua, non di meno si può dire che tale attività si avventa nell'ambito di una condivisione della propria esperienza con altri, e questo perché «l'uso delle parole da parte di persone riunite intorno a un oggetto comune è un'attività umana d'importanza vitale» Murdoch, I., *Existentialists and Mystics. Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, Chatto & Windus, London 1997, trad. di Costantino E., Fiorini M., Elefante F., *Esistenzialisti e mistici. Scritti di filosofia e letteratura*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2014, p. 249.

Tommaso d'Aquino, sottolinea proprio come la deliberazione condivisa sia una difesa contro l'errore: «“Nelle cose importanti noi deliberiamo con altri, non facendo affidamento su noi stessi per la certezza”» (*Etica Nicomachea*, III, 1112b, 10-11), ha scritto Aristotele, mentre Tommaso è stato più enfatico, sostenendo che un singolo individuo è sempre incline a considerare alcuni aspetti di un caso particolare a spese di altri, un pericolo cui si può rimediare quando ci si consulta con altri (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.14, a.3)<sup>69</sup>.

Attraverso le narrative degli altri, apprendiamo non solo a riconoscere le conseguenze negative che avremmo dovuto considerare, ma anche, e forse soprattutto, a cogliere la possibilità di praticare beni ulteriori rispetto a quelli direttamente intesi<sup>70</sup>. Proprio al fine di «illustrare il ruolo che giocano le narrative degli altri nella nostra comprensione della pratica»<sup>71</sup>, nell'ultimo capitolo del testo, intitolato «Quattro narrative»<sup>72</sup>, MacIntyre racconta le storie di quattro individui: nelle loro «vite buone» vediamo incarnato un esempio pratico di come «l'educazione alla virtù consiste [...] nel rendere coloro che sono educati consapevoli in maniera dettagliata delle possibilità di errore: quanto chiaramente gli agenti percepiscano la posta in gioco e quanto adeguatamente giudichino dipende spesso da quanto sono capaci di tenere in conto non solo come la situazione appare loro, ma anche come appare agli altri che sono coinvolti in essa, specialmente quegli altri con i quali cooperano nel raggiungimento dei beni comuni»<sup>73</sup>. Tale rilievo appare immediatamente significativo quando riguarda conseguenze negative che l'agente avrebbe dovuto considerare, prima di agire, e che connotano la sua azione, ma è forse ancora più cruciale in senso opposto: quando è in gioco, cioè, la possibilità di praticare, conseguire o raggiungere dei beni ulteriori rispetto al bene direttamente inteso, una possibilità che può muovere all'agire con più decisione. «I giovani – sottolinea MacIntyre – apprendono o meno ad immaginarsi come erano, come sono e come potrebbero diventare e i limiti della loro immaginazione impongono limiti ai loro desideri e al loro ragionamento pratico. Imparano a sperare il meglio che possono immaginare e disperano quando non riescono ad immaginare alcun buon futuro»<sup>74</sup>. L'ascolto e il racconto di storie sono attività capitali per comprendere noi stessi e gli altri, per imparare a immaginare<sup>75</sup> il futuro e alimentare la speranza in vista del bene.

<sup>69</sup> A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p.285.

<sup>70</sup> Con un corollario cruciale: tanto indispensabile appare la narrativa degli altri in vista del bene individuale e del bene comune, quanto potenzialmente distruttive si potrebbero rivelare narrazioni distorte che si imponessero, in particolare, su soggetti fragili e meno capaci di un giudizio critico autonomo. La formulazione di narrative condivise non è, in sé, garanzia di razionalità e non mancano, nel corso della storia anche recente, esempi eclatanti di narrazioni capaci di sostenere atroci crimini contro l'umano.

<sup>71</sup> *Ivi*, p.350.

<sup>72</sup> *Ivi*, pp.349-439.

<sup>73</sup> *Ivi*, p.284.

<sup>74</sup> *Ivi*, p.341.

<sup>75</sup> Sul ruolo cruciale dell'immaginazione si veda, per esempio, Fanciulacci, R. *Le parole giuste per l'etica: esercizio dell'immaginazione e immaginario sociale in Iris Murdoch*, *Ethics & Politics*, XVI, 2014, 1, pp. 333-392; M. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: the literary imagination and public life*, Beacon

## 9. CONCLUSIONE: L'INTELLIGIBILITÀ NARRATIVA E LE SUE FRONTIERE

In sintesi, il percorso argomentativo ha evidenziato come la comprensione profonda dell'azione umana, con le sue intenzioni dirette e le sue complesse conseguenze *praeter intentionem*, sia intrinsecamente legata alla struttura narrativa dell'esistenza. La filosofia di MacIntyre, che concepisce la vita come una narrazione incarnata e la ragione come storica, fornisce la cornice indispensabile per un tale discernimento. L'analisi dei concetti di intenzione e *praeter intentionem*, integrando prospettive come quelle di Anscombe e della teoria tomista dell'azione indagata da Brock, non è un mero esercizio descrittivo, ma il cuore dell'argomentazione: attesta come le narrative, condivise e critiche, siano lo strumento attraverso cui gli agenti morali possono rendere conto delle proprie azioni, comprenderne le implicazioni complesse e assumersene la piena responsabilità, anche per gli effetti non direttamente voluti, ma previsti e prevedibili.

Questa intelligibilità narrativa, nutrita dalla deliberazione condivisa e dall'apertura alle narrative degli altri, permette all'individuo di perseguire il proprio bene riconoscendo che «ciò è possibile solo nel prendersi a cuore il bene comune»<sup>76</sup>. Consente, inoltre, di rileggere il proprio vissuto non solo in termini di successi o fallimenti puntuali, ma di cogliere quella fioritura dell'umanità che può emergere anche dalle conseguenze indirettamente intese, orientando la vita verso un «un oggetto del desiderio al di là di tutti i beni particolari e finiti, verso il quale il desiderio tende nella misura in cui esso rimane insoddisfatto persino dei più desiderabili beni finiti, come accade nelle vite buone»<sup>77</sup>.

E se, come indica MacIntyre nelle battute di chiusura de *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, qui «hanno fine le ricerche della politica e dell'etica»<sup>78</sup> è possibile individuare una occasione di sviluppo nel paragone con quella che l'autore stesso definisce una «investigazione filosofica a sostegno di una proposta circa il miglior modo di vivere, che è quello di praticare le virtù»<sup>79</sup>.

Sebbene il presente saggio si sia concentrato sulla funzione esplicativa delle narrative riguardo all'azione e al *praeter intentionem*, si apre una promettente

Press, Boston, Massachusetts, 1995, trad. it. di G. Bottini, *Il giudizio del poeta, Immaginazione letteraria e vita civile*, Feltrinelli Editore, Milano 1996.

<sup>76</sup> A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p.35.

<sup>77</sup> *Ivi*, p.439.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> G. Abbà, *Le virtù per la felicità, Ricerche di filosofia morale - 3*, Las, Roma 2018, p.9.

linea di ricerca nel confronto con pensatori come Giuseppe Abbà<sup>80</sup>: la sua proposta di una filosofia morale che integri la teologia morale tomista, intervenendo sulla fragilità della condizione umana – un tema che MacIntyre affronta senza esaurirne l'indagine antropologica – suggerisce un superamento della concezione macintyriana della dipendenza, limitata all'attestazione dei tre momenti della vita umana in cui l'aiuto degli altri è indispensabile (infanzia, malattia o disabilità e vecchiaia). Questo potrebbe condurre al riconoscimento di una identità relazionale generativa del soggetto umano stesso<sup>81</sup>, spingendo ulteriormente l'analisi della condizione umana e del ruolo delle narrative in un orizzonte ancora più ampio e profondo.

<sup>80</sup> Nel suo percorso che parte da *“Lex et Virtus”*. *Studi sull'evoluzione della dottrina morale di San Tommaso D'Aquino*, Las, Roma, 1983, e attraverso *Felicità, vita buona e virtù. Saggio di filosofia morale*, Las, Roma 1989; *Quale impostazione per la filosofia morale? Ricerche di filosofia morale - 1*, Las, Roma 1996; e *Costituzione epistemica della filosofia morale, Ricerche di filosofia morale - 2*, Las, Roma 2009, Abbà approda appunto a *Le virtù per la felicità*, cit.

<sup>81</sup> Cfr. F. Botturi, *La generazione del bene*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2009.

# OLTRE LA COMPARTIMENTALIZZAZIONE: RICOMPORRE I FRAMMENTI DELL'ESISTENZE E RIPENSARE IL SENSO DELLA RICERCA FILOSOFICA

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study seeks to explore the notion of compartmentalization, drawing on the insights and perspectives offered by Alasdair MacIntyre in his last book *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*. I begin by examining several key passages in which he critiques compartmentalization as a phenomenon typical of advanced modernity (1). I then trace these insights back to their original psychological and sociological contexts, and I connect them to similar reflections found in MacIntyre's earlier writings. This issue emerges as a fundamental concern throughout this philosophical work, one to which he has returned at various stages (2). Next, starting from MacIntyre's theses, I highlight some of the "costs" that compartmentalization entails for moral life (3). Finally, I focus on the aspiration to restore philosophical enquiry to the unity of human life, beyond academic specialization and disciplinary fragmentation (4).

## **KEYWORDS**

MacIntyre, Compartmentalization, Responsibility, Philosophical Enquiry, University.

## **INTRODUZIONE**

Anche per l'ultimo libro di Alasdair MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità* (2016)<sup>1</sup>, vale ciò che era stato notato a proposito di un'altra sua opera, *Animali razionali dipendenti* (1999):

Il lettore, anche non strettamente specializzato, troverà comunque numerosi spunti per una profonda riflessione personale sulla propria condotta e le sue motivazioni, e soprattutto per imparare a inquadrare la propria attività, quale essa sia, intellettuale,

<sup>1</sup>A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità. Desideri, ragionamento pratico e narrative* (2016), a cura di S. Maletta, D. Mazzola e D. Simoncelli, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2023.

pratica, artistica, nelle sue diverse fasi, con ampio respiro e non come mera applicazione di regole estrinseche o meramente procedurali<sup>2</sup>.

La nostalgia per questo «ampio respiro», che fa dell'azione umana qualcosa di molto diverso dall'applicazione di regole funzionali, è il cuore del tema che affronterò qui, e che ha un rilievo fondamentale nell'ultimo libro: il concetto di «vite compartimentalizzate». La critica alla «compartimentalizzazione» come tratto distintivo della modernità avanzata, tanto nell'organizzazione della società quanto negli stili di vita delle persone, riveste un'importanza cruciale nell'argomentazione di MacIntyre, e interpella il lettore in modo speciale. Consideriamo anzitutto un passaggio del capitolo IV:

Una caratteristica dell'ordine sociale che oggi abitiamo è che molti di noi per la maggior parte del tempo vivono vite altamente compartimentalizzate, spostandosi durante la normale giornata, la normale settimana, il normale anno fra un ruolo sociale e un altro, dall'adesione a un insieme di norme che governano una parte delle nostre vite a un insieme spesso molto diverso di norme che governano un'altra parte. Ogni società presenta un certo grado di una tale differenziazione ma la nostra la porta all'estremo, con la conseguenza che impariamo presto nella vita a fare con facilità questi spostamenti e per la maggior parte senza accorgercene. Oggi la flessibilità è quindi una qualità altamente apprezzata<sup>3</sup>.

Con questa efficace metafora MacIntyre inquadra un fenomeno oggi molto diffuso, che è contemporaneamente una condizione esistenziale e un dispositivo di funzionamento sociale. Indotta dai vari contesti di cui facciamo parte o con cui dobbiamo interagire, la compartimentalizzazione della vita è il riflesso sugli individui di ben precise esigenze e dinamiche di sistema. Una sorta di meccanismo di adattamento con cui le persone riescono a rendersi compatibili e funzionali rispetto a ognuno dei molteplici ruoli che si trovano a dover svolgere, neutralizzando le eventuali incoerenze e contraddizioni tra un ruolo e l'altro, e attenuando i costi psicologici generati da tali incoerenze. Tale meccanismo, promuovendo l'adattabilità degli individui, assicura la loro efficienza e la loro *compliance* al massimo grado. Ma, se è vero che compartimentalizzando riusciamo a destreggiarci e a rimanere a galla rispetto a quanto la società ci richiede, ciò che veniamo a perdere non è poco: l'unità fondamentale della vita, il baricentro della nostra responsabilità morale. In questo senso si tratta di una condizione generale con la quale tutti si trovano potenzialmente a dover fare i conti, in quanto agenti morali e decisori pratici, in quanto soggetti in cerca del bene, in cerca dei criteri dell'azione giusta, e prima ancora in cerca di senso.

<sup>2</sup>M. D'Avenia, "Presentazione", in A. MacIntyre, *Animali razionali dipendenti. Perché gli uomini hanno bisogno delle virtù* (1999), a cura di M. D'Avenia, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2019, p. XIX.

<sup>3</sup>A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 298.

D'altra parte la metafora della compartimentalizzazione focalizza anche un altro problema più specifico, che pure ha un rilievo notevole nell'ultimo libro di MacIntyre, e che riguarda in particolare chi è coinvolto a qualche titolo nella ricerca filosofica: cioè l'esigenza di perseguire o ricomporre o preservare una continuità e un'armonia, sempre molto difficile e precaria, tra studi e prassi di vita, superando la settorialità e lo specialismo che caratterizzano oggi l'attività intellettuale.

Vorrei riflettere dunque su queste due dimensioni, valorizzando il nesso tra l'aspirazione a un'unità della vita, che trascenda i differenti ruoli che interpretiamo, e il recupero di un senso autentico della ricerca filosofica, che trascenda i limiti e gli steccati imposti dalla specializzazione accademica. In altri termini, il nesso intrinseco tra l'esigenza di superare, in generale, la compartimentalizzazione della vita e l'esigenza di superare, in particolare, la compartimentalizzazione della ricerca intellettuale. Anzitutto ripercorrerò alcuni passaggi del volume *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità* in cui MacIntyre critica la compartimentalizzazione della vita come dinamica generale, tipicamente contemporanea (1); dopo avere chiarito la genesi e il significato della nozione in ambito psicologico e sociologico, riprenderò alcune riflessioni sul tema da lui sviluppate nei suoi scritti precedenti: si tratta infatti di un nodo fondamentale del suo pensiero, sul quale è tornato più volte nelle diverse fasi del suo impegno filosofico (2). Quindi evidenzierò alcuni "costi" che la compartimentalizzazione comporta sul piano morale (3) e in ambito intellettuale (4), e mi soffermerò infine sull'invito di MacIntyre a ricondurre la ricerca filosofica all'unità della vita umana.

## 1. VITE COMPARTIMENTALIZZATE

In *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità* MacIntyre denuncia a più riprese il fenomeno della compartimentalizzazione della vita, in particolare nei capitoli IV e V. Ecco ad esempio come descrive, nello stesso punto già citato in apertura, il funzionamento e anche i limiti del meccanismo con cui affrontiamo i differenti contesti nei quali si svolge una giornata ordinaria:

Ciascuno di questi contesti ha le proprie norme che regolano chi parla e con chi, quale stile di conversazione è appropriato, quali barzellette possono essere raccontate, a chi mostrare rispetto, a chi le informazioni devono essere negate, quando è permesso o obbligatorio mentire, e così via. Ma non soltanto queste norme sono differenti; esse talvolta sono incoerenti o lo sarebbero se la loro applicazione non fosse circoscritta. Di tanto in tanto tuttavia sorgono problemi che non possono essere affrontati in termini così compartimentalizzati, problemi che



danno avvio a conflitti che fino a quel momento erano stati in parte o interamente nascosti alla vista<sup>4</sup>.

Può accadere dunque che tra le molteplici ragioni in gioco, fino ad allora gestite e controllate ognuna nel proprio ambito di riferimento, affiori a un certo punto una incompatibilità irriducibile. Improvvisamente si squarcia il velo sulla compartimentalizzazione nella quale viviamo immersi, e il suo meccanismo si inceppa. Una qualche circostanza concreta, come una scelta da fare, una decisione da prendere, un interrogativo che non riusciamo più a tacitare, un problema che si è fatto ineludibile, ci mette impietosamente faccia a faccia con istanze inconciliabili, e con l'incompatibilità e l'incommensurabilità tra le norme che abitualmente seguiamo in un settore e quelle che altrettanto abitualmente seguiamo in un altro. Ciò può avere l'effetto di spaccare una comunità, così come può portare il singolo individuo a scoprire in sé stesso una scissione interiore:

ora egli si confronta con problemi che richiedono una valutazione delle istanze rivali e una riorganizzazione delle sue attività alla luce delle sue conclusioni. Come dovrà procedere? Questa è una domanda che molti dei nostri contemporanei si trovano a porsi, anche soltanto perché molti di noi conducono vite tendenzialmente incoerenti, vite che rimangono coerenti solo perché e fintantoché alcune domande non vengono poste, un certo problema viene ignorato o viene evitato o eliminato<sup>5</sup>.

[E]ssere praticamente razionali significa sapere come dare un ordine ai beni [...]. Un punto di partenza peculiare per un simile apprendimento nella nostra cultura è, come ho detto in precedenza, l'esperienza di una rottura nella compartimentalizzazione della propria vita, cosicché un individuo che fino a ora ha vissuto serenamente con un insieme di norme in una parte della sua vita e con norme diverse e tendenzialmente incompatibili in qualche altra parte, ora e in maniera inaspettata si accorge di avere un problema<sup>6</sup>.

Un esempio di questi dilemmi sono i problemi riguardanti il dire la verità: «A chi dobbiamo dire la verità e perché? Che cosa dobbiamo ai nostri amici? Di che cosa ci è permesso parlare e a chi? Con chi e riguardo a che cosa dobbiamo restare zitti? Che tipo di rispetto dobbiamo riservare alle norme di questa o quella professione?»<sup>7</sup>.

Nel denunciare questo fenomeno MacIntyre non si limita a registrare un dato sociologico, bensì assume una posizione teorica ben precisa, strettamente inerente alla concezione aristotelico-tomistica del bene umano da lui difesa: proprio da ciò

<sup>4</sup>Ivi, p. 299.

<sup>5</sup>Ivi, p. 300.

<sup>6</sup>Ivi, p. 304.

<sup>7</sup>Ivi, p. 305.

deriva la centralità del tema nel suo discorso. Il nodo essenziale da affrontare è la possibilità di un conflitto tra la domanda fondamentale («come è meglio per me agire in quanto essere umano?») e altre domande («come è meglio per me agire in quanto zia o studente o agricoltore o medico?»)<sup>8</sup>. Mentre può essere facile determinare che cosa significhi agire bene in un ruolo specifico, la vera sfida è «integrare tra loro quelle diverse attività in cui siamo coinvolti in ciascuno dei nostri ruoli in modo da agire come è meglio in quanto esseri umani». E dunque non cessare di tendere al nostro fine ultimo in quanto esseri umani mentre miriamo a raggiungere i fini specifici propri delle attività che svolgiamo. La compartimentalizzazione è esattamente l'opposto di tale integrazione, poiché oscura «la misura in cui le decisioni prese in una parte delle nostre vite influiscono su altre attività e relazioni». Dunque «vivere vite compartimentalizzate e mancare di integrare i nostri diversi ruoli al punto da condurre vite veramente diverse - cosa che è fin troppo facile fare in una cultura come la nostra» è un modo palese di «fallire come esseri umani»<sup>9</sup>. Settorializzare la vita mette a nudo anche un altro problema di importanza cruciale, quello dell'organizzazione del tempo, indicatore significativo «di ciò che ci sta a cuore e della misura in cui ci sta a cuore», poiché «quanto più tempo impieghiamo in un settore delle nostre vite tanto meno tempo vi è per altri settori» (per esempio è un dato importante che uno «non trovi mai tempo per ascoltare Bach o non segga mai da solo in silenzio»)<sup>10</sup>.

In queste riflessioni critiche è sottolineato il modo indolore e addirittura inconsapevole con cui compartimentalizziamo le nostre vite. L'abilità nel fare continui passaggi da un ruolo all'altro è un'arte nella quale diventiamo sempre più disinvolti, fino ad applicarla come un automatismo necessario, quasi un riflesso condizionato, che non implica nemmeno ipocrisia o falsità:

<sup>8</sup> Ivi, p. 329.

<sup>9</sup> Ivi, p. 330.

<sup>10</sup> Ivi, p. 330. C'è anche un altro modo di fallire come esseri umani, alternativo e speculare alla compartimentalizzazione: «vivere praticamente a casaccio, condurre vite in cui noi reiteratamente consentiamo che le attività in un settore compromettano, ostacolino o rimandino attività in altri settori» (*ibidem*). La questione posta da MacIntyre in queste riflessioni si avvicina a un altro tema classico della riflessione aristotelica e neo-aristotelica, cioè il rapporto tra la pluralità dei beni e l'unità della vita etica. Si coglie qui una significativa affinità con il breve saggio di Ch. Taylor, «Condurre una vita» (1997), trad. di P. Costa, in «La società degli individui» 2/2001, pp. 73-89, che riflette su come integrare nella totalità della vita beni così differenti da risultare talvolta incommensurabili («riconosciamo una pluralità di beni e cerchiamo di dare un'unità alle nostre vite a dispetto di essa», p. 79). Il rischio da evitare è appunto la compartimentalizzazione, sebbene Taylor non la menzioni espressamente: «[i]n fondo ciò che ci viene richiesto non è di compiere degli atti isolati, ciascuno giusto, ma di vivere una vita, il che significa essere e divenire un certo tipo di essere umano» (p. 84). Per questo, come dice il titolo del saggio, la vita è qualcosa che «si conduce», un movimento o una serie di movimenti che si deve cercare di guidare; proprio il senso della totalità della nostra vita e di come stiamo cercando di condurla è la risorsa che ci permette di connettere i diversi beni che perseguiamo, e di trovare una misura comune anche tra beni differenti, in base a come «si integrano o meno nel dispiegarsi delle nostre vite» (p. 85).

Ho prima notato come nell'ordine sociale contemporaneo le nostre vite siano compartimentalizzate, così che in un'area delle nostre vite, ad esempio il posto di lavoro, possiamo concederci di essere governati da un insieme di regole molto diverso da quelle alle quali ci conformiamo in un'altra. Talvolta tali norme possono infatti essere incompatibili, ma anche in questi casi spesso ci muoviamo con un notevole agio tra un'area e l'altra, senza alcuna perdita di sincerità<sup>11</sup>.

Nella modernità avanzata persino una pratica culturale quale la narrazione sembra destinata ad essere compartimentalizzata. Ci sono infatti i racconti per bambini, la narrativa analizzata nelle lezioni accademiche di letteratura, le storie proposte come intrattenimento in televisione al cinema o a teatro, le storie riferite dai media; manca però «l'idea di ascoltare storie e raccontare storie come attività di importanza capitale per ciascuno di noi nel comprendere noi stessi e gli altri, una certa consapevolezza di quanto abbiamo bisogno di imparare anzitutto ad ascoltare e poi a narrare». Il frammentarsi e il moltiplicarsi dell'atto del narrare non rispondono semplicemente a una necessità di contestualizzazione funzionale, bensì rispecchiano un sistema culturale dominante, che per MacIntyre va contrastato tanto quanto l'ordine economico e politico dominante, per una ragione etica sostanziale: «la cultura che intrattiene e distrae rende spesso difficile o impossibile sviluppare quelle capacità immaginative che sono essenziali per vivere la vita delle virtù»<sup>12</sup>.

Questa è una svolta cruciale nell'argomentazione, sia perché introduce il tema delle virtù mettendo a fuoco il problema morale essenziale insisto nella compartimentalizzazione, sia perché avvia quello che potremmo definire il passaggio dalla teoria alle storie: «debbo andare oltre le mie conclusioni teoriche per dar conto di alcune vite esemplari», annuncia MacIntyre<sup>13</sup>. La sua idea è che in campo etico e politico le tesi teoriche necessitino di casi concreti. Pertanto la conclusione emersa nel corso dei primi quattro capitoli del libro (vivere bene significa agire per soddisfare solo desideri aventi per oggetto qualcosa che si hanno buone ragioni di desiderare, cioè agire come richiesto dalle virtù, orientati verso il raggiungimento del proprio fine ultimo) può essere compresa solo «ponendo attenzione al dettaglio dei casi particolari che la esemplificano in modi rilevanti»<sup>14</sup>. Di qui il bellissimo capitolo V, dedicato alle biografie di alcune figure assunte come paradigmi di ragionatori pratici: persone in cammino, più o meno imperfette, e dalle quali proprio per questo possiamo imparare. «C'è sempre una storia vera da raccontare» che coglie la struttura narrativa della vita, aveva

<sup>11</sup>A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 356.

<sup>12</sup> Ivi, p. 342.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> Ivi, p. 349.

osservato in precedenza MacIntyre<sup>15</sup>. Così, ripercorrendole vicende di due romanzieri del Novecento, Vasilij Grossman e Cyril Lionel Robert James, entriamo in contatto con esempi reali, storici di compartimentalizzazione: anche nelle loro vite, infatti, per quanto complessivamente riuscite e ben spese, non mancò qualche traccia di essa<sup>16</sup>. Nel caso di Grossman ciò fu dovuto al suo essere al contempo uno scrittore creativo e stalinista, come erano del resto altri scrittori russi del tempo:

Per gran parte della sua vita egli vive, pensa ed agisce *come se* fosse uno stalinista convinto, non come qualcuno a cui lo stalinismo sia stato imposto. Eppure per parte del suo tempo egli pensa, agisce e scrive [...] *come se* la sua propria visione percettiva di come stanno le cose lo rendesse capace di riconoscere degli aspetti della vita sociale che erano profondamente incompatibili con le tesi dello stalinismo. In parte ciò dipende da come quel “come se” debba essere inteso. Grossman, anche mentre appariva uno stalinista privo di dubbi, era forse tormentato da dubbi estetici? Oppure si muoveva agilmente tra i suoi due punti di vista, per gran parte della vita uno stalinista privo di dubbi, per il resto qualcosa di molto diverso, eppure capace di eludere la consapevolezza della propria doppiezza?<sup>17</sup>

Il secondo caso è quello di C.L.R. James. Oltre che un letterato era un esperto di cricket, e scriveva di questo sport per una rivista inglese. Entrambe le sue passioni, letteratura e cricket, le viveva come forme elevate di arte. Anche Neville Cardus, suo mentore, aveva due grandi passioni, musica e cricket; ma Cardus, «al contrario di James, compartimentalizzava la sua vita e le sue passioni»<sup>18</sup>; intendeva il cricket, infatti, come un semplice svago per le masse, e la musica come un'arte raffinata per una élite colta. James a sua volta sperimentò nella sua vita la compartimentalizzazione; marxista e attivista per i diritti dei lavoratori, si era reso conto a un certo punto che anche il marxismo più sofisticato non aveva nulla da dire su vasti ambiti dell'esistenza, su aspetti essenziali che esulano dall'area del lavoro: «Di che cosa vivevano gli uomini? Che cosa volevano? I loro desideri di adesso erano quelli che erano stati nel passato? Che ruolo avevano l'arte e la cultura nelle loro vite?»<sup>19</sup>. Fu proprio pensando alla passione della gente comune per lo sport e per i giochi organizzati che scrisse uno dei suoi libri più importanti, *Beyond a Boundary*, una storia del cricket inteso come vera e propria arte, con un senso, uno scopo, un'eccellenza da perseguire, un *ethos*, una tradizione di pensiero da ricevere e trasmettere. MacIntyre osserva che James, pur non mancando di integrità, fino a quel momento aveva mancato di

<sup>15</sup> Ivi, p. 116.

<sup>16</sup> Ivi, pp. 350-376, 387-415.

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, pp. 357-358.

<sup>18</sup> Ivi, p. 391.

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, p. 406.

integrazione: quel libro esprime la sua aspirazione a un'esistenza più completa, il suo tentativo di ricomporre quella che fino ad allora era stata in una certa misura la sua «doppia vita», integrandone i due versanti finora staccati, e dando conto delle relazioni esistenti tra due diversi insiemi di beni: quelli realizzabili mediante l'impegno politico e quelli realizzabili attraverso la dedizione all'arte del cricket e la partecipazione alla comunità del cricket<sup>20</sup>.

Da questi casi paradigmatici di «persone che conducevano una doppia vita»<sup>21</sup>, si può trarre un'indicazione concreta su come agisce la compartimentalizzazione anche nel ragionamento pratico:

Coloro che conducono una tale doppia vita sostengono argomentativamente in varie occasioni conclusioni pratiche a partire da premesse incompatibili con quelle a partire dalle quali argomentano in certe altre occasioni. I beni che forniscono loro le ragioni per trarre le conclusioni che traggono in questa particolare occasione sono rifiutati in altre occasioni come beni apparenti ma non autentici, come beni desiderati, ma non autenticamente desiderabili. Tali agenti possono essere degli agenti razionali coerenti, persino inflessibilmente coerenti in ciascuna parte della loro vita divisa. È rispetto a queste vite considerate nella loro interezza che essi difettano nella razionalità pratica, cosa che possono nascondere a sé stessi per lunghi periodi. Ma sono sempre soggetti a incontrare situazioni nelle quali la compartimentalizzazione delle loro vite collassa, momenti nei quali scelte tra beni incompatibili divengono ineludibili<sup>22</sup>.

Alla presa di coscienza della propria incoerenza e alla necessità di scegliere tra beni incompatibili si può reagire in vari modi: percorrere tra le alternative disponibili quella che consente di persistere nella propria doppiezza, senza più nascondersela ma costruendosi un *modus vivendi* comodo, diventando così cinici ipocriti; oppure fare una scelta all'insegna della coerenza, ma solo nell'ambito specifico su cui verte una determinata decisione da prendere; o ancora risolvere definitivamente il problema riconoscendo la doppiezza generale della propria vita e scegliendo di porvi fine. La conclusione di MacIntyre è che comunque «[n]essuna vita, osservata dal punto di vista dell'agire razionale, è priva di errori e limitazioni»<sup>23</sup>; si deve «riconoscere il carattere tragico dell'esistenza umana», imparando «che abbiamo bisogno di lottare per la completezza delle nostre vite, ma che tale completezza non può essere raggiunta»<sup>24</sup>.

## 2. GENESI E SVILUPPO DI UN'IDEA FONDANTE

<sup>20</sup> Ivi, p. 412.

<sup>21</sup> Ivi, p. 357.

<sup>22</sup> Ivi, p. 358.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. 387.

<sup>24</sup> Ivi, pp. 413-414.

Come ho cercato di mostrare, il concetto di compartimentalizzazione ricorre in senso pregnante nel volume *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, esprimendo un elemento paradigmatico di quella modernità avanzata che MacIntyre si propone di criticare. Ampliando l'analisi ad altri scritti, questo tema si rivela un nodo centrale del suo pensiero: in diverse fasi della sua opera egli ha utilizzato in senso critico la categoria, piegandone il significato ai fini del suo discorso filosofico e delle sue tesi. Le radici della nozione, per lo meno nel suo significato più tecnico, sono da rinvenire nel discorso clinico-psicologico, dove per compartimentalizzazione si intende quell meccanismo di difesa che permette al soggetto di rimuovere o archiviare esperienze traumatiche; oppure di adattarsi in modo indolore alla coesistenza di istanze e linee di azione conflittuali o incoerenti, sgravandolo dal senso di colpa o di contraddizione; o ancora di autoprotgersi da eventuali convinzioni negative che nutre su sé stesso, evitandole e negandole anziché accettarle realisticamente e integrarle. Dunque una strategia per gestire realtà complesse e disturbanti, sottraendovisi anziché affrontarle e risolverle in modo sostanziale<sup>25</sup>. In un'accezione analoga il concetto è utilizzato anche in sociologia, ed è proprio con il significato sociologico della compartimentalizzazione che MacIntyre si confronta espressamente in alcuni suoi scritti. Si può dire che nel suo ultimo libro egli abbia sviluppato, valorizzato e reso centrale uno spunto presente da molti anni nella sua riflessione: basti pensare che già in uno scritto del 1953, *Marxism. An Interpretation*, denunciava come la divisione tra sacro e secolare avesse ridotto la religione ad essere un «compartimento» della vita umana tra gli altri<sup>26</sup>.

Vorrei provare dunque a ricostruire il percorso della sua critica alla compartimentalizzazione, prendendo in esame alcuni riferimenti al tema rintracciabili in diversi suoi scritti, a cominciare da *Dopo la virtù* (1981)<sup>27</sup>. Qui egli parla con toni critici di un «io emotivista», di un «io democratizzato che non ha alcun contenuto sociale necessario e alcuna identità sociale necessaria», e «può dunque essere qualsiasi cosa, assumere qualsiasi ruolo o punto di vista, perché in sé e per sé non è nulla». Inoltre associa l'idea di compartimentalizzazione alle teorie sociologiche di Erving Goffman, che per le loro implicazioni filosofiche ritiene assimilabili alle tesi emotiviste e nietzscheane. A questo riguardo cita testualmente un passo dell'opera *La vita quotidiana come rappresentazione*, in cui

<sup>25</sup>Sul tema v. la voce «Compartmentalization», in AA.VV., *American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology*, <https://dictionary.apa.org/compartmentalization> (sito consultato il 28 agosto 2025); C.J. Showers, V. Zeigler-Hill, «Compartmentalization and integration: the evaluative organization of contextualized selves», in «Journal of Personality», 2007, pp. 1181-1204; J.S. Thomas, Ch.P. Ditzfeld, C.J. Showers, «Compartmentalization: A Window on the Defensive Self», in «Social and Personality Psychology Compass», 2013, pp. 719-731.

<sup>26</sup> Sul tema v. G. Giorgini, «Alasdair MacIntyre: relativismo, individualismo e altri problemi della modernità», in «Il pensiero storico», n. 7, giugno 2020, p. 207.

<sup>27</sup>A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù. Saggio di teoria morale* (1981, 1984, 1997), a cura di M. D'Avenia, trad. di P. Capriolo, Armando, Roma 2007.

Goffman «ha dissolto l'io nei suoi ruoli, sostenendo che l'io non è niente di più che “un attaccapanni” su cui sono appesi gli abiti dei ruoli», «l'attaccapanni psicologico cui egli nega ogni autonomia sostanziale, che svola e svanisce evanescente dall'una all'altra delle situazioni solidamente strutturate in base ai ruoli»; dunque è un errore fondamentale «supporre che esista un io sostanziale al di là e all'infuori delle complesse rappresentazioni dei ruoli»<sup>28</sup>. Nella sociologia di Goffman l'unità di analisi è sempre «l'individuo portatore di ruoli che lotta per realizzare la sua volontà all'interno di una situazione strutturata in base ai ruoli». In assenza di criteri oggettivi di successo, il fine di questo *role-player* è l'efficacia, nell'interazione e nella rappresentazione: «nell'universo sociale di Goffman, il successo non è altro che ciò che passa per tale»; quindi «è nella considerazione degli altri che io riesco o fallisco; di qui l'importanza della rappresentazione come un tema, o forse il tema fondamentale»; il bene per l'uomo consiste «nel possesso dell'onore, dove onore è appunto tutto ciò che incarna ed esprime la considerazione degli altri»<sup>29</sup>. Dunque un mondo sociale agli antipodi dell'*Etica Nicomachea*.

Il problema riemerge poi in una riflessione sull'unità della vita, e in particolare sugli ostacoli cui oggi va incontro ogni tentativo «di considerare ciascuna vita umana come un tutto, come un'unità, il cui carattere fornisce alle virtù un *telos* adeguato»:

la modernità suddivide ciascuna vita umana in una molteplicità di segmenti, ognuno con le proprie norme e modi di comportamento particolari. Così il lavoro è separato dal tempo libero, la vita privata da quella pubblica, il collettivo dal personale. Così tanto l'infanzia quanto la vecchiaia sono state strappate via dal resto della vita e ricostruite come sfere autonome. E tutte queste separazioni sono state compiute in modo tale che ci viene insegnato a pensare e a sentire in base al carattere distintivo di ciascuna di esse, e non all'unità della vita dell'individuo che scorre attraverso queste parti<sup>30</sup>.

A occultare l'unità della vita umana sono le separazioni nette: quella «fra l'individuo e i ruoli che svolge» (come nell'esistenzialismo di Sartre e nella teoria sociologica di Dahrendorf) o quella «fra le diverse rappresentazioni di ruoli e quasi-ruoli in una vita individuale, di modo che quest'ultima finisce per apparire

<sup>28</sup>Ivi, pp. 64-65. MacIntyre accosta la posizione di Goffman a quella di Sartre: a un disaccordo di superficie tra loro (l'io interamente dissolto nei ruoli sociali per Goffman, l'io del tutto distinto da qualunque ruolo sociale per Sartre) corrisponde una sintonia su un punto fondamentale: l'io separato dal mondo sociale e ad esso contrapposto.

<sup>29</sup> Ivi, pp. 153-154.

<sup>30</sup> Ivi, p. 249.

come nient'altro che una serie di episodi non collegati: una liquidazione dell'io caratteristica [...] della teoria sociologica di Goffman»<sup>31</sup>.

L'indagine di MacIntyre sulla compartimentalizzazione è proseguita negli anni successivi. Per esempio in *Giustizia e razionalità* (1988) in modo ancora più esplicito intende il fenomeno come un tratto caratterizzante del liberalismo, e lo critica specificamente come tale. Citando Rawls, evidenzia come per il liberale esista non un bene fondamentale, bensì il riconoscimento di una serie di beni, che implica il riconoscimento di «una serie di ambiti suddivisi in compartimenti [*a range of compartmentalized spheres*], all'interno di ciascuno dei quali viene perseguito qualche bene: politico, economico, familiare, artistico, atletico, scientifico». In base alla norma liberale, in questi diversi tipi di ambiente sociale si applicano diversi tipi di valutazione, ognuna indipendente dall'altra. Questa eterogeneità impedisce un «ordinamento complessivo dei beni». Nella cultura liberale «appare normale che si debbano perseguire svariati beni, ciascuno appropriato alla sua sfera, senza alcun bene complessivo che dia un'unità complessiva alla vita». Rawls ad esempio, nel sostenere che «[i]l bene umano è eterogeneo perché gli scopi dell'io sono eterogenei», fa coincidere l'io umano con l'io liberale. L'io liberale è quello che «si sposta da una sfera all'altra, suddividendo in compartimenti i suoi atteggiamenti [*moves from sphere to sphere, compartmentalizing its attitudes*]»<sup>32</sup>. Il tema della frammentazione tipica dell'individuo liberale è ripreso nelle pagine conclusive, con riferimento al modo in cui il soggetto si rapporta alle diverse tradizioni di pensiero, tenendo insieme le istanze più diverse proprio grazie alla compartimentalizzazione, che lo preserva dalla consapevolezza della propria incoerenza:

[q]uesto tipo di soggetto che ha troppe mezze convinzioni e troppo poche convinzioni coerenti e ferme, troppe alternative formulate parzialmente e troppo poche opportunità per valutarle sistematicamente, porta con sé nei suoi incontri con le tesi delle tradizioni rivali una fondamentale incoerenza che è troppo disturbante per essere ammessa alla coscienza, se non nelle circostanze più rare. Questa frammentazione appare in atteggiamenti morali divisi, espressi in principi morali e politici incoerenti, in una tolleranza verso razionalità differenti in ambiti diversi, in una compartimentalizzazione protettiva dell'io [*protective compartmentalization of the self*], e negli usi della lingua che passano dai frammenti di una lingua-in-uso attraverso gli idiomi della modernità internazionalizzata ai frammenti di un'altra lingua<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Ivi, pp. 249-250. In un altro punto, a proposito dell'individualismo moderno («io sono ciò che scelgo di essere»), è citato di nuovo Goffman, con riferimento a «un io che non può avere alcuna storia», in contrasto con la «visione narrativa dell'io» (ivi, p. 266-267).

<sup>32</sup> Id., *Giustizia e razionalità* (1988), vol. 2 *Dall'illuminismo scozzese all'età contemporanea*, trad. di C. Calabi, Anabasi, Milano 1995, pp. 158-159.

<sup>33</sup> Ivi, p. 231.



Il contributo forse più importante sul tema MacIntyre lo offre in un breve ma fondamentale saggio pubblicato nel 1999 nella rivista «Philosophy», dedicato al rapporto tra strutture sociali e *agency* morale<sup>34</sup>. Qui richiama uno studio sul campo cui aveva partecipato negli anni '70, mirante ad approfondire la dimensione morale dei processi decisionali nell'industria elettrica americana<sup>35</sup>. In quell'occasione aveva avuto modo di riscontrare che una persona rispondeva in modo diverso alle stesse domande a seconda che parlasse come dirigente dell'azienda o come genitore o come cittadino coinvolto; e i soggetti erano di fatto inconsapevoli di questo variare delle loro risposte al variare del loro ruolo sociale e del relativo punto di vista. Tale attitudine a cambiare atteggiamento inconsapevolmente in base al variare del ruolo è appunto ciò che MacIntyre definisce «compartimentalizzazione», intendendola come fenomeno peculiare della modernità («*a peculiarly modern phenomenon that I will call compartmentalization*»)<sup>36</sup>. Qualcosa di più della normale differenziazione in ruoli e strutture istituzionali propria di ogni società: piuttosto il destreggiarsi dello stesso individuo tra sfere di azione separate e autonome, ognuna relativa a un determinato ruolo e retta da precise norme, indicanti quali considerazioni vanno intese come rilevanti per prendere decisioni all'interno di quella sfera e quali invece sono da escludere.

Immerse come sono in un ordine socio-culturale così strutturato, le persone lo rispecchiano direttamente nel loro modo di agire e di ragionare; sono le strutture a dare forma alle loro vite, indicando una gamma di ruoli da svolgere, le responsabilità associate a ciascun ruolo, il tipo di ragionamento pratico ad esso adeguato: ciò che serve conoscere, ciò di cui è necessario essere consapevoli, ciò di cui si è chiamati a rispondere, e ciò di cui invece non occorre occuparsi o preoccuparsi nell'ambito di quel ruolo. Per esempio, sempre richiamando la sua precedente indagine sul mondo industriale, MacIntyre dice di avere notato che l'obiettivo di ridurre i consumi complessivi di energia non era nemmeno lontanamente contemplato nei ragionamenti dei dirigenti dell'azienda elettrica, mentre diventava plausibile quando essi parlavano in veste di consumatori o di cittadini coinvolti. Cioè il passaggio da una sfera all'altra, con assunzione di ruoli diversi e conseguentemente di set di norme diversi, ha come effetto la dissoluzione dell'individuo nei ruoli stessi: una persona interpreta un certo ruolo in famiglia, un altro al lavoro, un altro ancora nel suo club sportivo e un altro

<sup>34</sup>Id., «Social Structures and Their Threats to Moral Agency» (1999), ora in *Ethics and Politics. Selected Essays*, vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 186-204.

<sup>35</sup>Id., *Utilitarianism and the Presuppositions of Cost-Benefit Analysis: An Essay on the Relevance of Moral Philosophy to Bureaucratic Theory* (1977), ora in M. Wachs (ed.), *Ethics in Planning*, Routledge, New Brunswick 1985, pp. 216-232.

<sup>36</sup>A. MacIntyre, «Social Structures and Their Threats to Moral Agency», cit., p. 196.

ancora come riservista dell'esercito, conformandosi in ciascuna sfera a quanto esige il ruolo corrispondente<sup>37</sup>.

Gli effetti della compartimentalizzazione sulla vita di coloro che ne sono soggetti potrebbero essere giudicati e messi in discussione solo elaborando un punto di vista che riuscisse a sfuggire a tali effetti, cioè un punto di vista esterno rispetto alle attività strutturate dai ruoli. Ma nel meccanismo della compartimentalizzazione l'individuo non ha modo di fare un passo indietro rispetto ai differenti ruoli di volta in volta interpretati, per analizzare sé stesso e le strutture sociali, e per impegnarsi («insieme ad altri» sottolinea più volte MacIntyre<sup>38</sup>) in una riflessione critica sugli standard che governano le sue sfere d'azione, sui conflitti che ne derivano, sul carattere limitato dei giudizi pertinenti a ognuna di esse. Quindi la persona non si percepisce mai come portatrice di una

<sup>37</sup>Riporto due esempi interessanti che fa MacIntyre (ivi, pp. 197-199). Uno riguarda «l'etica dell'inganno»: alla domanda se, quando e in che misura sia giustificato ingannare gli altri si possono dare risposte diverse, a seconda del contesto e quindi del punto di vista morale assunto di volta in volta. Così saranno tenuti a obblighi di veridicità differenti lo scienziato che deve riportare i dati della sua ricerca in una pubblicazione scientifica e lo scienziato dipendente di un'azienda il cui CEO per non perdere clienti pubblicizza i dati relativi all'azienda a fini promozionali; e queste stesse persone, trovandosi a gestire la propria autorappresentazione conversando durante un *party*, saranno tenute in tale occasione a standard di veridicità ancora diversi. Si avranno così tre diverse «etiche dell'inganno», basate sui tre diversi punti di vista (il problema del «dire la verità» è un caso paradigmatico di comportamenti dettati dalla compartimentalizzazione, considerato anche in *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, come si è visto). Un altro esempio sono i diversi possibili atteggiamenti verso la morte: la morte di un bambino in un incidente automobilistico allo sguardo di un familiare rappresenta una perdita incolmabile, che nulla può valere a compensare; allo sguardo di un dirigente dell'azienda che ha prodotto l'automobile non è che una voce che concorre a definire il tasso annuo di mortalità, che a sua volta è una componente del compromesso fra perdite umane e profitti derivanti dalle vendite di automobili; allo sguardo di un avvocato che ha in mente un'azione per il risarcimento, infine, essa ha un preciso valore economico calcolabile in base alla giurisprudenza recente. Ognuna delle tre prospettive ha senso e giustificazione in base al contesto e alla specifica posizione del soggetto rispetto all'evento; ma la stessa persona riesce a passare da una prospettiva a un'altra solo compartimentalizzando, cioè assumendo una prospettiva e tacitando le altre due; così farà il dirigente di un'azienda automobilistica che passi istantaneamente dal fare le condoglianze ai genitori sulla tomba del bambino al presenziare a una riunione fissata per ridefinire gli obiettivi di produzione aziendale.

<sup>38</sup>«Together with others», p. 197; «with others», p. 199; «in the company of others», p. 203. La dimensione relazionale è essenziale, costitutiva: MacIntyre sembra qui voler evidenziare che l'individuo isolato è preda della compartimentalizzazione, mentre più individui in relazione hanno maggiori possibilità di prendere coscienza di questa dinamica, e quindi di reagirvi: alla compartimentalizzazione si potrebbe sfuggire soltanto insieme (del resto, la dimensione cooperativa è propria di ogni «pratica», tema-chiave del pensiero di MacIntyre, su cui v. *infra*, nota 79). A questo proposito è interessante anche il modo in cui egli, quasi forgiando un lessico tecnico, designa il contesto in cui l'io si trova collocato: solitamente utilizza il termine *sphere* per indicare gli ambiti compartimentalizzati e separati gli uni dagli altri in cui l'individuo interpreta i propri differenti ruoli, e invece il termine *milieu* per definire quegli auspicabili contesti comunitari (assenti nella compartimentalizzazione, e resi impossibili da essa) in cui l'individuo, uscendo dalle sfere e prendendo le distanze dai ruoli e da quanto essi impongono, potrebbe insieme agli altri giudicare criticamente quei ruoli, e prendere coscienza dei limiti, dei conflitti e delle incompatibilità che essi implicano.

identità sostanziale indipendente dai suoi ruoli e conseguentemente portatrice di responsabilità diverse da quelle derivanti dai ruoli stessi; una tale consapevolezza riaprirebbe proprio quel tipo di conflitti tra istanze incoerenti che la compartimentalizzazione previene e sopprime efficacemente.

Il tipo di soggettività emergente da tale contesto è allora un «io diviso»<sup>39</sup>: privo di integrità (perché il set di norme cui di volta in volta accorda lealtà cambia sempre, in relazione al contesto) e privo di costanza (perché portato a cambiare continuamente direzione, spostandosi da una sfera all'altra); cioè privo (inconsapevolmente) proprio di quelle due virtù che sono i presupposti per l'esercizio dell'*agency* morale. Dunque un individuo estraneo alla virtù in senso classico: la sua idea di virtù non è certo l'eccellenza come essere umano, bensì l'eccellenza nell'interpretare un ruolo. Non a caso la principale virtù che questo soggetto sfodera nel gestire le sue transizioni da una sfera all'altra è una virtù «nuova», assente nel catalogo classico delle virtù e tipica invece della compartimentalizzazione: l'adattabilità, la flessibilità, «l'abilità nell'assumere come un camaleonte il colore di questo o quel contesto sociale». L'io diviso è allora moralmente un «agente diminuito»: connotato da una «moralità diminuita», da «poteri di *agency* diminuiti», e da una «responsabilità diminuita»<sup>40</sup>; non sente alcuna responsabilità se non quelle che gli sono assegnate dai ruoli che ricopre in ciascuna particolare sfera di attività; e ammette come premesse del proprio ragionamento pratico in ogni sfera solo le considerazioni stabilite come rilevanti dalle norme proprie di essa.

MacIntyre sottolinea con nettezza la non-innocenza di un tale soggetto, il quale non è vittima suo malgrado di un sistema che lo fagocita e lo costringe alla scissione, bensì è complice del crearsi di tale stato di cose e ne è in larga misura responsabile («*those who inhabit a compartmentalized social order can be held responsible as co-authors of their social and moral situation*»)<sup>41</sup>. Certamente le strutture socio-culturali hanno di per sé l'effetto di inibire l'esercizio dell'*agency* morale; ma il soggetto coopera attivamente alla propria condizione di agente diminuito, e ne è corresponsabile. È lui, infatti, che impone artificialmente al proprio pensiero opportune restrizioni atte a limitare il ragionamento pratico all'adempimento delle sole responsabilità connesse ai ruoli stabiliti; è lui che arbitrariamente sceglie di precludersi certe possibilità di azione, sviluppando le abitudini mentali che rendono possibile tale chiusura. Se appare dissolto nei suoi vari ruoli, pur non essendolo in fondo, è esattamente perché evita di porsi domande sul ruolo di volta in volta interpretato, e anche sul modo di interpretarlo, avendo cura di sospendere il proprio ragionamento pratico ogni

<sup>39</sup> «Divided self», ivi, pp. 199-202.

<sup>40</sup> Ivi, pp. 192, 200, 202: «diminished type of agency», «diminished morality», «diminished powers of agency», «diminished responsibility», «diminished agent».

<sup>41</sup> Ivi, p. 203.

volta che esso tenderebbe a sconfinare da ciò che il ruolo richiede. L'io diviso di un ordine sociale compartimentalizzato adotta opportune strategie di evitamento per non percepire di trovarsi impegnato in giudizi incompatibili, e per non dover affrontare tale incompatibilità (ad esempio rispetto al dire la verità, come si è visto sopra); sviluppa inoltre precise abitudini mentali che gli consentono di non prestare attenzione a quelle che dovrebbe riconoscere come proprie incoerenze, se guardasse a sé stesso al di là dei propri ruoli; è così esonerato dal controllo delle conseguenze e preservato dal disagio connesso. Propriamente non vi sono dunque vittime della compartimentalizzazione; piuttosto tutti gli individui sono partecipi di una sorta di «cospirazione» che consente loro di «condurre vite conformi in modo ineccepibile», invocando la mancanza di quella conoscenza e di quella possibilità di controllo sugli esiti che, se presenti, sancirebbero la loro responsabilità<sup>42</sup>.

Quanto sia stato centrale questo tema per MacIntyre appare anche da un intervento che tenne all'Università di Notre Dame nel 2000, nell'ambito di un convegno intitolato *A Culture of Death*<sup>43</sup>. Anche in quella occasione indicava nella compartimentalizzazione un aspetto cruciale della nostra vita sociale («*There is another feature of our social life which is crucial, the one that I named compartmentalization*»), e dichiarava di essere debitore nei confronti della sociologia per l'uso di questa nozione. Citava espressamente uno studio condotto da Goffman alle isole Shetland per la sua dissertazione dottorale, in particolare la descrizione dei due tipi opposti di comportamento tenuti dai camerieri di un ristorante, a seconda che si trovassero in sala a interagire con i clienti oppure chiusi in cucina con lo staff della cucina: varcare le *swinging doors* significava per i camerieri passare all'istante da un mondo retto da certe regole a un mondo completamente diverso retto da altre regole; e altre regole ancora diverse avranno retto probabilmente la loro vita personale una volta rientrati a casa la sera dopo il lavoro. È un tipico esempio della nota distinzione di Goffman tra *front stage* (luogo pubblico in cui i soggetti svolgono secondo regole standardizzate la performance sociale propria del loro ruolo) e *backstage* (luogo riparato in cui possono rilassarsi, interrompere la performance, venir meno all'immagine che la performance ambisce a trasmettere, togliersi le maschere imposte dal ruolo e deporre i caratteri impersonati nel ruolo)<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Ivi, p. 202.

<sup>43</sup> Qui il video dell'intervento e della successiva sessione di Q&A: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzYHPaSKmTU>, e qui la trascrizione: <https://matiane.wordpress.com/2022/08/31/culture-of-choices-and-compartmentalization-by-alasdair-macintyre/> (siti consultati il 28 agosto 2025).

<sup>44</sup> Sono temi noti della sociologia dell'interazione di Goffman. Lo studio cui si riferisce MacIntyre risale al periodo di osservazione etnografica che Goffman aveva svolto da giovane nell'isola scozzese di Unst, i cui risultati confluirono nelle sue opere successive: l'esempio dello

MacIntyre proseguiva poi il suo intervento illustrando i caratteri della compartimentalizzazione, e come esemplificazione di questa dinamica considerava i modi differenti in cui trattiamo la morte nei diversi contesti. Ampliando e approfondendo un tema già affrontato, come si è visto, nell'articolo pubblicato l'anno prima, constatava anzitutto la mancanza di un pensiero unitario sulla morte. Ci sono modi molto diversi di pensare la morte, a seconda che ci si riferisca a un giovane rimasto vittima di un incidente automobilistico o che quella morte si trasformi in un dato statistico che serve a un'azienda automobilistica per fare un'analisi costi-benefici. Ancora diverso è il modo in cui si pensa (o piuttosto non si pensa) a quelle persone che nella società sono deputate a rischiare la morte per proteggere la sicurezza di tutti (forze dell'ordine, vigili del fuoco, *etc.*) o ancora a quelle persone che muoiono perché una terapia sperimentale rischiosa cui avevano accettato di sottoporsi non ha funzionato (MacIntyre in questo caso precisa che non intende entrare nel merito di questioni di competenza dei comitati etici ospedalieri, bensì semplicemente riflettere su come si guarda la morte di quei pazienti). L'abitudine a pensare la morte in singoli specifici contesti (una vera e propria "compartimentalizzazione della morte", potremmo dire) ci rende incapaci di pensare la morte in quanto tale; non interrogandoci sul nostro rapporto con la morte diventiamo incapaci di pensare alla morte degli altri. L'incapacità di pensare alla propria morte, a sua volta, deriva dall'incapacità di concepire la propria vita nel suo insieme, di capire che cosa significhi avere vissuto bene la vita nel suo insieme: tendiamo a leggere la vita come una serie di scelte, azioni, episodi, momenti da approvare e altri momenti di cui pentirsi, ma non qualcosa che possiamo afferrare come un tutto. Se è difficile pensare la morte è anzitutto perché manca l'idea di che cosa sia una vita ben spesa, una vita come unità e totalità.

Con queste intense riflessioni MacIntyre realizzava nella conferenza del 2000 una sorta di ricapitolazione del tema: dalle origini sociologiche della nozione al manifestarsi del fenomeno nella contemporaneità alle esemplificazioni di casi concreti al problema morale di fondo da esso posto, su cui tornerò: la compartimentalizzazione come sintomo dello smarrimento del senso unitario della vita umana.

### **3. L'EFFETTO DERESPONSABILIZZANTE DELLA COMPARTIMENTALIZZAZIONE**

Nel concludere il dibattito seguito alla conferenza appena ricordata, MacIntyre chiariva in che cosa la compartimentalizzazione si distingue dalla consueta

«Shetland Hotel» è citato più volte in E. Goffman, *La vita quotidiana come rappresentazione* (1959), trad. di M. Ciacci, il Mulino, Bologna 2020, pp. 96 ss., 136 ss., 181, 193.

differenziazione della società in sfere e comportamenti corrispondenti. In effetti un certo grado di differenziazione sociale si riscontra normalmente in tutte le culture, ma senza che le persone nel passare da una sfera all'altra perdano di vista le norme e le concezioni del bene condivise nella società intesa come un tutto: in questo modo ciò che funziona e vale entro una singola sfera non resta isolato da riferimenti più ampi. L'esempio che portava era quello dell'oncologa pediatrica, che per poter svolgere il suo lavoro ha la necessità ovvia di separare le sfere della sua vita, e dev'essere in grado di operare una distinzione tra i piccoli pazienti di cui si occupa come medico e i figli con i quali si mette a tavola quando torna a casa: è una differenziazione di ruoli indispensabile, che però non implica necessariamente compartimentalizzazione, perché lei come oncologa pediatrica è tenuta a rispondere, a dare conto, in base a standard che sono molto più generali. Il potenziale corrosivo della compartimentalizzazione emergerebbe, invece, in una situazione in cui gli oncologi pediatrici o altri medici specialisti o la professione medica complessivamente intesa trattassero il proprio ambito come una sfera autonoma, non implicante responsabilità verso l'esterno. Il cuore del problema della compartimentalizzazione sta cioè nella dinamica deresponsabilizzante che implica: è in questi termini che MacIntyre ne fa un oggetto privilegiato di riflessione morale nell'ambito della sua critica della modernità.

I "risultati" assicurati dalla compartimentalizzazione in termini di efficienza, funzionalità, aderenza al sistema comportano dunque significativi contraccolpi sul piano morale sostanziale<sup>45</sup>. Un primo effetto è una certa atrofizzazione della vita morale aristotelicamente intesa come pratica della virtù. Come è stato osservato, la compartimentalizzazione esprime una «crisi della razionalità pratica», «implica l'impossibilità di un'effettiva pratica delle virtù», «genera un agente morale acritico e perciò irresponsabile»<sup>46</sup>. Già in *Dopo la virtù* MacIntyre qualificava come «fortemente tipiche delle forme di pensiero e di prassi della modernità» le concezioni della soggettività basate su una fondamentale separatezza (l'io separato dai ruoli che svolge, oppure l'io ridotto a *player* di diversi ruoli separati tra loro); e constatava che «l'io così concepito non può essere considerato il portatore delle virtù aristoteliche»<sup>47</sup>. In un mondo plasmato dalla compartimentalizzazione (tanto a livello sistemico quanto a livello di atteggiamenti interiori individuali), il catalogo classico delle virtù non può che risultare trasformato. Se l'obiettivo è la *compliance* agli imperativi del sistema, saranno apprezzate e incoraggiate le virtù che favoriscono l'adattamento, la docilità, il conformismo; mentre non saranno

<sup>45</sup>Ci sono studi anche in ambito psicologico sui «costi nascosti» che la compartimentalizzazione comporta a fronte dei vantaggi che comunemente le vengono attribuiti: v.V. Zeigler-Hill, C.J. Showers, "Self-structure and self-esteem stability. The hidden vulnerability of compartmentalization", in «Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin», 33, 2007, pp. 143-159.

<sup>46</sup>S. Maletta, D. Mazzola, «*Legge naturale e critica del liberalismo in MacIntyre: aspetti teorici e prospettive critiche*», in «Acta Philosophica», 28, 2019, pp. 263-264.

<sup>47</sup>A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p. 250.

promosse né esercitate né valorizzate le virtù che consistono nell'opporsi, nel resistere al sistema, nel distinguersi<sup>48</sup>.

Possiamo trarre spunto da questi rilievi critici di MacIntyre per ampliare l'analisi dei costi che la compartimentalizzazione comporta sul piano morale. Il fenomeno è stato indagato per esempio anche negli studi sul *management*: si è rilevato che nelle organizzazioni il fatto di dare per scontato che in contesti differenti si giochino ruoli differenti, conformandosi alle relative regole, ha notevoli implicazioni sul piano morale. La compartimentalizzazione generata dal prevalere dei ruoli sulle persone mina la capacità di esercitare una piena *agency* morale e rende difficile ascrivere responsabilità morale agli individui; mentre, all'opposto, l'integrità e la responsabilità morale risultano promosse se si passa da una visione prettamente *role-based* alla consapevolezza della complessità e della totalità dell'io<sup>49</sup>.

Quando la persona si identifica con il proprio ruolo al punto da avvertire come imperativo quasi esclusivo il soddisfacimento dei requisiti e degli obiettivi dettati da tale ruolo, il suo senso di responsabilità risulta ridimensionato, a vantaggio di un'esecuzione burocratica, che la porta ad autoesonerarsi da un giudizio morale, da uno scrutinio della coscienza sulla condotta tenuta, e quindi anche ad autoassolversi rispetto al male eventualmente compiuto, prendendone le distanze o minimizzandolo fino al punto da non vederlo più. L'enfasi sul ruolo oblitera l'unità del soggetto in quanto agente morale e ragionatore pratico, anzi mette programmaticamente tra parentesi tale unità, frammentando il suo agire in una sequenza di fasi non comunicanti l'una con l'altra, retta ognuna da propri standard regolativi. La parcellizzazione garantisce l'efficienza di funzionamento del soggetto in ogni singolo ambito, e dunque è un meccanismo indotto e favorito dai sistemi di potere, ai quali servono soggetti allenati ad adattarsi ai vari scenari, come se disponessero di una sorta di interruttore che permette loro di passare dall'uno all'altro, evitando interferenze e spegnendo il proprio senso critico, molto più che soggetti unitari che hanno maturato determinate virtù e sanno dispiegarle con la stessa convinzione nei diversi contesti e situazioni con cui la vita li mette a confronto.

<sup>48</sup>S. Maletta, "Introduzione", in A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 18, osserva che nell'ambito della compartimentalizzazione dei ruoli quale tratto distintivo della *corporate modernity* si assiste a un «decisivo cambiamento della natura delle virtù, le quali divengono mere *abitudini* dell'individuo che lo rendono più *fit*, più adatto ai suoi propri ruoli sociali e quindi più efficiente nello svolgere i propri compiti»; le virtù perdono così «ogni loro possibile potenziale critico». Una delle conseguenze è che «il capitale sociale reso possibile dalla fiducia reciproca viene decisamente intaccato». Sul tema v. anche S. Maletta, *Biografia della ragione. Saggio sulla filosofia politica di MacIntyre*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2007, pp. 70-71; Id., *Aristotelismo sovversivo. MacIntyre oltre il disordine liberale*, Mimesis, Milano 2020, pp. 64-65, 124.

<sup>49</sup>C. Rozuel, "The Moral Threat of Compartmentalization: Self, Roles and Responsibility", in «Journal of Business Ethics» 102, 2011, pp. 685-697. In questo studio è ampiamente citato il saggio ricordato sopra: A. MacIntyre, "Social Structures and Their Threats to Moral Agency", cit..

In termini moralmente ben più pesanti, questo effetto deresponsabilizzante del primato del ruolo e di quanto esso impone (con un obnubilamento del senso critico e dei sentimenti morali) è esemplificato in modo paradigmatico dal comportamento dei capi nazisti. Nelle analisi di quelle vicende viene spesso evidenziata la scissione tra i crimini che erano capaci di perpetrare o avallare nei lager e la vita normale che riuscivano a continuare a svolgere nella dimensione privata e familiare<sup>50</sup>. E anche nella difesa che essi facevano del proprio operato emerge spesso l'effetto deresponsabilizzante indotto dall'invocare il ruolo (e i relativi obblighi) quale fondamento e giustificazione dell'azione, e dal segmentare l'azione stessa in comparti separati e isolati gli uni dagli altri, quasi a depotenziarne l'effettiva, e ovvia, natura di crimine: natura che sarebbe stato impossibile invece non percepire se si fossero conservate l'unità del soggetto agente e l'unità delle azioni compiute. Tipici esempi di compartimentalizzazione sono evidenziati ad esempio da Hannah Arendt negli argomenti utilizzati da Adolf Eichmann per difendersi durante il processo a Gerusalemme: il concetto di azione compiuta «per ordine superiore»; la definizione delle azioni compiute come «azioni di Stato», e il rifiuto di considerarle crimini<sup>51</sup>; la tendenza a operare sottili *distinguo* e a tracciare linee di demarcazione quanto a compiti, mansioni e relative responsabilità (emblematica, in questo senso, l'insistenza di Eichmann sul fatto – peraltro smentito dall'inchiesta – di non avere mai ucciso direttamente nessun ebreo, essendosi occupato esclusivamente di organizzare le deportazioni)<sup>52</sup>. Nell'adozione di queste distinzioni come «linea di difesa» si può cogliere una

<sup>50</sup>Ad esempio a proposito di Rudolf Höss, primo comandante del campo di Auschwitz, così scrive F.E. Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil. A Report on the Beguilings of Evil*, State University of New York Press, New York 1993, pp. 73-74: «Hoess rigidly separated home from work. He would not permit life in the camp to intrude into his family routines. At home there was no talk about camp brutalities, about the fate of this or that individual Jew. [...] Hoess created a family life that was relatively separate from his work. It was a life of simple joys, of nurtured family interactions. [...] What is more, the major actor in both contexts was the same person. Obviously, the physical separation of the two contexts is not the real issue. The real issue is Hoess's mental separation of the two contexts. We are talking about a *mental construction* of reality; and mental constructions are real, especially in the way they influence human behavior. In our daily life we continually bring mental constructions to bear on our situation. Through mental constructions we organize the reality in which we leave».

<sup>51</sup>H. Arendt, *La banalità del male. Eichmann a Gerusalemme* (1963, 1964), trad. di P. Bernardini, Feltrinelli, Milano 2003, pp. 29-30, 292-293.

<sup>52</sup>Eichmann sosteneva l'infondatezza dell'accusa di omicidio. In proposito Hannah Arendt riporta queste sue parole: «Con la liquidazione degli ebrei io non ho mai avuto a che fare; io non ho mai ucciso né un ebreo né un non ebreo, insomma non ho mai ucciso un essere umano; né ho mai dato l'ordine di uccidere un ebreo o un non ebreo; proprio, non l'ho mai fatto»; per questo, osserva Arendt, «non si stancò mai di ripetere [...] che poteva essere accusato soltanto di avere “aiutato e favorito” lo sterminio degli ebrei» (ivi, p. 30).



forma di vera e propria compartimentalizzazione, che permetteva ai nazisti di allontanare il senso di vergogna e orrore per quanto compivano<sup>53</sup>.

In un'intervista rilasciata alla giornalista Gitta Sereny nel 1971 nel carcere giudiziario di Düsseldorf, Franz Stangl, che nel 1942-1943 era stato comandante del campo di sterminio di Treblinka, citò espressamente la compartimentalizzazione come una sua strategia di sopravvivenza:

«Come poté, in tutta coscienza, offrirsi volontario, come fece a prendere una qualsiasi parte in questo crimine?»

«Era una questione di sopravvivenza – sempre di sopravvivenza. Ciò che dovevo fare, mentre proseguivo nei miei sforzi per uscirne fuori, era di limitare le mie azioni a quelle di cui – nella mia coscienza – potevo rispondere. Alla scuola di polizia ci avevano insegnato – ricordo, era il Rittmeister Leitner che lo diceva sempre – che un'azione, per essere definita criminale, doveva possedere quattro requisiti: doveva esservi un soggetto, un oggetto, un'azione e uno scopo. Se mancava uno di questi quattro elementi, allora non si trattava di un'azione punibile».

«Non vedo come possa applicare un simile concetto a tutta questa situazione».

«È proprio quello che sto cercando di spiegarle: l'unico modo che avevo per sopravvivere, era di dividere la mia coscienza in compartimenti stagni [*The only way I could live was by compartmentalizing my thinking*]. In tal modo potevo applicare questo principio alla mia situazione; se il 'soggetto' era il governo, l'oggetto erano gli ebrei, e l'azione erano i gasaggi, allora potevo dire a me stesso che, per me, il quarto elemento, lo 'scopo' [lui lo chiamava "volontà libera"] mancava»<sup>54</sup>.

Nel sopprimere e neutralizzare il conflitto interiore, la compartimentalizzazione provoca un oblio dell'unità della vita, della persona e della sua identità sostanziale, e quindi anche di quelle responsabilità che dipendono essenzialmente da tale identità e non dai singoli specifici ruoli di volta in volta "giocati"; l'espressione stessa "giocare un ruolo" (che ha paralleli in varie lingue: *jouer un rôle*, *jugar un rol*, *role-playing*, *eine Rolle spielen*, etc.) richiama l'idea della recita, della rappresentazione teatrale, della finzione, lasciando in ombra il nucleo sostanziale della persona, ciò che di essa permane e non muta con le circostanze. Come insegna MacIntyre negli scritti esaminati prima, l'abitudine della persona ad agire esclusivamente sulla base delle norme proprie della sfera in cui di volta in volta si

<sup>53</sup> È ciò che ha notato D. Keen, *Shame. The Politics and Power of an Emotion*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2023, p. 107: «A key thing for Eichmann was a kind of compartmentalization: in Jerusalem he repeatedly insisted that while he had organized transportation, he had not been involved in killing». Keen individua la compartimentalizzazione come una delle specifiche tecniche adottate nella routine dei nazisti: «"normal" shame was not exactly banished but instead was constantly warded off through techniques that we can identify. Whether it was compartmentalization or using euphemisms, or "drawing the line", or "following history", or invoking "the lesser evil", or simply redefining virtue as temptation, such techniques helped to enable the unfolding horror» (ivi, p. 110).

<sup>54</sup> G. Sereny, *In quelle tenebre* (1974), trad. di A. Bianchi, Adelphi, Milano 1975, p. 220.

trova ad operare, facendo dell'obbedienza a tali norme un fondamento e una giustificazione autosufficiente delle proprie azioni, azzerava la sua capacità di adottare quando necessario una sana presa di distanza critica dal ruolo, di assumere un punto di vista esterno e indipendente dal ruolo stesso, e di mettere in questione l'ordine sociale costituito dal quale tale ruolo è imposto e definito. Così le vite individuali diventano spesso, inconsapevolmente, un mero rispecchiamento dell'ordine stesso.

Il caso-limite dei crimini nazisti ci mostra amplificate ed estremizzate, in termini di entità e di gravità, come sotto una potente lente di ingrandimento, sia la dinamica deresponsabilizzante che sempre la compartimentalizzazione porta con sé sia l'assenza di quello che dovrebbe essere il principale antidoto ad essa: il mantenimento di una costante presa sul reale da parte della coscienza individuale, attraverso l'esercizio del giudizio, del senso critico e autocritico, del vitale lavoro delle idee e dell'immaginazione, preziosa risorsa sul piano morale. Vi è infatti una «strana interdipendenza tra mancanza di idee e male», come scriveva Hannah Arendt proprio a proposito di Eichmann. «Eichmann non era uno Iago né un Macbeth, [...] non riusciamo a scoprire in lui una profondità diabolica o demoniaca»; piuttosto una cifra della sua personalità che emerse durante il processo fu la «mancanza di immaginazione»: in altri termini, «egli *non capì mai che cosa stava facendo*.[...] Non era uno stupido; era semplicemente senza idee (una cosa molto diversa dalla stupidità) e tale mancanza d'idee ne faceva un individuo predisposto a divenire uno dei più grandi criminali di quel periodo. [...] Quella lontananza dalla realtà e quella mancanza d'idee possono essere molto più pericolose di tutti gli istinti malvagi che forse sono innati nell'uomo»<sup>55</sup>.

Con il suo potente effetto anestetizzante, ottundente, autoassolutorio e omologante, la compartimentalizzazione spegne quello che la stessa Arendt in un'altra occasione definì socraticamente «il vento leggero del pensiero», la cui manifestazione è «l'attitudine a discernere il bene dal male, il bello dal brutto. Il che, forse, nei rari momenti in cui ogni posta è in gioco, è realmente in grado di impedire le catastrofi, almeno per il proprio sé»<sup>56</sup>.

#### 4. «OLTRE L'ARENA DEL DIBATTITO TEORICO»: IL SENSO DEL LAVORO INTELLETTUALE NELL'UNITÀ DELL'ESISTENZA

Esplorate le implicazioni morali della categoria sociologica di compartimentalizzazione, da quelle più fisiologiche fino a quelle più estreme, vorrei concludere questa analisi tornando al libro *L'etica nei conflitti della*

<sup>55</sup>H. Arendt, *La banalità del male*, cit., pp. 290-291.

<sup>56</sup>Ead., *La vita della mente* (1978), a cura di A. Dal Lago, trad. di G. Zanetti, il Mulino, Bologna 1987, pp. 288-289.

*modernità* per trarne un ulteriore spunto di riflessione. Al problema generale che MacIntyre identifica attraverso il concetto-chiave di vite compartimentalizzate è riconducibile anche un tema più specifico, ma altrettanto cruciale nel suo ragionamento: la critica allo specialismo della ricerca filosofica in quanto ridotta a disciplina accademica. Il nesso tra queste due “riduzioni” proprie della modernità avanzata è esplicitato all’inizio del capitolo II: troviamo qui, infatti, la prima occorrenza della nozione di compartimentalizzazione in tutto il volume, riferita proprio al luogo comune che la filosofia sia materia da specialisti. Vale la pena riprendere per intero questo passaggio: una lucida riflessione sulle «limitazioni della ricerca filosofica o piuttosto della ricerca filosofica per come viene oggi concepita [...], vale a dire di una ricerca che è strettamente accademica»<sup>57</sup>.

MacIntyre individua molto concretamente tali limitazioni in tre caratteristiche principali, tra loro collegate. In primo luogo, la ricerca filosofica è oggi appannaggio delle università e delle pubblicazioni accademiche, dunque ha un «suo proprio idioma distintivo» molto distante da quello della maggior parte delle persone comuni, degli agenti morali. In secondo luogo, essa occupa «un certo territorio accademico ben definito: la filosofia è una cosa, la fisica un’altra, la sociologia è una terza cosa, la storia una quarta»; ne consegue che «le domande a cui non si può rispondere all’interno di una disciplina corrono sempre il pericolo di non essere nemmeno poste». In terzo luogo, la ricerca filosofica coincide quasi esclusivamente con il lavoro di docenti universitari, «la cui professionalizzazione garantisce che vengano assimilati certi abiti di pensiero, tra i quali sono compresi quelli che assicurano la stabilità delle gerarchie accademiche». È qui che emerge la denuncia della compartimentalizzazione. Coloro che sono selezionati in base al possesso di determinati prerequisiti per accedere alla ricerca filosofica come professione accademica di solito hanno un’esperienza di vita limitata («[d]i rado saranno soldati o organizzatori sindacali, di rado lavoreranno in fattorie, in equipaggi di pescatori o nelle costruzioni, di rado suoneranno in quartetti d’archi o andranno in prigione»). Coloro che invece hanno queste esperienze significative sono educati a credere, appunto per effetto della «compartimentalizzazione della vita sociale contemporanea», che la riflessione e la ricerca filosofica «siano cose da specialisti accademici e non facciano per loro»; e i filosofi di professione dal canto loro pensano altrettanto. Per MacIntyre questo è un errore: almeno per la filosofia politica e per la filosofia morale (aggiungerei: per la filosofia del diritto) i filosofi «hanno bisogno di cominciare dalle questioni quotidiane delle persone comuni - quelle persone comuni che essi stessi erano prima che iniziassero gli studi di filosofia»<sup>58</sup>.

Indubbiamente la professionalizzazione permette di sviluppare e affinare abilità molto mirate e sofisticate; ma comporta uno sradicamento della teoria dalla

<sup>57</sup>A. MacIntyre, *L’etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 131.

<sup>58</sup>Ivi, p. 132.

pratica che, nel caso della filosofia morale e politica, risulta particolarmente problematico: «la ricerca filosofica e la discussione della teoria morale viene isolata dalla pratica politica e morale»<sup>59</sup>. In una ricerca l'inizio è sempre fondamentale, e fin dall'inizio teoria e pratica sono connesse: come insegna Aristotele, è nella pratica che dev'essere appreso il punto di partenza di una ricerca teorica, e se questo è sbagliato si va «fuori strada» sia nella prassi sia nelle indagini teoriche<sup>60</sup>. Il punto essenziale, che emerge con la forza di un'istanza programmatica, è la priorità dell'agire morale rispetto a qualunque teoria:

Noi tutti siamo agenti prima di essere teorici ed è solo perché siamo agenti che abbiamo materiale riguardo a cui porre quelle domande che ci conducono alla teoria. È proprio in quanto agenti divenuti riflessivi che ci ritroviamo a porre quelle domande da cui inizia la ricerca filosofica. E quando gli agenti si coinvolgono in una ricerca filosofica non per questo cessano di essere agenti<sup>61</sup>.

La compartimentalizzazione del lavoro intellettuale, di cui soffre in particolare la ricerca filosofica, ha un significato paradigmatico: assorbe e rispecchia tutte le criticità proprie della compartimentalizzazione della società odierna e della compartimentalizzazione dell'esistenza individuale. Di qui il forte richiamo all'esigenza di unitarietà e coerenza dell'impegno intellettuale rispetto alla totalità della vita morale dell'individuo. Proprio in nome di questa unità MacIntyre indica in modo più o meno diretto, in vari passaggi, i requisiti di un'autentica ricerca filosofica, che sono anche, al tempo stesso, i requisiti del tipo di persona capace di condurla. Rintracciandoli possiamo ricostruire una sorta di "ideale regolativo" della ricerca filosofica e di chi la compie. Alcuni sono requisiti intellettuali (ma pur sempre dipendenti da qualità personali), e sono da lui indicati come le capacità tipiche di un aristotelico: saper risolvere le incoerenze interne al sistema, saper organizzare nuove scoperte, saper replicare alle obiezioni delle scuole di pensiero rivali, essere in grado di capire quando un'indagine va abbandonata perché si rivela sterile<sup>62</sup>. Altri esprimono l'esigenza più ampia di saldare ricerca e vita, o meglio di portare a consapevolezza e a compimento la loro reciproca connessione: è su questo secondo tipo di requisiti che vorrei soffermarmi brevemente.

Anzitutto la ricerca intellettuale, in generale, è annoverata di per sé da MacIntyre tra quei beni che rendono la vita umana degna di essere vissuta, accanto alla vita familiare, all'educazione, al compimento artistico; in quanto tale essa è uno degli oggetti cui tende l'azione giusta (risultato acquisibile solo agendo

<sup>59</sup> Ivi, p. 133.

<sup>60</sup> Ivi, pp. 138, 311.

<sup>61</sup> Ivi, p. 133.

<sup>62</sup> Ivi, p. 303.

insieme ad altri tramite relazioni di fiducia)<sup>63</sup>. Quando poi si tratta specificamente di filosofia, la vicinanza alla vita è costitutiva: la prima affermazione con cui si apre *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità* che, sebbene la filosofia sia «divenuta quasi esclusivamente una disciplina accademica specializzata» e sebbene coloro che la praticano comunichino esclusivamente tra loro anziché rivolgersi ai profani, alcune domande filosofiche fondamentali («le domande poste inizialmente sui nostri desideri e su come dovremmo concepirli») si presentano anche a individui comuni, privi di formazione filosofica<sup>64</sup>.

Il nesso tra filosofia e vita è poi evidenziato più volte nel corso del libro: la ricerca razionale sulla fioritura umana «è essa stessa uno dei segni distintivi della fioritura umana»<sup>65</sup>; nella prospettiva neoaristotelica la vita stessa è da intendere come «un'ampia ricerca su come è meglio vivere»<sup>66</sup>; come agenti possiamo giungere a una «concezione della vita pratica come vita di ricerca» reagendo costruttivamente ai nostri fallimenti e imparando così che cos'è il nostro bene<sup>67</sup>; il tipo di vita che conduciamo ha la sua importanza per poter diventare agenti pratici razionali: un agente neoaristotelico accetterà di disciplinare i propri desideri e la propria volontà, e intenderà determinati vincoli come «condizioni di possibilità dell'agire»; rifiutarli come costrizioni inaccettabili (in ottica espressivista-nietzscheana) significa invece privarsi di esperienze che sono essenziali per «sapere da dove iniziare la ricerca morale e politica»<sup>68</sup>; persino la possibilità di avere o meno «una fiducia giustificata nelle nostre tesi filosofiche in politica e in etica» è collegata alla nostra vita, poiché dipende in parte dalla qualità delle nostre relazioni in famiglia, a scuola, al lavoro e altrove (elemento ovviamente ignorato nell'ambito della ricerca accademica)<sup>69</sup>.

Un caso paradigmatico di convergenza tra filosofia e vita sono le virtù: «se dobbiamo essere il tipo di persona in grado di impegnarsi in una ricerca che pervenga a conclusioni valide relative per esempio al posto delle virtù nella nostra vita, dobbiamo sin dall'inizio possedere in un certo grado alcune di queste virtù». Non è che un esempio dell'importanza, già ricordata sopra, del punto di inizio per la riuscita di una ricerca: «avremo successo nella nostra ricerca se il modo in cui proseguiamo questa ricerca presuppone sin dall'inizio alcune delle sue conclusioni»<sup>70</sup>. E MacIntyre esemplifica molto concretamente le «virtù indispensabili per completare una ricerca». Si tratta di quelle qualità della mente e

<sup>63</sup> Ivi, p. 410.

<sup>64</sup> Ivi, p. 39.

<sup>65</sup> Ivi, p. 76.

<sup>66</sup> Ivi, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> Ivi, p. 94.

<sup>68</sup> Ivi, pp. 116-117.

<sup>69</sup> Ivi, p. 312.

<sup>70</sup> Ivi, p. 182. Su questa circolarità che caratterizza il ragionamento degli agenti riflessivi v. ivi, pp. 136-137.

del carattere che rendono capaci gli agenti di «distacco» dal proprio ruolo sociale e professionale, in modo da essere consapevoli dell'unilateralità di ogni punto di vista (è improbabile che il punto di vista di chi fa filosofia per professione coincida con quello di chi vive in condizioni di svantaggio e marginalità) e da liberarsi dal desiderio di successo, di piacere, di reputazione. Grazie a tale libertà possiamo dedicarci a «vedere e comprendere le cose per come sono», a giudicare e agire di conseguenza, anziché a compiacere noi stessi e gli altri. Ciò che è richiesto, dunque, è un «disciplinamento dei desideri», una vera e propria «ascesi». Vi sono anche qualità della mente e del carattere che possono essere di ostacolo a ciò, quali l'orgoglio e la fiducia in sé; mentre è di aiuto «l'umiltà, la capacità di vedere sé stessi e i propri successi senza compiaciuta soddisfazione o auto-svalutazione»; e per chi è a rischio di autoinganno è utile poter contare sul «giudizio di amici perspicaci e capaci di una critica senza scrupoli»<sup>71</sup>; fondamentale è poi il dialogo con gli interlocutori, l'apertura alle loro obiezioni: «una forma cooperativa di ricerca che fallisce nella misura in cui diventa troppo conflittuale»<sup>72</sup>.

Come è evidente da questa rapida rassegna, MacIntyre, nell'indicare i requisiti di un'indagine filosofica e le virtù necessarie a intraprenderla, solleva e presuppone questioni ben più complesse rispetto a quanto può emergere da studi teorici e discussioni accademiche: non a caso ci invita ad «andare oltre l'arena del dibattito teorico» (ben consapevole che con questo in fondo sta invitando i suoi lettori «a muoversi al di là delle limitazioni della ricerca teorica in un'opera che è e resta un'opera teorica»)<sup>73</sup>.

Il tema tocca da vicino chiunque si dedichi alla ricerca in campo filosofico. Indubbiamente gli imperativi propri del sistema accademico (che di fatto è oggi il principale contesto in cui si coltiva la filosofia) incoraggiano l'efficienza, la frammentazione e la scissione molto più che l'integrazione della ricerca intellettuale nella totalità della vita; ne deriva una situazione di disequilibrio in cui a competenze molto specializzate e sofisticate sembrano corrispondere responsabilità minime, e ciò genera un atteggiamento acritico. In primo piano sono i tecnicismi di ogni singola ricerca, che rischiano di diventare come la partita a *backgammon* per Hume<sup>74</sup>: un'evasione dagli interrogativi più autentici, «scomodi» e pressanti della filosofia (MacIntyre stesso in un altro scritto sottolineava che c'è un «genere di filosofia analitica che rappresenta spesso il *backgammon* del filosofo professionista»<sup>75</sup>).

<sup>71</sup> Ivi, pp. 182-183.

<sup>72</sup> Ivi, pp. 302-303.

<sup>73</sup> Ivi, p. 183.

<sup>74</sup> D. Hume, *Trattato sulla natura umana* (1739), in *Opere filosofiche* vol. 1, trad. di A. Carlini, E. Lecaldano e A. Mistretta, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2004, pp. 280-281.

<sup>75</sup> A. MacIntyre, «Crisi epistemologica e narrativa drammatica nella filosofia della scienza» (1977), trad. di S. Maletta, in S. Maletta, *Biografia della ragione*, cit., p. 112.

La critica della riduzione della filosofia a disciplina accademica è un tema caro a MacIntyre: in uno scritto precedente aveva osservato che imprigionare la filosofia nelle forme di professionalizzazione e specializzazione proprie di un curriculum istituzionalizzato, come avviene nella cultura occidentale contemporanea, neutralizza i suoi effetti più ancora della censura religiosa o del terrore politico<sup>76</sup>. Ma il suo discorso può essere applicato anche al di là della filosofia, alla professione accademica di per sé: del resto riflessione sulla ricerca morale e riflessione sul senso dell'università sono sempre state strettamente legate nel suo pensiero<sup>77</sup>. In particolare, contro i limiti di un sapere specialistico e rigidamente settorializzato si era espresso anche in un articolo del 2009, in cui riprendeva gli scritti sull'università di John Henry Newman: la sua concezione dell'unità del sapere ed el contributo di ogni disciplina alla comprensione complessiva dell'ordine delle cose, e le sue critiche alla frammentazione del curriculum di studi, alla divisione accademica del lavoro intellettuale, alla specializzazione intensiva, alla focalizzazione dell'intelligenza su un ambito ristretto, all'addestramento delle persone a guardare le cose solo dall'ottica limitata della loro disciplina<sup>78</sup>.

Gli spunti che MacIntyre ci offre nel suo ultimo libro per comprendere e custodire il senso autentico dell'indagine filosofica, e più in generale dell'impegno intellettuale, potremmo utilizzarli come termine di confronto per valutare con

<sup>76</sup>A. MacIntyre, *Edith Stein. Un prologo filosofico 1913-1922* (2006), trad. di C. Anselmi Tamburini, EDUSC, Roma 2010, p. 52. Sul tema v. tra gli altri J.M. Giménez Amaya, *The fragmentation and 'compartmentalisation' of knowledge according to Alasdair MacIntyre*, in AA.VV., *Sapienza e libertà. Studi in onore del Prof. Lluís Clavell*, a cura di M. Pérez de Laborda, EDUSC, Roma 2012, pp. 193-202; G. Giorgini, "Alasdair MacIntyre: relativismo, individualismo e altri problemi della modernità", cit., p. 211.

<sup>77</sup>V. ad esempio A. MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities. A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition*, Continuum, London 2009, e Id., *Enciclopedia, genealogia e tradizione. Tre versioni rivali di ricerca morale* (1990), trad. di A. Bochese e M. D'Avenia, Massimo, Milano 1993, in particolare il capitolo "Ripensare l'università come istituzione e la lezione come genere accademico", pp. 301-333. Qui MacIntyre fa anche una precisazione interessante sul modo in cui intende la nozione di *moral enquiry*: «quando parlo di ricerca morale, io intendo qualcosa di più ampio di ciò che viene classificato convenzionalmente come filosofia morale, almeno nelle università americane, dal momento che la ricerca morale coinvolge il campo della storia, della letteratura, della antropologia e della sociologia» (ivi, p. 24). Ancora una volta un invito ad andare oltre la compartimentalizzazione, anche quella che vige in ambito accademico.

<sup>78</sup>Id., "Fede, ragione e scienza. La lezione di Newman" (2009), trad. di R. Presilla, in «Vita e Pensiero», 4/2010, pp. 22-33. Nella conclusione di questo scritto MacIntyre, pur non menzionando esplicitamente la compartimentalizzazione, ne denuncia icasticamente gli effetti e ne menziona alcuni dei sintomi tipici, gli stessi che abbiamo evidenziato nei paragrafi precedenti: inconsapevolezza, mancanza di immaginazione, recita di un ruolo; in particolare osserva che molti disastri tra la fine del XX secolo e l'inizio del XXI, ad esempio in campo finanziario, «sono stati causati da alcuni dei più eminenti laureati di alcune delle università più famose, e questo a causa di un'educazione generale non adeguata, sia dopo la laurea sia soprattutto prima, che ha fatto sì che questi laureati agissero in modo deciso e determinato senza sapere che cosa stessero facendo [...], privi di quella immaginazione drammatica che avrebbe potuto rivelare loro in che razza di recita si erano assegnati dei ruoli» (ivi, pp. 32-33).

lucidità le nostre prassi di studiosi, e verificare in che misura noi stessi subiamo le dinamiche di compartimentalizzazione indotte dal sistema di cui facciamo parte, anche per automatismo e senza rendercene conto. Se ad esempio l'obiettivo immediato è "accreditare" o "rendere spendibile" un progetto di ricerca, è probabile che siamo portati a redigerlo con un linguaggio *à la page* o ricorrendo alle parole d'ordine della governamentalità o alla gergalità della disciplina, molto più che affidandoci a parole "vere", "nostre". Se si tratta di scegliere la collocazione editoriale per una pubblicazione, è probabile che nella scelta il peso maggiore o decisivo lo abbiano le classificazioni e i parametri del sistema, ben più che le nostre convinzioni o i criteri di giudizio personali o i rapporti sostanziali che animano i nostri studi, ed è probabile che questo sia considerato il modo scontato di procedere. Perfino nell'individuare i temi di ricerca e le motivazioni per cui studiamo qualcosa ha un ruolo tutt'altro che secondario, anche inconsapevolmente, l'esigenza di rinsaldare, confermare, esibire la nostra appartenenza al sistema, e di assicurare noi stessi e gli altri riguardo a ciò; e le scelte che ne derivano sono quasi automatismi: in un sistema che richiede produttività, rapidità, continuità, visibilità, riconoscibilità disciplinare, risulterebbe inutilmente dispendioso, o addirittura controproducente, chiederci ogni volta se e quanto ciò di cui ci stiamo occupando ci interpellasse, ci coinvolga autenticamente, sia in continuità con la persona che siamo e con gli obiettivi generali della nostra vita. E così queste domande, che sarebbero in realtà le domande essenziali, rischiano di diventare sempre più irrilevanti o di risultare del tutto non pertinenti: o vengono accantonate (appunto in nome della compartimentalizzazione) o non sorgono neppure.

Eppure, se seguiamo l'insegnamento di MacIntyre, non può sfuggirci che una ricerca che non si integri con la totalità della vita non può essere veramente una «pratica»<sup>79</sup>. In campo intellettuale l'esigenza di evitare la compartimentalizzazione, coltivando e preservando un'armonia e una continuità tra studi e prassi di vita, è anche in fondo un'esigenza di credibilità (di fronte a noi stessi non meno che di fronte agli altri) quanto all'orizzonte di senso della ricerca nella quale siamo

<sup>79</sup> La categoria di «pratica» è centrale nell'ultimo libro, e più in generale è un caposaldo del pensiero di MacIntyre, che ne ha dato questa definizione: «Per "pratica" intenderò qualsiasi forma coerente e complessa di attività umana cooperativa socialmente stabilita, mediante la quale valori insiti in tale forma di attività vengono realizzati nel corso del tentativo di raggiungere quei modelli che pertengono ad essa e parzialmente la definiscono. Il risultato è un'estensione sistematica delle facoltà umane di raggiungere l'eccellenza e delle concezioni umane dei fini e dei valori impliciti. Il gioco del filotto non è un esempio di pratica in questo senso, e neppure il tirare abilmente un pallone da football; ma lo è il gioco del football, e lo sono gli scacchi. Il lavoro del muratore non è una pratica, l'architettura sì. Il piantare rape non è una pratica, l'agricoltura sì. E sono pratiche le ricerche della fisica, della chimica e della biologia, e il lavoro dello storico, e la pittura e la musica. Nel mondo antico e in quello medievale è generalmente ritenuta una pratica nel senso che ho attribuito a questo termine la creazione e il mantenimento di comunità umane (casati, città, nazioni). Il campo delle pratiche è dunque vasto: arti, scienze, giochi, la politica in senso aristotelico, la costruzione e la conservazione della vita domestica, cadono tutti sotto questo concetto» (Id., *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p. 232).



impegnati, in tutte le sue componenti: da quelle più concrete (scelta dell'oggetto, formulazione di un'ipotesi, affinamento del metodo), fino ad arrivare alla piena consapevolezza del punto d'origine da cui la nostra ricerca scaturisce, dei suoi scopi autentici, dei destinatari ultimi cui si rivolge. Come accademici, non meno di altri professionisti, possiamo intraprendere una nostra peculiare "resistenza" alla compartimentalizzazione, facendo nostre e calando nei nostri contesti alcune domande universali e inaggirabili che MacIntyre ci lascia in eredità: «Quale tipo di essere umano devo diventare per poter raggiungere il mio proprio bene [...]? Di quali virtù ho bisogno per non essere in certi momenti esposto alla corruzione?»<sup>80</sup>.

<sup>80</sup>Id., *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 398. Più volte MacIntyre sottolinea quanto conta il «tipo di persona» che si è (ivi, pp. 49-50, 115, 226, 270, 305, 331, 413, 438).

# L'ETICA TRA STORIA, VITE E TEORIE IL CASO JÄGERSTÄTTER

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## **ABSTRACT**

According to Alasdair MacIntyre, moral crises are always epistemological crises. This is the consequence of the dramatic tension between theory and praxis typical of human lives. To follow the example of what MacIntyre does in the last chapter of *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, in this paper I tell the story of the anti-nazi catholic Austrian farmer Franz Jägerstätter to present the peculiar relation between theory and praxis in the case of a man who chose the ultimate sacrifice in the name of truth. Even if it is impossible to generalise the beliefs and the precepts that guided Jägerstätter, it is possible to corroborate them for their consistency in edge cases like that.

## **KEYWORDS**

Alasdair MacIntyre, Franz Jägerstätter, moral crisis, theory & practice, moral conscience, eschatology.

## **1. INTRODUZIONE**

MacIntyre dedica il capitolo finale di *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* all'ricostruzione delle vicende biografiche di quattro personaggi: Vasilij Grossman, Cyril Lionel Robert James, Sandra Day O'Connor e Denis Faul, "esempi di agenti le cui vite esemplificarono le virtù"<sup>1</sup>. Si tratta di esistenze che raggiunsero una loro fioritura in quanto i personaggi in questione furono in grado – non senza errori e ricadute – di indirizzare bene i propri desideri e di sviluppare ragionamenti pratici corretti. Agenti siffatti sono responsabili, vale a dire capaci di dar conto razionalmente a se stessi e agli altri delle proprie valutazioni e scelte, e ciò accade attraverso un'auto-comprensione narrativa in grado di mettere in relazione azioni e intenzioni. Poiché la vita umana è per sua natura fragile e vulnerabile, esposta agli imprevisti e agli errori sia nell'identificazione dei beni sia nella scelta dei mezzi per

<sup>1</sup> A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità. Desideri, ragionamento pratico e narrative*, Mimesis, Milano 2024, p. 432 (ed. orig. *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desires, Practical Reasoning, and Narratives*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016).

realizzarli, le narrative sono per loro essenza *drammatiche*; in altri termini ci sono nelle esistenze umane alcuni momenti in cui il perseguimento dei beni e del fine ultimo sembra compromesso. MacIntyre ci ha insegnato a considerare tali crisi morali nei termini di *crisi epistemologiche*, in quanto il soggetto riconosce la possibilità di applicare alla sua vita schemi narrativi alternativi, i quali presuppongono sempre assunzioni teoriche di carattere etico e antropologico<sup>2</sup>.

Nelle quattro narrative presentate da MacIntyre tale tensione tra teoria e prassi risulta in modo perspicuo: si tratta di donne e uomini la cui vita pratica è stata illuminata da teorie etiche e politiche e quindi da presupposti di carattere filosofico. Le loro crisi morali sono state occasione di messa in questione dell'affidabilità razionale di tali teorie e di conseguenza a volte hanno generato un impegno pratico diverso dal precedente. Tali narrative risultano perciò comprensibili “solo se comprendiamo anche le generalizzazioni e i concetti rilevanti. La comprensione teoretica e la comprensione narrativa risultano inseparabili”<sup>3</sup>. MacIntyre tuttavia avverte che a partire da tali narrative non “possiamo formulare un insieme di generalizzazioni adeguate all'uso pratico [...] che possono fungere da prescrizioni per tutti”<sup>4</sup> visto che i presupposti etici e antropologici degli agenti possono essere molto diversi e incompatibili.

Lo scopo del presente contributo è quello di presentare una narrativa *more macintyriano* relativa al contadino austriaco cattolico e anti-nazista Franz Jägerstätter. Si tratta di una sorta di caso-limite in quanto la fioritura di questa vita coincide col sacrificio supremo. Questo esempio è particolarmente interessante in quanto il soggetto in questione è una persona del tutto ordinaria dal punto di vista sociologico. Ciò va a corroborare una delle tesi principali di MacIntyre, vale a dire che l'etica, intesa come riflessione sull'esperienza morale, non è riservata ai filosofi professionali bensì è un'attività possibile per tutti, seppur con vari livelli di rigore.

## 2. UN RAGAZZO INQUIETO

Franz Jägerstätter nasce nel 1907 a St. Radegund, un paese dell'Alta Austria compreso nella diocesi di Linz<sup>5</sup>. I suoi genitori lavorano come garzoni di fattoria e

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Id., *Epistemological Crisis, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science*, “The Monist”, a. LX, n. 4, 1977, pp. 453-472; trad. it. di S. Maletta, *Crisi epistemologica e narrativa drammatica nella filosofia della scienza*, in S. Maletta, *Biografia della ragione. Saggio sulla filosofia politica di MacIntyre*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2007, pp. 91-112.

<sup>3</sup> A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 434.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Questo contributo deve molto al meticoloso lavoro di ricerca storica e biografica di Erna Putz, la quale ha vissuto a lungo accanto a Franziska Jägerstätter e ha svolto un ruolo importante nella causa di beatificazione di Franz. Farò riferimento in particolare a E. Putz, *Franz Jägerstätter. Un fulgido esempio in tempi bui*, a cura di L. Togni e G. Girardi, *Il Pozzo di Giacobbe*, Trapani 2023. Utile anche F. Comina, *Solo contro Hitler. Franz Jägerstätter, il primato della coscienza*, EMI, Verona 2021.

sono troppo poveri per potersi sposare e metter su famiglia. Franz viene quindi allevato dalla nonna materna, Elisabeth Huber, proprietaria di una piccola fattoria, vedova con tredici figli e profondamente religiosa. L'istruzione di Franks (questo il vero nome di Franz) si svolge nella scuola elementare pluriclasse del paese durante i sette anni che vanno dal 1913 al 1921. Si tratta di un'esperienza che il giovane Jägerstätter dipingerà a fosche tinte, a causa soprattutto dei maltrattamenti subiti dal maestro.

Nel 1917 la madre di Franz, Rosalia Huber, sposa un compaesano, Heinrich Jägerstätter, il quale adotta Franz accogliendolo nella sua fattoria. Il tenore di vita del ragazzo migliora sensibilmente e pure la sua istruzione, visto che il padre adottivo possiede una biblioteca (alla quale Franz attinge con passione) che comprende anche testi di teologia – una circostanza, questa, per nulla influente sul prosieguo della storia.

In quel periodo St. Radegund, che aveva circa cinquecento abitanti, godeva di una certa fama a motivo della rappresentazione della passione di Cristo che veniva organizzata durante la Settimana Santa. Questa attraeva fedeli e curiosi anche dalla vicina Baviera, almeno sino a quando i nazisti al potere in Germania non decisero di boicottare l'evento e di bloccare il confine<sup>6</sup>. L'impatto che la gente del paese ebbe col nazismo quindi fu subito traumatico e ciò non mancò di avere anche ripercussioni politiche, visto che nelle uniche elezioni libere tenutesi a St. Radegund nel 1931 il partito nazionalsocialista austriaco non raccolse alcun voto.

Dai ricordi di chi lo conobbe, Franz Jägerstätter appare come un giovane vitale, un po' irrequieto e dai molteplici interessi. All'età di vent'anni lascia il suo paese e, dopo aver lavorato in una fattoria in Baviera, si reca in Stiria per fare il minatore, facendosi esperienza di un ambiente alquanto diverso da quello originario in quanto caratterizzato da una forte conflittualità sociale e politica e da uno spiccato anticlericalismo, al quale Jägerstätter non rimase indifferente. Si trattò sicuramente di un periodo di prova per la sua fede cristiana. Tornato a casa nel 1930, usò i suoi risparmi per comprare una motocicletta, la quale contribuì non poco ad aumentare la sua capacità di attrazione verso le ragazze e a conquistare una posizione di rilievo nelle compagnie di ragazzi coi quali passava il tempo libero, non sempre in modo pacifico: a causa di una rissa si fece anche qualche giorno di prigionia.

Un altro segno dell'irrequietezza di Jägerstätter fu la nascita di una bambina avuta dalla relazione con una ragazza del paese. La bimba, di nome Hildegard, rimase con la famiglia materna, ma Jägerstätter si prese sempre cura di lei e quindi non è casuale che tanto la madre quanto la figlia abbiano sempre conservato un ottimo ricordo di lui.

<sup>6</sup> Tra i bavaresi che amavano recarsi a St. Radegund in tale occasione c'era anche la famiglia di Joseph Ratzinger (cfr. P. Seewald, *Benedetto XVI. Una vita*, Garzanti, Milano 2020, p. 33).

Già da queste prime note biografiche possiamo intuire alcuni aspetti del carattere del giovane Jägerstätter: curioso, inquieto, a volte intemperante ma sempre disposto a rispondere delle conseguenze delle sue azioni.

Sino a questo momento le circostanze storiche e gli eventi socio-politici non sembrano aver svolto un ruolo importante, anche se Jägerstätter sembra indirizzato verso il rifiuto delle due prospettive ideologiche più radicali, quella socialista (nei confronti della quale ha pure mostrato qualche simpatia mentre lavorava in miniera) e quella nazionalsocialista.

Il 1934 rappresenta uno snodo fondamentale nel processo di crescita umana di Jägerstätter: la sua fede diviene più matura e si confronta seriamente con la possibilità di entrare in convento. Nello stesso periodo conosce Franziska Schwaninger, la quale abitava in un paese poco distante e stava anche lei considerando la scelta religiosa. Nel 1936 i due si sposano scegliendo forme e modi inusuali. Il matrimonio viene celebrato il Giovedì Santo alle sei di mattina, lo stesso giorno del funerale di una sorella adottiva di Jägerstätter; i due novelli sposi non prendono parte alla cerimonia funebre in quanto partono immediatamente in pellegrinaggio per Roma, dove partecipano a un'udienza pubblica col papa.

La vita matrimoniale rende Jägerstätter più devoto e più impegnato nel far maturare la sua fede cristiana. La frequenza quotidiana alla messa, la lettura della Bibbia, lo studio di volumi di carattere teologico veniva considerato da molti compaesani come una cosa strana per un giovane uomo dal passato un poco burrascoso e assai vivace come Jägerstätter. Si diffuse così la convinzione – destinata a durare per decenni – che di questo cambiamento fosse responsabile, e quindi “colpevole”, Franziska. Una cosa è comunque certa: i due sposi approfondiscono sempre più la consapevolezza della dimensione sacramentale del matrimonio e si aiutano reciprocamente a crescere nella fede<sup>7</sup>. Segno di ciò è l'amore gioioso e fecondo che dona loro tre figlie nel giro di pochi anni.

Il cambiamento di Jägerstätter è quello tipico di una persona che ha finalmente individuato con chiarezza nella propria vita un compito, quello che il catechismo di Pio X – un testo che Jägerstätter ben conosceva – presentava così: “Dio ci ha creati per conoscerlo, amarlo e servirlo in questa vita, e per goderlo poi nell'altra, in paradiso”<sup>8</sup>. Il compito è, in termini sintetici, diventar santo.

Il chiarimento in Jägerstätter della propria vocazione lo porta a scoprire una *dimensionalità*, al medesimo tempo oggettiva e soggettiva, nella sua esistenza: oggettiva in quanto iscritta in lui da Dio; soggettiva in quanto presuppone un'accoglienza libera e consapevole da parte sua. Si tratta, in altri termini, della presa di coscienza

<sup>7</sup> Uno degli ultimi pensieri scritti da Jägerstätter in carcere poco prima di morire dice: “Sul matrimonio. L'uomo è immagine di Cristo, il redentore. La donna è immagine della Chiesa, la sposa di Cristo, amata sino al sacrificio di sé. Non è l'ambizione a unirli, ma la volontà di santificarsi a vicenda. L'uno diventa per l'altro un secondo io. E questa unità dei due è inserita nella comunione di vita spirituale in Cristo” (Franz Jägerstätter, *Scrivo con le mani legate*, Berti, Piacenza 2005, p. 87).

<sup>8</sup> Catechismo della dottrina cristiana, “La dottrina cristiana”, n. 13.

del proprio *destino*, inteso in senso cristiano, vale a dire della scoperta di un filo provvidenziale che lega le varie fasi della sua vita secondo un disegno coerente e allo stesso tempo misterioso al quale Jägerstätter si affida completamente.

In termini esistenziali e morali la scoperta della direzionalità della propria vita implica per Jägerstätter la possibilità di prendere criticamente le distanze dai propri desideri, riconoscendoli come bisognosi di purificazione, e conseguentemente di riconoscere i beni autentici distinguendoli da quelli non autentici, mettendo i primi nel giusto ordine. Si tratta della classica questione dell'*ordo amoris* considerata nella vita di un uomo comune destinato a compiere qualcosa di eccezionale.

### 3. LA SITUAZIONE STORICA

La nuova famiglia si trova sin da subito a vivere uno di quei periodi in cui l'intrigo tra la Storia e le storie delle persone comuni obbliga quest'ultime a decisioni e azioni fuori dell'ordinario. Dopo la Prima guerra mondiale la situazione politica, sociale ed economica della nuova repubblica austriaca è assai problematica. In primo piano è il rapporto con la Germania e la prospettiva di un'unificazione che trova largo seguito nella stessa Austria. Solo con l'instaurazione del regime autoritario di Engelbert Dollfuss nel 1933 il paese sembra trovare una certa stabilità; questi governa con l'appoggio dei cristiano-sociali, dei nazionalisti e della Lega dei contadini in funzione anti-socialista e anti-pangermanista e non è casuale che venga assassinato dai nazisti nel corso di un fallito colpo di stato nel 1934. Dollfuss gode inoltre del pieno appoggio della Chiesa cattolica austriaca, la quale loda in particolare la nuova costituzione di tipo corporativo che entra in vigore nel 1934 e che appare ispirata dall'enciclica *Quadragesimo anno* di Pio XI. La linea seguita dall'episcopato austriaco nei confronti del nazionalsocialismo è sin qui fedele alle direttive della Santa Sede; segno di ciò è la pubblicazione di una lettera pastorale di solidarietà con la Chiesa cattolica tedesca vessata dal Terzo Reich. Il primo vescovo austriaco a prendere pubblicamente posizione contro il nazionalsocialismo è proprio quello di Linz: già nel gennaio 1933 Johannes Maria Gföllner pubblica una lettera pastorale – che ebbe vasta eco in Austria e in Europa e che venne letta dai pulpiti delle chiese della diocesi durante la messa domenicale del 22 gennaio – nella quale si affermava chiaramente l'incompatibilità tra cattolicesimo e nazismo:

Il nazionalsocialismo è profondamente minato da un delirio razziale [...] da una concezione nazionalistica della religione, da un mero cristianesimo di facciata; perciò noi rifiutiamo il suo programma religioso. Tutti i convinti cattolici devono [*müssen*] rifiutarlo e condannarlo poiché, se nei termini della dichiarazione di papa Pio XI “è impossibile essere *buoni* cattolici e *veri* socialisti”, allora è anche impossibile essere nel medesimo tempo *buoni* cattolici e *veri* nazionalsocialisti.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> J.M. Gföllner, *Hirtenbriefüberwahren und falschen Nationalismus*, *Katolischer Pressverein*, Linz 1933, pp. 26-27. Il riferimento è alla già citata enciclica di Pio XI *Quadragesimo anno*, 1931.

Tale documento rimase un punto di riferimento fondamentale nella vita di Jägerstätter.

La posizione dell'episcopato austriaco cambia in modo repentino dopo l'*Anschluss* (marzo 1938), cogliendo di sorpresa non solo la diplomazia internazionale ma anche la Santa Sede e suscitando in particolare l'irritazione della Segreteria di Stato guidata da Eugenio Pacelli. Già pochi giorni dopo l'*Anschluss* il cardinale di Vienna Theodor Innitzer fa visita ad Adolf Hitler e alla fine del marzo 1938 viene resa pubblica una dichiarazione solenne dell'episcopato austriaco nella quale si esprime un chiaro ed entusiastico appoggio al referendum sull'annessione fissato per il 10 aprile successivo: "Il giorno del referendum è naturalmente un dovere nazionale per noi vescovi dichiarare la nostra fedeltà al Reich tedesco in quanto tedeschi e ci aspettiamo anche che tutti i fedeli cristiani sappiano cosa devono alla loro nazione"<sup>10</sup>. A nulla valse la convocazione a Roma di Innitzer e la pubblicazione il 6 aprile sull'*Osservatore Romano* di una nota redatta a nome dell'episcopato austriaco che chiarisce alcuni punti fondamentali in merito alla salvaguardia dei diritti dei genitori e della Chiesa nell'educazione delle giovani generazioni e del "diritto dei cattolici di proclamare, difendere e realizzare la fede cattolica e i principi cristiani per e in tutti i settori della vita umana, con tutti i mezzi culturali disponibili"<sup>11</sup>. Il senso del tentativo era quello di evitare che la dichiarazione fosse usata strumentalmente dal partito nazista, tuttavia esso fallì in quanto tale nota non venne ripresa da alcun organo di informazione austriaco.

Dopo il referendum dall'esito plebiscitario il regime nazista adottò crescenti misure restrittive contro la Chiesa cattolica austriaca al fine di limitarne al massimo l'azione educativa e sociale, quali la chiusura delle scuole e delle associazioni cattoliche, la confisca di beni ecclesiastici mobili e immobili, la chiusura di monasteri e conventi, la soppressione degli organi di informazione cattolici, il controllo poliziesco della vita del clero sino ad arrivare all'arresto e all'internamento nei campi di concentramento.

In una situazione simile la capacità di resistenza della Chiesa cattolica austriaca – se intendiamo per 'resistenza' il non allineamento del corpo ecclesiale e la capacità di conservare e annunciare la dottrina religiosa e morale<sup>12</sup> – venne sensibilmente ridotta. Pochi furono i casi di gruppi cattolici organizzati, assai più diffusi gli esempi di resistenza individuale. Tra le migliaia di austriaci che persero la vita re-

<sup>10</sup> Cit. in L. Lecis, *La Chiesa cattolica austriaca tra tentazioni autoritarie e resistenza (1938-1945)*, "Linea Tempo", n. 37, 2024, p. 51. Questo numero della rivista contiene un dossier dedicato a Franz Jägerstätter inteso ad approfondire i contenuti della mostra Franz e Franziska, non c'è amore più grande presentata dal Meeting di Rimini del 2024. Della mostra esiste anche un catalogo omonimo curato da Andrea Caspani e pubblicato dalle Edizioni LEV, Città del Vaticano 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Cit. in L. Lecis, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. A. Bellino, *La resistenza della Chiesa: S. Sede, cattolici e nazismo*, "Linea Tempo", n. 37, 2024, p. 42.

sistendo in varie forme al nazismo ci furono sicuramente tanti cattolici praticanti, anche se non è possibile quantificare tale forma di partecipazione; è invece possibile farlo per quanto riguarda i religiosi tra il 1938 e il 1945: “724 i sacerdoti imprigionati (sette deceduti), prevalentemente provenienti dalle diocesi di Linz, Seckau, Salisburgo; 110 i religiosi deportati nei campi di concentramento (di questi solo venti sopravvissero); 15 i condannati a morte e giustiziati; oltre 300 quelli espulsi dal Paese e più di 1500 i sacerdoti colpiti da misure restrittive (quali il divieto di predicazione e insegnamento)”<sup>13</sup>. Da rilevare il prezzo pagato dal clero della diocesi di Linz per la sua resistenza, soprattutto se paragonato a diocesi più grandi: quaranta sacerdoti arrestati, dei quali undici morirono in prigione. Nel decanato di Ostermiething, del quale faceva parte St. Radegund, i quattro quinti dei sacerdoti finirono in carcere<sup>14</sup>. Laddove s’era ben seminato, si raccoglieva qualcosa di importante.

#### 4. L’ELABORAZIONE DELLA SCELTA

L’impatto degli avvenimenti storici su St. Radegund fu sensibile, come in tutti i villaggi austriaci, con la particolarità che qui non c’erano nazisti; nel 1938 si fece persino fatica a trovare qualcuno disponibile a svolgere il ruolo di sindaco. Jägerstätter si stupì per il fatto che tale incarico fosse proposto anche a lui e che i suoi compaesani non lo considerassero incompatibile con la loro propria fede cristiana. Ciò segna una differenza decisiva all’interno della popolazione del paese: con pochissime eccezioni tutti inizialmente erano antinazisti ma solo pochi avevano sviluppato la consapevolezza che il nazionalsocialismo non fosse un incidente della storia da tollerare ma un male estremo da rifiutare. Non a caso la comunità cercò spesso di condurre Jägerstätter a miti consigli nel tentativo di trovare col regime un *modus vivendi* accettabile per tutti; il ripetuto fallimento di questi tentativi rese i rapporti reciproci sempre più tesi.

Tuttavia col passare del tempo l’incompatibilità tra nazionalsocialismo e cristianesimo divenne più chiara. Il 10 luglio 1940 il parroco di St. Radegund Josef Karobath viene arrestato a motivo di un’omelia contro il regime; i paesani sono solidali con lui e isolano il presunto delatore. In una lettera al marito risalente al secondo periodo di addestramento militare di Jägerstätter, Franziska dimostra di aver compreso una delle ragioni di tale incompatibilità: “Le autorità non vogliono e non possono più tollerare che i bimbi vadano sempre in chiesa perché la gioventù appartiene a loro”<sup>15</sup>. I due coniugi intuiscono l’essenza *totalitaria* del regime,

<sup>13</sup> L. Lecis, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. E. Putz, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> Lettera del 3 dicembre 1940, in Una storia d’amore, di fede e di coraggio. Franz e Franziska Jägerstätter di fronte al nazismo, a cura di G. Girardi e L. Togni, Il Pozzo di Giacobbe, Trapani 2013, p. 116.



pur mancando loro le parole per indicarla con chiarezza. Già il 10 aprile 1940 Jägerstätter aveva partecipato alle votazioni per il referendum relativo all'*Anschluss*, pur sapendo che si trattava di una consultazione non libera a motivo dell'occupazione tedesca. Si recò al seggio non per convinzione ma per le insistenze della moglie e degli amici evotò "no". Il suo voto venne tuttavia annullato dalla commissione elettorale in modo da dare alla consultazione un carattere plebiscitario.

Come abitualmente avviene nei regimi autoritari, il rischio di cedere alla tentazione di condurre una "doppia vita" – di seguire standard morali diversi nell'ambito privato e in quello pubblico – è assai grande. Tale pericolo è nel caso di Jägerstätter rafforzato dal fatto che molti tra i suoi parenti, gli amici e i conoscenti e pure alcuni membri del clero giustificavano tale modalità di condotta. Tuttavia un regime totalitario come quello nazista per sua natura non si accontenta di una obbedienza passiva ma punta al coinvolgimento *attivo* di tutti i suoi sudditi nelle organizzazioni di partito e nelle manifestazioni politiche. Non c'è ambito della vita o fase dell'esistenza umana che possa rimanere immune dalla militanza forzata e dalla propaganda ideologica: scuola, università, sport, lavoro, cultura, tempo libero. Il progetto esistenziale della doppia vita è quindi condannato al fallimento. Jägerstätter si chiede come sia possibile la pratica di virtù quali la fede e la giustizia rimanendo fedeli a un regime nel quale è impossibile dare a ciascuno il suo, né a Dio né al prossimo.

La conoscenza della natura del regime nazista viene approfondita da Jägerstätter subito dopo l'*Anschluss*, recandosi nella vicina Baviera dove nelle birrerie trovava sempre qualcuno che gli raccontasse delle sue esperienze politiche, e poi durante i due periodi di addestramento militare, dapprima tra il maggio e il giugno 1940 e in seguito tra l'ottobre 1940 e l'aprile 1941, allorché fu spesso fatto oggetto di soprusi e angherie. Quando Jägerstätter rientra a casa è ormai deciso a non prestare servizio militare nell'esercito del Reich.

I due coniugi si preparano a vivere tempi che si prospettano sempre più foschi – alla dittatura totalitaria nazista s'era aggiunta la guerra – approfondendo la coscienza della propria fede: entrambi entrano nel Terz'ordine francescano. Jägerstätter prende tale iniziativa insieme all'amico Franz Mayer, conosciuto durante l'addestramento militare e, tornato a casa, comincia a partecipare quotidianamente alla messa diventando addirittura sacrestano della parrocchia del suo paese.

Tra il 1941 e il 1942 intrattiene con Mayer uno scambio epistolare decisivo per la sua maturazione umana e culturale. Gli argomenti trattati nelle lettere sono spesso di carattere religioso, ispirati dalle letture che i due si consigliavano reciprocamente, tra cui spiccano alcuni scritti di Tommaso Moro – probabilmente una silloge dei testi relativi al periodo di detenzione precedente all'esecuzione della condanna a morte (1534-1535) nei quali il santo patrono dei politici insiste sul primato della coscienza, sul dovere di obbedire a Dio e non agli uomini e sulla necessità del sacrificio a imitazione di Cristo. Importanti anche gli scambi epistola-

ri con altri soldati al fronte, ai quali raccomanda di coltivare la propria fede e di non rinunciare a giudicare ciò che capitava a partire dalla propria coscienza. Questi scritti sono assai importanti in quanto spingono Jägerstätter a una riflessione approfondita nella quale è sollecitato a ritornare agli insegnamenti religiosi ricevuti e alle letture svolte autonomamente e questo al fine di essere in grado di *dar conto agli altri e a se stesso* delle convinzioni che veniva maturando in merito all'incompatibilità tra la fede cristiana e la fedeltà al Reich e a Hitler. A tal proposito gli scritti più importanti sono le lettere che egli scambia con la moglie nei periodi di addestramento militare e in quello della detenzione dal 1° marzo al 9 agosto 1943 e i tre quaderni e fogli sparsi prodotti nel medesimo lasso temporale. Questi scritti sono la traccia che ci resta della drammatica, a volte disperata, *Auseinandersetzung* (confronto e scontro) che Jägerstätter opera tra sé e sé e con gli "altri rilevanti"<sup>16</sup>, con coloro che egli individua come interlocutori importanti ai fini del giudizio e delle scelte che deve compiere. E questi altri rilevanti non sono solo persone viventi ma anche e soprattutto personaggi che hanno giocato un ruolo che Jägerstätter ritiene decisivo nella storia della cristianità e che conosce attraverso i loro scritti. Oltre ai testi sacri e ai documenti del magistero ecclesiale, le risorse intellettuali di Jägerstätter sono costituite dalle biografie e dalle opere dei santi. In altri termini egli vuole essere sicuro di *intendere bene* ciò che Dio gli chiede in questo particolare frangente della sua vita, nella consapevolezza che la "chiamata" non passa tanto attraverso segni clamorosi quanto attraverso gli interstizi della coscienza. Come dice Erna Putz, Franz "cerca consiglio" presso i religiosi del suo paese, parroco e vicario, e pure presso il vescovo di Linz Joseph Calasanz Fliesser, successore di Gföllner, i quali cercano di dissuaderlo da ogni atto di rottura col regime e lo richiamano alle sue responsabilità di *paterfamilias*<sup>17</sup>.

## 5. LA FINE ANNUNCIATA

Quando il 23 febbraio 1943 riceve la cartolina precetto Jägerstätter ha quindi già deciso da tempo di non servire nell'esercito del Reich e di non giurare a Hitler. Dal 2 marzo al 9 agosto 1943, quando viene giustiziato, passa i suoi giorni in prigione prima a Linz e poi a Berlino. Si tratta di una *via crucis* nella quale l'identificazione con Cristo diviene sempre più piena e consapevole. Il fatto che Jägerstätter venga trasferito a Berlino e giudicato da un tribunale di guerra è indice del fatto che per il regime nazista la renitenza alla leva per motivi religiosi era con-

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> A proposito del discernimento operato da Jägerstätter nei confronti della sua vocazione, interessante ciò che Fliesser scrisse nel 1946 a proposito del suo incontro con lui: "Vedevo che l'uomo aveva sete di martirio e di espiazione e gli ho detto che avrebbe dovuto intraprendere questo cammino solo se fosse sicuro che la chiamata veniva da Dio e non da se stesso. Lui confermò" (E. Putz, op. cit., p. 98).

siderato un crimine gravissimo a motivo della sua possibile emulazione in un paese dalle profonde radici cristiane. L'11 luglio ha la possibilità di rivedere brevemente Franziska e il parroco di St. Radegund, il quale cerca ancora una volta di convincerlo ad accettare il servizio militare. Oltre a questo episodio il momento più lieto per Jägerstätter coincide con la notizia, datagli dal cappellano del carcere, del martirio del padre pallottino Franz Reinisch, avvenuto nello stesso luogo e per le stesse ragioni di Jägerstätter poco tempo prima: "Non ho mai visto in carcere un uomo così felice come suo marito dopo aver saputo di Franz Reinisch"<sup>18</sup>. Jägerstätter vede nel sacrificio del prete, austriaco anche lui, un'autorevole conferma della sua scelta.

Franz Jägerstätter viene decapitato il 9 agosto 1943 alle ore 16,00 a Brandenburg an der Havel e le sue ceneri sepolte nel cimitero locale. Grazie al sacerdote che lo accompagnò nelle ultime ore e alle suore dell'ospedale fu successivamente possibile rintracciare la sua urna e dargli degna sepoltura.

## 6. TEORIA E PRASSI

In che modo opera in Jägerstätter la tensione tra teoria e prassi di cui abbiamo parlato inizialmente?<sup>19</sup>

C'è un brano, contenuto nel quaderno n. 3 e non databile con precisione, tuttavia scritto sicuramente negli ultimi tre anni della sua vita, che si presta a un'analisi di tipo teorico:

Vorrei trovare dei cristiani che sanno resistere nei tempi bui, in riflessiva lucidità, nella calma e nella sicurezza, che stanno in perfetta pace, letizia e spirito di servizio là dove non ci sono né pace né gioia e dominano astio ed egoismo, che non sono come una canna sbattuta dal vento, che non stanno a guardare cosa fanno i camerati o gli amici, ma che si chiedono che cosa insegnano Cristo e la Chiesa e che cosa dice la loro coscienza. Se i cartelli indicatori sono piantati male, così da girare a ogni spirare del vento, tanto da segnare ora questa ora quella direzione, si potrà trovare la strada che non si conosce?<sup>20</sup>

Qui Jägerstätter fa ricorso a tre immagini per descrivere la situazione sociale e culturale coeva. La prima è quella dei *tempi bui*, un'immagine non certo originale. Ciò che tuttavia risalta nel brano è che l'oscurità ha a che fare non solo con la guerra e il terrore totalitario ma anche e soprattutto con la condizione diffusa tra la popolazione soggetta al dominio nazista di *crisi morale*, di incapacità di resistenza.

<sup>18</sup> Lettera del 18 febbraio 1946 di Heinrich Kreutzberg a Franziska Jägerstätter, cit. in E. Putz, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>19</sup> Riprendo e rielaboro in tale paragrafo quanto scritto in Franz Jägerstätter di fronte al male totalitario, "Linea Tempo", n. 37, 2024, pp. 16-17.

<sup>20</sup> F. Jägerstätter, Scrivo con le mani legate, cit., p. 187.

L'origine della crisi morale inoltre non viene ricondotta solamente alla paura e all'insensibilità per la sorte altrui – vale a dire a un deficit di virtù etiche, come il coraggio o la giustizia – ma soprattutto a una debolezza che investe le virtù intellettuali (la conoscenza del bene e del male, la saggezza pratica) e che rende succube la maggioranza della popolazione nei confronti dell'ideologia nazista. Non si tratta solo di non aver la forza caratteriale di fare ciò che si dovrebbe, ma anche di non sapere che cosa si dovrebbe fare. Di conseguenza la maggioranza si lascia – altra immagine che ricorre spesso nelle pagine di Jägerstätter – trasportare dalla *corrente*. Si tratta del fenomeno, assai noto agli storici del nazionalsocialismo, dell'“allineamento”, in tedesco *Gleichschaltung*, termine che significa più propriamente *sincronizzazione*. Ciò è indicativo – secondo l'autorevole analisi di Hannah Arendt – del fatto che il successo nazista appariva ai più come un “verdetto della Storia” al quale era inutile contrapporre un giudizio personale e col quale non si poteva far altro che sincronizzarsi<sup>21</sup>. Il successo politico di un regime totalitario e la pervasiva propaganda ideologica forniscono alle persone molti motivi per scusare e giustificare le sue irrazionalità e i suoi crimini<sup>22</sup>. Una condizione precipua dei tempi bui è quindi la diffusa *incapacità di esercitare il giudizio personale*.

La pietra d'inciampo più dolorosa per Jägerstätter è tuttavia il comportamento dei cristiani, in particolare dei cattolici<sup>23</sup>. Viene utile a tal proposito evidenziare la terza immagine cui Jägerstätter ricorre per descrivere il contesto storico e culturale, quella del *viaggiatore* privo di mappe che si avventura in una landa sconosciuta e inospitale dove non solo le indicazioni degli abitanti del luogo ma anche i cartelli indicatori sono inaffidabili. Egli così coglie un altro aspetto peculiare dei tempi bui: il crollo dei codici morali tradizionali (le mappe) e la crisi delle autorità morali e religiose (i cartelli indicatori) e la loro sostituzione con nuovi codici e nuove autorità. Coerentemente a ciò Jägerstätter trae una conclusione assai rilevante dal punto di vista storico e politico: all'origine della guerra di Hitler non sta tanto una mera volontà di dominio, quanto un *progetto rivoluzionario* che mira a cambiare radicalmente l'ethos europeo di stampo cristiano; si tratta di una “guerra di fede” più pericolosa del comunismo<sup>24</sup>.

Il fatto che la maggior parte dei cattolici europei di lingua tedesca non riesca a cogliere la radicale incompatibilità tra nazismo e cristianesimo è qualcosa che Jägerstätter fa fatica ad accettare. Egli, come abbiamo visto, è consapevole che la

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. H. Arendt, *La responsabilità personale sotto la dittatura* (ed. orig. *Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship*, “The Listener”, 6 agosto 1964, pp. 185-187, 205), in Ead., *Responsabilità e giudizio*, a cura di J. Kohn, Einaudi, Torino, 2004, pp. 20-21.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 354.

<sup>23</sup> In un brano che compare nel quaderno n. 1 Jägerstätter afferma: “Siamo stati afferrati da una forte corrente, in cui nuotiamo tutti noi cattolici tedeschi e a cui dobbiamo opporci; finché ci rimaniamo è irrilevante se nella corrente ci siamo buttati da soli o ci siamo fatti trascinare da altri. Per ritornare felicemente a riva non ci rimane che nuotare controcorrente” (Scrivo con le mani legate, cit., pp. 140-141).

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, p. 164.

Chiesa cattolica, in particolare quella austriaca, è venuta a patti col regime nazista e che di conseguenza “la situazione per noi cristiani tedeschi è molto più infelice e confusa di quella dei cristiani nei primi secoli, durante le più brutali persecuzioni”<sup>25</sup>, tuttavia non crede che ciò possa giustificare la collaborazione col regime. Si tratta di un punto importante che mostra le ragioni dell’attualità della testimonianza di Jägerstätter. Le ambiguità e gli errori dei pastori non rappresentano mai un buon motivo per mettere a tacere gli scrupoli morali, tutt’altro: quando la situazione è ingarbugliata, la responsabilità personale deve venire in primo piano. Sia chiaro che per il cattolico Jägerstätter la fede ha un’ineludibile dimensione comunitaria e che il rapporto con la parola di Dio è sempre mediato dall’autorità ecclesiale. Ecco perché l’incoerenza dei pastori rimane per lui un problema aperto e drammatico almeno sino agli ultimi giorni della sua vita, come abbiamo visto, allorché viene a conoscenza della vicenda di padre Reinisch. Jägerstätter si sente abbracciato di nuovo dall’istituzione che ha giocato il ruolo più importante nel suo percorso di formazione umana e culturale: la Chiesa e la coscienza morale sono di nuovo concordi nel trasmettergli la volontà di Dio.

Nell’esistenza di Jägerstätter c’è un fenomeno che non si può negare, una sorta di inquietezza che, almeno a partire dagli anni Trenta, viene da lui considerata come un fenomeno di origine trascendente, un sentimento da non ridurre psicologicamente ma al quale dare ascolto in quanto chiama all’esercizio della responsabilità individuale. Se alla base della coscienza morale sta un sentimento ineludibile, una sorta di santa inquietudine, questo va però messo alla prova relativamente alla sua origine e alle sue motivazioni attraverso l’esercizio della riflessione, la quale è sempre effettivamente o potenzialmente dialogica<sup>26</sup>. La coscienza morale acquisisce così una dimensione epistemica, vale a dire conoscitiva.

Jägerstätter medita a lungo in merito al rapporto tra nazismo e cristianesimo ponendosi due domande: che cosa insegna la Chiesa a riguardo? E che cosa insegna la coscienza? Il presupposto, del quale Jägerstätter pare consapevole, è che in ultima istanza la Chiesa, considerata nelle sue forme più elevate di insegnamento e testimonianza, e la coscienza educata non possono contraddirsi in quanto hanno la medesima origine in Gesù Cristo. L’evidenza di ciò è tuttavia qualcosa che va riconquistata ogni volta che vi sia un serio dilemma morale.

Viene qui in primo piano un tema assai caro a Jägerstätter, quello della centralità della formazione cristiana<sup>27</sup>. L’errore di molti cattolici infatti sta nel credere

<sup>25</sup> Ivi, p. 147.

<sup>26</sup> Sulla “santa inquietudine” cfr. il numero monografico di “Communio”, n. 212, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> “Se la Chiesa negli ultimi tempi non si fosse fortemente premurata di divulgare fra i laici le Sacre scritture e comunque delle buone letture, i fedeli non avrebbero potuto orientarsi quando le guide spirituali venivano portate via o costrette al silenzio” (ivi, pp. 139-140). Già nel 1935 Jägerstätter scriveva così al suo figlioccio Franz Huber: “un uomo che non legge non sarà mai in grado di reggersi sulle proprie gambe e spesso diventerà solo un fantoccio nelle mani di altri” (Una storia d’amore, di fede e di coraggio, cit., p. 236).

che sia sufficiente pregare e avere fede in Dio, senza comprendere che la fede fiorisce solo attraverso i doni dello Spirito Santo – tra i quali Jägerstätter sottolinea la centralità della sapienza e dell'intelletto – e ha come frutto il giudizio di discernimento. Egli, di conseguenza, stigmatizza la tendenza a nascondere la responsabilità personale dietro le funzioni dell'ordinamento gerarchico ecclesiastico o sociale: “Dio ci giudicherà più per la nostra capacità di discernimento che per il ruolo da noi ricoperto”<sup>28</sup>. La colpa morale di atti gravemente ingiusti ricade quindi non solo su chi comanda ma anche su coloro che obbediscono.

Da questa disamina di alcuni scritti particolarmente significativi di Jägerstätter emerge che le esperienze pratiche lo spingono ad approfondire la conoscenza dei contenuti teologici e morali della propria fede cristiana. Il motore di tale attività – per lui certamente gravosa in termini di economia familiare e lavorativa – è il bisogno di render conto a sé e agli altri significativi dei suoi giudizi e delle sue scelte. Tale attività di approfondimento teorico ha a sua volta delle ricadute sul piano pratico in quanto lo induce a un atteggiamento sempre più intransigente verso le pretese del regime nazista. Jägerstätter si rende infatti conto che queste pretese gli impediscono esercitare virtuosamente le pratiche attraverso le quali persegue i beni della sua vita: il suo lavoro di fattore, il suo compito di padre di famiglia oltre che di marito e di figlio, la partecipazione alla vita delle comunità sociali e politiche delle quali è membro. Tale impedimento si traduce in un ostacolo al perseguimento del bene ultimo – del quali quei beni particolari sono particolari espressioni – vale a dire la santità.

## 7. LE RISORSE DELLA RESISTENZA

Quali furono le risorse che permisero a Jägerstätter di mantenere la tensione direzionale verso l'obiettivo che aveva riconosciuto come ineludibile per la paradossale fioritura della sua vita? Che cosa gli permise, seppur faticosamente e drammaticamente, di perseguire i beni che aveva riconosciuto come indispensabili per la realizzazione del suo bene ultimo e di evitare i mali incompatibili con questo?

La prima risorsa fu l'educazione ricevuta soprattutto in famiglia e nella comunità parrocchiale – un'educazione sicuramente lacunosa sia dal punto di vista caratteriale sia da quello intellettuale che il giovane Jägerstätter riuscì comunque a completare attraverso le esperienze della vita e la lettura autonoma dei testi della biblioteca del padre adottivo. La Chiesa, intesa come istituzione educativa nei suoi vari livelli, giocò un ruolo ambivalente nel cammino esistenziale di Jägerstätter: il clero e i documenti dottrinali e pastorali per lui furono sempre punti di riferimento inevitabili, in alcuni casi assolutamente fondamentali, anche se Jägerstätter im-

<sup>28</sup> Scrivo con le mani legate, cit., p. 160.

parò gradualmente a conquistare una distanza critica da tali forme di autorità a partire dalle incoerenze che riscontrava in esse e dalle incongruenze rispetto ai testi sacri e alle biografie e agli scritti dei santi. L'educazione ricevuta, per quanto limitata, fu tuttavia in grado di fornire una base sulla quale poterono nascere e svilupparsi le virtù etiche e intellettuali. Se la temperanza e la saggezza non erano inizialmente i punti di forza del giovane Jägerstätter, occorre però dire che egli dimostrò sempre una disposizione verso la pratica della giustizia non sfuggendo alla responsabilità verso le conseguenze delle proprie azioni. La maturazione di Jägerstätter appare nel fatto che egli impara gradualmente e attraverso i propri errori a sviluppare – per esprimerci in termini macintyriani – un atteggiamento *critico* nei confronti dei propri desideri e inclinazioni, diventando così un soggetto che tende ad agire per soddisfare in primo luogo i desideri che ha buone ragioni di coltivare. Così facendo Jägerstätter diviene, pur coi suoi limiti, un “buon ragionatore pratico”<sup>29</sup>, imparando ad agire secondo virtù. Tra tali virtù spiccano per la loro importanza in ogni contesto sociale, e in particolare in una società totalitaria, l'*integrità* – intesa come capacità di limitare la propria disponibilità di adattamento ai ruoli sociali – e la *costanza* – vale a dire la limitazione della flessibilità del carattere<sup>30</sup>. In tal modo Jägerstätter diviene un giovane uomo affidabile e veritiero e, proprio per tale sua qualità, capace di mantenere una rete di relazioni fiduciarie con coloro che fungono da altri ri levanti nei processi di discernimento e di scelta, vale a dire i suoi *amici*. Un momento decisivo in tale crescita morale e umana è quello dell'incontro con Franziska e del matrimonio. In tali frangenti Jägerstätter diviene per la prima volta consapevole dell'esistenza nella sua vita di una *direzionalità* verso un bene ultimo capace di ordinare in modo coerente gli altri beni. Se ne rende conto anche e soprattutto grazie al rapporto con la moglie, tuttavia il bene ultimo non coincide con tale rapporto, nemmeno quando questo viene suggellato dal sacramento del matrimonio. Il bene ultimo è la santità e il matrimonio – insieme a tutti gli altri beni della vita matrimoniale, della vita comunitaria, dei beni legati alla sua pratica lavorativa di fattore ecc. – è funzionale a quello. Tale funzionalità tuttavia non è meramente strumentale, come vedremo.

Grazie alla pratica delle virtù etiche e intellettuali Jägerstätter acquisisce sempre più una certa “eloquenza”, diviene cioè capace di dar conto a se stesso e agli altri rilevanti dei suoi giudizi e delle sue scelte. Ciò è possibile in quanto egli – grazie alla sua educazione religiosa e alle sue letture – può sviluppare una certa consapevolezza dei presupposti etici e teologici che forniscono le basi di quei giudizi e scelte. In tal modo la vicenda di Jägerstätter illustra in modo esemplare la tesi macintyriana che tra agenti eloquenti e non eloquenti non c'è – come in genere sostengono i primi – una netta opposizione ma semmai una differenza di grado<sup>31</sup>. Ciò ap-

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 436.

<sup>30</sup> Cfr. *Ivi*, p. 437.

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, p. 416.

pare ancor più vero se consideriamo che alle riflessioni di Jägerstätter, come abbiamo visto, non manca – seppur a uno stadio necessariamente embrionale – una critica del sistema sociale e politico e la consapevolezza assai chiara che gli impedimenti alla realizzazione dei suoi propri beni vadano considerati come veri e propri errori e malvagità da correggere, rifiutare ed eventualmente combattere: non è possibile eliminare dalla maturazione morale la dimensione ascetica e polemica<sup>32</sup>.

In definitiva Jägerstätter può venire definito un “agente razionale indipendente” nel senso macintyriano dell’espressione: l’*ordo amoris*, esito dell’esercizio della razionalità pratica, è reso possibile dal fatto che questa opera intersoggettivamente, in quanto all’interrogativo in merito al proprio vero bene non si può dare risposta senza considerare il punto di vista degli altri rilevanti, vale a dire di coloro coi quali si collabora nel perseguimento dei beni comuni e che si rivelano pure indispensabili per identificare e realizzare il bene ultimo, anche qualora non siano effettivamente presenti in quanto lontani nello spazio o nel tempo. Tale carattere intersoggettivo che una coscienza morale opportunamente educata ed allenata viene ad acquisire è reso possibile dall’esercizio della facoltà immaginativa, la quale non soltanto consente di guardare alla realtà da punti di vista altrui ma anche di considerare la contemplazione dei possibili corsi di azione e delle loro conseguenze<sup>33</sup>. Si prospetta qui la concezione di una *comunità* costituita dagli altri rilevanti che attraversa la separazione tra interiorità ed exteriorità, costituendo una dimensione ineludibile non solo sul piano sociale e giocando un ruolo nel processo di costituzione della soggettività<sup>34</sup>. Alla luce di ciò la stessa dimensione ontologica della soggettività necessita di una nuova concettualizzazione<sup>35</sup>. A tal punto appare assai pregnante la tesi antropologica sviluppata da MacIntyre soprattutto nel suo volume *Dependent Rational Animals* (2019), vale a dire che il cammino del soggetto verso la saggezza – intesa come virtù intellettuale che guida la condotta – passa necessariamente attraverso il riconoscimento della sua ineludibile dipendenza non solo a livello psico-fisico ma soprattutto a livello dell’esercizio della razionalità pratica<sup>36</sup>.

Concepita nel modo suddetto, la coscienza morale perde il suo carattere “oracolare”, che le viene spesso attribuito, in quanto necessita di contesti sociali e istituzionali che hanno tra i propri scopi anche quello di educarla e correggerla: se è vero che l’essere umano deve obbedire alla sua coscienza, non è detto infatti che

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. ivi, pp. 432-434.

<sup>33</sup> Cfr. ivi, p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> Alla luce di tale considerazione si può forse individuare un limite nel bellissimo film biografico di Terrence Malick *A Hidden Life* (Germania, USA, 2019), il quale, già a partire dal titolo, tende a mettere in secondo piano la dimensione intersoggettiva dell’*Auseinandersetzung* di Jägerstätter.

<sup>35</sup> Cfr. S. Maletta, *Il soggetto differente. Peripezie della responsabilità*, Mimesis, Milano 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. *Dependent Rational Animals. Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Open Court, Chicago 1999; trad. it. di M. D’Avenia, *Animali razionali dipendenti. Perché gli uomini hanno bisogno delle virtù*, Vita & Pensiero, Milano 2001.



questa detti sempre ciò che è buono e rigetti ciò che è cattivo. La vicenda di Jägerstätter mostra che il suo cammino di discernimento della volontà divina passa attraverso il rapporto con gli altri rilevanti e con le istituzioni, in quanto tali rapporti gli permettono di chiarificare il significato degli scrupoli che si esprimono in prima battuta attraverso un'inquietudine interiore. E proprio grazie a tale faticoso e drammatico lavoro di discernimento appare finalmente chiara a Jägerstätter la sua vocazione, il significato della chiamata di Dio, che prende sempre più la forma di un'*ingiunzione ineludibile* attraverso la quale egli viene spinto verso la realizzazione del suo proprio bene, seppur nel modo paradossale del sacrificio supremo<sup>37</sup>.

## 8. UNA PROSPETTIVA ESCATOLOGICA

Alla fine del suo ponderoso volume MacIntyre si chiede se le vite dei quattro personaggi dei quali ha raccontato la storia possono dirsi felici. Nel far ciò chiarisce che quando si usa il termine 'felice' in una delle lingue europee moderne si intende in genere una condizione *emotiva* che può variare da soggetto a soggetto. Ciò è sostanzialmente diverso da quel che Aristotele e Tommaso d'Aquino intendevano rispettivamente per *eudaimonia* e *beatitudo*, vale a dire condizioni di fioritura umana oggettivamente riconoscibili. Da tale prospettiva ciò che determina la fioritura di una vita è il suo orientamento a un fine, la capacità di "progredire verso la realizzazione dei beni migliori dei quali si è capaci e così divenire il tipo di agente capace di realizzarli"<sup>38</sup>. L'aspetto paradossale della vita umana è che "non c'è un particolare bene finito la cui realizzazione perfeziona e completa la propria vita": nel momento in cui si comprende l'orientamento di una certa vita se ne ri-

<sup>37</sup> La storia di Jägerstätter potrebbe fornire alcuni strumenti teorici per affrontare un problema che secondo MacIntyre affligge la modernità avanzata, quello della separazione tra etiche riflessive ed etiche responsive. Nella nostra società la vita morale può infatti essere "frammentata a tal punto che differenti aspetti di essa – da un lato schemi di ragionamento sui beni e sulle virtù che ci rendono praticamente riflessivi, dall'altro capacità di sentire e giudicare che ci rendono immediatamente responsivi al bisogno urgente – prendono vita propria e in tal modo vengono forse distorti" (A. MacIntyre, *Danish Ethical Demands and French Common Goods: Two Moral Philosophies*, "European Journal of Philosophy", vol. 18, n. 1, marzo 2010, p. 15; a tal proposito cfr. S. Maletta, *Il soggetto differente*, cit.). Se tale ipotesi fosse confermata, ciò costituirebbe un'importante motivazione a favore di un approccio tomista in campo etico. La convinta adesione alla dottrina cattolica del suo tempo e la sua educazione religiosa rendono infatti Jägerstätter, seppur inconsapevolmente, un tomista sui generis e in lui l'elemento riflessivo e quello responsivo sono entrambi presenti e inoltre si correggono secondo la logica di un dinamismo che andrebbe esplicitata. In tale prospettiva le vicende di Jägerstätter e di padre Denis Faul sono simili. In merito al rapporto tra l'elemento riflessivo e l'elemento responsivo dell'etica cfr. J. Ratzinger, *L'elogio della coscienza. La verità interroga il cuore*, Cantagalli, Siena 2009; D. Simoncelli, *Natura, ragione e relazione. Una prospettiva sulla legge naturale a partire da Alasdair MacIntyre*, Orthotes, Salerno 2020, in particolare il cap. II; G. Samek Lodovici, *La coscienza del bene*, ETS, Pisa 2020.

<sup>38</sup> A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 439; a tale pagina fanno riferimento anche le citazioni successive.

conosce inevitabilmente anche la sua incompletezza. Allo stesso tempo il fine indicato dall'orientamento rimanda oltre i beni finiti: "C'è sempre qualcos'altro e qualcosa di più da ottenere, quali che siano i propri risultati [...] un bene verso il quale il desiderio tende nella misura in cui rimane insoddisfatto persino dai più desiderabili dei beni finiti, come accade nelle vite buone". A questo punto il discorso di MacIntyre si interrompe piuttosto bruscamente: "Ma qui hanno fine le ricerche della politica e dell'etica. Qui inizia la teologia naturale".

Queste osservazioni sembrano adeguate a descrivere anche la vicenda di Jägerstätter. In questo caso del bene ultimo si può dare addirittura una definizione, come abbiamo visto, si tratta infatti del godimento di Dio. È chiaro che questa è la prospettiva soggettiva dell'agente, che è un cattolico convinto, e che questa definizione è giustificabile solo da un punto di vista che eccede le possibilità della filosofia (e quindi anche della teologia naturale) e sfocia nella fede. Questo significa che la vita di Jägerstätter contiene degli elementi normativi che però non possono venire generalizzati. Ciononostante si può presentare un'argomentazione razionale che corrobora quella prospettiva a partire dalla considerazione del particolare rapporto che si instaura tra beni particolari e bene ultimo, il quale può essere colto nella sua autenticità solo se collocato in una dimensione escatologica e quindi nell'ambito del rapporto tra vita terrena e vita eterna. Nelle ultime settimane della sua vita Jägerstätter volge il pensiero sempre più spesso alla vita eterna, la quale gli appare come un'idea certamente misteriosa ma allo stesso tempo piena di una promessa di beatitudine non del tutto sconosciuta in quanto già sperimentata nella sua vita terrena, in particolare nell'ambito familiare e nel rapporto con la moglie<sup>39</sup>. La vita familiare e il rapporto di coppia sono beni finiti e quindi funzionali al bene ultimo, tuttavia essi di questo bene ultimo sono già un'anticipazione, seppur ancora imperfetta. Detto in altri termini, i beni particolari, pur essendo funzionali al godimento del bene ultimo, non vengono per questo annichiliti in tale beatitudine; al contrario, essi ne costituiscono un aspetto decisivo. Nella prospettiva escatologica cattolica del *già e non ancora* i beni finiti (i beni finiti relazionali, in particolare) non vengono né assolutizzati né ridotti a meri strumenti di un godimento che li oltrepassa consumandoli. Essi anzi, se ben ordinati, rendono possibile l'esperienza del "centuplo quaggiù" che rende la scelta estrema di Jägerstätter, di per sé altamente rischiosa ed drammatica, paradossalmente ragionevole.

<sup>39</sup> A tale esperienza i due sposi fanno spesso riferimento durante i loro scambi epistolari: "Vedi, cara Fanj [...] il fatto che noi nel nostro matrimonio abbiamo vissuto degli anni così felici e sereni, questa fortuna rimane per me indimenticabile e mi accompagnerà per tutta l'eternità! (Lettera di Franz a Franziska del 19 ottobre 1940, in *Una storia d'amore, di fede e di coraggio*, cit., p. 83).

# EDUCAZIONE E NARRAZIONE RIFLESSIONI PEDAGOGICHE A PARTIRE DA *L'ETICA NEI CONFLITTI DELLA MODERNITÀ* DI MACINTYRE

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## **ABSTRACT**

This essay analyses the role that educational practice assumes in MacIntyre's writings, bringing it into dialogue with the theme of narrative. Drawing on *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative*, the paper examines the interplay between education and narrative in order to show the particular sense that the category of narrative takes on in MacIntyre's thought.

## **KEYWORDS**

MacIntyre, Narratives, Education, Conflicts, Ethics

## **1. PRATICHE ED EDUCAZIONE**

L'opera di Alasdair MacIntyre ha stimolato un intenso dibattito sul ruolo che la scienza morale può assumere nelle società contemporanee. In particolare, a partire dalla pubblicazione di *Dopo la virtù. Saggio di teoria morale*<sup>1</sup>, molti studiosi si sono occupati<sup>2</sup>, da diverse prospettive e anche con sguardo critico, delle sfide e dei problemi sollevati dal suo tentativo di interpretare e riflettere sugli argomenti etici in una prospettiva neoaristotelica<sup>3</sup> capace di superare, almeno in parte, la profonda crisi che la scienza morale sta attraversando.

<sup>1</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù. Saggio di teoria morale* [1981], Feltrinelli, Milano 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Vi sono diversi autori che si confrontano con gli scritti di MacIntyre e con il suo metodo. Esiste una vera e propria scuola che trova la sua espressione nel International Society for MacIntyre Enquiry (ISME). Per approfondimenti, si veda: [www.macintyreanenquiry.org](http://www.macintyreanenquiry.org).

<sup>3</sup> La formazione di MacIntyre è eterogenea e difficilmente iscrivibile in categorie rigide. Il suo pensiero viene influenzato da autori della filosofia analitica anglosassone, da Marx, Aristotele e san Tommaso. Inoltre, dialoga nelle sue opere con sociologi, economisti, filosofi e antropologi. Anche se lo stesso filosofo scozzese utilizza la definizione di neoaristotelismo, non può essere considerata come una semplice adesione acritica alle tesi del filosofo greco: «quando ho parlato per la prima volta della tradizione di cui mi sto occupando, ho usato l'espressione ugualmente fuorviante di "morale classica", ugualmente fuorviante dal momento che il termine "classico" ha un significato troppo esteso, proprio come "aristotelico" ne ha uno troppo ristretto. Non è facile dare un nome a

Non è possibile in questo saggio ripercorrere, nemmeno per accenni, i punti fondativi dell'intera produzione macintyriana. La finalità di queste pagine è soffermarsi sul ruolo che la pratica educativa assume nella sua opera, ponendola in dialogo con il tema della narrazione. Anche se l'educazione è un concetto ricorrente nella riflessione morale del filosofo scozzese ed emerge come attività fondamentale che permette all'essere umano di esercitare la virtù in modo consapevole, non sempre viene problematizzata come categoria autonoma. Per questa ragione, partendo dalle considerazioni presenti nel volume *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, può essere interessante approfondire l'intreccio tra educazione e narrazione, che consente a ciascun soggetto di riflettere sulla propria esistenza<sup>4</sup>.

Secondo il ragionamento di MacIntyre, l'educazione è una pratica tipicamente umana. Il concetto di pratica assume nella sua produzione un significato specifico e centrale: «per “pratica” intenderò qualsiasi forma coerente e complessa di attività umana cooperativa socialmente stabilita, mediante la quale valori insiti in tale forma di attività vengono realizzati nel corso del tentativo di raggiungere quei modelli che pertengono a essa e parzialmente la definiscono. Il risultato è un'estensione sistematica delle facoltà umane di raggiungere l'eccellenza e delle concezioni umane dei fini e dei valori impliciti»<sup>5</sup>. Le pratiche sono attività umane articolate e coerenti che hanno un riconoscimento sociale esplicito. Non coincidono con le istituzioni che le promuovono e le supportano, ma possono esistere grazie e attraverso una relazione necessaria con le istituzioni sociali che ne permettono lo sviluppo. Per questa ragione, il filosofo scozzese esclude da questa concezione specifica di pratica i singoli atti o comportamenti, come il calciare con abilità un pallone o il coltivare un campo di pomodori. Al contrario, sono pratiche il gioco del calcio o l'agricoltura. Ma non è sufficiente il riconoscimento sociale per definire una pratica. Oltre ai valori esterni che la definiscono – come il prestigio, il denaro, l'approvazione della comunità, il ruolo istituzionale – la pratica, per poter essere tale deve realizzare anche «valori insiti», che permettono l'estensione di facoltà umane.

Proseguendo il ragionamento, per approfondire il significato di valori interni che emergono nelle pratiche, MacIntyre propone – come accade spesso nella sua argomentazione – un'esemplificazione tratta da un ambito di apprendimento, nel caso specifico l'ipotesi di un bambino che impara a giocare a scacchi. Se il bambino in questione, inizialmente, si avvicina al gioco perché il maestro gli promette delle caramelle delle quali è goloso e, addirittura, un premio aggiuntivo di caramelle in caso di vittoria, è ipotizzabile che, a un certo punto del percorso di apprendimento del gioco degli scacchi, il bambino scoprirà altre ragioni per giocare: «possiamo

questa tradizione, non è però eccessivamente difficile riconoscerla. Dopo Aristotele, essa utilizza sempre l'*Etica Nicomachea* e la *Politica* come testi fondamentali, quando possibile, ma non si affida completamente ad Aristotele. È infatti una tradizione che si pone sempre in un rapporto di dialogo con Aristotele, e non di mero consenso» (A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p. 199). Essendo consapevole della difficoltà di definire in modo rigido la tradizione da cui parte, MacIntyre afferma l'importanza della contaminazione dell'aristotelismo con diversi autori, tra cui san Tommaso: «sarà meno fuorviante parlare della mia visione come aristotelismo tomista» (A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità. Desideri, ragionamento pratico e narrative* [2016], Mimesis, Milano 2024, p. 253). Una tradizione che anche nel Novecento ha trovato interpreti significativi, come l'economica Amartya K. Sen e la filosofa Martha C. Nussbaum.

<sup>4</sup> Sull'importanza del testo *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, i curatori dell'edizione italiana affermano che: «si presenta come una sintesi del lungo e articolato percorso teoretico dell'autore scozzese – a patto che per “sintesi” non si intenda una mera ricapitolazione teorica bensì una soluzione di questioni aperte o non chiarite ereditate dagli scritti precedenti» (S. Maletta, D. Mazzola, D. Simoncelli, *Già e non ancora. MacIntyre nei conflitti della tarda modernità*, in A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 9).

<sup>5</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p. 225.

sperare che giungerà un momento in cui il bambino troverà un nuovo insieme di ragioni nei valori specifici del gioco degli scacchi, nel conseguimento di una certa particolarissima specie di capacità analitica, immaginazione strategica e intensità competitiva: ragioni, a questo punto, non soltanto per vincere in una determinata occasione, ma per cercare di eccellere in tutto ciò che è richiesto dal gioco degli scacchi. Adesso, se il bambino bara, non sconfigge me, ma sé stesso»<sup>6</sup>.

Ecco che emerge il significato dei valori intrinseci che costituiscono le pratiche. Nell'esempio del gioco degli scacchi, i valori interni che appartengono alla pratica possono essere la capacità analitica di una particolare fase del gioco, l'immaginazione strategica o lo sviluppo di una determinata intensità agonistica di concentrazione. Solo giocando, ossia esperendo la pratica in sé, si possono apprendere questi valori che caratterizzano e, in parte, definiscono proprio quella pratica specifica. MacIntyre conclude il ragionamento affermando che l'ipotetico bambino dell'esempio dell'apprendimento degli scacchi se barasse, una volta compresa l'importanza dei valori interni della pratica, sconfiggerebbe non più l'avversario ma sé stesso. Un'affermazione forte che può essere spiegata proprio per la funzione che il filosofo scozzese attribuisce ai valori intrinseci di ogni pratica. Infatti, sono questi valori a generare la tensione che porta il bambino dell'esempio - e in generale chiunque faccia esperienza di una pratica sufficientemente complessa - a tentare di eccellere sviluppando le proprie potenzialità. Il bambino che apprende gli scacchi non gioca più solo per vincere e ottenere le caramelle, ma per eccellere nella pratica migliorando, in questo modo, sé stesso.

Si potrebbe affermare che ogni pratica comporta un processo educativo e formativo<sup>7</sup>, caratterizzato dalla tensione all'eccellenza generata dai valori interni che la strutturano. Ma cosa si intende per eccellere nell'argomentazione del filosofo scozzese? Come indica anche l'etimologia, l'eccellenza (dal latino *ex* e *cellĕre*, spingere, muovere) rimanda a un movimento di oltrepassamento e superamento di una determinata realtà, situazione o tradizione, mostrando la presenza di qualcosa di nuovo. Eccellere significa, quindi, come primo aspetto, accettare alcuni modelli e regole che costituiscono le tradizioni di una pratica e riconoscere la propria inadeguatezza, almeno momentanea, rispetto a quei modelli: «se iniziando ad ascoltare musica non riconosco la mia incapacità di giudicare correttamente, non imparerò mai non dico ad apprezzare, ma neppure ad ascoltare gli ultimi quartetti di Bartok. Se iniziando a giocare a baseball non riconosco che altri sanno meglio di me quando occorre lanciare una palla veloce e quando no, non imparerò mai non dico a lanciare, ma neppure ad apprezzare un buon lancio. Nel campo delle pratiche, l'autorità dei valori e dei modelli opera in modo tale da escludere ogni analisi soggettivista ed emotivista del giudizio»<sup>8</sup>. Ogni pratica presenta modelli (valori interni) positivi di azione, che la costituiscono e la identificano. Questi modelli rappresentano la tradizione e devono essere accettati e riconosciuti come tali da chiunque partecipa. La tensione a eccellere nelle pratiche prevede, inevitabilmente, il riconoscimento di questi modelli tradizionali come valori positivi. Allo stesso tempo, però, MacIntyre sottolinea che i modelli intrinseci non sono fissi e inamovibili, ma mutano con le trasformazioni sociali. Per questa ragione, la tensione a eccellere porta con sé, oltre il miglioramento delle proprie facoltà, anche la possibilità di trasformare, almeno parzialmente, le tradizioni e i valori che identificano una specifica pratica.

La tensione trasformativa ad eccellere evidenzia una dimensione sociale significativa. Infatti, l'acquisizione di valori interni a una pratica non porta beneficio solo al singolo essere umano che li ottiene sviluppando proprie potenzialità, ma «il loro conseguimento è un valore posseduto

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, p. 226.

<sup>7</sup> Per una distinzione tra le categorie di educazione e formazione, si veda G. Bertagna, *Tra educazione e formazione: plaidoyer per una distinzione nell'unità*, in id. (ed.), *Educazione e formazione. Sinonimie, analogie, differenze*, Studium, Roma 2018, pp. 89-127.

<sup>8</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., pp. 228-229.

dall'intera comunità che partecipa alla pratica»<sup>9</sup>. Seguendo l'argomentazione aristotelica delle virtù come disposizioni che riguardano il riconoscimento e la scelta del giusto mezzo<sup>10</sup>, MacIntyre sottolinea l'importanza di un'educazione sentimentale delle virtù che, attraverso l'esercizio delle pratiche, l'accettazione delle norme e dei vincoli al loro interno, l'approvazione e il biasimo sociale, consentono di generare abiti di comportamento, ossia azioni ripetute che portano l'indole caratteriale di ciascuno a conformarsi, con equilibrio, alla ragione: «le virtù sono disposizioni non solo ad agire, ma anche a sentire in modo particolare. Agire virtuosamente non significa, come in seguito riterrà Kant, agire contro la propria inclinazione: significa agire in base a un'inclinazione plasmata mediante la coltivazione delle virtù. L'educazione morale è una “*education sentimentale*”»<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. L'EDUCAZIONE SENTIMENTALE COME FIORITURA DELL'UMANO

L'educazione sentimentale-morale costituisce il processo più significativo per la formazione dell'uomo virtuoso. Sempre in accordo con il pensiero di Aristotele, MacIntyre sostiene che le virtù, intese come finalità dell'educazione sentimentale, sono una disposizione sia a sentire, sia ad agire che porta l'essere umano a manifestare pienamente la sua essenza di animale razionale e sociale. I numerosi riferimenti polemici nei confronti di Kant testimoniano come il filosofo scozzese vede nell'atteggiamento moderno – che Kant sintetizza e interpreta per alcuni aspetti – la crisi irreversibile del sapere morale<sup>12</sup>. Ma in che cosa consiste l'errore della modernità in ambito di riflessione morale? In sintesi, nell'aver creato una frattura insanabile tra l'inclinazione naturale e biologica dell'uomo e la ragione. Troppo attento a una difesa dei bisogni individuali, l'uomo moderno vive, nell'orizzonte dell'agire morale, un conflitto, insanabile e tragico, tra i propri desideri, ambizioni, inclinazioni e aspirazioni e la razionalità che dovrebbe avere il compito di giudicare le azioni senza avere più, però, nessun criterio per farlo<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Ivi, p. 229.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotele afferma: «la virtù, dunque, è una disposizione concernente la scelta, consistente in una medietà in rapporto a noi, determinata in base a un criterio, e precisamente al criterio in base al quale la determinerebbe l'uomo saggio. Medietà tra due vizi, tra quello per l'eccesso e quello per difetto; e inoltre è medietà per il fatto che alcuni vizi restano al di sotto e altri stanno al di sopra di ciò che si deve, sia nelle passioni sia nelle azioni, mentre la virtù trova e sceglie il mezzo» (Aristotele, *Etica nicomachea*, II, 6, 1106b36 – 1107a5).

<sup>11</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p. 181.

<sup>12</sup> «La concezione moderna si esprime, a un certo livello, in luoghi comuni come “sì buona, dolce fanciulla, e lascia l'intelligenza a chi la vuole” e un altro in pensieri profondi quali la distinzione di Kant fra la volontà buona, il cui possesso soltanto è condizione necessaria e sufficiente del valore morale, e quella che a suo giudizio è una dote naturale del tutto distinta, il sapere come applicare le regole generali ai casi particolari: una dote la cui mancanza viene definita stupidità. Così per Kant si può essere buoni e stupidi; ma per Aristotele la stupidità di un certo tipo esclude la bontà» (ivi, p. 187). La separazione tra la volontà buona e la ragione pratica si pone alla base anche della tradizione morale moderna che MacIntyre chiama espressivista, che parte dalle riflessioni di Hume e poi di Nietzsche.

<sup>13</sup> MacIntyre propone una tesi sostenuta da diversi autori che sottolineano la diversità tra l'antropologia classica e quella moderna, basata sull'individualismo e teorizzata da filosofi come Machiavelli, Locke, Hobbes o anche Kant. Per esempio, Gatti sostiene: «l'individualismo, sia nella versione radicale di Hobbes sia in quella temperata di Locke, comporta un deciso ripensamento del

Rifiutando l'impostazione organica e unitaria aristotelica, la modernità secondo il filosofo scozzese concepisce l'esercizio delle virtù come una pratica separata e non completamente valutabile dalla ragione, generando una frattura nella complessa idea di uomo che non può che portare a produrre «simulacri di morale», perché «abbiamo perduto, in grandissima parte se non del tutto, la nostra comprensione, sia teoretica sia pratica, della morale»<sup>14</sup>. Infatti, ciò che risulta essenziale dell'argomentazione pratica aristotelica, per MacIntyre, è l'intimo intreccio tra inclinazioni (desideri) che nascono anche dalla dimensione biologica e capacità razionale di giudicarli che genera azioni, abitudini e virtù. Per questa ragione, le virtù del carattere (etiche), come il coraggio, la temperanza, la giustizia, amicizia si integrano con quelle della ragione (dianoetiche) come la sapienza (*sophía*) e la saggezza (*phrónesis*)<sup>15</sup>. Non a caso, MacIntyre sottolinea che «la *phrónesis* è una virtù intellettuale: ma è quella virtù intellettuale senza cui non può essere esercitata nessuna delle virtù del carattere. La distinzione aristotelica fra questi due generi di virtù è attuata inizialmente in base a una contrapposizione dei modi in cui vengono acquisite: le virtù intellettuali sono acquisite attraverso l'insegnamento, quelle del carattere attraverso l'esercizio abituale. Diventiamo giusti o coraggiosi compiendo azioni giuste o coraggiose; diventiamo saggi nella teoria o nella prassi come risultato di un'istruzione sistematica. Ciononostante, questi due generi di educazione morale sono intimamente collegati»<sup>16</sup>.

L'educazione sentimentale si costituisce nell'intreccio tra esercizio pratico delle virtù, che equilibrano le polarità dei vizi, e della ragione, che riflette e giudica le azioni svolte. Solo alternando virtù etiche e dianoetiche, la dimensione empirica e quella riflessiva<sup>17</sup>, si può generare il circolo virtuoso che consente l'esercizio riflessivo delle virtù e la realizzazione di un processo di educazione sentimentale che è necessario per formare ogni essere umano. Per esempio, la virtù etica del coraggio viene educata attraverso il costante esercizio, che stimola l'equilibrio tra i due eccessi che producono i vizi dell'imprudenza e della vigliaccheria. L'educazione sentimentale del coraggio avviene esercitando nelle pratiche quotidiane questa virtù, in modo che l'essere umano possa costruire un abito che lo spinga ad agire in modo coraggioso, intrecciando anche altre virtù come la giustizia o l'amicizia. Attraverso l'esercizio del coraggio, l'essere umano cerca di eccellere

fondamento della società politica. La tradizione aristotelica lo pone, come si è visto, nella socievolezza, la quale manifesta una precisa finalità interna della natura umana. Negata questa premessa, la società politica non può che essere considerata una creazione per mezzo della quale gli individui realizzano un ordine artificiale in grado di porre rimedio al disordine naturale» (R. Gatti, *Filosofia politica. Gli autori, i concetti, i problemi*, La Scuola, Brescia 2011, p. 119).

<sup>14</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> «Come nel caso della parte opinativa dell'anima ci sono due specie di disposizioni, l'abilità e la saggezza, così anche nel caso della parte morale ce ne sono due: da una parte la virtù naturale e dall'altra la virtù vera e propria; e di queste due, la virtù vera e propria non nasce senza la saggezza. [...] È chiaro, dunque, da quanto si è detto che non è possibile essere buono in senso proprio senza saggezza, né essere saggio senza la virtù etica. In questo modo resterà anche confutato l'argomento dialettico con cui si vorrebbe provare che le virtù esistono separatamente l'una dall'altra: infatti, la medesima persona non è ugualmente ben disposta per natura verso tutte le virtù, ma sarà tale che una l'ha già acquisita, l'altra non ancora; questo infatti può capitare per quanto riguarda le virtù naturali, ma per quanto riguarda la virtù per cui uno è chiamato buono in senso assoluto, non è possibile: quando, infatti, gli appartiene una sola virtù, la saggezza, gli appariranno insieme tutte le virtù» (Aristotele, *Etica nicomachea*, VI, 13, 1144b14 - 1145a3).

<sup>16</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., pp. 186-187.

<sup>17</sup> Sul principio dell'alternanza formativa in prospettiva pedagogica che sottolinea la necessità di una costante circolarità tra pratica e teoria nelle pratiche educative, mi permetto di rimandare al mio *Alternanza formativa. Radici storiche e attualità di un principio pedagogico*, Studium, Roma 2020.

nell'attività pratica che sta svolgendo, formandosi, accettando e riconoscendo norme e regole sociali e, allo stesso tempo, sviluppando e promuovendo in azioni buone alcune proprie disposizioni e potenzialità<sup>18</sup>. In quanto virtù etica, il coraggio non può mostrarsi pienamente senza essere «conforme alla retta ragione»<sup>19</sup>, che in ambito pratico coincide con la saggezza, la quale consente di comprendere e giudicare il giusto mezzo: «questa interrelazione fra le virtù spiega perché esse non ci forniscano una serie di criteri distintivi con cui giudicare la bontà di un particolare individuo, ma piuttosto un sistema di misura complesso»<sup>20</sup>.

L'educazione sentimentale non si realizza grazie a una singola virtù, ma all'intreccio dell'insieme delle virtù che, solo nella loro manifestazione organica, possono dare vita ad azioni buone e riconosciute come tali dalla società nella quale si vive. Un intreccio che prevede sia una intima e costante connessione tra dimensione pratica-concreta e teorica-riflessiva, sia un sistema di riferimenti e norme condivise, anche in un orizzonte sociale e politico che Aristotele identifica nell'ideale della *polis*. La visione etica aristotelica produce un sistema che si integra nella sua concezione antropologica e politica. Le virtù etiche e dianoetiche possono realizzarsi nel contesto, relativamente chiuso, della *polis*, nel quale i cittadini riconoscono un orizzonte comune di significato e possono manifestare la propria natura positiva: «l'uomo è per natura un animale socievole. Essi quindi, anche se non hanno bisogno d'aiuto reciproco, desiderano non di meno vivere insieme: non solo, ma pure l'interesse comune li raccoglie, in rapporto alla parte di benessere che ciascuno ne trae. Ed è proprio questo il fine di tutti in comune e di ciascuno in particolare: ma essi si riuniscono anche per il semplice scopo di vivere e per questo stringono la comunità statale. C'è senza dubbio un elemento di bellezza nel vivere, anche considerato in sé stesso, a meno che non sia gravato oltre misura dai mali dell'esistenza»<sup>21</sup>.

L'essenza socievole dell'essere umano trova, nella città stato greca, l'ambiente più favorevole per manifestarsi. In questo modo, riconoscendo un orizzonte politico e una tensione etica comune, i cittadini delle *polis* hanno la possibilità di compiere il proprio percorso di educazione sentimentale alle virtù e di cogliere la bellezza del vivere nel tentativo di raggiungere la felicità (*eudaimonia*)<sup>22</sup>. Come è noto, il sistema politico greco prevede delle limitazioni, in quanto le condizioni libere di accesso all'esercizio delle virtù sociali e politiche riguardano solo un numero ristretto di esseri umani. Ne risultano esclusi barbari, schiavi, donne almeno parzialmente e anche, in parte, i cittadini non agiati che non si possono dedicare all'esercizio delle virtù più elevate: «quello che probabilmente ci offende, e a ragione, è che nei suoi scritti Aristotele se la sbrighi con i non greci, barbari e schiavi, considerandoli non soltanto privi, ma incapaci di relazioni politiche. Possiamo affiancare a questa la sua tesi che solo i ricchi e i membri delle classe elevate possono raggiungere certe virtù essenziali, quelle della munificenza e della magnanimità; artigiani e commercianti costituiscono una classe inferiore, pur non essendo schiavi»<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> «Il coraggio è una medietà che ha per oggetto cose che suscitano ardire e cose che suscitano paura, nelle circostanze che abbiamo indicato, e le sceglie e le affronta perché è bello il farlo, o perché è brutto il non farlo» (Aristotele, *Etica nicomachea*, III, 7, 1116a10-13).

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, VI, 13, 1144b27.

<sup>20</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p. 188.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotele, *Politica*, III, 1278b20-28.

<sup>22</sup> Secondo il ragionamento aristotelico, la felicità (*eudaimonia*) consiste in un bene perfetto, ossia compiuto e che non viene scelto come mezzo per altri beni. Un bene che può essere raggiunto agendo virtuosamente grazie alla ragione: «la felicità è, manifestamente, qualcosa di perfetto e autosufficiente, in quanto è il fine delle azioni da noi compiute» (Aristotele, *Etica nicomachea*, VI, 7, 1097b20 - 1097b22).

<sup>23</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p. 192.



Il rilievo di MacIntyre non riguarda l'impostazione delle riflessioni pratiche aristoteliche che, al contrario, ritiene valide anche nella contemporaneità. La domanda che interroga il filosofo scozzese concerne la possibilità di utilizzare l'impostazione aristotelica sulle virtù e sul bene in contesti sociali e politici contemporanei, che sono frammentati<sup>24</sup> e lontani da quelli chiusi e organici delle città stato greche: «se buona parte dei dettagli dell'interpretazione aristotelica delle virtù presuppone il contesto, ormai scomparso da tempo, delle relazioni sociali dell'antica città-stato, come può l'aristotelismo essere formulato in modo da costruire una presenza morale in un mondo dove non esistono città-stato?»<sup>25</sup> La risposta attraversa gran parte della sua opera, è articolata, complessa e non può essere analizzata completamente in queste pagine. Ciò che è importante sottolineare per la nostra argomentazione è che MacIntyre individua, riprendendolo comunque dall'impostazione aristotelica, un criterio generale che può essere utilizzato come guida e orientamento al bene anche nelle società contemporanee. Un principio che coincide con la fioritura dell'umano (*human flourishing*) e che permette alle virtù, etiche e dianoetiche, di realizzare l'intreccio tra dimensione empirica e riflessiva, generando un orizzonte comune (bene comune): «coloro che sono esseri umani compiuti o che sono sulla strada per diventarlo hanno quelle qualità della mente e del carattere che li rendono capaci, in compagnia di altri e attraverso le loro relazioni con altri, di sviluppare le loro capacità in modo da realizzare quei beni che completano e perfezionano la loro vita»<sup>26</sup>.

La fioritura dell'umano indica le modalità attraverso le quali un agente umano riesce a manifestare, nel modo più integrale possibile, le proprie potenzialità in un determinato contesto sociale e politico. La manifestazione delle proprie potenzialità si realizza, secondo l'argomentazione macintyriana, nel costante intreccio tra le azioni concrete e il giudizio razionale, attraverso il *logos*, di ciò che si sta compiendo. Sicuramente, non esiste un unico modo di fiorire per gli esseri umani, ma molteplici, in base anche alle condizioni culturali, sociali e ai processi educativi che la singola persona si trova a vivere. Per questa ragione: «non è sorprendente che ciò che significa fiorire in questo o quell'insieme di circostanze particolari debba essere scoperto e riscoperto abbastanza spesso»<sup>27</sup>. I processi che portano a riscoprire il significato di fioritura umana in una determinata azione o in un contesto sociale-politico specifico, in particolare nelle frammentate culture contemporanee, possono generare conflitti e difficoltà, ma ciò non significa, secondo il filosofo scozzese, che il principio del fiorire umano debba essere abbandonato e non possa rappresentare un orizzonte finalistico a cui tendere e sul quale costruire le condizioni di possibilità dell'agire morale e dell'educazione sentimentale.

### 3. EDUCAZIONE E BENE COMUNE

Da ciò che abbiamo messo in evidenza nel paragrafo precedente, è possibile affermare che l'educazione, secondo la prospettiva di MacIntyre, è autenticamente tale solo se è educazione sentimentale alla vita pratica. Ne consegue che anche i processi di istruzione – e di riflessione

<sup>24</sup> Sulla distanza tra il progetto comune delle *polis* greche e quello moderno, MacIntyre scrive: «questo concetto della comunità politica come progetto comune è estraneo al mondo moderno, liberale e individualista. In questi termini pensiamo, almeno qualche volta, alle scuole, agli ospedali o alle organizzazioni filantropiche; ma non abbiamo nessuna concezione di una simile forma di comunità che investa, come la *polis* secondo Aristotele, la totalità della vita, non questo o quel bene, ma il bene dell'uomo in quanto tale» (ivi, p. 189).

<sup>25</sup> Ivi, p. 197.

<sup>26</sup> A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., pp. 81-82.

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p. 82.

teoretico-contemplativa di ricerca interiore – sono orientati alla vita pratica e possono acquisire un senso solo se consentono di far fiorire le potenzialità di ciascun essere umano nel contesto politico e sociale che vive<sup>28</sup>. La frammentazione e la complessità delle società moderne rendono, però, difficile riconoscere un insieme di fini e modalità che possono costituire un orizzonte condivisibile per ciò che una determinata comunità considera forme di fioritura dell'umano desiderabili. Il conflitto insanabile tra le finalità dei processi educativi si genera non solo tra gruppi sociali e culturali diversi per storia e tradizione, ma anche all'interno della stessa società, tra individui che non riescono a riconoscere attraverso la ragione un orizzonte valoriale comune.

Il filosofo scozzese sostiene che nelle società moderne si tende a confondere l'idea di bene comune con quella di bene pubblico. Il riconoscimento dell'esistenza di beni, che sono necessari per vivere adeguatamente in una determinata società, non significa che questi beni coincidano con l'orizzonte del bene comune: «i beni pubblici possono essere infatti compresi come beni raggiungibili e godibili da individui in quanto tali, sebbene solo in collaborazione con altri individui, mentre i beni comuni possono essere raggiunti e goduti, come ho già sottolineato, da individui in quanto membri di vari gruppi o in quanto partecipanti a diverse attività»<sup>29</sup>. In sintesi, i beni pubblici si identificano con l'insieme di servizi che le istituzioni statali hanno il dovere di tutelare, a partire dal mantenimento della sicurezza interna, fino a un sistema di istruzione e formazione, a enti di previdenza sociale per i lavoratori e le famiglie, a un'organizzazione economica e a servizi sanitari. Naturalmente, i beni pubblici si trasformano ed evolvono con i mutamenti sociali e politici della storia e delle comunità.

Al contrario, seguendo le riflessioni classiche e sottolineando l'importanza della categoria di comunità<sup>30</sup>, MacIntyre afferma che il bene comune può intrecciarsi e anche sovrapporsi

<sup>28</sup> La riflessione di MacIntyre non è esplicitamente pedagogica, ossia non si inserisce nella tradizione del sapere pedagogico riflettendo in modo diretto sui suoi oggetti. Eppure, come abbiamo cercato di sostenere in queste pagine, il tema educativo occupa una posizione centrale nella sua argomentazione. Possiamo affermare che nei testi del filosofo scozzese emerge una priorità di educazione e formazione, rispetto ai processi istruttivi che non possono essere considerati neutrali, ma sempre intrecciati con la dimensione etica dell'educazione e della formazione di sé. Su questo dibattito in ambito pedagogico, si vedano a titolo d'esempio: G. Mialaret, *Le scienze dell'educazione* [1976], Loescher, Torino 1978; W. Brezinka, *Metateoria dell'educazione. Introduzione ai fondamenti della Scienza dell'educazione, della Filosofia dell'educazione e della Pedagogia pratica* [1978], Armando, Roma 1980; F. Cambi, *Il congegno del discorso pedagogico. Metateoria ermeneutica e modernità*, CLUEB, Bologna 1986; M. Gennari, *Filosofia della formazione dell'uomo*, Bompiani, Milano 2001; G. Bertagna, *Dall'educazione alla pedagogia. Avvio al lessico pedagogico*, La Scuola, Brescia 2010; G. Mari, *Educare la persona*, La Scuola, Brescia 2013.

<sup>29</sup> A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 256.

<sup>30</sup> Il pensiero di MacIntyre è stato avvicinato, spesso, alle tesi del comunitarismo, ma occorre osservare che il filosofo scozzese ha rifiutato questa interpretazione e l'ha discussa e problematizzata, cfr., A. MacIntyre, *I'm not a communitarian, but ...*, in «The responsive community», I, 3, 1991, pp. 91-92. Sicuramente, l'obiettivo polemico di MacIntyre è l'antropologia individualista che appartiene ad alcune teorie liberaliste. Maletta afferma: «condivide con alcuni comunitaristi proprio il recupero di un'impostazione etica classica, in polemica con l'impostazione moderna, in particolare con quella rawlsiana, accusata di sottrarre alla riflessione razionale il rapporto tra l'io e sé stesso, di assumere come data e imperscrutabile l'identità del soggetto e quindi ciò che desidera» (S. Maletta, *Biografia della ragione. Saggio sulla filosofia politica di MacIntyre*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2007, p. 24). Si veda anche il saggio di M. D'Avenia, *La teoria dell'intelligibilità sociale di Alasdair MacIntyre e la sua critica alle società liberali*, in G. Dalle Fratte (ed.), *Concezioni del bene e teoria della giustizia. Il dibattito tra liberali e comunitari in prospettiva*

momentaneamente con quello pubblico, ma non identificarsi con esso. La differenza sostanziale risiede nella necessità di un processo attivo di sviluppo e di manifestazione delle potenzialità relazionali da parte dell'individuo per realizzare un bene comune. Un processo che avviene all'interno della comunità grazie alle relazioni sociali, senza però accettare passivamente le regole e le consuetudini di un determinato gruppo o istituzione sociale e senza considerarle come qualcosa di imposto o come un mezzo per ottenere benefici e obiettivi privati. Per esempio, «i membri di ciascuna famiglia devono trovare da sé che cosa significhi per questa in una data situazione agire al fine di raggiungere il proprio bene comune attraverso le deliberazioni condivise e le azioni conseguenti»<sup>31</sup>. Nel contesto sociale della famiglia, il processo di fioritura dell'umano – o possiamo dire di educazione sentimentale – è personale, pur avvenendo grazie e attraverso le relazioni con gli altri componenti. In questo modo, nella pratica quotidiana e attraverso l'esempio, si potranno apprendere e manifestare le virtù di giustizia tra genitore e figlio, o tra fratelli, o tra nonni e nipoti, di temperanza nel mostrare i propri desideri e di saggezza nel prendere decisioni. Ciò potrà avvenire solo se i componenti della famiglia, in modo progressivo rispetto all'età e allo sviluppo delle consapevolezze, riescono a riconoscere, almeno parzialmente, le norme e i beni famigliari non come vincoli inibenti e frustranti o come «puro mezzo per il raggiungimento di fini individuali»<sup>32</sup>, magari a scapito del bene di altri componenti.

Ancora più evidente la centralità del bene comune come fine dell'educazione sentimentale nell'esempio che MacIntyre propone della scuola. Certamente, la scuola in quanto sistema di istruzione e formazione di uno stato rappresenta un bene pubblico che, come tale, ha il compito di fornire strumenti, conoscenze, metodi, limiti e norme che mancano ai singoli per poter diventare cittadini e comportarsi in modo adeguato nella società. Ma la scuola non ha solo questa funzione. Come le famiglie e i luoghi di lavoro, si costituisce anche sulla finalità di realizzare beni comuni per tutti coloro che ne partecipano (genitori, studenti, docenti): «le scuole sono istituzioni in cui diversi partecipanti possono o meno contribuire al bene comune di una certa scuola. Gli insegnanti raggiungono il proprio bene in quanto insegnanti e contribuiscono a quel bene comune facendo del bene dei propri allievi il loro bene prioritario, mentre i loro allievi contribuiscono all'educazione condivisa della loro classe partecipando alla vita della classe e così raggiungono il loro bene»<sup>33</sup>. Ecco che emerge la circolarità virtuosa del processo di educazione sentimentale, attraverso il riconoscimento di un bene comune che può essere realizzato in un determinato contesto scolastico. Gli insegnanti riescono a eccellere nelle pratiche di insegnamento/apprendimento quando riconoscono ciò che è bene per i singoli allievi e contribuiscono ad accompagnarli verso la realizzazione di quel bene. Allo stesso tempo, partecipando alla vita di classe e alla relazione educativa, gli allievi consentono ai docenti e a tutti coloro che vivono l'intera istituzione di trasformarsi e migliorare.

Non sempre ciò accade nelle istituzioni scolastiche e nei processi educativi. Le mancanze che si vengono a generare riguardano, principalmente, l'incapacità di docenti e studenti di comprendere che «soltanto dirigendosi verso il raggiungimento dei beni comuni sono in grado di dirigere se stessi verso il raggiungimento del loro proprio bene in quanto individui»<sup>34</sup>. L'incapacità di comprendere che la dimensione del bene comune consente la realizzazione di beni individuali porta i componenti delle varie istituzioni, tra cui la scuola, a concentrarsi

*pedagogica*, Armando, Roma 1995, pp. 163-198. Per un approfondimento sulle differenze tra le posizioni teoriche di comunitarismo e liberalismo, si veda: A. Ferrara (ed.), *Comunitarismo e liberalismo*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1992.

<sup>31</sup> A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 257.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ivi*, p. 261.

<sup>34</sup> *Ivi*, p. 264.

esclusivamente sulla propria funzione pubblica, sul raggiungimento di prestazioni misurative fissate dall'esterno e sullo sviluppo di abilità e di conoscenze che non rispecchiano le potenzialità del singolo, ma solo le esigenze e i bisogni del mondo del lavoro o le convenzioni imposte dalle società. Seguendo questa direzione, il sistema di istruzione e formazione – come ogni altro dispositivo – degenera in una macchina che prepara a sostenere esami o ad acquisire abilità che possono essere, velocemente, utilizzate nella società per ottenere successo, denaro o prestigio.

In ogni dispositivo e gruppo sociale, l'educazione sentimentale che permette il conseguimento delle potenzialità empiriche e riflessive di ciascuno si realizza nel riconoscimento di beni comuni, che trasformano e migliorano la singola pratica in un determinato contesto storico-politico<sup>35</sup>. Questa posizione teorica che utilizza la fioritura dell'umano come criterio di bene comune da raggiungere consente al filosofo scozzese di sostenere la priorità, da un punto del sapere morale, del paradigma neoaristotelico rispetto a quello espressivista, che egli oppone alle sue argomentazioni morali. Un paradigma, quello espressivista, che nella sintesi macintyriana coincide con: «dare espressione ai propri e spesso complessi stati mentali. [...] In una qualsiasi ottica espressivista, laddove sono in questione problemi normativi e valutativi, non si dà alcun criterio autorevole – esterno e indipendente rispetto ai sentimenti, agli interessi, agli impegni e agli atteggiamenti dell'agente – al quale potersi appellare»<sup>36</sup>.

Ma se l'educazione sentimentale che consente la fioritura dell'umano all'interno di una pratica specifica generando beni comuni rappresenta lo snodo centrale dell'argomentazione di MacIntyre che gli permette di superare le obiezioni espressiviste, quali modalità possono portare a concretizzare, per quanto possibile, la fioritura dell'umano? Quali abitudini spingono il singolo a riconoscere che il proprio bene individuale si realizza attraverso il raggiungimento di un bene comune in un determinato contesto? La risposta del filosofo scozzese è articolata, anche se si può affermare, pur in modo non esaustivo, che la narrazione costituisce una modalità che più di altre spinge i singoli agenti a fiorire, a partire dalle condizioni della tradizione nella quale si trovano a vivere.

<sup>35</sup> Berti critica nelle opere del filosofo scozzese proprio la tendenza a considerare il bene comune solo come qualcosa di particolare, che deve essere negoziato di volta in volta nelle singole comunità/tradizioni e che non possiede un orizzonte universale: «nel richiamarsi, giustamente, alla dialettica teorizzata da Aristotele, MacIntyre dovrebbe dunque tenere conto che essa è, sì, una forma di razionalità non rigorosamente dimostrativa, come lo è invece quella delle scienze teoretiche, ma tuttavia è dotata di un suo grado di universalità, perché gli *endoxa* che ne formano le premesse possono essere ammessi da tutti gli uomini, o almeno dalla maggior parte» (E. Berti, *Alasdair MacIntyre: comunità e tradizione*, in G. Chiosso (ed.), *Sperare nell'uomo. Giussani, Morin, MacIntyre e la questione educativa*, SEI, Torino 2009, p. 191).

<sup>36</sup> Ivi, p. 73. Diversi sono gli autori che MacIntyre considera nell'ampia categoria dell'espressivismo nell'ambito del sapere morale. A titolo d'esempio, si vedano: Ch.L. Stevenson, *Etica e linguaggio* [1945], Longanesi, Milano 1962; S. Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, Oxford university Press, Oxford 1985; A. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: a theory of normative judgement*, Harvard university press, Cambridge 1990 e M. Schroeder, *Being for: evaluating the semantic program of expressivism*, Oxford university press, Oxford 2010.

#### 4. POTENZIALITÀ E LIMITI DELLA NARRAZIONE PER L'EDUCAZIONE SENTIMENTALE

Per approfondire il significato che la narrazione assume nell'argomentazione macintyriana, può essere utile soffermarsi sull'etimologia del termine. La parola "narrazione" deriva dal latino *narrāre*, contrazione dall'antiquato *gnarigāre*, che trova il suo fondamento nella radice *gna-* (conoscere, rendere noto) e nel verbo *igāre* per *agere* (fare, agire). Risulta evidente una connessione forte tra la dimensione del conoscere e quella dell'agire. Narrare significa sia esprimere un concetto, un'astrazione che genera conoscenza, sia produrre un atto linguistico (voce, suono, discorso) che indica la realtà e vi si inserisce, a tutti gli effetti, come azione performativa. Emerge l'intreccio tra dimensione empirica-concreta e razionale-riflessiva, che costituisce la struttura principale dell'idea di pratica del filosofo scozzese. Se la prassi – come abbiamo già sottolineato – è un'attività umana complessa che consente al singolo di trasformare in atto alcune potenzialità avviando, di conseguenza, un processo educativo che tende alla sua fioritura, la narrazione diventa una modalità privilegiata per agire, in modo consapevole e responsabile, all'interno delle stesse pratiche.

Infatti, attraverso la narrazione, il singolo essere umano può diventare, in modo attivo, sempre più consapevole di ciò che vive e della ricchezza che ogni esperienza porta con sé. Per questa ragione, il raccontare, che può prendere la forma di un dialogo, di un resoconto o di forme articolate di letteratura, rappresenta già una prassi che porta il soggetto a trasformarsi, rielaborando le proprie esperienze passate e rendendole nel presente un testo, orale o scritto, che si apre a possibili interpretazioni future di chi ascolta o legge<sup>37</sup>. Nel momento in cui qualcosa dell'esperienza si fa memoria, lasciando un residuo nella coscienza soggettiva, genera una trasformazione nel soggetto che può essere portata alla parola (*logos*), ossia può essere narrata, modificando la consapevolezza del soggetto in formazione e aprendolo, contemporaneamente, a nuove azioni nel suo rapporto con il mondo e gli altri.

L'educazione sentimentale macintyriana che porta alla fioritura dell'umano non può che essere narrativa, consentendo all'io di riconoscere, essere consapevole e raccontare, progressivamente, aspetti sempre più approfonditi di sé e della sua relazione con il mondo: «è per questo motivo che le nostre vite hanno la struttura narrativa che hanno e che noi possiamo renderci adeguatamente comprensibili in termini narrativi. Nel momento in cui, attraverso le nostre vite, ci dirigiamo verso il nostro fine ultimo, ciascuno di noi sta mettendo in scena una storia che ha, dal punto di vista di Aristotele, un certo numero di diversi tipi possibili di finale»<sup>38</sup>. In accordo con le posizioni di autori come Jerome Bruner, Paul Ricoeur o Charles Taylor sull'importanza della narrazione nella formazione dell'identità soggettiva<sup>39</sup>, MacIntyre sostiene

<sup>37</sup> Non a caso, la parola "esperienza" deriva dal latino *ex-perientia*, composto dal prefisso *ex* (da), che suggerisce l'idea di un movimento di uscita da qualcosa di compiuto e finito e da *perientia*, che contiene la radice indoeuropea *per-*, la quale rimanda, al contrario, all'attraversamento di qualcosa che si sta ancora svolgendo e che è esposto a esiti imprevedibili, come testimoniato dal verbo greco *peirao* (tentare, esplorare) e dal latino *perire* e *periculum*.

<sup>38</sup> A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 332

<sup>39</sup> Ricoeur sottolinea la dimensione narrativa dell'identità soggettiva che avviene attraverso la mediazione dei testi: «contrariamente alla tradizione del *Cogito* e alla pretesa del soggetto di conoscere sé stesso attraverso un'intuizione immediata, bisogna dire che noi ci comprendiamo solo attraverso il grande periplo dei segni d'umanità lasciati nelle opere di cultura. Cosa conosceremmo dell'amore e dell'odio, dei sentimenti etici e, in generale, di tutto ciò che chiamiamo l'io, se tutto ciò non fosse stato portato a parole e articolato attraverso la letteratura?» (P. Ricoeur, *Dal testo all'azione. Saggi di ermeneutica* [1986], Jaca Book, Milano 1989, pp. 111-112).

che l'essere umano, grazie alla capacità di raccontare se stesso e costruire una storia della propria vita, avvia sia un processo di riconoscimento e formazione di sé, sia un percorso di educazione sentimentale (morale) che lo spinge a interrogarsi su ciò che è bene per sé e per gli altri e a cercare di orientare conseguentemente le proprie azioni in «una comunità sistematicamente impegnata in un'impresa dialettica»<sup>40</sup>. Occorre osservare che nel pensiero di MacIntyre, anche per l'influenza della filosofia analitica, emerge una particolare idea di narrazione, che presenta sfumature peculiari. Infatti, egli la considera come la modalità primaria che una tradizione possiede per produrre una riflessione morale coerente. La narrazione diviene resoconto, il più possibile completo, di un problema morale e assume, di conseguenza, una forte connotazione epistemologica<sup>41</sup>. Narrare non significa solo descrivere, da un particolare punto di vista, una realtà, ma anche dare conto e spiegare, meglio di altri resoconti, attraverso un confronto dialettico, un determinato argomento etico: «MacIntyre perciò risolve il problema della crisi morale prima di tutto riportandolo al suo aspetto essenziale, che è quello epistemologico, e poi estendendo la funzione narrativa al di là dell'ambito letterario: la narrazione è il resoconto di una questione, il più completo possibile dal punto di vista dei fattori in gioco»<sup>42</sup>.

La narrazione/resoconto che attualizza le argomentazioni antropologiche ed etiche aristoteliche e tomiste è in grado, secondo il filosofo scozzese, di offrire più temi e più strumenti di comprensione razionale dei comportamenti rispetto a ogni altra narrazione/resoconto possibile, dando la possibilità anche ai soggetti delle società contemporanee di orientarsi tra i molteplici beni dell'esistenza e permettendo loro di riconoscere il significato di un bene finale, che rappresenta il compimento di una determinata vita. L'apertura teleologica mostra l'esistenza di un bene finale che non è paragonabile e in competizione con altri beni particolari. Al contrario, possiede una struttura analogica al bene comune in quanto, grazie alle relazioni con gli altri e la realtà, consente la possibilità di compimento di un'intera esistenza attraverso il fiorire di potenzialità e virtù. Proprio la presenza di un orizzonte teleologico permette agli esseri umani di ordinare i beni particolari e di giudicare responsabilmente il proprio agire, avvicinandosi allo stato di *beatitudo*, traduzione della *eudaimonia* aristotelica<sup>43</sup>. L'interpretazione tomista della beatitudine in prospettiva teologica cristiana porta MacIntyre a sottolineare uno snodo importante nel ruolo della narrazione per l'educazione sentimentale umana<sup>44</sup>, ossia la dimensione di

<sup>40</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Enciclopedia, genealogia, tradizione. Tre versioni rivali di filosofia morale* [1990], Massimo, Milano 1993, p. 279.

<sup>41</sup> Secondo MacIntyre, le narrazioni non hanno il compito solo di descrivere il reale, ma di spiegare al meglio una determinata situazione o problema. Ogni tradizione genera forme di narrazione che tentano di illustrare, razionalmente, i problemi e le incoerenze di azioni e abitudini. Le tradizioni possono dialogare tra loro dialetticamente, trovando momenti di fecondazione reciproca. Cfr. A. MacIntyre, *Giustizia e razionalità* [1988], Anabasi, Milano 1995, pp. 205 e succ.

<sup>42</sup> S. Maletta, *Biografia della ragione*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> Nella prospettiva di san Tommaso, la beatitudine mostra il fine dell'uomo nel suo avvicinamento a Dio, anche se, nella vita terrena, non è uno stato continuo: «la beatitudine indica una certa perfezione ultima: perciò essa dovrà avere applicazioni diverse nei vari esseri capaci di raggiungere la felicità, secondo i diversi gradi di perfezione. Infatti la beatitudine si trova in Dio per essenza: poiché l'essere stesso in lui è la sua attività, mediante la quale egli non gode di altro che di sé stesso. [...] Negli uomini, infine, la beatitudine della vita presente è l'ultima perfezione raggiunta nell'atto mediante il quale l'uomo aderisce a Dio; ma tale atto non è continuo, e quindi non è unico, poiché un'operazione, interrompendosi, diviene molteplice» (Tommaso D'Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.3, a.2, 4).

<sup>44</sup> Il rapporto con la tradizione cristiana è centrale per comprendere il pensiero di MacIntyre. Oltre alla vicinanza rispetto alle posizioni tomiste, vi è anche un percorso personale religioso,

incompletezza dell'esistenza: «una buona vita è una vita in cui un agente, pur continuando a dare un ordine a beni particolari e finiti, non tratta nessuno di questi beni come necessario al compimento della propria vista, restando aperto a un bene finale al di là di tutti questi beni, come un bene desiderabile al di là di tutti questi beni»<sup>45</sup>.

L'incompletezza dell'esistenza non nega, secondo MacIntyre, la possibilità di fiorire, di realizzare le proprie potenzialità e, quindi, di compiersi. Anche una persona che muore prematuramente o che non ottiene i beni specifici che desiderava ottenere, se agisce mantenendosi aperto a un bene finale può vivere una vita buona e accedere alla dimensione della beatitudine. Il riconoscimento dell'incompletezza presente nel reale e in ogni esperienza umana non privano la narrazione del suo significato forte, epistemologico, di resoconto complesso che ogni singolo essere umano, all'interno di una comunità, può fare dei problemi morali che appartengono alla propria esistenza. Un resoconto/narrazione che non possiede solo una funzione di descrizione, ma che ha anche il compito – si potrebbe dire formativo – di rileggere razionalmente il proprio agire e, se possibile, di trasformarlo per l'avvenire<sup>46</sup>. Un'idea di narrazione/resoconto che, per essere tale, pur distinguendosi da altre forme di ragionamento logico, deve mantenere un legame stretto con la verità – intesa in senso neotomistico – e con la necessità di avere una coerenza interna che lo porti a essere riconosciuto migliore e più capace di spiegare il reale rispetto ad altre narrazioni diverse od opposte.

Ne consegue che questa concezione particolare macintyriana della narrazione, che diviene un resoconto per la costruzione di un sapere morale, inevitabilmente, riduce il ruolo di alcuni aspetti del raccontare l'esperienza umana, che possiedono un significato importante per la prospettiva pedagogica. Per esempio, la dimensione mancante, e non solo incompleta, del narrare e il ruolo dell'immaginazione e del verosimile. In particolare nei testi letterari, la costruzione della finzione narrativa impone di lasciare vuoti e lacune, che rappresentano uno snodo generativo nella relazione tra autore e lettore attraverso la mediazione testuale: «vorrei dire che ogni finzione narrativa è necessariamente, fatalmente rapida, perché – mentre costruisce un mondo, coi suoi eventi e i suoi personaggi – di questo mondo non può dire tutto. Accenna, e per il resto chiede al lettore di collaborare colmando una serie di spazi vuoti. Del resto, come ho già scritto, il testo è una macchina pigra che chiede al lettore di fare parte del proprio lavoro. Guai se un testo dicesse tutto quello che il suo destinatario dovrebbe capire: non finirebbe più»<sup>47</sup>. Eco sottolinea che la finzione letteraria procede strutturalmente in modo rapido, ossia non si pone la finalità – come avviene nei testi dimostrativi, comunicativi-informativi e forse anche nei resoconti che MacIntyre propone – di spiegare e dare coerenza a tutto ciò che sta raccontando.

Infatti, il testo letterario costruisce una realtà verosimile, che non necessariamente deve essere accaduta, piena di lacune, di aspetti impliciti, che consentono al lettore di interagire intuendo e

sicuramente tormentato, ma molto profondo che lo porta ad approfondire anche le forme di biografia e di narrazione religiose. Cfr., A. MacIntyre, *Difficulties in Christian belief*, Philosophical library, New York 1960. L'influenza del tomismo sul pensiero del filosofo scozzese diventa più significativa nelle pubblicazioni successive a *Dopo la virtù*: «ciò che Tommaso d'Aquino offre è una radicale riformulazione dell'aristotelismo che, pur teistica, ha riportato i suoi contemporanei del tredicesimo secolo all'Aristotele originario in una nuova maniera» (A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 303).

<sup>45</sup> Ivi, p. 333.

<sup>46</sup> Un tentativo che lo stesso MacIntyre propone nel quinto capitolo del testo *Etica nei conflitti della modernità* andando a raccontare le biografie di quattro personaggi (Vasilij Grossman, Sandra Day O'Connor, C.L.R. James, Denis Faul) che, in contesti sociali diversi, hanno saputo agire nelle pratiche, riflettendo in modo critico sull'ordine politico che stavano vivendo. Cfr., ivi, 349-439.

<sup>47</sup> U. Eco, *Sei passeggiate nei boschi narrativi*, Bompiani, Milano 2005, p. 3.

costruendo ciò che manca<sup>48</sup>. In questa direzione, la narrazione mostra in atto l'inesauribilità strutturale di ogni prassi e di ogni esperienza umana. Non a caso, se un autore raccontasse tutto in testo «non finirebbe più» e, addirittura, «per dire troppo, diventerebbe più comico dei suoi personaggi»<sup>49</sup>. La narrazione letteraria parte dall'evidenza che la realtà è talmente complessa e imprevedibile che non può essere raccontata nei minimi dettagli; qualcosa manca sempre e non può essere colmato dai segni di uno scritto o di un racconto<sup>50</sup>. Questo aspetto della narrazione non sempre viene approfondito dall'argomentazione macintyriana, più interessata a indagare le condizioni epistemologiche dei resoconti per costruire criteri di valutazione dei comportamenti morali. Anche se il filosofo scozzese sottolinea la dimensione dell'incompletezza che apre a un orizzonte teleologico non oggettivabile e richiama le riflessioni della fenomenologia sull'alterità inappropriabile che appartiene al reale<sup>51</sup>, tende a limitare il ruolo e le conseguenze, anche generative, che la verosimiglianza, l'immaginazione<sup>52</sup>, l'invenzione e le mancanze assumono sulla capacità umana di raccontare l'esperienza. Non è un caso, che MacIntyre affermi più volte che

<sup>48</sup> Nella *Poetica*, sul ruolo del poeta che può essere esteso anche all'autore letterario, Aristotele osserva: «compito del poeta è di dire non le cose accadute ma quelle che potrebbero accadere e le possibili secondo verosimiglianza e necessità. E infatti lo storico e il poeta non differiscono per il fatto di dire l'uno in prosa e l'altro in versi, ma differiscono in questo, che l'uno dice le cose accadute e l'altro quelle che potrebbero accadere» (Aristotele, *Poetica*, 9, 1451a 37 - 1451b 5).

<sup>49</sup> U. Eco, *Sei passeggiate nei boschi narrativi*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Kundera afferma sulla narrazione letteraria in relazione all'inesauribilità del reale: «lo spirito del romanzo è lo spirito della complessità. Ogni romanzo dice al lettore: "le cose sono più complicate di quanto tu pensi". È questa l'eterna verità del romanzo, sempre meno udibile, però, nel frastuono delle risposte semplici e rapide che precedono la domanda e la escludono. Per lo spirito del nostro tempo, o ha ragione Anna o ha ragione Karenin, e la vecchia saggezza di Cervantes, che ci parla della difficoltà di sapere e dell'inafferrabile verità, sembra ingombrante e inutile» (M. Kundera, *L'arte del romanzo* [1986], Adelphi, Milano 1988, p. 36).

<sup>51</sup> Merleau-Ponty afferma: «il pensiero, appunto come pensiero, non può illudersi di restituire l'intero vissuto: esso ne conserva tutto, salvo il suo spessore e il suo peso. Il vissuto non può più ritrovare sé stesso nelle idealizzazioni che noi ne ricaviamo» (M. Merleau-Ponty, *Il visibile e l'invisibile* [1964], Bompiani, Milano 2003, p. 109). MacIntyre dichiara di accettare la posizione filosofica di Merleau-Ponty, ma critica subito dopo le tesi di Laszlò Tengelyi che, ispirandosi alle argomentazioni del filosofo francese, afferma che l'identità del sé non può essere individuata nell'unità della vita narrata, ma nelle esperienze vissute (*The Wild Region in Life-history*, Northwestern University Press, 2004, p. XIX). Cfr., A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., pp. 142-143.

<sup>52</sup> Occorre osservare che MacIntyre non nega il ruolo dell'immaginazione e della letteratura per ipotizzare possibili azioni pratiche. La mancanza di immaginazione porta a conformarsi all'ordine sociale presente senza avere la capacità di metterlo in discussione: «essi non hanno imparato anzitutto a immaginare come le cose potrebbero essere altrimenti e poi a chiedere come queste possano essere fatte diversamente. [...] Per andare avanti essi hanno bisogno di immaginare un futuro coerente» (ivi, pp. 310-311). Al contrario, ciò che è possibile sostenere - e che può costituire un limite in prospettiva pedagogica - è la riduzione del ruolo dell'immaginazione a una spinta iniziale che deve essere, subito, ricondotta all'interno di una narrazione coerente delle proprie azioni in vista di una loro giustificazione. Condizione certamente necessaria per costruire epistemologicamente un sapere morale fondato, ma che limita aspetti significativi della narrazione, in particolare quella letteraria che, attraverso l'immaginazione, stimola la fantasia e sottolinea dimensioni contraddittorie, strutturalmente mancanti e imprevedibili del reale esperito. Dimensioni che assumono un ruolo nel processo educativo e formativo di ciascuno.



«fiorire significa funzionare bene»<sup>53</sup>, intendendo – come abbiamo già osservato – il funzionamento come la capacità dell'agente umano di mettere in atto le sue potenzialità al meglio in un determinato contesto pratico, riflettendo responsabilmente sul proprio agire. Ma questo funzionamento, per potere essere analizzato, riflettuto e narrato, ha bisogno di considerare gli aspetti incoerenti come qualcosa da superare, almeno in vista di una futura possibile narrazione più razionalmente consapevole e in grado di spiegare «come quell'agente ha imparato a dare un ordine ai beni»<sup>54</sup>.

Al contrario, il soffermarsi sul ruolo dell'alterità inappropriabile del reale e della propria esperienza, senza giungere agli eccessi dell'espressivismo, potrebbe spingere a indagare anche i limiti stessi del discorso razionale e quegli aspetti dell'esperienza che, per dirla con Agamben, costituiscono «un limite trascendentale del linguaggio, [che] esclude che il linguaggio possa presentarsi esso stesso come totalità e verità»<sup>55</sup>. Limiti che, in prospettiva pedagogica<sup>56</sup>, l'intreccio tra narrazione (letteraria) ed educazione mostra pienamente, in quanto il tessuto del racconto, funzionando come una “macchina pigra”, mette in luce le mancanze e i vuoti strutturali dell'esperienza che il lettore-interprete ha il compito non solo di comprendere e riconoscere, ma anche di trasformare attivamente, agendo e narrando. In questo modo, attraverso l'ascolto di racconti o la lettura di testi è possibile sperimentare e affrontare, anche senza viverle direttamente, situazioni e pratiche verosimili o accadute ad altri, che consentono di esercitare la capacità di affrontare il futuro. In questo modo, attraverso i processi di imitazione e immaginazione, il lettore-interprete diventa allievo, in una relazione educativa potenziata dall'orizzonte di qualcosa che non è solo presentificato in un determinato contesto, ma è anche possibile, già accaduto, verosimile, non pienamente consapevole o irreali. Bertagna suggerisce: «la letteratura si rivela il più potente mezzo moltiplicatore dell'unica vita reale che ciascuno possiede e diventa il più formidabile strumento a disposizione di tutti, e in particolare della pedagogia, per far maturare in ciascuno, quasi senza accorgersene, le competenze indispensabili per affrontare, con un valore aggiunto di prudenza, l'irruzione dell'imprevisto e dello stesso impensabile nel presente di ogni vita, nel mondo e nella storia»<sup>57</sup>.

In questa direzione, la narrazione oltre alla funzione ben tratteggiata da MacIntyre di strumento per l'educazione sentimentale umana può consentire all'uomo di sperimentare i propri limiti, ciò che non è presente, che non è ancora accaduto, che non accadrà mai o che non è padroneggiabile e misurabile, stimolando continue trasformazioni formative ed educative.

<sup>53</sup> Ivi, p. 80.

<sup>54</sup> Ivi, p. 304.

<sup>55</sup> G. Agamben, *Infanzia e storia. Distruzione dell'esperienza e origine della storia*, Einaudi, Torino 1998, p. 46.

<sup>56</sup> Per un approfondimento, in prospettiva pedagogica, dei limiti del *logos* e della pretesa di misurabilità razionale del reale, mi permetto di rimandare al mio *La circolarità non finita della pedagogia*, Studium, Roma 2023.

<sup>57</sup> G. Bertagna, *La pedagogia e le “scienze dell'educazione e/o della formazione. Per un paradigma epistemologico*, in id. (ed.), *Educazione e formazione. Sinonimie, analogie, differenze*, cit., p. 55.

# MODERNITY, GEOPOLITICS, MORALITY. GEOGRAPHICAL IMPLICATIONS IN ALASDAIR MACINTYRE

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article examines the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, with particular attention to the geographical and geopolitical dimensions that underpin his thought. It outlines the central arguments concerning the relationship between morality, tradition, and rationality, situating them within broader debates in geographical thought and geopolitical implications. Special emphasis is given to MacIntyre's critique of modern individualism and his call for a return to Aristotelian virtue ethics as a framework capable of providing coherence to moral life. The analysis also highlights how his reflections on community and practices clashes with modern international politics. Through this overview, the article provides readers with essential insights into the geographical implicit reminds of MacIntyre's thought, while also offering points of reflection for future discussion across disciplinary boundaries.

## **KEYWORDS**

Alasdair MacIntyre, Geography, Geopolitics, Space and Politics, Modernity, Territorialization.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Reading Alasdair MacIntyre's book *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* and the considerations he develops around the morality of politics is enormously stimulating, even for those who practice geography. It indeed offers thoughts for consideration that, although apparently distant from the most immediate interests in political spatiality, allows for an in-depth exploration of decisive issues in doing politics, understood as acting in decision-making terms on public spaces, even through specifically spatial and geopolitical lenses.

Some reasoning, especially regarding a sort of Thomistic idealism that MacIntyre embodies and which, in my view, clashes with modern statehood and current dynamics of international politics, seems to emerge rather glaringly.

The attempt of this article is to highlight, albeit from a geographical perspective, apparently distant from that expressed by the philosopher, the elements of greatest interaction between his field of inquiry and political geography, also offering a view

on the current international reality and evidencing the critical aspects of his thought, due to the lack of spatial lenses in considering the “conflicts of modernity”. For this reason, my main purpose as a political geographer is to highlight the convergences between MacIntyre and the main elements of geographical thought and, at the same time, to put in light how his arguments seem to not consider the present geopolitical reality and the power spatialized relations.

## ENVIRONMENT AND TERRITORIALIZATION

First of all, what is the scale of analysis of the Scottish author? What is his reference geography, the geography within which his reflection moves, ranging from the mere individual, subjective sphere, to the state and collective one, relating above all to the concept of the «common good»?

In MacIntyre there is a linear conjugation of the different spheres just mentioned (from the personal to the state one). His is a spatial stratification – or, better said, a multiscalarity, or spatial multidimensionality – that emerges quite clearly from his words, although it sets aside a global logic, to focus more on the sphere of personal action.

Starting indeed from the dual meaning of «personal end» that we find in Aristotle according to the idea of *εὐδαιμονία*, and then in Thomas Aquinas according to the principle of *beatitudo*, MacIntyre often refers to the relationship that each of us establishes with our surrounding environment: it is here that his philosophical, anthropological, and also theological or moral reflections implicitly become geographical. His consideration of humanity – understood as the deepest nature of human beings, that distinctive trait that distinguishes them from animals – is precisely the capacity to overcome the natural and immediate bond with their reference environment. If animals indeed generally cannot separate their development from the environment in which they were born and raised, human beings, on the contrary: «have developed unique abilities to change their environments, so that natural selection no longer operates as it did and does with other species» (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 225).

Here the author identifies the peculiar trait of human beings: their capacity, thanks to intellect and their reference culture, to shape the surrounding environments and not be subservient or passive to them, as is the case for other animal species. He takes a further step in overcoming environmental determinism and also a certain basic evolutionism: he speaks of language and the pursuit of the common good that derive from a “high” cultural setup, thus capable of pursuing a good that transcends one’s own person and is aimed at the collectivity.

Beyond this specific moral objective, proper to his belonging to the Thomistic strand, MacIntyre here reasons almost like a geographer: the capacity of men is to

shape the earth and make it their own, and from this derives the good functioning of a social and political system. He specifies in this regard, involving the theme of virtue, that it is exercised when one acts in the functioning of one's social roles «as citizen, as member of a household and family, and so on» (MacIntyre, 2016, pp. 220-221). The fulfillment of one's human virtue reconnects to one's reference spheres and the different geographical scales that these trigger.

In the moral aspects of spatial action, an interesting convergence is found, especially if we take up the reflections of another highly significant French geographer, Augustine Berque, who, like MacIntyre, argues that our condition as human beings derives from the relationship with the other and thus with places and the earth: «this relationship – argues Berque – is the basis of our very humanity; it is its condition» (Berque, 2019, p. 52) and it is what distinguishes us precisely from other animate beings. And indeed, continues the French geographer, we «are human because what happens at our antipodes concerns us not only in a moral sense. [...]. Unlike anthropoids, what happens over there, in a place we may never go, the issue has to do with our very existence» (Berque, 2019, p. 52). In Berque, this relationship between human beings, even distant from each other, and similarly between men and the natural environment, is constitutive of humanity itself and at the same time distinctive compared to other living beings: «the geographicality of being, in fact, is nothing but the relationship in which physical reality is hardly foreign to the thinking thing, which participates in its own being» (Berque, 2019, p. 53).

When in geography the process of «territorialization» is defined, we speak precisely of the capacity to modify the natural environment that is expressed through a cultural apparatus and a reference language or a semiotic system that is reported on the geographical map. Angelo Turco founded his theory of complexity precisely on the three crucial phases of territorialization, consisting of *denomination*, *reification* and *structuration* and the symbolic control of space that derives from it (Turco, 2010; Maggioli, 2015). Every process of shaping natural space inevitably starts from cultural presuppositions, which MacIntyre himself clearly identifies in his philosophical analysis. Territorialization also presupposes at the same time a capacity for planning, which the Scottish author himself associates with the enormous theme of the pursuit of the common good deriving from the exercise of virtue and the application of man's highest rationality: here perhaps lies the distinctive aspect of one approach (the geographical one) and the other (that of our author), although with many elements in common.

In the first case, in fact, planning in geography is understood in a political sense: we speak, in this regard, of a process of territorialization aimed at the creation of social structures, which in turn determine the landscape stratification so full of political and cultural meanings. The same territorial structures depend on human

action organized in social bodies according to a specific objective, relating to the ordering of the elements of nature and the realization of favorable conditions for life on earth: the territory thus becomes, according to this perspective, the mirror of the functioning of a society and its organizational capacity, while at the same time providing the resources for the realization of collective projects (Casti, 1998, p. 18). The nature of this dual interaction defines precisely human action, which should distinguish itself from the animal one precisely because it tends – or should tend – to overcome the *natural*/conflictual logic triggered by territorial dynamics. Indeed, as Giuseppe Dematteis argues, it is essential in this regard «the transformation of what by nature tends towards exclusion and conflict, into a socio-spatial system founded on opposite behaviors, such as communication, cooperation, exchange, that is, on forms of socialization within increasingly vast territorial formations» (Dematteis, 1985, p. 74). It is this concept of “territory” that is not found in animal territoriality, according to the Turin-based geographer. In effect, it is the predominant characteristic of human beings to go beyond nature, as also Berque argues: «to go beyond nature is what we call culture or civilization [...]». One of the proper characteristics of the human (there are others, of course) is to be ethical; to possess the sense of good and evil, and to be able to determine one’s conduct based on this distinction, having thus the consciousness of a duty» (Berque, 2021, p. 42).

In MacIntyre’s case, instead, the question that emerges most strongly at this stage is, or should be, quoting him directly, «What is the good of doing this or that, of making this or that happen or allowing this or that to happen?» (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 225). Clearly, the nature of individual life and thus also of collective life, depends on personal choices, which «differ from culture to culture and social order to social order and differs too depending on an agent’s place in her or his social order» (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 223). The author states that «Everything turns on how and to what extent agents in their everyday practice conceive of themselves and others as having the powers and potentialities of rational agents» (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 215), because – he argues – «to be a good practical reasoner is closely related to being a good human being» (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 190).

This is clearly a different reference platform for the philosopher compared to geographers, but not necessarily, in any case, does it clash with the definition of territorialization formulated by the geographical literature. On the contrary, there seems to be an unexpected convergence of visions, which makes the sense of the human its crucial pivot and the connection of man with his function, exercised through places, its spatial reference point. What for Berque is the «duty» of man, expressed in his daily actions with a clear distinction between good and evil, coincides with the concept of virtue formulated by MacIntyre, who argues that «the most important judgments that can be passed upon a man concern the way in which he discharges his allotted social function» (MacIntyre, 2017, p. 5). If this

was valid for archaic orders, with the advent of modernity we will witness a decay of this kind of hierarchical and social order, dictated by a moral crisis that precedes the process of secularization, which in turn coincides with the compartmentalization of society (cf. Maletta, 2020, pp. 59-65)

## **POLIS AND STATE**

If, therefore, a first geographical configuration can be found precisely in the relationship between man and environment, a relationship which according to the Scottish author properly defines humanity in its highest sense and which is also the basis, as we have seen, of geographical reflection, there are two other reference scales of the Aristotelian-Thomistic logic that are addressed by the Scottish philosopher.

The political-geographical dimension of MacIntyre is first of all that of the Aristotelian *polis* or the Thomistic *civitas*, also in this case indissolubly linked to the development of human nature in its deepest sense: it is in the *polis*, but not only within it, «that human beings can flourish as rational animals. And – the author further argues – it is not too difficult to rewrite Aristotle’s arguments about the need for the *polis* (*Politics* I, 1253a1–39) in contemporary terms» (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 224).

But what is the *polis* or the *civitas* that MacIntyre refers to and, we might add, aspires to? Is there a geographical reflection in these concepts (Elden, 2013)?

It is one that possesses some fundamental characteristics: it must be justly ordered and well-functioning, such that there exists a double virtuous mechanism concerning the governed and the governors, who both aim to achieve the common good. This happens through participation in the political society, thus acquiring dispositions and virtues that orient citizens towards their ideal ultimate end. It is here that the clash with modern statehood seems to emerge most blatantly, and the author himself does not hide the irrelevance of such theoretical considerations, in a context such as the modern one, «whose bureaucratic institutions and liberal pluralism seem to make Aristotelianism irrelevant» (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 176).

The author’s attempt to overcome the difficulties that modern society and politics have offered compared to the moral-Thomistic framework appears, however, fruitless: for MacIntyre the concern for the common good requires a strong political commitment that can be found in local bodies, trade union sections, community organizations, citizen assemblies, associations, and so on, which in his vision would give «contemporary form to a distinctively Aristotelian politics» (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 177). In modern practice, which has undergone the fragmentation of society due to moral decay and subsequent secularization, the examples cited appear equally fragmented. The author is well aware that the world

he refers to – the medieval and classical European one – has run aground in modernity, thus the virtuous examples appear equally fragmented and minute. The properly Aristotelian character would therefore be identifiable in another element: the conjugation between ethics and politics, to the point of outlining some examples of such a virtuous relationship, like the case of the community of Danish fishermen in Northern Jutland.

Here the author's framework seems to not consider the reality – the typically modern one, of political globalization, *governance* and mechanisms of close connection between economic and political interests detached from territories, as well as a dirigiste political setup, as in the European case – that profoundly contradicts his theses. The examples reported by the author – and there are several –, as well as the small congregations aimed at the search for a common good, represent in his eyes certainly virtuous examples. At the same time, contemporary geopolitical analysis reveals that these positive examples, while significant, operate from a position of structural marginality relative to dominant power blocs, which calls into question the scalability of its proposal. In the search for small practices of ethical virtue, MacIntyre seems deliberately to neglect the enormous burden of modernity or, more simply, he intends to target those virtuous practices that represent the grain of sand in the vast secularized and amoral bloc of modern society.

His reflection, once again, aligns itself unconsciously with that of geographers, who, by placing the relationship between human beings and the environment at the center, question the inextricable link between human societies, territory, and the definition of civilization. Berque, reflecting at a general and deeper level, emphasizes in this regard that it is modernity itself that undermines values, to the point of being considered an evil, in the paradox that it is precisely the West from which modernity sprang that denies itself: «to the extent that it attacks the identity of a people, modernity is felt as an evil, and the values that oppose it, in an amalgam of premodern and non-Western, are on the contrary perceived as a good» (Berque, 2021, p. 70).

Geography allows us to identify the substantial distinctions between hemispheres and the geographical trajectories of modernity and its opponents, as in the case of Berque, who is an expert of Japan, and of Yi-Fu Tuan, who, as a native Chinese, carried out his teaching function in the USA, and identified the distinction between his two reference worlds in the «cosmos» and the «hearth» (Yi-Fu Tuan, 1996). In the Scottish author the aspect relating to regional differences that exist, for example, between Northern and Southern Europe, between contexts where local realities can still “have their say” and contexts where they are truly irrelevant, seems to be neglected, that is, where the blend between the utilitarian principle and the liberal idea of happiness has taken root more

strongly<sup>1</sup>. In other words, if he reasons at a moral and individual level, analyzing society and human behaviors according to an idea of fragmentation into spheres of existence and distinct stages, he does not seem to take into account the broadening of horizons and the distinction between regions of the world from a political and social point of view.

In the first case, therefore, the MacIntyrean discourse coincides with that of many geographers where the stages of individual life in fact coincide with the places of the everyday, the object of study of geography. In the second case, that is, when the gaze extends beyond the individual contingent, the distinction between different social conceptions and trajectories of modernity is lost. It is on the individual reference scale that his reflection moves most, although he tries to extend it to the modern state sphere as well: it is in this case that the categories he refers to suddenly lose their cogency with reality and clash with modernity.

MacIntyre seems indeed not to consider another, decisive aspect, that is, the foundation of modern politics. Or, better said, he would like to overcome it, in an impulse that in light of current reality appears almost wishful or excessively idealistic. For the Scottish author, in fact, Morality still acts in modern politics. If for him the beacon of action must normatively be Morality, in the pursuit of a supposed «common good», in the application to modern reality this principle seems to lose meaning: «In a society such as our own in which so much economic and political activity is expressive of the attitudes and standpoints of rational maximizers, Morality therefore continues to have a distinctive function, function, since its constraints extend beyond any that rational maximizers would impose and its projects are other than those that rational maximizers would undertake» (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 188).

From this he derives two other considerations: 1) Morality would go hand in hand with rationality and 2) loyalty to Morality allows Western governments to make aid promises.

The question we must ask ourselves at this point is: is this really the case?

## MODERNITY AND A-MORALITY

The limits of the MacIntyrean model in grasping the nature of modern politics becomes evident when contrasted with an alternative paradigm, such as the ‘stasis’ or global civil war framework proposed by Giorgio Agamben. While MacIntyre seeks to reconstruct a moral *polis*, Agamben diagnoses its definitive dissolution, wherein the boundary between the political and the domestic, friend and enemy,

<sup>1</sup> «The encounter between the utilitarian principle and the liberal idea of happiness however does not seem to have rivals today: that the “concept of happiness it embodies is so amorphous and adaptable does not make it less but rather more pleasing to those who seek a court of appeal on evaluative questions which they are sure will decide in their favor”» (Maletta, 2020, p. 76).



becomes blurred<sup>2</sup>. Although the premises and conclusions of the two philosophers are radically divergent, their thought offers two contrasting lenses through which to read the same phenomenon: the eclipse of a shared political space.

There is indeed certainly a certain degree of incoherence in Western political logic, which the author himself highlights well: geopolitically we can see this incoherence in the wars of the West and NATO, always cloaked in good intentions, affirmation of good and export of democratic values, which no longer have quarter and spatial definition, to the point that Giorgio Agamben defines the civil war as a political paradigm of global spaces: and indeed *stasis* confuses, in a dual shift, what belongs to the *oikos* and what is proper to the *polis*, the intimate and the foreign (Agamben, 2015, p. 15).

This distinction between these scales of action does not appear in MacIntyre's logic, who indeed does not consider the distinct geographical spheres that this entails. If he still sees an active presence of Morality, especially in state action, today the only true morality admitted is not the one with a capital M described by the author but one based too often on untruthful presuppositions, of those who, beyond any morality, divide the world into «good» and «bad» (think of the applied idea of «Rogue States») and on this basis declare new «*just wars*» which, unlike those of the past, are not such because they are based on a common *iuris*, but on a fragile and fake morality that often hides base interests (Colombo, 2021). Not coincidentally, MacIntyre's attitude in the face of such a world stage seems to correspond to Agamben's description. His focus on the private sphere is the result of a general condition dictated by *stasis* as the prevailing modern political paradigm, which excludes from political belonging those who do not participate in it: «Not taking part in the civil war amounts to being expelled from the *polis* and confined to the *oikos*, to losing citizenship by being reduced to the unpolitical condition of a private person» (Agamben, 2015, p. 17).

At this point a question arises spontaneously, also relating to the individual level: to what extent does the Morality spoken of by MacIntyre act in the lives of people and the collectivity, that is, in the personal sphere of the *oikos* that transfers into the political one of the *polis*?

He himself responds that sometimes people act and think according to the perspective of the common good and thus of a high rationality, other times on the basis of interests and external conditioning. But it is a decidedly uneven relationship, entirely to the disadvantage of those who act according to Morality.

<sup>2</sup>It is not the intention of the present article to engage with the substance of the criticisms directed at Giorgio Agamben's theses, as this would lead the reader too far astray. However, for a critique of the Italian philosopher's "normativist" attitude, as well as his use of "paradigms" considered ahistorical, the reader is referred to the works of Crosato (2019); de la Durantaye (2009); McLoughlin (2017); Raciti (2019) and Revel (2016).

In this, perhaps the simple observation of our daily reality, not even the political one, would suffice for immediate confirmation.

When the author reports the example of the child in danger of life (cf. MacIntyre, 2016, p. 189), he imagines a man who, acting according to maximum rationality and Morality, is ready to save him with an immediate gesture, and the same should happen at the local community level: but in both spheres – the personal and the state one – how many times do we witness total indifference towards violence committed against other fellow citizens? News reports often speak, tragically, of such widespread indifference much more than of expressed solidarity towards those in difficulty<sup>3</sup>.

Also at the political level, how many times do the same rulers act blatantly against the good of their own citizens, knowingly doing harm? Suffice it to think, in this latter regard, of the continuous calls to the necessity of entering war made in recent years, without considering the nefarious effects of such declarations on the civilian portions of Western and European society.

Moreover – and here we come to the crucial point of the question – MacIntyre seems almost unwilling to consider that at the foundation of modern politics, of the management of the *polis* and the State, there exists only and solely interest, be it particular or – in the most virtuous cases – be it collective. According to the realist school, clearly prevalent in the strand of international relations and also of geopolitics<sup>4</sup>, it is only interest that guides the action of rulers, from the most corrupt, who maximize their own personal gain, to the most virtuous, who nonetheless represent the attempt to pursue the collective and national interest. The modern geopolitical panorama is not dotted with practical-rational actors in a high and Aristotelian sense, of men ready to save children in difficulty, but with “practical-interested” actors who act for their own immediate interest or that of those who support them, completely overriding any idea of common good or sense of state collectivity.

At the foundation of modern politics, particularly in the state logic of international relations, there is the notional and conceptual framework formulated in the 16th century by Niccolò Machiavelli and Giovanni Botero, the true first reference of the crucial theme of *Reason of State* (Botero, 2009; Baldini, 1992)<sup>5</sup>.

It is the modern political framework that contradicts the almost idealistic setup, based on Morality, proper to MacIntyre: the foundations of modern statehood

<sup>3</sup> The media system certainly influences this widespread perception, being far more inclined to report tragic events and crime news than positive episodes. In any case, among these, the notorious case is the brutal killing of the Ukrainian refugee Iryna Zarutskya, killed for no apparent reason while she was inside a carriage on the blue line of the Lynx Rapid Transit, in Charlotte (USA). Images from closed-circuit cameras captured the dramatic indifference of the other 5 passengers around the victim, without providing any assistance.

<sup>4</sup> Although with some distinctions. See, in this regard, Kelly (2019).

<sup>5</sup> For interpretations from a geopolitical perspective of both these authors, please refer to Ricci (2015; 2016; 2023b). For Botero, see also Descendre, 2022; Raviola, 2020.

that we find in Machiavelli, in fact, outline for us the features of a management of the territory based not on Morality nor on a sense of common good, but on the figure of the prince and the personalization of the power management setup, with the difference that while the Florentine secretary had contemplated the use of reason and force by the prince for the purpose of a collective good, in the modern politics of his ideal setup only the first assumption has remained.

Not that this was absent from the political forms of the past, but the principles of political geography expressed from modernity, in opposition to the imperial idea, denote the features of an a-moral politics because founded on the territorial datum and on specific, particular, national interest. That of Machiavelli is – like it or not – the model that emerged prevailing from political modernity, and it is the model of particular interest over the universal (Chabod, 1964). The particular first of all of a territorial type, but then also cultural and the sense of collective identity, which in the attempt to assert itself over others inevitably leads to a condition of equilibrium or possible clash on the global scenario.

The theme of the balance of power, governed by a *Jus Publicum Europaeum*, will not coincidentally emerge in the reflections of Carl Schmitt (2003) precisely with the political structuring of modernity, when the imperial forms centered on universalistic principles, which also coincided with the search for a common good in an, if you will, Aristotelian sense, began to deteriorate.

## CONCLUSIONS

Another fact must be outlined.

The model proposed by Machiavelli, which is based on the clear and unquestionable overcoming of morality in favor of an extreme realism embodied by the new Prince, will be the winning one compared to its counterpart, more or less contemporary to the Florentine secretary, embodied by Giovanni Botero.

Although starting from the same platform of reflection, based on the consideration of reality as such, the Counter-Reformation thinker from Bene Vagienna, a former Jesuit, attempted to overcome the Machiavellian setup by proposing precisely the return of morality into modern political dynamics, to the point of hypothesizing the constitution of a «Council of Conscience» to guide the management of the State. This corresponded *de facto*, according to Chabod's interpretation, to the «intrusion of the Church into the singular act of government, by means of religious orders, confessors, and canonical advisors of the princes (...). The Prince in this way bound himself to the faith, which was, naturally, only one: the Roman Catholic. This alone could assure him happiness in government and open the safe path for him» (Chabod, 1993, p.130). The Council of Conscience that Botero proposes diverges from the model prevalent today.

MacIntyre's political order is established by more or less precise rules, which are those proper to Morality and rationality. In this the Scottish philosopher comes much closer to Botero, guided by an idealized conscience, than to Machiavelli (2005). The current geopolitical scenario, on the other hand, is not only - as Headley Bull would say in *The Anarchical Society* (1977) - profoundly *disordered* and, we might add, *uncertain*, because based on the very personal interests of States, but in it the minimal rules that governed the international political game have also completely broken down. The threshold of the minimal, basic rules on which relations between States and also conflicts on the international scenario were based has been surpassed, as we are observing in the tragedy of Gaza.

Think of the rules of engagement or of mutual respect for international political spaces. The *ius ad bellum* de facto no longer exists (when is war declared, nowadays?!). The albeit minimal rules of the *ius in bello* have also broken down (just see the number of civilians killed in Gaza, often deliberately and without any consideration for children, contrary to the idea of the man ready to save them, as figured by MacIntyre); and the inviolability of diplomatic spaces and international dialogue has also lapsed, as can easily be observed in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and in the Western responses to it.

At this point one might wonder not so much where the Morality described by MacIntyre has gone, but where the minimal rules of civil coexistence have gone, placing oneself on a much more basic and less elevated level.

In this sense, the modernity experienced today seems to represent the existential counterpart of the Aristotelian-Thomistic political logic reposed by the Scottish author: it is, in short, the contrast emerging from modernity - and which also manifests itself in today's geopolitical uncertainty (Ricci, 2023a) - and to which MacIntyre himself tries to provide a complex and almost unattainable moral remedy.

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# TRA INDIVIDUO E COMUNITÀ LA LEGGE NATURALE DA MACINTYRE A TOMMASO D'AQUINO

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## **ABSTRACT**

The engagement with Aquinas's philosophical heritage marks a turning point in the intellectual development of Alasdair MacIntyre. In particular, the Thomistic doctrine of natural law provides the Scottish philosopher with a more comprehensive framework for grounding ethics not only at the individual level but, more importantly, at the level of the community. This paper examines how MacIntyre engaged with Aquinas's doctrine of natural law and adopted its key features as a foundation for the ethical and political order. Through MacIntyre's interpretation of Aquinas's ideas, it also becomes possible to highlight certain aspects of the Dominican master's arguments.

## **KEYWORDS**

Alasdair MacIntyre, Aquinas, Natural law, Individual & community, Ethics & politics.

Nel quadro dello sviluppo della propria riflessione filosofica MacIntyre è venuto approfondendo, fra gli altri temi discussi, quello della legge naturale. Soprattutto a partire dagli anni Novanta del secolo scorso, dunque con il consolidarsi della cornice neo-aristotelica del proprio discorso etico-politico, il filosofo scozzese ha dedicato pagine rilevanti al ripensamento di questa nozione, che è venuta acquistando un ruolo sempre più cruciale nel delineare i fondamenti di un assetto di pensiero critico rispetto al liberalismo contemporaneo<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Sulla elaborazione filosofica dedicata da MacIntyre alla legge naturale si veda D. Simoncelli, *Natura, Ragione e Relazione. Una Prospettiva sulla Legge Naturale a Partire da Alasdair MacIntyre*, Orthotes, Napoli-Salerno 2020. Una importante lettura di come questo tema entra nella speculazione del filosofo scozzese e si intreccia al suo confronto con Tommaso d'Aquino si deve a MacIntyre stesso e per essa si veda *An Interview with Giovanna Borradori*, in *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. by K. Knight, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame IN 1998. Una discussione del modo in cui MacIntyre si misura con l'eredità di pensiero di Tommaso si trova in J. Macias, *Natural Law, the Common Good, and Economics. A Difficulty for Thomists*, in *Practical Rationality and Human Difference. Perspectives on and beyond Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. by S. Maletta, D. Mazzola and D. Simoncelli, Mimesis International, Sesto San Giovanni (MI) 2022, pp. 211-220.

Di legge naturale MacIntyre discute anche nel più recente *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning and Nature*, in pagine dedicate a chiarire i caratteri dell'agente razionale nella prospettiva neo-aristotelica<sup>2</sup>. La legge naturale si configura come una componente essenziale del sistema di coordinate che consentono di articolare il discorso etico-politico macintyriano, portando a compimento un itinerario di riflessione che conosce varie tappe nella parabola filosofica del pensatore scozzese. L'intenzione di questo contributo è quella di delineare le modalità con cui MacIntyre discute la funzione della legge naturale, mettendo in luce il ruolo cruciale che assegna al contributo di Tommaso d'Aquino al riguardo<sup>3</sup>. Un elemento, questo, che implica uno specifico giudizio sul posto che l'Aquinate occupa nella storia della filosofia. A questo si aggiunge il proposito di avanzare considerazioni che vogliono problematizzare il modo in cui MacIntyre legge Tommaso sul tema della *lex naturalis* e le ricadute di ordine politico che egli trae dal proprio argomentare. Si intende allora ripercorre l'argomentazione dispiegata in una pagina di *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, per poi sviluppare alcune considerazioni di carattere storico-critico circa l'elaborazione di Tommaso in merito alla legge naturale e il contributo che MacIntyre offre ad una sua più puntuale comprensione.

## 1. MACINTYRE E L'AGIRE ETICO IN TOMMASO D'AQUINO

Le modalità con cui si determina l'agire etico-politico, secondo la prospettiva neo-aristotelica, sono quelle che lo Stagirita descrive nella prima metà del terzo libro dell'*Etica Nicomachea*. Qui viene analizzata la dinamica psicologica dell'atto morale, la quale si configura come deliberazione relativa ai mezzi necessari al conseguimento di un fine desiderato. Secondo Aristotele la "deliberazione" (βουλή) riguarda le cose che si pongono nell'ordine delle possibilità dell'essere umano e dipendono dall'agire dell'uomo<sup>4</sup>. In ragione di tali caratteristiche, le

<sup>2</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity. An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge - New York 2016. Di seguito si cita dall'edizione italiana *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità. Desideri, ragionamento pratico e narrative*, Mimesis, Sesto San Giovanni (MI) 2024. Il tema è stato affrontato direttamente anche in A. MacIntyre, *Natural Law as Subversive. The Case of Aquinas*, in *Ethics and Politics. Selected Essays. Volume 2*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 41-63. Si veda anche il contenuto di A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals. Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Open Court, Chicago 1999, sul cui contenuto si veda D. Simoncelli, *Giving and Receiving in Light of the Human Difference. A Reading of MacIntyre's "Dependent Rational Animals"*, in *Practical Rationality and Human Difference*, cit., pp. 157-167.

<sup>3</sup> È da osservare che l'interesse per l'Aquinate da parte di MacIntyre non si limita al tema della legge naturale. Si veda ad esempio lo studio dedicato al tema della vulnerabilità da M. Damonte, *MacIntyre's Anthropological Vulnerability between E.F. Kittay and Kenny's Aquinas*, in *Practical Rationality and Human Difference*, cit., pp. 137-146.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Aristotele, *Etica Nicomachea*, III, 5, 1112a30-34.



scienze sono al di fuori della sfera della deliberazione, perché si è di fronte a saperi che rispondono ai principi della “certezza” (ἀκρίβεια) e dell’essere sufficienti a sé stessi (αὐτάρκεια). Le deliberazioni riguardano invece le arti (τέχνη), perché queste sono dell’ordine del “per lo più” (ὥς ἐπιτόπολῶ).

Sviluppando questo punto della riflessione aristotelica MacIntyre sottolinea come quello che nelle pagine dell’*Etica Nicomachea* viene discusso come processo deliberativo individuale, richiede di essere inserito dentro una dinamica relazionale allorché la deliberazione riguarda i mezzi necessari al conseguimento di beni comuni. Il filosofo scozzese considera qui cruciale l’apporto di Tommaso d’Aquino, richiamando esplicitamente un luogo della *Summa Theologiae*, in cui si legge:

La deliberazione (*consilium*) comporta che si sia svolto un confronto fra più <persone>. ... Si deve infatti considerare che per giungere a conoscere qualcosa di certo nelle circostanze particolari contingenti è necessario prendere in considerazione una pluralità di condizioni e circostanze che non è facile siano considerate da un solo <essere umano>, ma sono colte in modo più certo da più <persone>, dato che quel che una persona prende in considerazione non viene in mente ad un altro, mentre nelle cose necessarie e universali la valutazione è più assoluta e più univoca, così che una sola <persona> può bastare a sé stessa in una valutazione di questo genere<sup>5</sup>.

A giudizio di MacIntyre, quando la deliberazione si svolge nel quadro della discussione circa un bene comune – cioè, per utilizzare la definizione che ne dà il filosofo, un bene che può essere raggiunto e goduto da individui in quanto membri di vari gruppi o in quanto partecipanti a diverse attività – la capacità del singolo non si rivela sufficiente, perché il peso della contingenza e delle variabili che questa introduce nell’elaborazione del giudizio pratico rende incerta la verità<sup>6</sup>. Per il filosofo scozzese, Tommaso coglie il punto, come mostra il fatto che per lui la deliberazione in materia etico-politica richiede un confronto (*collatio*) fra più agenti razionali, perché solo in questo modo è possibile sopperire al limite di conoscenza pratica che caratterizza ciascun individuo.

<sup>5</sup>Tommaso d’Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II<sup>ac</sup>, q. 14, art. 3: «Respondeo dicendum quod consilium proprie importat collationem inter plures habitam. Quod et ipsum nomen designat, dicitur enim consilium quasi Considium, eo quod multi considerant ad simul conferendum. Est autem considerandum quod in particularibus contingentibus, ad hoc quod aliquid certum cognoscatur, plures condiciones seu circumstantias considerare oportet, quas ab uno non facile est considerari, sed a pluribus certius percipiuntur, dum quod unus considerat, alii non occurrit, in necessariis autem et universalibus est absolutior et simplicior consideratio, ita quod magis ad huiusmodi considerationem unus per se sufficere potest».

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. MacIntyre, *L’etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 256.

Per chiarire ulteriormente la posizione dell'Aquinate, che qui MacIntyre segue, si potrebbe richiamare il commento del maestro domenicano al passo aristotelico dell'*Etica Nicomachea* citato in precedenza, in cui si ricorda che la sfera dell'agire morale è dell'ordine del "per lo più". A questo riguardo Tommaso osserva che la differenza fra le scienze e le arti risiede nel fatto che le prime restituiscono una verità che è nell'ordine della necessità e della natura. Questo spiega perché esse sono escluse dalla deliberazione: non vi è necessità di "deliberare" sulla dinamica del movimento o sulla conformazione degli organi di un corpo.

In questo <ambito> è meno necessario deliberare che nelle scienze pratiche, rispetto alle quali dubitiamo in misura maggiore a motivo della grande varietà che si determina in queste arti<sup>7</sup>.

Delineato con precisione il perimetro della deliberazione secondo la lezione aristotelica, Tommaso si sofferma sull'enunciato in cui Aristotele spiega:

Ci procuriamo dei consiglieri per gli affari di grande importanza, dato che non ci fidiamo di noi stessi, perché crediamo di non essere capaci di discernere bene<sup>8</sup>.

Il commento dell'Aquinate chiarisce:

<Aristotele> afferma che ci rivolgiamo ad altri per ricevere consiglio nelle questioni più importanti, quasi non credessimo di essere noi stessi bastevoli a discernere che cosa è necessario che noi compiamo. E così è chiaro che la deliberazione non deve riguardare le cose infime ma quelle importanti<sup>9</sup>.

Il passo di Tommaso concorda con il luogo della I<sup>a</sup>-II<sup>ae</sup> della *Summa theologiae* citato in precedenza nel sottolineare l'esigenza che il *consilium* abbia una dimensione relazionale e comunitaria. E tuttavia spiega anche che questo si rivela necessario quando ad essere in questione non sono le realtà di minor valore (*res minime*) ma piuttosto quelle importanti, rispetto alle quali il giudizio del singolo

<sup>7</sup> Tommaso d'Aquino, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, III, lectio VII, n. 469: «In quo tamen minus est necesse consiliari quam in scientiis practicis, circa quas magis dubitamus propter magnam varietatem quae in istis artibus accidit».

<sup>8</sup> Aristotele, *Etica Nicomachea*, III, 5, 1112b 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Tommaso d'Aquino, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, III, lectio VII, n. 472: «Dicit quod assumimus nobis alios ad consiliandum in rebus magnis, quasi non credentes nobis ipsis ut simus sufficientes ad discernendum quid oporteat nos facere. Et sic patet quod consilium non debet esse de minimis quibuscumque, sed de rebus magnis».

corre il rischio del dubbio e dunque necessita del conforto di una deliberazione che coinvolge più agenti razionali.

## 2. LA LEGGE COME FATTO COMUNITARIO

Rispetto a questa cornice, in cui la dimensione comunitaria entra nella costruzione di un giudizio pratico per il quale la capacità deliberativa individuale non è più bastevole a sé stessa, MacIntyre coglie l'esigenza di fissare un criterio oggettivo capace di ordinare il discorso etico come discorso "comune"<sup>10</sup>.

Coloro che deliberano insieme – spiega – hanno bisogno di assicurarsi che non si escluda o ignori alcuna voce rilevante, che, per quanto possibile, ciò che si afferma tanto sui fini quanto sui mezzi sia vero e che a ogni considerazione proposta venga dato il dovuto peso razionale e non le venga attribuita troppa o troppo poca importanza e seconda di chi la propone o di come la propone o di quali stimoli non razionali abbiano accompagnato quella proposta<sup>11</sup>.

Questa esigenza impone che la deliberazione comunitaria sia posta entro i limiti di un confronto razionale fra le diverse valutazioni che i singoli esprimono, in una forma di vero e proprio dialogo, in ragione della quale attraverso un argomentare sviluppato come atto condiviso e comunitario, si è in grado di pervenire ad un'intelligenza comune dei mezzi adeguati al bene comune che si intende perseguire.

Per MacIntyre è qui che si apre l'esigenza della legge naturale, la quale assume la valenza di quel sistema di precetti che costringono la relazione deliberativa comunitaria nel perimetro di una discussione che non solo è pubblica, ma esige di essere razionalmente condotta, escludendo ogni forma di imposizione o coercizione che attenga alla forza o alla violenza di qualsiasi genere. È in ragione dell'obbedienza a questo genere di precetti, i quali fissano il perimetro di possibilità della deliberazione razionale, che è possibile andare al di là della semplicemente individuale.

Perciò – prosegue MacIntyre – alcuni tra i precetti che Tommaso ha chiamati precetti della legge naturale, di quella legge la cui autorità riconosciamo in virtù della nostra natura di agenti razionali, sono necessari per strutturare le relazioni di coloro che perseguono i loro beni individuali e comuni in compagnia di altri. E da una

<sup>10</sup> L'interazione fra la dimensione individuale e quella comunitaria è affrontata da MacIntyre anche in rapporto al concetto di giustizia, soprattutto nel saggio A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame IN 1988.

<sup>11</sup> MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 114.

prospettiva neoaristotelica e più specificamente tomista non ci sono altri modi per perseguirli<sup>12</sup>.

Così concepita la nozione di legge naturale si presenta come uno sviluppo e un completamento della psicologia dell'agire morale di matrice aristotelica, nella cui trattazione lo Stagirita discute con accuratezza i diversi passaggi del processo che dalla determinazione del bene desiderato giunge all'azione compiuta. La discussione aristotelica mette in evidenza il carattere razionale di questo processo, insistendo, anche in termini di lessico, sul combinarsi di nozioni come προαίρεσις e βουλή, che comportano un'irriducibile componente argomentativa (λόγος). La stessa προαίρεσις, come nota lo stesso MacIntyre, si configura come combinato di giudizio razionale e desiderio, ossia come tensione verso qualcosa che la valutazione razionale riconosce come un bene da perseguire. In conseguenza di questo, la deliberazione implica l'ulteriore e necessario passaggio sul piano dei mezzi adeguati a perseguire quel fine. Nell'Aristotele dell'*Etica Nicomachea*, tuttavia, la discussione si attiene alla dimensione del singolo agente razionale, là dove invece, come si è visto, già Tommaso d'Aquino mette in luce come, la natura stessa della sfera "pratica" – caratterizzata dal "per lo più" quale criterio valutativo disponibile alla ragione – richieda il conforto di una deliberazione comunitaria almeno per quei "beni" che non possono essere goduti in forma individuale.

Perché questa deliberazione comune abbia una consistenza occorre determinarne le condizioni di possibilità e dunque introdurre un criterio oggettivo che determini la cornice in cui una pluralità di agenti razionali sono in grado di condurre la deliberazione come atto comune e non individuale. La legge naturale assolve a questa funzione, nella misura in cui stabilisce un punto di riferimento che permette a quello che nel lessico della scolastica medievale si indica con *intellectus practicus* di poter articolare giudizi la cui valenza non è solo individuale ma attiene ad una collettività. Dunque, la legge naturale, nella versione di Tommaso d'Aquino che MacIntyre intende far propria, assumerebbe il valore di un "limite" entro cui l'intelletto pratico può operare su scala comunitaria. Essa infatti stabilisce il criterio secondo cui l'intelletto può scegliere i beni comuni e deliberare riguardo ai mezzi adeguati per giungere a godere di essi. Così intesa, la legge naturale non è però solo una condizione di possibilità, ma rappresenta anche un vincolo, nel senso che, se si accetta la nozione di bene comune nell'accezione del filosofo scozzese, allora l'esercizio di una scelta e di una deliberazione comuni non hanno solo il connotato di una legittima possibilità, ma anche quello di un dovere che è in capo agli agenti razionali coinvolti. La legge naturale non è cioè riducibile a coercizione, ad esempio, il divieto di imporre un

<sup>12</sup> *Ivi*, p. 115.

giudizio individuale con la forza. Essa comporta un appello alla natura razionale dell'essere umano, che è posto di fronte al dovere di operare in coerenza con la propria natura razionale, la quale implica, quanto alla sfera pratica, oltre ad una psicologia individuale dell'atto morale anche una psicologia, per così dire, "comunitaria" dell'agire etico-politico, limitatamente a quei beni che rientrano nella *communio*<sup>13</sup>.

### 3. RILEGGERE TOMMASO ALLA LUCE DI MACINTYRE

L'elaborazione della legge naturale nella riflessione di MacIntyre rappresenta un punto di vista utile ad una rilettura degli elementi teoretici della dottrina dell'Aquinate riguardo a tale nozione. Nelle questioni 90-97 della I-II<sup>ae</sup> della *Summa theologiae*, che vengono considerate come un vero e proprio trattato sulle leggi, Tommaso offre una disamina puntuale della nozione di legge naturale dalla quale traspaiono con chiarezza i fondamenti filosofici, più che teologici, di questa nozione. Più in dettaglio, il contenuto della legge naturale viene individuato in unariformulazione della "regola d'oro" di matrice biblica, ossia: «fa il bene e rifuggi il male». Per Tommaso l'enunciato determina il modo in cui la ragione umana partecipa della legge eterna che regge l'ordine universale. È opportuno richiamare come Tommaso argomenta su questo punto, soffermandoci sulla chiarificazione dei due termini che compongono l'espressione *lexnaturalis*.

L'Aquinate chiarisce che la nozione di "legge" implica due elementi fra loro inseparabile: la regola e la misura. *Lex* è ciò che stabilisce un criterio operativo, fissa una prescrizione, e al tempo stesso consente di valutare l'esistente e funge da metro rispetto a cui l'intelletto è capace di esprimere un giudizio. Ora, questa duplice valenza della legge può essere colta da un duplice punto di vista: sia dal lato della legge stessa – cioè del principio che regola e misura le cose –, sia dal punto di vista di chi è soggetto della legge – cioè di chi viene regolato e misurato. Nel caso dell'essere umano, ossia di un agente razionale, la condizione di soggetto della legge è qualificata dalla ragione quale differenza specifica della natura umana. Questo forte connotato noetico è esplicitato da Tommaso allorché qualifica la legge naturale «come una luce della ragione naturale, per mezzo della quale discerniamo cosa sia bene e cosa male»<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Per una discussione del concetto di comunità in MacIntyre e un quadro del dibattito filosofico in cui la riflessione del filosofo scozzese si inserisce si veda G. Bombelli, *Occidente e 'figure' comunitarie (volume introduttivo). 'Comunitarismo' e 'comunità'. Un percorso critico-esplorativo tra filosofia e diritto*, Jovene, Napoli 2010. Si veda poi, per un quadro generale relativo al pensiero politico di MacIntyre il saggio di S. Maletta, *Biografia della ragione. Saggio sulla filosofia politica di MacIntyre*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Tommaso d'Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 91, a. 2, resp.: «Quasi lumen rationis naturalis, quo discernimus quid sit bonum, et quid malum».

In tal modo l'espressione legge naturale significa un principio inerente alla natura razionale dell'essere umano che è possibile riconoscere come il criterio che orienta e guida la volontà nel suo scegliere e deliberare.

Si deve dire – prosegue l'Aquinate – che ogni operazione della ragione e della volontà deriva in noi da quello che è secondo natura, come si è detto in precedenza<sup>15</sup>: ogni argomentazione, infatti, deriva da principi naturalmente noti. E ogni desiderio di quelle cose che sono orientate al fine deriva dal desiderio naturale del fine ultimo. E così è anche necessario che il primo indirizzarsi dei nostri atti verso un fine avvenga a motivo della legge naturale<sup>16</sup>.

A giudizio dell'Aquinate, per l'essere umano, la legge che è regola e misura, è al tempo stesso il criterio a cui conformare i giudizi pratici e anche il metro per valutare le azioni compiute, ma lo è in quanto conosciuto come tale dalla ragione. Non è dunque un principio eteronomo, ma quell'elemento proprio della natura umana in quanto natura razionale che la abilita alla vita pratica: perché consente di distinguere il bene dal male e dunque, per utilizzare la terminologia aristotelica, scegliere il bene da perseguire e deliberare sui mezzi adeguati a raggiungere il suo godimento.

Questo modo di intendere la legge naturale consente di articolare la normatività della legge morale in ragione di quel criterio del “per lo più” che già Aristotele individuava come caratteristico del sapere etico-politico – che è una *ars* – distinguendolo rispetto a quello certo e sufficiente delle scienze. Tommaso osserva infatti che mentre il precetto della legge naturale resta evidente alla ragione, perché è il *principium* dell'operare dell'intelletto pratico, la sua traduzione in prescrizioni (*regulae*) e giudizi valutativi (*mensurae*) specifiche e relative alla contingenza, muta in ragione delle circostanze. Significativo, nella prospettiva teologica della *Summa*, la distinzione che questo comporta fra i precetti primari e secondari: mentre i primi (ad esempio l'amore per Dio e l'amore per il prossimo) sono immutabili – perché rappresentano di fatto una riformulazione del principio “fa il bene e rifuggi il male” – gli altri precetti sono invece mutevoli in ragione delle contingenze. Mentre la legge naturale – «fa il bene e rifuggi il male» – è il principio operativo dell'intelletto pratico, le prescrizioni morali che da esso derivano e che sono frutto del giudizio pratico, sono la risposta

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Tommaso d'Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II<sup>o</sup>, q. 10, a. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Tommaso d'Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II<sup>o</sup>, q. 91, a. 2, ad 2um: «Dicedum quod omnis operatio rationis, et voluntatis derivatur in nobis ab eo, quod est secundum naturam, ut supra habitum est: nam omnis ratiocinatio derivatur a principiis naturaliter notis; et omnis appetitus eorum quae sunt ad finem, derivatur a naturali appetitu ultimi finis, et sic etiam oportet, quod prima directio actuum nostrorum ad finem fiat per legem naturalem».

alla domanda: «che cosa è il bene da fare e cosa il male da rifuggire nella specifica condizione in cui mi trovo?».

La legge naturale così concepita non è un semplice sistema normativo, ma rappresenta quel principio – speculare al principio del rapporto fra intelletto e cosa che è il criterio veritativo proprio dell'*intellectus speculativus* – che permette di rendere ragione della vita etico-politica che è propria degli esseri umani. Quella di Tommaso è cioè una concezione che suppone un'antropologia fondata sull'idea che l'essere umano è razionale e politico insieme, anzi: che è politico proprio perché razionale. La razionalità, intesa come capacità caratteristica della natura umana, comporta la comprensione chiara (*simpliciter*) dell'ente come fondamento del piano speculativo e del bene come fondamento del piano pratico. Tommaso spiega infatti che è sulla nozione prima di *ens* che si fonda il principio di non contraddizione e di seguito ad essi tutti i principi che determinano la nostra capacità di conoscere il vero. Allo stesso modo, egli osserva, la nozione di bene fonda il primo precetto, cioè il principio della legge naturale.

Come l'ente è quel che per primo cade nell'apprensione in senso chiaro, così il bene è quel che per primo cade nell'apprensione della ragione pratica che è ordinata all'opera. Ogni agente, infatti, agisce in vista di un fine che risponde alla nozione di bene. E quindi il primo principio nella ragione pratica è quel che è fondato sulla nozione di bene, che è: *il bene è quel che ogni cosa desidera*, cioè a dire il primo precetto della legge secondo cui il bene è quel che deve esser fatto e perseguito e il male è quel che deve essere evitato. E su questo si fondano tutti gli altri precetti della legge naturale, cioè che sarebbero pertinenti alla legge naturale tutte quelle cose che debbono essere fatte o evitate, le quali la ragione pratica apprende naturalmente essere beni umani<sup>17</sup>.

La razionalità dell'operare della ragione pratica rende il discorso etico-politico non solo individuale ma comunitario<sup>18</sup>. Soprattutto perché la legge naturale, come criterio razionale di giudizio, rende possibile arrivare a conclusioni riconosciute come giuste da parte della pluralità di agenti razionali. Tommaso esplicita questo

<sup>17</sup>Tommaso d'Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II<sup>e</sup>, q. 94, a. 1, resp.: «Sicut autem ens primum, quod cadit in apprehensione simpliciter; ita bonum est primum, quod cadit in apprehensione practicae rationis, quae ordinantur ad opus: omne enim agens agit propter finem, qui habet rationem boni: et ideo primum principium in ratione practica est, quod fundatur supra rationem boni; quae est: *Bonum est, quod omnia appetunt*: hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod bonum est faciendum, et prosequendum, et malum vitandum; et super hoc fundantur omnia alia praecepta legis naturae, ut scilicet omnia illa facienda, vel vitanda pertineant ad praecepta legis naturae, quae ratio practica naturaliter apprehendit esse bona humana».

<sup>18</sup> Sulle posizioni etico-politiche di MacIntyre si veda G. Bombelli, *MacIntyre, Practical Reason, and Law. Some Remarks*, in *Practical Rationality and Human Difference*, cit., pp. 195-209. Riguardo poi al ricorso a Tommaso in questa declinazione politica si vedano T.S. Hibbs, *MacIntyre, Aquinas, and Politics*, in *The Review of Politics*, 66.3 (2004), pp. 357-383.

punto là dove, chiarendo che le cose che si dicono “naturalmente” giuste, sono tali non perché sono *principia communia*, ma perché sono gli esiti di scelte o di deliberazioni razionali che derivano dai *principia communia*. Questi ultimi non sono altro che le diverse formulazioni della legge naturale, che dunque fungono da criterio regolatore di un operare dell'intelletto pratico che conduce a *conclusiones* che hanno un valore comune perché tutti gli agenti razionali concordano sulla *rectitudo* dell'argomentare<sup>19</sup>.

#### 4. DARE UN FONDAMENTO ALLA COMUNITÀ

L'elaborazione di MacIntyre offre la possibilità di ritornare sulle argomentazioni che Tommaso d'Aquino dedica alla legge naturale cogliendone alcune caratteristiche specifiche. A partire dal forte connotato noetico che questa nozione ha per il maestro domenicano e il fatto che essa non abbia un carattere eteronomo, ma sia piuttosto concepita come uno dei *principia* dell'essere umano in quanto animale razionale. Accanto a questo, la legge naturale si rivela come il fondamento della dimensione “comunitaria” del discorso etico, che passa dall'essere semplicemente morale ad essere etico-politico, perché articola i beni desiderati dall'essere umano in beni privati, beni pubblici e beni comuni, delineando uno spazio, quello comunitario, che è il *proprium* della politicità della natura umana.

Da questa rielaborazione in chiave aristotelico-tomista, MacIntyre deriva un'opzione di rifondazione della politica a partire dalla dimensione della *civitas*, nella quale, egli osserva, si determina la possibilità di esercitare la scelta e la deliberazione razionali come atto comunitario indirizzato al bene comune e al suo perseguimento<sup>20</sup>. In questo il filosofo scozzese declina in positivo un'alternativa al liberalismo contemporaneo e alla crisi delle sue forme istituzionali, a partire da quella statuale. Ci si può tuttavia chiedere se davvero questa assunzione di Tommaso come pensatore che riformula e sviluppa il punto di vista etico-politico

<sup>19</sup>Cfr. Tommaso d'Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 94, a. 4, ad 2<sup>um</sup>: «Ad secundum dicendum quod verbum Philosophi est intelligendum de his, quae sunt naturaliter iusta, non sicut principia communia, sed sicut quaedam conclusiones ex his derivatae; quae ut in pluribus habent rectitudinem, et ut in paucioribus deficiunt».

<sup>20</sup> Per MacIntyre si determina in tal modo la possibilità di superare i limiti del relativismo etico dentro il perimetro dell'etica comunitaria. Su questo si vedano le osservazioni di C.S. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre. Relativism, Thomism and Philosophy*, Lexington Books, Oxford UK 2004. Sul concetto di ‘tradizione’ in MacIntyre, che assume un ruolo preminente, si veda il volume di T. D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality and Virtue. The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2007.



di Aristotele, debba necessariamente condurre ad un'alternativa che consideri come irreversibile la crisi del liberalismo<sup>21</sup>.

Assumere il discorso di Tommaso e sviluppare le sue intuizioni circa il carattere comunitario che una parte dell'attività deliberativa necessariamente deve avere, comporta certamente una centralità della dimensione della *civitas*, ma anche la possibilità di ordini politici superiori. È l'Aquinate stesso a metterlo in evidenza nel suo commento alla *Politica* di Aristotele, dove sottolinea come, anche nel caso di una dimensione politica estesa – un regno, ad esempio – il criterio del governo delle cose deve rispondere ad un coinvolgimento di tutti i soggetti razionali interessati. Al di là degli istituti che esercitano le diverse *potestates*, nota Tommaso, resta preferibile un quadro in cui tutti concorrono alla scelta del fine da perseguire e hanno un ruolo nel processo deliberativo. La preferenza per il regime “misto”, descritto da Aristotele, è coerente, in Tommaso, con la visione di una antropologia che si articola su più livelli, da quello individuale a quello comunitario, con quest'ultimo che non ha un carattere univoco.

In questa luce si spiega allora come Tommaso abbia potuto essere recuperato anche alla riflessione di chi ha ragionato sulla possibilità di declinazioni altre del liberalismo politico. Per restare al mondo anglosassone è significativo il caso di John Courtney Murray e del suo *We Hold These Truths*<sup>22</sup>. Pur ponendosi sul terreno della teologia, lo sforzo di Murray di ragionare sulla continuità fra dottrina etico-politica tomista e liberalismo nordamericano, al di là delle esigenze culturali a cui risponde, si fonda sulla possibilità di individuare nella nozione di legge naturale di Tommaso un dispositivo capace di fondare come *bona communia* i diritti codificati nelle dichiarazioni e costituzioni settecentesche e ottocentesche. Si pensi anche all'elaborazione di un autore come John Finnis, per il quale proprio

<sup>21</sup> La posizione critica di MacIntyre verso il liberalismo politico e i suoi fondamenti etici matura attraverso un itinerario scandito dai suoi tesi a cominciare dal notissimo A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame IN, 2007<sup>3</sup>. Si vedano poi *Is Patriotism a Virtue?*, Lindley Lecture, University of Kansas 1984; *Cross-purposes. The Liberal-Communitarian Debate*, in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. by N.L. Rosenblum, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass. – London 1989, pp. 159-182; *I'm not a communitarian but...*, in *The Responsive Community* 1.3 (1991), pp. 91-92. Una ricostruzione storica dell'accento anti-liberale di MacIntyre è offerta in S. Maletta, *Un aristotelismo sovversivo. MacIntyre oltre il disordine liberale*, Mimesis, Sesto San Giovanni (MI), 2020. Si veda anche D. Lorenzo, *A. MacIntyre: Person, Community and Tradition against Individualism*, in *Ramon Llull Journal of applied Ethics*, 11 (2020), pp. 85-115.

<sup>22</sup> J. Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths. Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition*, Sheed and Ward, New York 1960. Si veda la traduzione italiana, *Noi crediamo in queste verità. Riflessioni cattoliche sul “principio americano”*, a cura di S. Ceccanti, Morcelliana, Brescia 2021, con il saggio introduttivo all'opera. Sul ruolo della nozione di legge naturale nella proposta etico-politica del gesuita americano si vedano le considerazioni sviluppate da F. Cadeddu, *A Call to Action. John Courtney Murray, S.J., and the Renewal of American Democracy*, in *The Catholic Historical Review* 101.3 (2015), pp. 530-553.

la nozione di legge naturale tomista può operare come solido fondamento del concetto di diritti naturali<sup>23</sup>. Occorrerebbe allora riflettere se questo dialogo con la tradizione aristotelico-tomista non possa portare ad un ripensamento profondo del liberalismo, tanto sul piano dei suoi assunti etici quanto su quello dei suoi esiti politici, nella misura in cui prospetta una maggiore articolazione di nozioni come bene, diritto, legge.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011<sup>2</sup>.

# PATOLOGIE SOCIALI E CURA DELL'ANIMA. UN CONFRONTO TRA ALASDAIR MACINTYRE E JAN PATOČKA

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to compare some characteristic aspects of the ethical-political perspectives of Alasdair MacIntyre and Jan Patočka. We will examine their critical reading of modernity and the centrality assigned to “classical” thought, used to highlight the distorting effects caused by that epochal historical upheaval, as well as the resulting “social pathologies” afflicting the contemporary world. In this way, the diagnoses offered by MacIntyre in his most important works will be compared with some of the instances put forward by Patočka on several occasions, particularly in outlining his idea of “care for the soul”. The great importance given to the problem of how to accomplish a meaningful life will be examined, as well as the peculiar way in which MacIntyre understands the meaning of human flourishing, which is achieved by accepting human existence in its narrative dimension – that is, by conceiving one’s life as something unitary, of which a coherent narrative can be made: as it occurs, in some way, with the philosophical and existential path of Patočka himself.

## **KEYWORDS**

MacIntyre, Patočka, Meaningful life, Flourishing, Care for the soul, Narrative unity of life.

## **1. INTRODUZIONE**

L'intento di queste pagine è di proporre un confronto tra alcuni aspetti che caratterizzano, e a nostro avviso accomunano, le prospettive etico-politiche di Alasdair MacIntyre e Jan Patočka. Questa peculiare giustapposizione sarà motivata dalla comune lettura critica della modernità e dalla centralità che, in entrambi gli autori, assume il richiamo a un pensiero “classico”, atto a rilevare gli effetti distorsivi e contraddittori provocati da quell'epocale rivolgimento storico-conoscitivo, nonché le conseguenti patologie sociali che affliggono il mondo contemporaneo. Da questo punto di vista, le diagnosi offerte da MacIntyre

all'interno di alcune delle sue opere più importanti saranno fatte interagire con alcune istanze analoghe che, dal canto suo, Patočka avanza in diverse occasioni e, in particolare, nel delineare quell'idea di "cura dell'anima" che informa decisamente la sua proposta speculativa. Sarà interrogata l'indiscutibile rilevanza attribuita alla questione del senso e al problema di come realizzare una vita significativa, nonché il suo delinearsi quale urgenza teorica e morale ineludibile. Di conseguenza, verrà messo in discussione il modo peculiare in cui MacIntyre intende il senso del compimento umano, quell'idea peculiare di "fioritura" che si realizza a patto di assumere l'esistenza umana nella sua dimensione narrativa – concependo, cioè, la propria vita come qualcosa di unitario e di cui si possa fare una narrazione coerente: una prospettiva che, in qualche modo, rispecchia la vicenda filosofica ed esistenziale dello stesso Patočka.

## 2. CRISI DEL SENSO E VITA SIGNIFICATIVA

Se c'è un elemento in grado di istituire un legame teorico solido tra due pensatori apparentemente distanti per formazione e attitudine come MacIntyre e Patočka<sup>1</sup>, questo deve essere senz'altro individuato nel fatto che entrambi fanno della modernità il punto di riferimento critico fondamentale delle rispettive prospettive. Nelle sue opere più rappresentative, in effetti, MacIntyre presenta una disamina strutturata e tagliente della condizione morale e sociale della modernità. Notoriamente, è con *Dopo la virtù*<sup>2</sup>, considerato da molti l'*opus majus* del filosofo scozzese, che il pensiero "classico", e nella fattispecie aristotelico, viene assunto quale alternativa conoscitiva fondamentale per dirimere i controversi problemi etici e politici ingenerati dal trionfo dell'attitudine soggettivista e individualista moderna. Da quel momento in poi, MacIntyre riconduce, infatti, la scaturigine di ogni ricerca su desideri, possibilità e scelte umane al modo in cui Aristotele (così come chi si è storicamente ispirato al suo pensiero) ha potuto delineare una prospettiva generale sull'essere umano, intendendolo quale agente razionale capace di interrogarsi su quale sia il suo bene – un bene che, in questa stessa prospettiva, non può mai essere disgiunto da quello della comunità. Aristotele, così come ogni forma storicamente e culturalmente determinata di (neo)aristotelismo, appartiene quindi, secondo quanto lo stesso MacIntyre concede, a una tradizione peculiare, a quella tradizione in grado di fondare lo spirito di un'esperienza critica e generativa di senso che, nel contesto specifico

<sup>1</sup> La possibilità di un confronto proficuo tra i due autori emerge in S. Maletta, *Il giusto della politica. Il soggetto dissidente e lo spazio pubblico*, Milano, Mimesis, 2014, in particolare nel terzo e nel quarto capitolo del saggio.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù, Saggio di teoria morale*, tr. it. e cura di M. D'Avenia, Roma, Armando, 2007.

della *polis* greca, dà luogo a una storia. E a questa storia è stato abitualmente conferito il nome di Europa.

Secondo Patočka, la storia europea descrive quel grandioso tentativo storico di fondare il senso dell'esistenza su qualcosa di intangibile, su di una paradossale azione riflessiva che però genera un effetto concreto: uno sconvolgimento radicale del modo in cui l'essere umano si rapporta al mondo. Si tratta di un'esperienza precipua a cui il pensatore boemo ha dato il titolo di cura dell'anima. In questo senso, come è possibile leggere in una delle sue opere più importanti in cui indugia particolarmente sulla questione e che, non a caso, sarà intitolata *Platone e l'Europa*, «la storia dell'Europa è, in gran parte, almeno fino al XV secolo, la storia dei tentativi di realizzare la cura dell'anima»<sup>3</sup>. Eppure, tanto per Patočka quanto per MacIntyre, l'origine di questa storia peculiare non ha nulla di pacifico, essendo inestricabilmente legata allo *choc*, all'esperienza "taumatica" e traumatica che consegue alla presa di coscienza del crollo di un mondo, alla messa in discussione di quel sistema di valori rappresentato dal passato eroico narrato dai poemi omerici che, per quanto "arcaico", continua nondimeno a informare e regolare l'agire dei singoli all'interno di quel consesso sociale<sup>4</sup>. La storia europea emerge, in effetti, dal tentativo audace di rispondere alla crisi che caratterizza la comunità politica ateniese del V secolo a.C., laddove i vecchi ideali e le antiche narrazioni fondative di quello spirito unificante diventano oggetto delle dispute tra le diverse concezioni di bene che vanno delineandosi. E lo stesso Patočka, riferendosi a questa decisiva esperienza di rottura col passato *mitico*, definisce lo spirito della *polis* come «lo spirito dell'unità nella discordia e nella lotta»<sup>5</sup>, sottolineando come l'ordine della comunità non si configuri semplicemente quale associazione *degli uni con gli altri*, ma si nutra altresì di quell'elemento comune che Eraclito di Efeso chiama πόλεμος e che, ponendosi al di sopra di ogni

<sup>3</sup> J. Patočka, *Platone e l'Europa*, tr. it. e cura di S.A. Matrangola e B. Penna, Napoli-Salerno, Orthotes, 2023, p. 69. La specificazione «almeno fino al XV secolo» risulta di estrema importanza rispetto alle argomentazioni seguenti.

<sup>4</sup> Come scrive a questo proposito MacIntyre, «narrazioni del genere costituirono davvero la memoria storica, adeguata o inadeguata, delle società in cui ricevettero la loro trascrizione definitiva. Ma soprattutto esse fornivano uno sfondo morale alla discussione contemporanea nelle società classiche, una descrizione dell'ordine morale ormai superato o in parte superato, le cui credenze e concetti esercitavano ancora un'influenza parziale, ma che offriva anche un illuminante contrasto con il presente» (A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p. 159). Per approfondire il modo peculiare in cui MacIntyre ripercorre il passaggio dalla concezione eroica delineata all'interno dei poemi omerici alla prospettiva critica che caratterizza il contesto storico-culturale ateniese del V secolo a.C., cfr. anche C. Seal, "MacIntyre and the Polis", in *Analyse & Kritik*, 30 (2008), pp. 5-16.

<sup>5</sup> J. Patočka, *Saggi eretici sulla filosofia della storia*, tr. it. di D. Stimilli, Torino, Einaudi, 2008, p. 48.

contendente, ne rende possibile la realizzazione come «associazione *degli unicontra gli altri*»<sup>6</sup>.

Per il pensatore boemo, la filosofia, la politica e il senso della storicità europea nascono e si sviluppano quale istanza critica che, una volta svanito dal mondo greco l'effetto di "cristallizzazione" sociale resa possibile dall'esperienza compartecipata delle Guerre persiane, viene a configurarsi come il *tonus* determinante di una vita cittadina in cui vecchie e nuove questioni divengono impellenti<sup>7</sup>, facendo emergere criteri di giudizio eterogenei che determinano quella che, dal suo canto, MacIntyre definisce in più occasioni l'accesa conflittualità tra opinioni o teorie rivali. In quel contesto risultano emblematiche le sempre più frequenti e virulenti dispute che caratterizzano l'agone pubblico e che gravitano intorno alla controversia "antropologica" su come agire per rendere significativa l'esperienza di vita del singolo all'interno della sua comunità di appartenenza. Da questo punto di vista, come scrive MacIntyre in *Dopo la virtù*,

elenchi diversi e antagonisti di virtù, atteggiamenti diversi e antagonisti verso le virtù e definizioni diverse e antagoniste delle virtù individuali sono frequenti nell'Atene del quinto secolo [...]. Proprio perché queste rivalità e incoerenze sono sintomi di conflitto, non sorprende che compaiano interpretazioni filosofiche antagonistiche e in competizione reciproca delle virtù, interpretazioni che rendono aperti ed espliciti i conflitti sottostanti<sup>8</sup>.

Ora, questo spirito agonistico si incarna in modo eccezionale anche in quella figura chiave della cultura occidentale che è Socrate, il quale, assumendo un'attitudine analoga a quella dei sofisti – che d'altronde rispecchia l'atmosfera politica e intellettuale del tempo – comprende come le risposte che scaturiscono dalla discussione pubblica, dal conflitto dialettico e persino dalla riflessione più intima sul senso profondo di istanze insopprimibili, rechino sempre il carattere dell'incompletezza e della provvisorietà. Eppure, anziché abbandonarsi al relativismo sofistico o rassegnarsi alla miseria spirituale provocata dalla perdita di significato dei valori che tradizionalmente informavano la prassi etico-politica greca, Socrate suggerisce la possibilità di perseguire un "progetto di vita" fondato sulla riflessione e sulla libera iniziativa<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem* (corsivo mio). Un rilievo analogo su Eraclito e sull'idea del conflitto, inteso come «chiave per comprendere la natura delle istituzioni e degli ordini sociali» nel mondo greco dell'epoca, viene presentato altresì in A. MacIntyre, *Giustizia e Razionalità*, vol. 1: *Dai greci a Tommaso d'Aquino*, tr. it. di C. Calabi, Milano, Anabasi, 1995, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. J. Patočka, *Saggi eretici*, cit., pp. 47-48.

<sup>8</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p. 179. Su questi motivi cfr. J. Scolaro, "After Ethics: Bringing Transcendence to Alasdair MacIntyre's Concept of Tradition", in *The Catholic Social Science Review*, 23 (2018), pp. 113-124, qui pp. 114-116.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. J. Patočka, *Platone e L'Europa*, cit., p. 67.

È proprio all'interno di questo orizzonte storico-speculativo e critico che, per Patočka, emerge quella necessità di prendersi cura dell'anima che, a partire dal magistero socratico, definisce il grandioso e travagliato progetto di vita europeo. Si tratta, però, di un ideale che, in quanto tale, viene enfatizzato unicamente attraverso la scrittura platonica – un ideale che, pur rappresentando il motivo conoscitivo ed etico caratteristico di quella poderosa tradizione, non trova più alcun riscontro esplicito già in quella prospettiva immediatamente conseguente al platonismo, e nondimeno distinta da esso, che è la “sistematizzazione” aristotelica. Di questo aspetto problematico è consapevole anche il pensatore boemo, il quale spiega però come la cura dell'anima sia possibile concepirla quale elemento fondativo della storicità europea solo se compresa lungo tutto il dipanarsi di quella tradizione che diventa “classica”, e solo in quanto si rende riconoscibile quale matrice spirituale comune a quella stessa tradizione che è da considerarsi innanzitutto e inconfutabilmente “socratico-platonico-aristotelica”. Le ragioni di questa peculiare assunzione vengono specificate ancora una volta nel succitato *Platone e l'Europa*, all'inizio della lezione che conclude quello straordinario ciclo seminariale, allorché l'autore si chiede proprio per quale motivo Aristotele debba essere annoverato tra i promotori di siffatto ideale e, di conseguenza, a quale titolo possa essere considerato un continuatore di quella tradizione:

Perché enfatizziamo l'aspetto della cura dell'anima [...], anche se il termine è unicamente platonico e in Aristotele non si parla espressamente di una cosa del genere? Perché credo che l'aspirazione [...] del filosofo alla *vita buona* costituisca [...] il terreno su cui si sviluppa interamente la loro filosofia. Non dobbiamo immaginare che Platone e Aristotele siano dei professori, che siano dei filosofi nel senso ufficiale che il termine ha assunto in tempi recenti. [...] I grandi filosofi dell'antichità sono, in primo luogo, pensatori della *praxis umana*. [...] Nessun professore moderno si presenterebbe davanti ai suoi uditori con la pretesa di renderli uomini buoni. [...] Ciò che in Aristotele è comunemente definito etica o morale non deriva dalla sua teoria e non è comprensibile a partire da qualsivoglia concezione puramente teorica dell'etica [...]. Al contrario, [...] ciò che egli chiama vita teoretica, vita contemplativa, vita nello sguardo rivolto [...] all'ente, all'ente in totalità, emerge dalla cura per una *vita buona*<sup>10</sup>.

È evidente come queste riflessioni si ricolleghino esplicitamente alle istanze che rendono riconoscibile l'itinerario speculativo di MacIntyre, e in particolare all'instancabile tentativo di comprendere il senso di ogni possibile compimento dell'esistenza umana – quel compimento che nel lessico specifico della filosofia macintyriana viene espresso attraverso il concetto centrale di

<sup>10</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 241-242.

fioritura(*flourishing*)<sup>11</sup>, messo a fuoco e interrogato ancora nell'ultima grande opera del filosofo scozzese, dedicata a *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*<sup>12</sup>. Cosa significa, si chiede ancora una volta MacIntyre in quel contesto, condurre una vita buona? Significa mettere la propria umanità nelle condizioni di realizzarsi, diventare pienamente tale, volgere lo sguardo verso quella *profondità* che unicamente è in grado di restituire la misura del proprio essere umani.

Siffatto assunto relativo alla fioritura, al senso di un compimento che si rende possibile unicamente nel compimento di un senso, sembrerebbe, dunque, facilmente interpretabile alla luce dell'idea patočkiana di cura dell'anima. Tuttavia, se si pone come centrale per l'indagine la questione dell'"oggettività" del bene, non si può non problematizzare la pretesa universalistica che sta a fondamento della storia dell'Europa. Inoltre, uno degli aspetti che rendono quantomeno controversa l'ascrizione della prospettiva aristotelica sulla vita buona a quel tema fondamentale investe il problema del "criterio", della "misura" del bene. È questo, secondo MacIntyre, un aspetto dirimente che investe la possibilità stessa di uno sviluppo che possa definirsi propriamente umano, il quale discende dal modo in cui ogni agente razionale, ogni ragionatore pratico divenuto indipendente dovrebbe arrivare a porre (a sé stesso e anche agli altri)<sup>13</sup> quella domanda semplice, epperò anche spinosa, che è: «qual è il mio bene? Come faccio a capire cos'è bene per me?».

Come sottolinea anche Patočka, effettivamente è proprio questo il problema decisivo che Aristotele rileva nel prendere atto dei limiti del "trascendentalismo" platonico:

Aristotele [...] intravede una possibilità che Platone non scorge, una possibilità che si basa proprio su di una problematica fondamentale delineata da Socrate e dallo stesso Platone: il problema della misura. Secondo quale criterio posso stabilire, di qualcosa, che cosa essa sia e se sia buona? Questo è il problema della misura, il problema della concordanza con se stessi nel processo della misurazione [...].

<sup>11</sup> Per una disamina puntuale del concetto, cfr. A. Bielskis, E. Mardosas, "Human Flourishing in the Philosophical Work of Alasdair MacIntyre", in *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 2 (2014), n. 2, pp. 185-201.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità. Desideri, ragionamento pratico e narrative*, tr. it. e cura S. Maletta, D. Mazzola, D. Simoncelli, Milano, Mimesis, 2024, pp. 74-83.

<sup>13</sup> Notoriamente, negli anni che seguono alla pubblicazione di *Dopo la virtù*, MacIntyre concepisce lo sviluppo umano alla stregua di un passaggio dalla connaturata dipendenza intellettuale e fisica dagli altri alla fioritura della capacità di ragionare in modo pratico e indipendente. Sulla condizione di dipendenza dell'essere umano e sulla possibilità di coltivare le virtù morali e intellettuali che consentono il conseguimento dell'indipendenza, MacIntyre si concentra in modo particolare in Id., *Animali razionali dipendenti. Perché gli uomini hanno bisogno delle virtù*, tr. it. e cura di M. D'Avenia, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2001. Sulla questione cfr. anche A. Bielskis, E. Mardosas, "Human Flourishing", cit., p. 192.



Questo è il problema socratico-platonico per il quale Aristotele propone una soluzione diversa<sup>14</sup>.

Una soluzione che non prescrive una teoresi disincarnata, volta alla mera conoscenza del bene, ma che, in quanto tematizzazione di un agire in vista del bene ultimo, implica il coinvolgimento di quello stesso agente, con tutti i limiti e le possibilità che gli sono ascritti, in vista della piena realizzazione del suo essere razionale. Si tratta di una soluzione in cui si dispiega, d'altro canto, la cifra stessa della teleologia aristotelica – quell'idea secondo la quale esista un fine verso cui l'essere umano deve tendere e per cui le azioni atte a realizzarlo debbano essere valutate in base al loro tendere o meno verso quel medesimo fine. Ed è proprio questa l'istanza che viene accolta da MacIntyre nella sua “interminabile” storia dell'etica, la quale, alla stregua della patočkiana storia dei tentativi di realizzare la cura dell'anima, passa attraverso alterazioni e interazioni conoscitive storicamente determinanti – in particolare con l'avvento del cristianesimo<sup>15</sup> – per giungere, infine, al momento di rottura segnato dall'epoca moderna, allorché la scena politico-culturale europea diventa di nuovo critica e conflittuale, e nondimeno incapace di (ri)proporre un progetto di vita significativo, dovendosi presto assuefare alla perniciosità di patologie sociali<sup>16</sup> da essa stessa generate e destinate a riverberarsi inesorabilmente anche nella contemporaneità.

<sup>14</sup> J. Patočka, *Platone e l'Europa*, cit., p. 235.

<sup>15</sup> Per entrambi gli autori, l'avvento della rivelazione cristiana e la sua interazione con la filosofia classica assume una pregnanza storica e conoscitiva indubitabile. Questa rilevanza è piuttosto evidente in MacIntyre, il quale, già nel capitolo 13 di *Dopo la virtù*, dedicato ad “Aspetti e situazioni medievali”, parlava della *trasformazione* fondamentale generata dall'integrazione della fede cristiana nell'esperienza empirica del mondo, in virtù della quale il *telos* umano diventa qualcosa che deve andare oltre la vita terrena, cosicché il percorso per raggiungerlo diventa una vita all'interno di un ordine trascendente. Sulla questione cfr. anche J. Scolaro, “After Ethics”, cit., p. 118. D'altronde, molte le opere successive del pensatore scozzese hanno come obiettivo quello di riformulare il pensiero etico di stampo “aristotelico-tomista” in termini moderni. Per quanto riguarda Patočka, in alcune pagine straordinarie dei suoi *Saggi eretici* il rivolgimento cristiano viene presentato come un momento storico-conoscitivo decisivo nella riconfigurazione del senso teleologico del progetto europeo, in virtù del quale «la vita responsabile venne intesa come il dono di qualcosa che, pur avendo il carattere del Bene, ha allo stesso tempo le caratteristiche proprie di ciò che è inaccessibile ed eternamente superiore all'uomo» (J. Patočka, *Saggi eretici*, cit., p. 117). Nelle medesime pagine il pensatore boemo parla altresì di “bontà dimentica di sé stessa” e dell'asimmetria del rapporto dell'essere umano con un essere assoluto, intesa quale elemento originario in grado di fondare il senso della ricerca dei beni e della realizzazione della vita umana (cfr. *ivi*, pp. 117-118).

<sup>16</sup> L'espressione “patologie sociali” può facilmente richiamare alla mente il significato che essa assume nell'ambito specifico della “teoria critica”, e in particolare nella prospettiva di Axel Honneth. A tal proposito, cfr. A. Honneth, “Patologie del sociale”, in *Iride*, 18 (1996), e anche S. Maletta, *Il giusto della politica*, cit., pp. 13-27. Tuttavia, pur tenendo conto della diagnosi honnethiana, è necessario specificare che nel contesto della presente trattazione la suddetta espressione viene intesa più che altro come *vox media* atta a descrivere quella condizione di disagio e frammentazione sociale che caratterizza, a più livelli, la vita contemporanea.

### 3. LA MORALITÀ E IL SUO CONFLITTO INTERNO

Quando si parla di Età moderna, si fa spesso riferimento a uno stravolgimento della visione classica del mondo, da ricondurre al sovvertimento di quel nucleo intimo che aveva dato impulso all'esperienza della *polis* e che, proprio nel momento in cui i “principi” della vita europea sembrano consolidarsi ed espandersi globalmente, risulta invece clamorosamente disatteso, in quanto privato della sua cornice storico-conoscitiva. E in effetti MacIntyre considera “critica” la situazione che prelude all'avvento di quell'epoca, paragonandola alla condizione in cui versa il mondo greco durante il V secolo a.C., proprio perché ripropone lo stesso problema a cui tenta di dare risposta il progetto classico: rintracciare un senso generale per l'esistenza umana in un contesto sociale in cui si scatenano conflitti virulenti tra prospettive morali rivali, desiderose di rendere dominante la propria visione particolare.

Pur seguendo traiettorie speculative differenti, anche Patočka riconduce a quel passaggio storico la decisiva trasformazione epocale delle condizioni di possibilità della ricerca stessa di un senso per l'umano essere nel mondo<sup>17</sup>. In particolare, lungo tutto il suo itinerario filosofico, il pensatore ceco rileva come l'umanità europea si sia facilmente rassegnata alla perdita di ogni riferimento a qualsivoglia “totalità significativa” o dimensione trascendente<sup>18</sup>, e come a questo abbandono abbia fatto da contraltare l'emergere di quelle tendenze all'enfatizzazione dell'individualità, alla reificazione e allo sfruttamento spregiudicato della natura, sottese agli ideali etici e politici “inediti” che gradualmente si affermano nella riflessione moderna. Quello che dal punto di vista concettuale e morale risulta svilita è, d'altronde, la rilevanza tradizionalmente attribuita alla finalità di ogni ricerca razionale. Da qui il deciso rifiuto di ogni teleologia di matrice classico-aristotelica, il quale va di pari passo con la paradossale riconfigurazione del concetto di libertà – quel concetto che Aristotele aveva legato inestricabilmente proprio alla ricerca di un *telos*, notando come gli esseri umani siano effettivamente liberi solo *nella misura* in cui possono realizzare, ma anche disattendere il proprio fine, cosa che invece risulta impossibile agli altri esseri naturali animati (i quali devono compiere il loro fine secondo natura) o inanimati (i

<sup>17</sup> Questo motivo risulta centrale già negli scritti giovanili patočkiani, nei quali risulta evidente e dichiarata l'influenza del magistero husserliano, anche e soprattutto rispetto all'assunzione di quell'attitudine critica nei confronti della modernità. In questo senso, un'indagine strutturata sulla questione è presentata già all'interno della tesi di abilitazione all'insegnamento accademico pubblicata a Praga nel 1936 (cfr. Id., *Il mondo naturale come problema filosofico*, tr. it. e cura di S.A. Matrangolo, Napoli, Orthotes, 2025).

<sup>18</sup> Sulla rilevanza che la questione della trascendenza assume da questo punto di vista nel pensiero patočkiano, cfr. M. Gubser, “Jan Patočka's Transcendence to the World”, in *Investigaciones Fenomenológicas*, 4 (2013), n. 2, pp. 155-175; S. Lehmann, “Ways of Self-Transcendence: On Sacrifice for Nothing and Hyperbolic Ontology”, in *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society*, 8 (2022), pp. 305-320.

quali si muovono necessariamente verso il proprio luogo naturale). Ed è proprio in relazione a siffatto rischio di fallimento, di fronte all'eventualità di risultare manchevoli rispetto a sé stessi che gli esseri umani, da un certo momento in poi, si sono probabilmente convinti che forse non esiste alcun *telos*, e quindi dell'inutilità di qualsivoglia ricerca razionale di un fine per la propria esistenza<sup>19</sup>.

Se nel mondo antico far fronte a una crisi morale e conoscitiva significa tentare di dare una risposta razionalmente fondata alla questione di come realizzare una vita significativa, nella modernità si prescrive l'abbandono di siffatte istanze totalizzanti, nonché una loro radicale riformulazione individualistica, relativistica e utilitaristica in domande come "quali preferenze, quali desideri dovrei soddisfare per essere felice?"<sup>20</sup>. Come scrive a questo proposito MacIntyre ancora nella sua ultima grande monografia:

La tesi propria di Aristotele era che nella sua politica ed etica egli aveva esplicitato e articolato i criteri presupposti dai giudizi e dalle azioni di quegli esseri umani che in quanto agenti razionali esemplificavano personalmente, nella loro propria cultura, la fioritura umana, e che nel far ciò avevano fornito i fondamenti di una spiegazione del perché molti esseri umani non fioriscano e perché quindi vi sia uno spettro di giudizi diversi e incompatibili in merito a ciò che è bene e a come è bene vivere<sup>21</sup>.

L'epoca moderna, al contrario, porta con sé l'avvento di un modello di vita *liberale* ed *emotivista* (*espressivista*), non più fondato sull'attitudine a interrogarsi su ciò che è bene e sulla possibilità di una fioritura umana, ma sull'idea che l'identità del nostro essere, anziché scaturire da una ricerca razionale sul fine dell'esistere, coincida in realtà con gli stati psicologici che ci caratterizzano. Cosicché, gli enunciati etici non diventano altro che l'espressione di determinati "sentimenti": mere espressioni di preferenze soggettive svuotate di ogni fondamento oggettivo e razionale<sup>22</sup>. Da qui la crisi che irretisce la riflessione moderna nei disaccordi su giudizi morali che appaiono inconciliabili, in quanto basati su argomenti concettualmente incommensurabili, per quanto intrinsecamente validi, sembrano tuttavia essere stati scelti in modo arbitrario – anche se chi li presenta reclama la loro imparzialità e coerenza razionale<sup>23</sup>. In questo modo, è il concetto stesso di bene – che pure viene ancora utilizzato per cercare di conferire un fondamento "oggettivo" a idee particolari, ascrivibili a diverse tradizioni antagoniste – a essere definitivamente svuotato di significato.

<sup>19</sup> Sulla questione, cfr. S. Belardinelli, L. Cimmino, "Il realismo etico di Alasdair MacIntyre", in *Acta philosophica*, 28 (2019), n. 2, pp. 241-256, qui p. 254.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. A. Bielskis, E. Mardosas, "Human Flourishing", cit., p. 188.

<sup>21</sup> A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 81.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. Id., *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, pp. 37-38. Sulla questione si veda anche il modo in cui simili argomenti vengono rielaborati in Id., *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., pp. 185-189.

L'esito storicamente e culturalmente più riconoscibile di siffatta incoerenza, secondo il pensatore scozzese, è incarnato dal progetto illuminista, il quale affonda le sue radici nell'esigenza, palesata dai più eminenti pensatori moderni, di liberare la mente umana da qualsiasi pregiudizio conoscitivo e dalla dipendenza da qualsivoglia tradizione speculativa, per quanto autorevole. L'idea, infatti, è che per intraprendere una qualsiasi ricerca razionale atta a cogliere la natura dell'universo (e anche delle cose umane) occorra unicamente la ragione. È evidente, però, che i tentativi dei più grandi pensatori moderni di giustificare la morale ereditata dalla tradizione precedente, proprio perché rinunciano al concetto ineludibile di *telos*, siano destinati necessariamente a fallire<sup>24</sup>. Se la ricerca morale non viene più condotta nel quadro della comprensione della vita umana quale *narrazione* che si dipana in riferimento a un fine, l'unico modo per giustificare le assunzioni teoriche su ciò che è bene e ciò che è male diventa quello di appellarsi a concetti come diritto e utilità, i quali risultano però incommensurabili se privati di qualsivoglia riferimento a un'istanza trascendente<sup>25</sup>.

Si è visto che la questione risulta decisiva anche per Patočka, il quale sin dai suoi primi contributi filosofici esplora il tema della trascendenza in riferimento a come si declina nella prospettiva fenomenologica husserliana – prospettiva che egli sottoscrive e della quale, significativamente, accoglie anche la peculiare critica allo psicologismo<sup>26</sup>. Il pensatore boemo sostiene, in effetti, che la situazione “misera” in cui versa l'umano nell'epoca contemporanea sia da ricondurre a quella crisi ingenerata dal processo di oggettivazione e reificazione del mondo che determina il progressivo abbandono del “mondo naturale” – inteso alla stregua della *Lebenswelt* husserliana come il contesto esperienziale concreto che dà senso al proprio essere e al proprio agire – e che prelude all'avvento di quella che, in un saggio incompiuto degli anni '50, l'autore definirà la “superciviltà”<sup>27</sup>, ovvero: il grandioso progetto moderno di razionalizzazione dei processi conoscitivi (e dei dibattiti morali), atto a superare ogni deficienza di universalità attraverso l'imposizione del dominio tecnoscientifico su tutto l'esistente. La categoria di superciviltà si riferisce, cioè, a quella stessa civiltà europea che, nell'epoca moderna, diventa capace di affermarsi su altre forme di vita in virtù della sua crescente capacità di razionalizzazione interna<sup>28</sup>. È questo però, secondo il filosofo ceco, un esito nefasto, dovuto al pervertimento di quella che era stata l'aspirazione genuina all'universalità che aveva caratterizzato il progetto di vita europeo, il quale, privato ora di ogni finalità intrinseca e convertito all'esigenza di interpretare i

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. Id., *Dopo la virtù*, cit., pp. 85-88.

<sup>25</sup> Sulla questione cfr. ancora J. Scolaro, “After Ethics”, cit., p. 120.

<sup>26</sup> In questo senso, si veda, ad esempio, quanto il pensatore boemo scrive nella succitata tesi di abilitazione del 1936. Cfr. J. Patočka, *Il mondo naturale come problema filosofico*, cit., pp. 45-49.

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. Id., *La superciviltà e il suo conflitto interno*, tr. it. e cura di F. Tava, Milano, Unicopli, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Sulla questione cfr. *ivi*, pp. 55 e ss.

fenomeni meccanicisticamente e causalmente, diventa mera logica della potenza, del dominio e del profitto.

In questo processo inesorabile, Patočka rileva, nondimeno, un “conflitto interno”. Innanzitutto, perché la marginalizzazione del suo nucleo originario e più intimo priva l'umano di quell'attitudine spirituale atta a disciplinare istanze *orgiastiche* che non smettono mai di agitare l'esperienza singolare e collettiva del mondo – cosicché, per quanto queste tendenze siano occultate e derubricate a mero irrazionalismo, il trionfo del progetto tecnoscientifico e iper-razionalistico porta con sé, paradossalmente, crescenti e sempre più eclatanti “straripamenti” orgiastici<sup>29</sup>. In secondo luogo, perché questa stessa superciviltà, nel corso del XX secolo, appare ormai lacerata in due prospettive rivali: da un lato, la superciviltà “moderata”, espressione del successo dell'ideologia borghese liberale occidentale; dall'altro, la superciviltà “radicale”, espressione dell'altrettanto celebrata ideologia socialista impostasi a est della “cortina di ferro”<sup>30</sup>. Come spiega Patočka, entrambe le alternative possono considerarsi eredi legittime dell'ecatombe storico-politica europea. Tuttavia, quello che qui risulta particolarmente interessante è che, nel tracciare un profilo “genealogico” dell'alternativa moderata, il pensatore boemo individui nel liberalismo moderno uno dei motori indiscutibili della trasformazione della civiltà europea in una superciviltà tecnoscientifica decadente, offrendo acute considerazioni che vanno corroborare quanto MacIntyre sostiene sui cortocircuiti della *Moralità* moderna<sup>31</sup>.

Secondo Patočka, il liberalismo, che rappresenta un'espressione dell'essenza stessa del moderatismo, si fonda su due valori fondativi della civiltà occidentale: la verità scientifica e la libertà umana<sup>32</sup>. Il primo viene perseguito attraverso quel processo di reificazione e oggettivazione del mondo naturale che informa la rivoluzione filosofico-scientifica moderna e che consente all'individuo di sfruttare le leggi della natura a proprio vantaggio. Il secondo valore – tantopiù costitutivo in quanto, per definizione, ne dovrebbe incarnare le prerogative – si declina innanzitutto nel compito che il liberalismo prescrive a sé stesso: «difendere i diritti della razionalità di fronte alla finitezza umana»<sup>33</sup>. Portando a compimento alcune

<sup>29</sup> Si tratta di un tema fondamentale che costituisce altresì il nucleo speculativo intorno al quale si raccolgono le analisi presentate dall'autore nel quinto dei *Saggi eretici*, intitolato “La civiltà tecnica è destinata al declino” (cfr. Id., *Saggi eretici*, cit. pp. 105-131, qui pp. 124-126). Una ormai celebre e straordinaria esegesi di questo testo patočkiano è stata presentata in J. Derrida, *Donare la morte*, tr. it. L. Berta, Milano, Jaca Book, 2002, in particolare nel primo capitolo dedicato a “I segreti della responsabilità europea” (*ivi*, pp. 41-71).

<sup>30</sup> Il confronto tra le due alternative viene tracciato in J. Patočka, *La superciviltà e il suo conflitto interno*, cit., pp. 60 e ss.

<sup>31</sup> Il motivo per cui la prospettiva morale moderna viene definita la “Moralità” (con la maiuscola) è spiegato in A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 124. All'analisi della Modernità viene altresì dedicato l'intero terzo capitolo del libro (cfr. *ivi*, pp. 185-251).

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. J. Patočka, *La superciviltà e il suo conflitto interno*, cit., p. 72.

<sup>33</sup> *Ivi*, p. 101.

istanze del pensiero umanistico-rinascimentale in cui affonda le radici, il liberalismo crede, almeno inizialmente, che l'essere umano sia l'unico essere in grado di elevarsi al di sopra delle cose e di rivendicare la peculiarità del proprio rapporto con un'istanza trascendente (divina). In tal modo, esso esprime una certa "consapevolezza metafisica" che si rende riconoscibile nella categoria di individuo<sup>34</sup>, la quale, incarnando il principio distintivo del moderatismo, non può che determinarne, al tempo stesso, il progressivo declino<sup>35</sup> – attestato dall'inesorabile tendenza all'*atomizzazione*<sup>36</sup> che, *de facto*, affligge le società liberali. Nel perseguire l'obliterazione di ogni profondità<sup>37</sup> *spirituale*, nonché l'abbandono di ogni richiamo a una trascendenza di scopo e significato finali, l'individualismo borghese sposta sempre di più l'attenzione dell'essere umano verso l'interiorità del proprio essere individuale, verso una dimensione morale che scaturisce dai propri sentimenti, da esperienze e impressioni effimere, da un interesse personale che spesso confligge con quello dei propri simili. L'interesse personale, in questo modo, diventa non solo un momento costitutivo della stessa vita economica, ma va a costituire altresì il movente di inedite dinamiche etico-sociali in cui i rapporti (socio-economici) possono essere regolati, e addirittura armonizzati, attraverso "conflitti d'interesse" tra soggetti che perseguono i propri concetti particolari di felicità – in un contesto in cui, evidentemente, è la libera decisione individuale a costituire il fondamento stesso della vita morale<sup>38</sup>.

Se è vero che la libertà, nella variante moderata superciviltà, è effettivamente qualcosa di fondativo, nondimeno, come scrive Patočka, «non è chiaro quale sia il suo scopo»<sup>39</sup>. Così, proprio a causa della sua inconsistenza teleologica, il principio liberale appare incapace di giustificare ogni possibile assunzione di responsabilità verso i propri simili, verso la loro condizione ed, eventualmente, la loro sofferenza, in quanto nega la storicità come origine autentica della trascendenza e della libertà umana. Deprimendo ogni istanza significativa e declinando ogni appello a quella dimensione ontologica, intrinsecamente buona, capace di fondare e promuovere un certo *dover essere*, il

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, p. 102. Sul significato di siffatta "consapevolezza metafisica", cfr. anche M. Zvarík, "The Decline of Freedom. Jan Patočka's Phenomenological Critique of Liberalism", in *The Yearbook on History and Interpretation of Phenomenology*, 4 (2016), pp. 79-99, qui p. 92.

<sup>35</sup> Cfr. J. Patočka, *La superciviltà e il suo conflitto interno*, cit., p. 112: «Il declino non è mai, in nessuna epoca, un fenomeno secondario ed esteriore: esso è cooriginario al principio proprio dell'epoca».

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, pp. 113-115.

<sup>37</sup> Il termine profondità ricorre in modo significativo nell'ambito dell'acritica della modernità sviluppata da Patočka e, in particolare, nei riferimenti (critici) all'idea di progresso propugnata tanto nel contesto neoliberale che in quello del socialismo realizzato. Una disamina accurata della questione è stata presentata in F. Tava, *Il rischio della libertà. Etica, fenomenologia, politica in Jan Patočka*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 2014, pp. 59-64.

<sup>38</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, p. 73.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

moderatismo esibisce la sua più eclatante “aporia morale”: nel desiderio di emancipare l'individuo, perde ogni riferimento al fatto della trascendenza umana, rischiando di abbandonarlo all'irresponsabilità<sup>40</sup>.

#### 4. BUONE RAGIONI PER DESIDERARE, VITE ATIPICHE DA NARRARE

Sia nel “realismo etico” di MacIntyre che nella prospettiva patočkiana della cura dell'anima ci sembra di poter riconoscere uno sforzo analogo, atto a rivendicare uno “sfondo” per il nostro essere che si rivela nella ricerca del senso stesso della storicità umana, nell'appello inquieto all'unità cui ogni storia, nel *farsi* tale, deve necessariamente adempiere. In un passaggio fondamentale de *L'eticane nei conflitti della modernità*, MacIntyre scrive: «chiedere “qual è il bene per me?” è chiedere come la mia vita, concepita come avente l'unità che è manifestata nella sua narrativa, potrebbe essere portata a compimento al meglio»<sup>41</sup>. Dal canto suo, quando verso la fine di *Platone e l'Europa* (si) chiede, per l'ennesima volta, cosa significhi prendersi cura dell'anima, Patočka risponde: «Significa voler essere in unità con se stessi. L'uomo non è in unità con se stesso dal principio e per sempre, ma vi giunge solo con un lavoro impressionante, quello di una vita intera. Dietro tutto questo lavoro vi è l'impulso all'unità»<sup>42</sup>. Per concludere la nostra indagine, proveremo a mostrare come questa ulteriore contiguità speculativa risulti altresì *verificata* praticamente dal modo peculiare in cui si compie la vicenda personale del pensatore boemo. Per farlo, però, bisognerà dapprima mettere in questione l'idea di unità narrativa della vita, che costituisce uno degli elementi portanti della struttura teleologica sottesa alla teoria macintyriana delle virtù.

Poiché gli esseri umani sono sempre alle prese con diverse pratiche, devono inevitabilmente interrogarsi sul valore che ciascuna di esse riveste per la propria vita e su come dovrebbero essere ordinate affinché la vita stessa diventi intelligibile e significativa nel suo complesso. Voler dare una risposta a simili istanze significa, allora, tentare di concepire la propria vita come un tutto, come «un io la cui unità risiede nella unità di una narrazione che collega la nascita alla vita e alla morte, come l'inizio di un'opera letteraria è collegato al suo centro e alla sua fine»<sup>43</sup>. La necessità della narrazione diventa dunque costitutiva di un'esistenza moralmente responsabile, di un cammino esistenziale che si compie solo nella misura in cui arriva a declinarsi quale comprensione di sé nell'orizzonte teleologico della ricerca del bene. È la vita umana stessa che reclama l'unità e la continuità di una ricerca di senso il cui fine si scorge nello svolgersi di quella stessa ricerca che, solo in ultima istanza, può arrivare a rivelare la verità complessiva del proprio essere. Si

<sup>40</sup> Cfr. *ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 346.

<sup>42</sup> J. Patočka, *Platone e l'Europa*, cit., p. 234.

<sup>43</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Dopo la virtù*, cit., p. 250.

tratta, tuttavia, di una ricerca necessariamente comune, legata alla dialettica per cui gli individui di una comunità, attraverso il perseguimento di beni interni alle pratiche, prosperano e avanzano sulla strada della fioritura, senza avere necessariamente nozione della forma ideale che essa dovrebbe assumere. In questo senso, l'etica aristotelico-tomistica macintyriana non è «questione di divinazione di verità ultime, ma di costruzione in vista di una verità che esiste e che tuttavia è, in ultima istanza, irraggiungibile»<sup>44</sup>.

Il *dramma* della vita sottende quindi una responsabilità morale che determina ogni possibile fioritura umana<sup>45</sup>. Solo considerando la propria vita in modo narrativo l'agente razionale impara infatti a distinguere tra pratiche e beni particolari e arriva a comprendere se vi siano o meno buone ragioni per desiderare quel bene particolare. Questo presuppone una determinata attitudine morale, in virtù della quale l'individuo, lungi dal ridursi al mero aggregato di pulsioni e desideri che pure lo caratterizzano, diventa capace di discernere razionalmente «i propri desideri, riorientarli e rendere la propria vita intelligibile nel suo complesso, a sé stesso e agli altri»<sup>46</sup> – in quanto egli non è mai veramente un atomo sociale, essendo sempre preso nella trama delle relazioni sociali e, di conseguenza, in quel complesso di narrazioni che diventano intelligibili proprio nell'interazione con i propri simili. Da questo punto di vista, la prospettiva etica macintyriana non può che assumere anche un profondo significato politico, in quanto l'individuo discerne l'ordine delle sue pratiche e dei suoi beni sempre nel contesto specifico della comunità a cui appartiene, prendendo parte a una tradizione, intesa quale ricerca storicamente vivente e socialmente incarnata sul bene umano che si dipana lungo diverse generazioni e che si caratterizza dall'incessante messa in discussione di quella stessa idea di bene<sup>47</sup>.

L'urgenza drammatica del vivere e la necessità di una sua unità narrativa, come visto, emergono in modo altrettanto eminente (anche se non sempre esplicito) nella prospettiva di Patočka, il quale concepisce l'esistenza umana quale movimento ontologico che si realizza nel venire al mondo, nell'incontro con i propri simili con i quali condividere quello stesso mondo e, sempre ponendosi in relazione agli altri, nel tentare di conferire un senso complessivo alla propria esperienza di vita<sup>48</sup>. Com'è noto, la vita del pensatore boemo è stata profondamente segnata dal dramma storico della marginalizzazione intellettuale

<sup>44</sup> J. Scolaro, "After Ethics", cit., p. 116.

<sup>45</sup> Su tali motivi, cfr. R.A. Gahl, "View of MacIntyre on Teleology, Narrative, and Human Flourishing. Towards a Thomistic Narrative Anthropology", in *Acta philosophica*, 28 (2019), n. 2, pp. 279-296, qui pp. 280-281.

<sup>46</sup> A. Bielskis, E. Mardosas, "Human Flourishing", cit., p. 189.

<sup>47</sup> Cfr. *ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> È questo, in estrema sintesi, il significato della teoria dei tre "movimenti fondamentali dell'esistenza umana" che viene delineata e presentata dal pensatore ceco in diversi suoi scritti degli anni '60 e '70 (che qui per ragioni di spazio non possiamo elencare), tra cui i succitati *Saggi eretici*.



che dovette subire per mano del regime comunista cecoslovacco, culminata nella sua tragica morte in circostanze politiche particolari, legate alla repressione del dissenso e alla nascita della piattaforma di protesta di *Charta 77*. Ed è proprio in questo aspetto peculiare della sua vicenda personale che forse si potrebbe riscontrare quella verifica pratica degli assunti storico-narrativi macintyriani, in quanto il coinvolgimento del pensatore boemo nel movimento dissidente, con la conseguente assunzione di responsabilità nell'accettare il rischioso ruolo di portavoce di *Charta 77*, costituisce innanzitutto un esempio paradigmatico di come le istanze politiche, sociali, e in questo caso anche giuridiche, non possano prescindere dal riferimento a una dimensione che le trascende. Quello che, in ultima istanza, fa Patočka è tentare di conferire un significato morale a quella petizione per il rispetto dei diritti umani, consapevole che «nessuna società, neanche quella meglio dotata dal punto di vista tecnico, può continuare a funzionare, una volta che sia stata privata di un fondamento morale»<sup>49</sup>. Grazie al magistero di Patočka, l'istanza morale diventerà l'essenza stessa del movimento che, dopo la morte del filosofo, sarà mantenuta desta all'interno del variegato mondo del dissenso dal suo "allievo spirituale" Václav Havel, quel perseguitato politico che diventerà però anche l'"artefice" della *Rivoluzione di velluto* e il primo Presidente incaricato di guidare, dopo il 1989, la (riuscita) transizione pacifica del Paese verso un regime democratico<sup>50</sup>.

In definitiva, ci pare che questa vicenda possa essere accostata a quelle "vite atipiche" che MacIntyre ci racconta nell'ultimo capitolo della sua ultima opera – proprio perché, nel doversi confrontare «con questioni che molti di noi non affrontano mai»<sup>51</sup>, Patočka, così come chi è stato in grado di recepire il significato profondo del suo insegnamento, ha incarnato il senso di una ricerca razionale, morale e responsabile che si dipana attraverso un percorso esistenziale tutt'altro che agevole e lineare, ma sicuramente capace di assumere in tutta la sua urgenza il significato di un'istanza storico-conoscitiva unitaria che, nella vita umana, di tanto in tanto, si rivela quale trascendenza paradigmatica e assoluta.

<sup>49</sup> J. Patočka, *Che cos'è e che cosa non è Charta 77*, in Id., *La superciviltà e il suo conflitto interno*, cit., pp. 173-176, qui p. 174. Nella medesima pagina, l'autore spiega, in questo senso, com'è l'appello dei "chartisti" al rispetto dei diritti umani «non consiste in altro se non nella convinzione che anche gli stati e la società debbano sottostare, nel loro complesso, alla supremazia del sentire morale» (*ibidem*).

<sup>50</sup> Per avere un quadro maggiormente dettagliato di siffatte vicende, rimandiamo a S.A. Matrangola, *Dal dissenso alla Rivoluzione di velluto di Havel: l'esperienza cecoslovacca*, in *Chiese, società e politica nelle trasformazioni dell'Est europeo*, Edizioni Mille, Torino 2022, pp. 51-66, qui pp. 57-62. Sul carattere peculiare e multiforme del dissenso ceco, e sul ruolo fondamentale svolto da varie "narrative" in quel contesto, cfr. il fondamentale saggio di J. Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent. The Plastic People of the Universe and Czech Culture Under Communism*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> A. MacIntyre, *L'etica nei conflitti della modernità*, cit., p. 350.

# MACINTYRE AND MORGENTHAU TWO CRITICS OF “MORALITY”

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## **ABSTRACT**

Alasdair C. MacIntyre and Hans J. Morgenthau are two central figures in the intellectual history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who are rarely mentioned together. Without denying the important differences and the distance between the two, this article shows that they converge – partially yet importantly – both in their critique of contemporary morality and in some of the proposed solutions. Morgenthau and MacIntyre believed that the post-Enlightenment project of establishing rationally an objective and compelling standard of morality is doomed to fail. They also believe that, absent such framework, and given the rejection of pre-modern moral systems by central actors and institutions of modern societies, morality – and social life with it – are left in a Weberian/Nietzschean: *de facto* individualism, anarchism, and incoherence. The article concludes with an invitation of a further and systematic comparison: not only between MacIntyre and Morgenthau’s moral and social critique, but also between their once again converging, original stance on the epistemological status of the socio-political sciences.

## **KEYWORDS**

Alasdair MacIntyre, Hans Joachim Morgenthau, Morality, Crisis, Rationality, Aristotle.

## **INTRODUCTION: ON TWO SOMETIMES CONVERGING “WORLDS APART”**

An encounter with Alasdair Chalmers MacIntyre and Hans Joachim Morgenthau is humbling to the extreme. If the former has “authored or edited eighteen books (...) and published over 150 professional articles” making him “one of the most important philosophers of our time” (Sayre 2024, quoting Stanley Hauerwas), “part of [Morgenthau’s] collected papers related only to professional work fills 212 boxes” (Frei 2001, 4). If MacIntyre is “the most widely cited virtue ethicist in the business ethics literature” (Sinnicks 2021, Ferrero & Sison 2014), Morgenthau is widely credited with being “a founder of the modern discipline of International Relations” (Turner and Mazur 2009) and “the most influential theorist of International Relations (IR) of the twentieth century” (Gaskarth 2018). A relative marginality and the strongest intellectual independence could also be attributed to

<sup>1</sup>The author is very grateful to the two reviewers who improved the article in both content and style.

both, as the first half of Morgenthau's career was rather insecure and obscure, while the publication of MacIntyre's masterpiece *After Virtue* set him at odds with the prevailing liberal-analytic philosophical culture. Morgenthau bitterly disclosed that he "might have become a great idealist if [he] had lived in a realistic environment" (Morgenthau 1959, cited in Frei 2001, 177). MacIntyre, in turn, was recognized as an "intellectual nomad" (*Catholic Herald*, 2025) and wrote sweepingly of "having survived the academic moral philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" (MacIntyre 2013). The two even shared some geographic and biographic elements, with both crossing the Atlantic Ocean and living and working in the Midwest for important stretches of their careers (at the University of Chicago, in the case of Morgenthau 1943-71, and the University of Notre Dame in that of MacIntyre: 1988-1995 and then again, 2000 until nearly the end of his life).

Yet beyond these similarities and coincidences - which could appear as broad, shallow and anecdotal - it would remain all too easy to spot and emphasize the major and striking differences between the two. When it comes to the substance of their political theories, MacIntyre is a staunch critic of the nation-state, while Morgenthau is mostly credited for having introduced *Realpolitik* and *raison d'état* into the American context. MacIntyre's and is much debated "wait for another - doubtless very different - St. Benedict"<sup>2</sup> (MacIntyre 2007, 263) could not seem more remote from this "realism". If Morgenthau participated in politics as a consultant for the Kennedy's administration from 1961 to 1963, in 2004 MacIntyre advised that his readers should not even vote.

On this background of analogies and disanalogies, this article will make the claim that a number of important convergences - substantial and theoretical - draw these two thinkers together. These are, most notably, the criticism of the modern-Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment's aspiration to an objective/scientific "morality" (the one MacIntyre dubs *Morality* in his 2016 book) and - relatedly - the rejection of a social-political science modeled after the hard sciences, with its pretenses of objectivity, neutrality, and reliable predictive power. Given the limited space available, I will focus primarily on the first agreement - the one on the criticism of modern morality - which is more manageable thanks to the relatively limited space it finds in Morgenthau's realist writing. In any case, even this will necessarily be a preliminary and limited exploration: nonetheless,

<sup>2</sup> This is one of the most controversial passages of the entire book, and it is worth recalling MacIntyre's clarificatory note on its subject: "In the last sentence of *After Virtue* I spoke of us as waiting for another St. Benedict. Benedict's greatness lay in making possible a quite new kind of institution, that of the monastery of prayer, learning, and labor, in which and around which communities could not only survive, but flourish in a period of social and cultural darkness. The effects of Benedict's founding insights and of their institutional embodiment by those who learned from them were from the standpoint of his own age quite unpredictable. And it was my intention to suggest, when I wrote that last sentence in 1980, that ours too is a time of waiting for new and unpredictable possibilities of renewal. It is also a time for resisting as prudently and courageously and justly and temperately as possible the dominant social, economic, and political order of advanced modernity. So it was twenty-six years ago, so it is still." (MacIntyre 2007, XVI).

and beyond merely academic curiosities, the convergence on such a crucial theoretical aspect shows the possibility of integrating the works of these two titanic thinkers into a coherent argument over crucial questions in ethics and politics.

## ON "MORALITY": ELEMENTS OF TWO CRITIQUES

A rejection of the validity of major contemporary philosophical moral systems is one of the hallmarks of the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. While arguably prepared all throughout the author's earlier writings, (in particular MacIntyre 1971, 1977), MacIntyre's critique is fully articulated in *After Virtue* (1981) and later deepened in a number of works where MacIntyre's own response to the failures of "Morality" accompanies and integrates the critical-destructive part.

*After Virtue's* main arguments have been dissected and contested countless times: as of October 1, 2025, Google Scholar counts 37173 citations. Yet a perhaps minimal and uncontroversial version of its gist could read as follows: modern morality, the morality of the culture of emotivism, is essentially manipulative<sup>3</sup>. It masks its manipulative character behind modern moral philosophy, and much of contemporary moral discourse, relies on inconsistent re-combinations of fragments inherited from previous paradigms which have been, in their comprehensive wholes, by and large rejected by society. As a consequence, terms such as 'good,' 'bad,' and other evaluative-normative formulas continue to be employed as though there were an underlying, shared social understanding of their meaning and application. But such implicit model is simply non-existent, and moral discourse is therefore exposed to re-semantization: its meaning is contested and fluid. Exemplary cases in point are those of emotivism, deontology, and consequentialism.

As for emotivism, MacIntyre's 1981 critique considers it a valid reconstruction of the *use* of evaluative-normative terminology in the circumstances and contexts of advanced modernity. Accordingly, "good" and "bad" are simply expressive/injunctive/strategic codes to express an individual's emotional responses and to promote that individual's interests against others'. On this background, deontological and consequentialist precepts could be explained as the local requirements of the fragmented social-political (dis)order of modernity, and particularly of the situation of individuals in relation to the central and defining entity which is the nation-state (MacIntyre 2016, 125). In their conditions of subjects, these citizens' actions are effectively regulated by sets of impersonal rights and duties, while from the point of view of the overriding authority, an "ethics of responsibility" mindful of consequences and the "greater good" excuses the infringement of the same obligations.

<sup>3</sup> I am thankful toward one of the reviewers for this nice formulation, that stresses the manipulative and deceptive use of "Morality" in MacIntyre's view.

What MacIntyre finds to be an effective description of the (ab)use of moral terminology by the characters of morality is, from his very point of view, seriously defective as a theory of its meaning. For, what constitutes the effectiveness and the very intelligibility of claims of badness and goodness is precisely their implicit appeal to an objective interpersonal moral standard, such as that reducing it to “what is good or bad *for me*” would be tantamount to abolishing the same standard outright and making these statements meaningless and unintelligible.

MacIntyre’s conclusion is straightforward, however daunting:

The hypothesis which I wish to advance is that in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in [a] state of grave disorder... What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have-very largely, if not entirely-lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality (MacIntyre 2007, 2).

My own conclusion is very clear. It is that on the one hand we still, in spite of the efforts of three centuries of moral philosophy and one of sociology, lack any coherent rationally defensible statement of a liberal individualist point of view... (MacIntyre 2007, 259).

MacIntyre also claims that any *analytic* approach to this problem would have to miss it entirely and by definition. We will later disclose why this claim is especially interesting.

We may notice that if in this [...] world analytical philosophy were to flourish, it would never reveal the fact of this disorder. For the techniques of analytical philosophy are essentially descriptive and descriptive of the language of the present at that... (MacIntyre 2007, 2).

Now let us turn to considering Morgenthau’s critique of morality (or Morality?) on its own. The default view could be that, not being a moral philosopher, and as a realist, Morgenthau would not hold any such preoccupation at all. And this view would be wrong, probably born out of a simplistic misreading of realism as a synonym to a/immoralism, as well as of a superficial knowledge of Morgenthau.

Indeed, the German-American Jewish thinker concerned himself with *The Reality of Norms and in Particular the Norms of International Law* since his homonymous habilitation dissertation published at 30 years of age in 1934. The problems of the sources of normativity are also entertained – at least in part – in the lesser known “European” writing of the early Morgenthau – such as Morgenthau

1933 – and are quasi-systematically developed in some of his major books (Morgenthau 1949, here sparsely, e.g. the “six principles of realism”; Morgenthau 1951, and especially Morgenthau 1960).

However, there is one (unpublished) essay in which Morgenthau’s tone and questions are strikingly and most explicitly “MacIntyrean”. It is the long article that concludes Morgenthau’s European life, and to which we have easy access thanks to excerpts and a commentary by Christoph Frei. The telling title of the essay is: “Kann in unserer Zeit eine objektive Moralordnung aufgestellt werden?” (“Is it possible to establish an objective moral order in our times?”, Morgenthau 1937).

Throughout one hundred pages, Morgenthau examines Kant’s, Hegel’s, Comte’s and Nietzsche’s conceptions in light of their moral-philosophical content. He asserts that each of these thinkers attempted to reestablish the normative power of moral systems in a specific way, either by ridding metaphysics of any substantive content or by giving it a new substance. In sum, he concludes that “all attempts failed and, in fact, *were doomed to fail*”. (Frei 2001, 175, quoting Morgenthau 1933, emphasis added)

Evidently, Morgenthau concludes that it is impossible to establish an ‘enlightened’ objective-scientific moral order. His own deep-seated admiration for Nietzsche (see Frei 2001, 101-114, where the Nietzschean-Weberian roots of Morgenthau’s thoughts are thoroughly demonstrated) is qualified by the recognition that Nietzsche himself is utterly unable to offer any foundations for a *social* morality, and that an *individualized* morality is a contradiction in terms (see Frei 2011, 175, note 122, in reference to the discussion of Nietzsche in Morgenthau 1937, 82-97).

A reader with a solid acquaintance with MacIntyre would be, I surmise, impressed by the substantial convergences in a number of ways. Not only does Morgenthau recognize the failure of a number of prevailing systems of modern moral philosophy – most notably, Kant, all his influence on the same Morgenthau and his teacher and friend Hans Kelsen notwithstanding – and therewith the validity of the Nietzschean critique (in keeping with MacIntyre’s binomial in the Chapter 9 of *After Virtue*: “Nietzsche or Aristotle?” MacIntyre 2007, 109). Furthermore, Morgenthau seems to anticipate – although merely in a nutshell – MacIntyre’s criticism of emotivism and the corresponding post-Nietzschean fragmentation of social morality and distortion of the meaning of moral concepts, when he claims that the Nietzschean project of a “transvaluation of all values” ultimately reposing on individual will to power is intrinsically at odds with the constitutive essence and function of any “morality”. And Morgenthau does sometimes even express these with the exact same terminology as MacIntyre (confront with “Why the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality Had to Fail”: *After Virtue* Chapter 5, MacIntyre 2007 51).

Another impressive reoccurrence is Morgenthau's insistence that tacking stock of the crisis of morality is merely an *analytic* exercise – not evaluative or normative. It parallels closely the note on the powerlessness of *analytic* philosophy in a world of moral upheaval just quoted above from *After Virtue* (2007, 2).

In his letters to Hugo Sinzheimer, as well as in his essay “Positivisme mal compris et théorieréaliste du droit international” (Morgenthau 1936, 5, 10: both cited and discussed in Frei 2001, 143) Morgenthau insists: variously on his being “a purely *analytical*, in no way normative approach”, that he seeks “a disinterested understanding of reality as we can observe it”: “Je constate simplement ce que je vois” (“I simply state what I see”).

And just like MacIntyre, Morgenthau is dismissive of the possibility that the approach of mainstream analytic philosophy might provide any way out: (he mentions G. E. Moore, whom MacIntyre cites critically 38 times in *After Virtue*):

*Student:* Moore said: “The good is not definable.” Good cannot be defined”.

*Hans J. Morgenthau:* “Moore belongs to a particular philosophic school that tries to eliminate philosophy by semantics – by showing the semantic impossibility of a complete and objective definition. I think justice or the good can be defined, but the definition is bound to be empty and abstract. And has to be filled with historic content. Here the problems and difficulties arise. (Morgenthau 2004, 102, confront with note 12 on the same page)

In view of the powerlessness of analytic philosophy, Morgenthau's diagnosis is almost literally identical to MacIntyre's:

My findings lead me to the inescapable conclusion that ethics, like all the other normative realms, is in a state of total dissolution. (Morgenthau's letter to Sinzheimer, cited in Frei 2001, 143)

## IN SEARCH OF A WAY OUT: REDISCOVERING TELEOLOGY?

As mentioned, the convergences between these two thinkers would run much deeper, and at least one more is closely related to their shared indictment of modern “Morality”. In the same fashion, both MacIntyre and Morgenthau forcefully rejected the predictive power and the mimicry of hard sciences by those working in social and political disciplines. Both criticized the prevailing post-Enlightenment ideology, with its positivistic faith in progress and perspective of total intelligibility – Morgenthau in *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (1946) and MacIntyre in *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (1971), with further arguments expounded over in the eighth chapter of *After Virtue* (“The Character of Generalizations in Social Science and their Lack of Predictive Power”). Both stressed the necessity of re-

personalizing the studying and understanding of society and politics all throughout their work. The impossibility of predicting. Yet rather than exploring this additional – epistemological – harmony, it is here more fitting to question how the two responded to the first unsettling discovery they both made: that is, the state of “grave disorder” (MacIntyre) or “crisis” and “total dissolution” (Morgenthau) of “Morality”.

If the diagnosis was similar, what about the prognosis?

Here the evidence of the differences between not only the two thinkers, but even the two men, resurfaces. In a sense, they seem to embrace opposite answers to a tragic dilemma: as it were, to favor alternative sides of the same coin.

Confronted with the immorality of politics, MacIntyre appears to favor disengagement. He insists, for instance in “The Only Vote Worth Casting in November” (2004) that between evil alternatives one has to choose none. More broadly and radically, MacIntyre rejects the entirety of politics which is done within and through the modern nation-state:

The modern nation-state, in whatever guise, is a dangerous and unmanageable institution, presenting itself on the one hand as a bureaucratic supplier of goods and services, which is always about to, but never actually does, give its clients value for money, and on the other as a repository of sacred values, which from time to time invites one to lay down one’s life on its behalf. As I have remarked elsewhere [“Poetry as Political Philosophy”], it is like being asked to die for the telephone company. (MacIntyre 1994, 303)

To the contrary, Morgenthau obviously devoted the near entirety of his public theorizing to politics comprising the agency and working of the state, in line with the realist tradition. While we have seen that he was tormented by the questions of morality, nonetheless he sometimes sounded bitterly dismissive of any St. Benedict-like “escape” from politics:

Of course you can have an absolute moral standard. You say that lying under any circumstances is disapproved on moral grounds. Pacifists and Quakers believe that violence under any circumstances is wrong for moral reasons. But then you opt out of the political realm altogether. You take a metapolitical position and say, “politics is rotten on moral grounds and we have nothing to do with it, no moral grounds,” which is, of course, the position of many alienated youths in this country today. Politics is a lousy business, a rotten business; we have nothing to do with it. We go back to nature, or go back to Woodstock, or whatever it is we go back to. In any case, we opt out of the political situation, as it exists. But this does not answer the question. It answers the question for certain individuals who have made an individual decision on moral grounds, but it is not an answer. It is like the hermit who goes into the woods and prays for the rest of his life. (Morgenthau 2004, 93)



Yet neither of these two great thinkers is ultimately comfortably situated in the solutions they articulated for the problem they agreed on. MacIntyre embraces Thomism-Aristotelianism, and argues, basically, that the modern nation-state and post-Machiavellian political thought is a dead end conducing toward either amorality or totalitarianism, if not both. By so doing, he not only avoids engaging, by and large, with the “statist” currents that belong to his very tradition – from Aquinas’ *De Regno* on (on MacIntyre and/against the state, see Aksiuto 2020). He also escapes the typical and most excruciating political-moral dilemmas articulated in that tradition. For instance, in “Toleration and the Goods of Conflict”, MacIntyre (2006, 214) has a field day in claiming that the gravest harm to the Catholic Church has been done by its establishment under Franco’s regime. At the same time, MacIntyre does not make it explicit whether the disappearance of the same Church would have been the alternative he would have endorsed, given that according to at least some historians (Cárcel Ortí 2008) these were then the terms of the question (note that the accuracy of the historical account is irrelevant: the moral-political question remains). More generally, one of the largest interrogatives pending on MacIntyre’s legacy hinges precisely on its concrete political implications, given that MacIntyre has been read and misread as a *maître à penser* by both the radical left and the post-liberal right (French 2025 aptly epitomizes his lesson as something to be “wrestled with”).

Conversely, the assumption that Morgenthau’s realist – more cynical? – position would be more comfortable and more easily tenable is demonstrably wrong. Not only did Morgenthau face accusations of grave incoherence whenever he recalled that values, ethics and moral are *ineliminable* aspects of politics (see the reactions to *The Purpose of American Politics* quoted in Frei 2001, 212). He somehow embraced MacIntyrean integrity – rather than stereotypically realist pragmatism – when he sacrificed his consulting position with the American government to voice his opposition to the Vietnam War – on both strategic and moral grounds.

Where does this newfound moral standpoint find its roots and anchor? Morgenthau is no systematic moral philosopher, and his references and guiding stars vary. Very differently from MacIntyre, he does often mention a form of Kantian transcendentalism, or the Judeo-Christian revealed doctrine (Frei 2001, especially the “Epilogue”; confront with Morgenthau 2004, 92). Yet two central elements of MacIntyre’s own system, natural law and the virtue of prudence (see for instance MacIntyre 2016, 50) become central in Morgenthau’s articulation of a moral standpoint as well:

Professor Morgenthau wants to hold fast both to the tradition of natural law and to the “realism” of a Machiavelli, but I do not think he has shown us how to reconcile the one with the other. (John Hallowell, quoted in Frei 2001, 223, reviewing *The Purpose of American Politics*)

When digging deeper, a stronger convergence surfaces once again. Is not the tension and delicate equilibrium between *interest* and *purpose* (see for instance: *In Defense of the National Interest; The Purpose of American Politics*) an exquisitely Aristotelian framework for ethics in politics, that is, an introduction that could potentially lead in a direction close to MacIntyre's? Substantial evidence of Morgenthau's deep engagement with the Greek philosopher confirms that this interrogative is not a bizarre interpretation. Morgenthau cites Aristotle's *Politics* as one of the ten books that shaped his life in an answer to an inquiry by *The New York Times*, and lectured on the same book as early as 1948 and then again, for decades, from 1956 to 1974 (Morgenthau 2004, 11-14). As Christoph Frei notices, more generally, "he used specific elements of Aristotelian thought to expand and enhance arguments in his own work" (2001, 225). It has to be emphasized that Morgenthau remains marked by Nietzsche and Weber in his *understanding* of the realm of contemporary (international) politics. Nonetheless, he did not embrace nihilism as a *normative* standpoint – in the fashion, say, of Leo Strauss, at least in Peter Levine's (1995) interpretation. As the last example, the reader of *After Virtue* and *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* would probably recognize a version of MacIntyre's argument against emotivism in this lecture on "Power, Interests, and the Common Good":

We don't even pretend to have a transcendent objective criterion for the public interest. We say it is the public interest because the crowd wants it.

This is a very crucial issue for modern political philosophy because if you assume that there is no objective standard whatsoever, you of course eliminate also the concept of truth from political philosophy. You would have nothing but a universe where different groups struggle with each other and where justice and the common good are identical with whomever happens to prevail at a particular moment in this struggle. Or else you must find an objective platform from which you can judge what is in the public interest and what is not. While it so happens that all of us assume that such an objective platform exists, none of us when he enters the political arena assumes that it is really nothing more than a struggle between different pressure groups, each of which has the same right or the same moral dignity in representing the public interest. We assume without any question that certain interests have a higher moral dignity than others. It generally happens that it is our own interests that have a higher moral dignity. But the very fact that nobody will argue in absolute terms testifies to the vitality of the concept of the common good and the public interest itself. (Morgenthau 2004, 106-107)

Thus, if ultimately Morgenthau continues to place enduring relevance onto revealed and transcendental morality in his way "Out of the Moral Wilderness" (MacIntyre 1998), it seems also fair to claim that he overcomes Nietzsche, at least partially, through Aristotle.

## CONCLUSION: GREAT (INDEPENDENT) MINDS THINK ALIKE

Despite the richness and complexity of MacIntyre and Morgenthau's thoughts, the claim of this article is simple. It is that the two converged on the rejection of "modern moral philosophy", and on the accompanying diagnosis of a protracted moral-political crisis. After showing that they expressed this assessment with near identical terms, I have briefly touched on some of the problems that characterize the respective answers, and especially on the general ways they suggested treading to reorganize the theory and practice of morality. I wanted to show that, once again, a commonality can be found in the return to Aristotle and teleological thinking, even if in Morgenthau's case this standpoint is by no means systematically embraced, or unique. Incidentally, I have noticed that Morgenthau and MacIntyre also agreed on the criticism of positivistic scientism, and of the social ideology that accompanies it, with its mythologies of progress, objective and neutral expertise, and the like. In the face of not only one, but two such towering thinkers, it might seem arrogant to extrapolate theoretical blind spots and weak points, especially after such an admittedly cursory overview. However, the very juxtaposition of them suggests that MacIntyre is lacking in a – clear – engagement with real politics (especially state politics and *Realpolitik* in both domestic and international relations). Conversely, Morgenthau failed to articulate a moral theory in a systematic way, even if this seems to be required, to some extent, by his insistence that morality is an interpersonal, intelligible, and ineliminable dimension of politics. In any case, the countercultural contributions of these two exceptionally original thinkers reinforce each other: a claim cannot be dismissed as "marginal" when margins multiply, and take up such breadth and depth. Therefore, Morgenthau and MacIntyre's lessons on the predicaments of morality, and their thoughtful attempts at bettering them, will continue to find interested readers and interesting readings, all the more through their mutual dialogue.

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# MACINTYRE'S READING OF VASILIJ GROSSMAN AND THE CONTEMPORARY WAYS OF REALISM

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## **ABSTRACT**

The last book of Alasdair MacIntyre, recently translated into Italian, considers the peculiarity of Grossman's life and work (MacIntyre 2016). Grossman appears as one of the examples of practical reasoners who succeeded in achieving a virtuous life. On the one hand, MacIntyre's reading is a sign of the growing popularity of Grossman in our epoch. On the other hand, philosophically speaking, MacIntyre's peculiar reading is part of a tradition of readers focused on Grossman's work, which is considered part of or an emblem of a philosophical theory. This paper attempts to recall those fundamental early theoretical readings (1), to situate MacIntyre's reading of Grossman within this tradition, emphasizing in particular his realism (2), and further to qualify Grossman's realism, taking into account the chronological development of his thought in a metaphysical sense (3).

## **KEYWORDS**

Alasdair MacIntyre, Moral reasoning, Vasilij Grossman, Realism, Metaphysics.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The last book of Alasdair MacIntyre, recently translated into Italian, considers the peculiarity of Grossman's life and work (MacIntyre 2016). Grossman appears as one of the examples of practical reasoners who succeeded in achieving a virtuous life. On the one hand, MacIntyre's reading is a sign of the growing popularity of Grossman in our epoch. On the other hand, philosophically speaking, MacIntyre's peculiar reading is part of a tradition of readers focused on Grossman's philosophical theory. Both aspects are noteworthy, and I will briefly recall them.

Many scholars have underlined the Western intelligentsia's controversial reception of Grossman. This singular treatment was marked by difficulties in accepting Grossman's unusual characteristics. Grossman was neither an "official" author nor an "official" dissident. Seen from the West's point of view, he was known for being a famous Soviet journalist whose report about the Treblinka

extermination camp had been used during the Nuremberg trial. In the seventies, the publication of *Everything Flows* (1970)<sup>1</sup> was acknowledged by only a few commentators. Even fewer were aware of the manuscript of *Life and Fate*, which was not published in the West until 1978, despite numerous attempts. As the owner and director of the publishing house L'âge d'homme, Vladimir Dimitrievich, recalled at the 2006 International Conference in Turin, many publishers were uninterested because it seemed that everything about the Soviet labor camps had already been said. The Communist intelligentsia in both Italy and France, the nations with the two largest Western Communist parties, did not want to endure additional scandals arising from the inhuman practices that took place in the Soviet Union. The adversaries of communism and the Soviet regime in the West sought something more substantial politically, which could be used against the regime rather than cultural commentary and novels. Therefore, few intellectuals acknowledged its importance when *Life and Fate* was published in France (1980) and then in Italy (1984).<sup>2</sup> However, among those few, some inserted Grossman's work and thought into their philosophical frameworks. Here, before passing to MacIntyre's reading, I will recall perspectives on Grossman from three commentators of this first wave: E. Lévinas, T. Todorov, and L. Giussani. Beyond the speculative side of their observations, these founding fathers of philosophical scholarship focused on Grossman also engendered a small but continuous stream of readers that eventually resulted in Grossman's rising fame, particularly after the 2006 foundation of the Grossman Study Center in Turin (Italy), new translations of the author into many languages<sup>3</sup>, and a BBC radio drama.<sup>4</sup> From then on, the story of Grossman's reception has completely changed, with the continuous flow of Grossman scholarship leading to a deeper study of the philosophical topics. Investigations into Grossman's philosophy typically focus on his politics, including

<sup>1</sup> See also Ellis (2018).

<sup>2</sup> See the introduction of Calusio M., Krasnikova A., Tosco P. (2016). See Calusio (2017) for Grossman's reception in Italy.

<sup>3</sup> As for the English language, after the announcement of the Turin conference, the translator Robert Chandler revised his own translation of *Life and Fate* (1985), republishing it in 2006. The first part of the saga, published in Russian under the title *Занравоедело* (1952), was published by Chandler himself in 2019 under the title *Stalingrad*, with particular editorial choices expressed in the introduction. In 2000, *Pour une juste cause* was published in French (*Pour une juste cause*, Lausanne). Tzvetan Todorov edited Grossman's *Oeuvres* in 2006 and *La paix soit avec vous: notes de voyage en Arménie* in 2007. In Italy during the same years readers welcomed a new version of *Vita e destino* (2008), which was followed by translations of *L'inferno di Treblinka* (2010) and the short stories of *Il bene sia con voi!*. In Spain, the first translation of *Vida y destino* (2007) was a literary event and was followed by a Catalan version (*Vida ídestí*, 2008) and then by translations of *Todo fluye* (2008), *Por una causa justa* (2011), and *Años de guerra* (2009). War notebooks have appeared in English (*A Writer at War*, 2005), French (*Carnets de Guerre de Moscou a Berlin 1941-1945*, 2008), Spanish (*Un escritorenguerra: Vasili Grossman enelEjército Rojo, 1941-1945*, 2006), and Italian (*Uno scrittore in guerra*, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Fate*, BBC, London 2011.

his description of totalitarianism, his comparisons with Hannah Arendt, and the legitimacy of the parallels between Nazism and Communism presented in Grossman's work. The other common approach is to focus on his moral teaching: Grossman is the author advocating for the "small goodness" and "senseless kindness" versus the implacable conclusions of formidable ethical doctrines, free choice versus the deterministic fate preached by various ideologies, and love of life versus the temptation to embrace death<sup>5</sup>. The three approaches taken by Lévinas, Todorov, and Giussani put these crucial topics within more comprehensive, theoretical frameworks. Each of these approaches captures essential aspects of Grossman's work, and each, in its way, advances our understanding of the Russian author. Coming much later, in an epoch of acknowledged success of Grossman's work, MacIntyre's reading finds its place in this theoretical tradition. In him, as in the other authors, Grossman has a specific place as a symbol or emblem of a philosophical conception.

This paper aims to revisit those fundamental early readings (1), situate MacIntyre's reading of Grossman within this theoretical tradition (2), and further qualify Grossman's philosophy, taking into account the chronological development of his thought in a metaphysical sense (3).

## 2. THREE EARLY ATTEMPTS TO QUALIFY GROSSMAN'S THEORETICAL PHILOSOPHY: LÉVINAS, TODOROV, GIUSSANI

Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995) read Grossman at a time when his thought had already become settled (Anckaert, 2021). In Grossman, the French philosopher finds confirmation of his central argument: ethics precedes and surpasses metaphysics. Following Heidegger's insights, Lévinas draws a parallel between metaphysics and an objectification of Being that accompanies its loss of meaning. The more you focus on Being as an object, the more you objectify it in language, doctrine, and technique, and the more you restrict it to a measure that Lévinas calls "totality". The error of Western metaphysics has been to confound totality with infinity; that is, with the meaning of Being, of its possibility of revealing itself (Lévinas 1961). Beyond Heidegger, Lévinas maintains that this possibility is not a new form of truth, not even in the form of new interpretations and understandings. Instead, it is something completely different that goes beyond any measure: it is an absolute, ethical call to responsibility. The importance of ethics as a personal call to commitment cannot but resonate with Grossman's small goodness, the gist of Ikonnikov's manuscript presented in *Life and Fate*, possibly the only theoretical manifesto in Grossman's works. As is well known, in that

<sup>5</sup> In English, we have to recall two major collections of essays in which one can find all these topics: the special issue of the *Journal of European Studies*, 43(4), 2013 and Bonola-Maddalena 2018.



passage, Grossman advocates for gestures of small goodness and senseless kindness as opposed to ethical theories of the Good. The latter tend to become ideological and violent. Ethical theories of the Good have justified every evil in history.

Yes, as well as this terrible Good with a capital ‘G’, there is everyday human kindness...The private kindness of one individual towards another; a petty, thoughtless kindness; an unwitnessed kindness. Something we can call senseless kindness. A kindness outside any system of social or religious good (Grossman 2006: 407-8).

Lévinas’s philosophical considerations, grounded in anthropology and religion, recognize the enduring validity of this law. To him, Grossman’s depiction of the opposition between the theory of the Good, objectivation and ontologization of the primacy of Ethics, and small goodness is a “remarkable utopia” (Lévinas 1991: 242).

As much as this picture of life and the fate of the universe and human beings is congenial to Lévinas’s thought, Anckaert notices a crucial point of distinction. Lévinas builds up a theory of justice that derives from this ethical primacy. Justice is the call to responsibility that does not exhaust its meaning in the dangerous and always manipulable I-Thou relationship. The call to responsibility is also the call to consider the third presence, the mute face who is present in the I-Thou relationship without being an overt character. This thirdness implies that responsibility becomes justice, which can be administered not directly but through institutions.

Grossman’s radical, senseless kindness questions Lévinas’s structure of justice. Small gestures cannot become institutions without losing their goodness, novelty, and absolute gratuity. The call of the other is absolute, as Lévinas notes in a particular scene from *Life and Fate*, in which this call is not even the face but the back of the other’s head.

In *Life and Fate*, Grossman tells how in Lubyanka, in Moscow, before the infamous gate where one could convey letters or packages to friends and relatives arrested for “political crimes” or get news of them, people formed a line, each reading on the nape of the person in front of him the feelings and hopes of his misery...the face can assume meaning on what is the “opposite” of the face! (Lévinas 1998: 232)

Lévinas thus integrates Grossman’s view into his own by affirming that this radicalism of otherness is the dialectical contestation of the plan of justice that we

have already settled. Small goodness is a call to revise institutional justice and to keep it away from ideology and violence.

The relationship I-Thou, the critical turn in Lévinas's reading of Grossman, is also fundamental to Todorov's reading. Tzvetan Todorov (1939-2017) inserts Grossman into his book *Mémoire du mal, tentation du bien: enquête sur le siècle* (Todorov 2000). He confronts totalitarianism's extreme political and moral evil with the example of lives that resist this evil and find a path toward freedom and democracy. The memory of all of these people fosters humanity, in contrast to the cruel animality that seems to be the fate of human beings in such extraordinary circumstances. Loyal to this vision, Todorov sees Grossman as a character of this resistance, which is centered on the notion that other human beings are the ultimate aim of human beings. They find their realization in the gestures of kindness they show to one another. Light within the moral darkness of totalitarianism comes from this naturalistic and humanist view. The moral stance also becomes political because this view cannot help but lead to the possibility of engaging in free gestures, which in turn fosters democracy.

Todorov posits a continuity between humanism, the Enlightenment, and this form of liberalism. Beyond the famous parallel between Communism and Nazism, which Todorov tackles in a long chapter of his book, he sees Grossman as a moral philosopher who, amidst the horrors of totalitarianism, discerns a higher order—a sense of humanity's refusal to succumb to chaos. This sense is needed to explain the trauma of his mother's death at the hands of the Nazis (Todorov 2000: 76). Grossman is, in this sense, a humanist who places freedom and goodness at the center of his philosophy as the outcome of the biological impulse of the human being, which must be embodied in individual gestures (Todorov 2000: 77).<sup>6</sup>

It should be comforting to know that the instinct for freedom is part of humanity's biological nature, for that would suggest that political regimes based on the systematic suppression of individual liberty cannot last very long...But that is only half comforting. The trend of biological evolution does not necessarily determine the history of humankind. (Todorov 2003: 69).

Grossman is understood in terms of one of his essential cultural roots, the Enlightenment. Indeed, Grossman, as a good Marxist of his time, took the Enlightenment as a crucial step towards Marxism and communism. It is no wonder we find many pages in Grossman that invoke the order and universalism

<sup>6</sup> "Grossman offers more than a critical analysis of totalitarianism, although that is the underlying thread of his writing. He sees the enslavement and degradation of the individual as the source of the evil in totalitarianism; this leads him to see the individual as his own guiding value. By 'individual' Grossman means both a source of action (the autonomous self) and a target of action (the finality of the other). To put it in other words, Grossman's values are freedom and kindness". (Todorov 2003: 69)

of reason as the opposite of violence. Above all, Grossman frequently condemns Fascism as something against human beings, particularly in *The Black Book*, written after the war and never published under Stalin's leadership (Ehrenburg-Grossman 2003: 8).<sup>7</sup>

Todorov describes Grossman's search for a humanist sense that somehow puts human beings at the top of the universe, conscious of that transcendental stance that is their unique Self. Ultimately, trust in this transcendental yet naturalistic and humanist order appears to be the core of Grossman's thought in Todorov's reading.

Fr. Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) is at the center of the Italian reception of Grossman. Giussani was a professor of theology at the Catholic University of Milan. His philosophical stance is a traditional Thomism filtered through the pragmatist idea of "experience", which he derived from his studies of Niebuhr and American theology (Giussani 2003). Dedicated to youth education and the promoter of many charities and cultural activities, he was also a consultant of Fr. Scalfi, the founder of Russia Cristiana, one of Europe's hubs of dissident literature. Giussani read *Life and Fate* when Jaca Book published it in Italy in 1984. From then on, he recommended the book every year of his teaching, underlining Grossman's realism. Giussani focuses on the epistemic value of this philosophical position: realism means accepting reality in its richness. For Giussani, realism is the antidote to ideology because it places the importance of the object of thought above our subjective ways of understanding (Giussani 1996: 546-7).

For Giussani, realism implies that the reality that affects our senses or minds (ideas and ideals are also real) acquires meaning when they touch the level of affection, which he considers the root of reason and reasonableness (Giussani 1996: 232). From this epistemic pattern follows a moral stance: accepting and adhering to reality as it happens is the way to understand it profoundly and to change it. Here, Grossman enters Giussani's theoretical landscape.

...the life of the Russian people under Stalin is described; it's a historic, dramatic, and terrific book: it's a book worthy of Dostoevsky. Their lives are all massacred and crushed, yet it was either right for them to commit suicide or right for them to live. It was right for them to live because in living, they were accepting, without knowing, the path that led to their destiny. (Giussani 2008: 85-86)

You see the bulk of Giussani's philosophical reading even in this colloquial form. Grossman's realism is an emotional registration of what happens. This realism implies the role of freedom, called to accept or deny the value of experience. As in classic Thomism, true freedom is only the acceptance of truth,

<sup>7</sup> For an exhaustive account of the complicated history of the *Black Book*, see Boschiero (2015).

good, and being. Therefore, Grossman's realism is powerful insofar as it introduces us to this conception of freedom.

The three crucial authors of Vasily Grossman's first wave of reception tackled relevant points that hint at a more complete theoretical framework. Lévinas introduces the transcendental level in Grossman's realist work. There is something, a call that asks for the exercise of responsibility, that arises from a level beyond the historical realm or any ideological pattern. It does not come from the Self itself. It is transcendent. Todorov, who would not accept absolute transcendence, agrees in identifying a cosmos, an order of universal values that provide strength and human hope in the face of a century of totalitarianism. Giussani underlines the epistemic value of Grossman's realism.

### 3. MACINTYRE'S READING OF GROSSMAN

MacIntyre also inserts Grossman's life and work into his philosophical framework. What interests the Scottish-American philosopher is Grossman's example of a good practical, neo-Aristotelian, or neo-Thomist reasoner. MacIntyre indicates four characteristics of these peculiar human beings that he uses as a narrative conclusion of his work. These four characteristics form a "single, complex, theoretical conclusion" (MacIntyre 2016: 243):

It is that agents do well only if and when they act to satisfy only those desires whose objects they have good reasons to desire, that only agents who are sound and effective practical reasoners so act, that such agents must be disposed to act as the virtues require, and that such agents will be directed in their actions toward the achievement of their final end (MacIntyre 2016: 243)

This passage encapsulates MacIntyre's thoughts. Drawing on Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, he considers a cognitive conception of the good, viewing this attitude more as a form of reasoning than a simple relationship between the good and reason. For MacIntyre, there are good reasons to desire something. Otherwise, it is not a thorough good that we desire. Reasons must be articulated through language and logic, but their outcome is not merely a deliberation but an action. Those actions are inserted into common practices and circumstances; acting appropriately means acting virtuously. Finally, these practices are directed toward a final end or aim. The book's novelty is that MacIntyre does not want to conclude theoretically once again. He already opened to a not-theoretical conclusion at the end of *After Virtue*, where he was invoking a new S. Benedict, very different from the first one, as a solution to the moral confusion of our epoch (MacIntyre 1981: 245). In the following books, however, he followed a more traditional, theoretical path<sup>8</sup>. Here, he wants to convey models through narrative,

<sup>8</sup> For a study of MacIntyre's production in the 1980s, see Maddalena 2000.

convinced that new forms of morality, or rather, old forms, can endure in new times only if they create a narrative —a story that can be told in our time. Therefore, more than the author of literary masterpieces, Grossman is portrayed here as a human being who must progressively open his mind and habits to broader perspectives, reaching eventually a reasonable attitude towards life that a neo-Aristotelian can evaluate as *eudaimon*, happy<sup>9</sup>.

In MacIntyre storytelling (MacIntyre 2016: 244-263), Grossman starts as a young man focused on his career and success, well settled into the intellectual circles of Stalin's first years of leadership. As a practical reasoner, he finds a way to live in both Stalin's Soviet socialism and an intellectual circle where he can flourish his creative capacities. It is a double life, with two different standards, typical of authoritarian societies. MacIntyre is keen on demonstrating that the issue of double standards in life extends beyond practical concerns to encompass theoretical and literary aspects. Grossman participates in a literary group, Pereval, founded by the former Bolshevik author Aleksander Voronsky, who proposed a vision of art opposed to the official one, maintained by Gorky's socialist realism. For Voronsky, the artist finds beauty and truth within reality and communicates them to others. Somehow, art teaches politics, rather than the other way around, as Gorky maintained. Soviet realism meant that politics guided art, aiming to reveal the truth and teach lessons. In choosing the topic of realism for reading Grossman's life, MacIntyre puts himself in the line of theoretical readings provided by Lévinas, Todorov, and Giussani. However, Grossman's realism here is the progressive broadening of Grossman's moral reasoning about the good and the true. The reasoning of the first part of his life seems to equate with the double answer of a duplicity of life: there are different goods in different compartments, and sometimes, they are at odds with one another. For MacIntyre, this is the reason why Grossman seems so weak in putting his name on an article that pleads for the death penalty to the self but false confessions of the pretended Bucharin's conspiracy. At the same time, though, he appears so strong in trying (and succeeding) to free his second wife, Olga Mikhailovna, from the NKVD prison in 1937.

However, through the pain of the war erupted in 1941 and the death of his mother, shot by Nazis in the quick and unpredicted invasion of Ukraine, he needs to solve the duplicity. The first kind of answer is the unity of self-commitment to liberation. He enlisted in the Army and became a writer for the cause, a soldier among soldiers. Since MacIntyre analyzes this epoch as a progression toward a broader conception of the final end and keener visions of virtue, war gives the divided man a sense of an encompassing, common good and fosters a sense of friendship and self-sacrifice. During the war, particularly in the hell of the battle of

<sup>9</sup> For the difference between happiness as a mental state and happiness as *eudaimonia* see MacIntyre 2016, 54-60.

Stalingrad, Grossman realized the inadequacy of bureaucracy and the party apparatus. When he returned home, he was also committed to the broader aim to be a witness to what he saw and to do justice to the many dead, starting with the Jews. He realized that belonged to these people much more than he had learned before. That is why he was also so struck by the uprising of Stalin's antisemitism that eventually menaced his life too. After the war, he tried in vain to publish *The Black Book of the atrocities perpetrated by Nazis in Soviet Union*<sup>10</sup>. Stalin did not want people to know that Jews and not communists were the first target of Hitler's death machine. Neither he wanted people to understand that many soviet comrades of the sister republics collaborated with Nazis. Again, the realism of the true depiction clashed with socialist realism, for which "real" means what is useful to Soviet power.

The tension between the two truths — the one of the Party and the one referring to real facts, ideas, and sentiments — is the bulk of the long fight between Grossman and censorship over the publication of the first part of the saga about the battle of Stalingrad. The book was out in 1952, between the highest appreciations and the harshest critiques suddenly emerging from Stalin's circle. Grossman was now menaced insofar as a Jew. The dualism between the two realities brought Grossman to the infamous signature on a petition against the plot of the Jewish medical doctors (January 1953). However, at the peak of the criticism of Grossman, Stalin died in March 1953. That signaled a decisive move toward the unity of life and a further broadening of the ultimate goal. Grossman wrote the second part of his saga about the battle of Stalingrad, published and known as *Life and Fate*, criticizing from within the Soviet power, which eventually seized the drafts of his work (1960) and condemned him to some sort of social segregation until his death (1964). MacIntyre sees Grossman's major achievement in *Life and Fate* because, according to him, the Russian author finds the right horizon of summum bonum, to tell the truth, and the perfect balance of moral reasoning. He sacrificed himself for a proper realism à la Pereval, namely, finding the ideals of beauty, truth, justice, and happiness within reality, the cosmos of human values. His reasoning and his rightly directed desires (*proairesis*) were no longer directed to the simple aim of being a good writer or a truthful witness of the Jews. Now, he was settled to tell the truth for the sake of humanity itself and, even, for the good of the whole Soviet Union, whose socialism could be amended. Contrary to the majority of Grossman scholars, MacIntyre does not see *Life and Fate* as anti-socialist and thinks that the concerns about his anti-Sovietism by the highest ranks of the Soviet Union were wrong. Finally, MacIntyre briefly comments on Grossman's last achievement, *Everything Flows*. He considers this last work a bitter testament in which Grossman becomes what his adversaries wanted him to be: an enemy of the system. In MacIntyre's eyes, this last book is

<sup>10</sup> See n. 7

seriously anti-Soviet and loses the realist balance that *Life and Fate* had conquered. However, the final judgment of MacIntyre is that, even though not perfectly, Grossman achieved *eudaimonia* in the sense of a life in accordance with reason and virtue within the culture in which he was embedded. He was an artist who succeeded in being an internal critic of his own society and culture in the name of reasonable, universal truths.

A couple of comments are necessary to complete the critical picture of MacIntyre's reading of Grossman. MacIntyre's view is interestingly Thomistic. Like Giussani's, he focuses on epistemology, linking Grossman's style, life, and philosophy. For MacIntyre, Grossman is both a great author and a great man, specifically a good neo-Aristotelian reasoner who adjusts his reasons according to circumstances, particularly in the most challenging ones, broadening the scope of his concerns and aims. Ultimately, he does not resolve the duplicity of his life and style, remaining torn between the highest ideals and personal bitterness, but reveals the tremendous human path behind him and an already achieved state of *eudaimonia*.

For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that also several philological flaws affect this reading. Many aspects of MacIntyre's storytelling are inaccurate. Grossman always declared that his art was to find the truth, and it is not true that "he did not care too much about truth" in his beginnings (MacIntyre 2016: 262)<sup>11</sup>. It is highly questionable that Trotsky's communism was a "truthful Marxism" (245) and that *Life and Fate* proposed "a newly critical form of Soviet life and thought still inspired by and directed toward some version of the goals of the October Revolution" (257). Scholarly studies so far seem to point to other directions, much closer to what Grossman says in *Everything flows* in which Grossman condemns communism as a whole (Calusio, 2018; Dell'Asta, 2007; Ellis, 2018; Gihini, 2018).

It is certainly unjust to label Grossman's habits during the 1930s as mere "duplicity" (248-252) since, at that time, any open manifestation of thought would have led to death. Finally, the reading of *Everything flows* as "rhetorically powerful, but argumentatively weak" (261) does not grasp the final step of Grossman's philosophical path. In the next paragraph, I will try to put MacIntyre's reading in a more accurate philological framework, trying to save his profound insights from his own prejudices.

#### 4. METAPHYSICAL REALISM

From the meaning of *Everything flows* begins the last step for comprehending Grossman's peculiar realism that resonates with MacIntyre's reading of Pereval

<sup>11</sup> For a reconstruction of the continuity of MacIntyre's thought see also Bit-Yunan 2011, Tosco 2012.

and Voronsky. As many authors have acknowledged, from the beginning to the end of his work, Grossman's central concern is telling the truth by describing the correspondence between what is real and what the pen puts on paper.<sup>12</sup> As MacIntyre points out and several analyses of texts confirm, Grossman's conception of this reality changed profoundly over the years. His initial realism was materialist, imbued with a certain classical humanism; Gorky did not overlook this when he invited young Grossman to consider that soviet realism is not describing the reality that you see with humanitarian eyes – the reality of poor, suffering people – but writing about a reality that ideology will create.<sup>13</sup>

Biographical evolution and philosophical maturation expanded Grossman's initial humanitarian realism, as MacIntyre acknowledges in the chapter dedicated to the Russian author. MacIntyre is right in linking the literary and human changes in Grossman's life, but he probably stresses the biographical aspect too much. Ultimately, he seems to derive Grossman's literary achievements from his moral reasoning. A closer study indicates that the gesture of literature is wholly intertwined with the change of thought. Literature is not an application of moral principles but the place where they happen. Moreover, the change in Grossman's life seems to be theoretical more than moral, bound to the progressive broadening of Grossman's conception of reality in a metaphysical sense. I will try to pursue this path of growing realism, trying to save MacIntyre's insights from another point of view.

The reality to be described is not only that of the "little people" and their sorrows but began to encompass the enormous stage of nature and world history as they came to play out decisively during the battle of Stalingrad, as well as moral themes of goodness and evil, the necessity of telling the truth, the ultimate meaning of life, the possibility of eternity, the existence of the soul and God. It is thus an enlargement in scope and intent, that MacIntyre points out, taking Grossman's realism from a physical to a metaphysical plane. Reality encompasses the physical, material, social, and political aspects, as well as the good, the true, the beautiful, and the just (with their opposites resulting from their absence). Reality is thus also full of what medieval philosophy called the transcendentals, the fundamental properties found everywhere in being at every degree, level, and realization. Significantly, Grossman adds life and freedom to these traditional transcendentals. Freedom and life form a hendiadys that Grossman employs in all his novels and short stories of the second part of his life. Perhaps the most iconic affirmation is his language at the end of the short story *The Sistine Madonna*.

<sup>12</sup>Dell'Asta 2007, Samov 2007, Strada 2007, Tosco 2012.

<sup>13</sup> On this exchange with Gorky, which Grossman recalls many times in his novels, see all of the major biographies: for example, Garrad & Garrard 1996, Popoff 2019.



What can we, people of the epoch of Fascism, say before the court of the past and the future? Nothing can vindicate us. We will say, "There has been no time crueler than ours, yet we did not allow what is human in man to perish." Seeing The Sistine Madonna go on her way, we preserve our faith that life and freedom are one, that there is nothing higher than what is human in man. This will live forever and triumph (Grossman 2010: 192).

Grossman's contemporary view completes the classical medieval picture of transcendentals: truth, goodness, beauty, but also life and freedom, *inter se convertuntur*. A separate discourse could be made for "motherhood," whose power is such in Grossman that it could be included among the transcendentals, were it not that it perhaps coincides *tout court* with life.<sup>14</sup> In any case, reality is no longer limited to what we see, touch, and feel with our senses, but also encompasses all ideas, feelings, abstractions, and ideals that constitute the uniqueness of every human individual. Grossman is not a philosopher and does not analyze this belief to establish whether it is explicitly religious. He is not interested in this consequence, but his openness to religion in a broad sense, to his Jewish roots, to a sense of forgiveness is apparent, as Suslov himself recognized in the notorious dialogue that took place after the seizure of the manuscript of *Life and Fate*.<sup>15</sup>

The broadening of realism to encompass transcendentals has a counterpart in the theory of truth. The initial truth of Grossman's works is reduced to a correspondence with what happens or has happened, hence the egalitarian or humanitarian impulse. Metaphysical realism, as developed in *Life and Fate*, is a recognition of transcendentals and an openness that does not find fulfillment in their unfolding in the world and in history, without, however, doing so according to any dialectic that would bring Grossman back into the sphere of idealism. His theory of truth becomes similar to that proposed by the pragmatist Charles S. Peirce: it is the embodiment and unfolding of effects over the long course of history. The correspondence between reality and its description takes time to appear. Still, it occurs in a gradual unraveling that coincides with a growth of awareness on the part of human beings. A famous line by William C. Bryant, often quoted by Peirce, steeped in ancient Christian wisdom, comes to mind here, perhaps representing Grossman's art and biography: "Truth, crushed to the ground, will rise again."<sup>16</sup>

Truth is not merely a description of states of affairs but is the sure aim of a process that does not invalidate its uniqueness but instead expands its possibilities.

<sup>14</sup> Maddalena 2023, Sisto 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Among Sulsov's statements, Grossman recalls: "Your book contains direct comparisons between us and Nazi Germany. ...You speak favorably in your book about religion, about God, about Catholicism. You defend Trotsky. You often express serious doubts about our Soviet system". For the transcription of the dialogue with Suslov, see Garrard (1996: 357-360).

<sup>16</sup> Bryant 1878.

It will always remain true for Grossman that “there is only one truth. There cannot be two truths” (Grossman 2006: 661) – his reply to Gorky’s theory of duplicitous truth – but the one truth will have to wait to reveal its content entirely. It will take Ivan’s years in the concentration camp and loneliness to allow Anna Sergeevna to “confess” to actively participating in the Holodomor (Grossman 2010: 123-149). It will take Grossman’s years and suffering to admit that Lenin was no less guilty than Stalin of the subsequent totalitarian terror (Grossman 2010: 177-186). It will take years, Grossman seems to say in one of his last stories, to understand the full horror of the atomic bomb (Grossman 2006a: 751-767).

In the expectation of full correspondence between truth and reality that will unfold over time, transcendentals occasionally manifest in the physical world, prompting people to discover new aspects of their nature. Indeed, part of Grossman’s realism is the well-known issue surrounding “acts of senseless kindness” or “madness”, the issue of the sudden and gratuitous – and therefore unrepeatable – gestures that appear in human life, not as a consequence of antecedent factors. As we know, Grossman will oppose these gestures to any theoretical conceptualization (and ‘capitalization’) of the Good, the True, the Beautiful. These gestures embody transcendentals that form the human in man, the highest level of his freedom, life itself. Transcendental goodness is suddenly manifested in the widow who cures her husband’s murderer (Grossman 2006: 408-9) or the woman who gives a piece of bread to the German prisoner who was a perpetrator of violence (805-6). Truth is embodied in Ikonnikov’s refusal to build a gas chamber and also in the kiss on the hand of the Catholic priest who blesses God’s madman in his “crazy” decision (304-5). Beauty is embodied entirely in Raphael’s Sistine Madonna, recognized as alive in the streets as she begs for bread in the Ukrainian famine, as she looks down from the stairs at her son kidnapped by the KGB, as she tries to defend her newborn from the clutches of the Nazis at Treblinka. Life, freedom, and motherhood live on in the unique gesture of Sof’ja Osipovna, who dies in a gas chamber, remaining to the last with the little David she has just met. Nature itself becomes a gesture as it happens in *The Good be with you!* In the Ararat stone, Grossman sees embodied “the migrations of peoples, paganism, the ideas of Marx and Lenin, the wrath of the Soviet state” (Grossman 2013: 170).

Summarizing in a more theoretical manner, gestures of senseless kindness are the sublime moments of the embodiment of transcendentals in action. Their strength lies in their sudden and unique appearance and the weakness of their unrepeatable event, bringing Grossman’s thought closer in this sense to that of Buber than that of Lévinas.<sup>17</sup> Grossman’s gestures are not external to metaphysical reality as Lévinas would have said, but are instead – and more classically, as Todorov pointed out – expressions of a logos, of a metaphysical order with its

<sup>17</sup> Buber 1937.

classic transcendental values. Grossman does not recognize this position theoretically—emphasizing the difference between this layer of gratuitousness and the rational one and not clarifying the ontological status of these transcendentals—but his realism, which expands metaphysically without yielding to forms of nihilism or pessimism, testifies to a classic conception of it that to structure itself theoretically would have needed a philosophical training that Grossman did not possess.<sup>18</sup> The crucial point is that classic transcendental values are potential realities that enter existence without adhering to any determinist attitude. However, while understood as unrepeatable events, gestures that embody transcendentals show their full extension and intension. They are the beginning of the revelation of the truth that will emerge in the long run. In this embodiment, through gestures, transcendentals show their intension, while in their being always potentially present, they show extension. For Grossman, anyone, in any condition and society, can always reach out to this transcendental, invisible order and bring it into existence. Ontologically speaking, Grossman's view is an ontology of real potentialities that suddenly and abruptly emerge into existence, but without the opportunity to be transformed into definitions or consistent theories.

Thus, following Grossman's characters in his later works, we amend MacIntyre's judgment on Grossman's late work. In *Everything flows*, justice, an intrinsic aspect of truth, becomes a necessity for forgiveness; we understand from the Judas chapter of *Everything Flows* (Grossman 2010: 61-75) and Anna Sergeevna's confession (Grossman 2010: 123-149) that goodness becomes gratuitousness as it happens in the many gestures already mentioned of aiding the enemy or, even more emblematically, in the virginal offering the Madonna makes of her Child who will die on the cross (Grossman 2010a: 184-5). Finally, beauty becomes comprehensible only as goodness and truth, as Ivan and Anna Sergeevna say on their night of love, confession, and consolation. Speaking the truth means accepting that transcendentals happen and widen our narrow ideological views, leading us to new, unexpected meanings.

## 5. CONCLUSION

MacIntyre's view of Grossman is original and interesting. Like Lévinas, he sees the ethical call to responsibility included in Grossman's life and work. Like Todorov, he understands that Grossman can be an example of human values, even though he translates them on the plane of reasoning. For MacIntyre, Grossman is above all a good human reasoner, a neo-Aristotelian one, as he would label this attitude to thought. Like Giussani, MacIntyre thinks that this sound reasoning is related to some form of epistemic realism. All of these insights

<sup>18</sup> For this acknowledgment see Maddalena (2007) and Riconda (2007).

are important. I add to them that realism must be metaphysical and, if we consider it this way, we will understand better the passages of Grossman's literary work. In particular, we can understand his late work, related to a metaphysics of forgiveness, which is otherwise incomprehensible in MacIntyre's terms.

This evolutionary metaphysical realism accounts for the consideration of Grossman as a classic author of Russian, Jewish, and Christian religious literature. Grossman was often compared with Chekhov, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, alongside the great names of nineteenth-century literature, whose work was pervaded by compelling and imposing metaphysical questions. It is a metaphysics full of action, namely, of gestures in which transcendental ideals find embodiment, but it is still a metaphysical issue.

Finally, even in this seemingly classic rediscovery, the very modern quality of a missing ending remains. It is a quality MacIntyre correctly ascribes to Grossman's work and life. Whereas in classical metaphysical realism, the individual, the cosmos, and history seem to find fulfillment and pacification in higher orders, be they religious or historical-ontological, in Grossman's metaphysical realism, the non-repeatable embodiment of potential transcendentals means that there are only partial developments and that the end of human life and freedom is neither already decided nor already written. It is no accident that *Life and Fate* ends with a series of questions from the grandmother about the destiny – this time understood in the sense of task and fulfillment – of her loved ones (Grossman 2006, 860-2), as MacIntyre correctly underlines. Destiny, thus conceived, is not fate because it is not necessary. The possibility of other incarnations of transcendentals and order is still open. The fact that those ultimate questions and sudden gestural realizations of transcendentals exist is a sign of the possibility of a final and totalizing answer, of a positive and happy outcome for our lives. Still, nothing will occur without our acceptance of what happens and the concomitant sacrifices. Nothing will come to pass without our freedom.

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F o c u s

**PUTTING REINHART KOSELLECK'S PARADIGM TO WORK**





# KOSELLECK AND FOUCAULT: CRISIS, ESCHATOLOGY AND EXPERIMENTATION

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## ABSTRACT

This article responds to the suggestion implicit in Reinhart Koselleck's *Critique and Crisis* that the Enlightenment worldview should be understood as a kind of secularized eschatology. Specifically, I hope to gain more precision about what this apparently vague diagnosis means and what to do about it. To do this, I will place Michel Foucault's readings of Kant and Baudelaire in 'What is "Enlightenment"?' alongside Koselleck's own account in *Critique and Crisis* to flesh out some of the conceptual richness that is missing from the latter. I also draw on a number of religious scholars – particularly J.J. Collins – to give a more precise idea what in particular makes Enlightenment eschatological. Thus, I argue that, at the level of its conceptual grammar, Enlightenment rehearses many of the features of what Collins calls the apocalyptic genre. I conclude by suggesting that Foucault's concept of an experience book provides a model for future philosophies less beholden to the moral-eschatological framework latent in modern critique.

## KEYWORDS

Koselleck; Foucault; Enlightenment; Eschatology; Critique; Religion

## INTRODUCTION

Must we think of global crises *as* global crises? Otherwise: why is modern philosophy tied to the notion that history is a procession of crises, and to what extent is it possible to think differently? These questions are posed implicitly in the title of Reinhart Koselleck's 1959 *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (hereafter '*CC*').<sup>1</sup> In this essay I hope to question certain prejudices about what the answers to this question should be, and to offer the beginnings of some alternative answers. Though I will use Koselleck's theory to frame this question, I will not limit the question to this author alone.

<sup>1</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Berg 1988: Oxford).

Despite scholarly efforts to understand what Koselleck said in *CC*, and the context in which he said it, it remains unclear what should be done with the idea of enlightenment experience as “pathological”. As Niklas Olsen notes, the ethical thrust of *CC* was ‘left implicit’; Koselleck described the development of enlightenment critique as a *Pathogenesis*, yet he did not make it clear how to remedy this process.<sup>2</sup> His interpreters’ attempts to derive an ethical stance from this text have been unsatisfying, not because they fail in this task, but because they fail to question this enterprise: why is an ethical stance required at all, here? For instance, Olsen suggests that Koselleck intends us to strike ‘a proper balance between the two opposites [morality and politics] [...] by acknowledging the *conditio humana*.’<sup>3</sup> If Koselleck pathologizes critique, it seems to follow that there must be a remedy, even if only a theoretical one. One assumes that for all problems, including the supposed pathologies of enlightenment critique, there must be the possibility of a resolution. Yet, possibility is neither necessity nor sufficiency: it is perfectly possible never to resolve a problem whose features are oppressively clear. The irony of any reading which seeks an ethical-political stance from *CC* is, of course, that Koselleck regards this desideratum as symptomatic of the very problem he seeks to diagnose. Yet, no particular ethical stance is explicit in *CC*; Koselleck professes no obvious meta-ethical position (utilitarianism, deontology, virtue-ethics, etcetera), nor any clear ideological sympathy.

By “lacking an ethical stance”, I do not mean that Koselleck withholds from making evaluative judgements. The apocalyptic opening pages of *CC* warn that our submission to the ideologies born from the enlightenment have led almost to the brink of nuclear war.<sup>4</sup> Hence, I do not argue that Koselleck positions himself “beyond” the problem that he diagnoses, nor that he is immune from the “pathology” he is concerned with. *Of course*, Koselleck is engaged in a historical critique of the enlightenment, and of its quintessential gesture, critique. However, one of the aims of this essay is to show that it is not as simple as just that, otherwise Koselleck’s enterprise would be circular, as we already argued. Rather, it is as though Koselleck pointedly refuses to replace Enlightenment ethics with some other mode of engaging/seeing the world. The absence of any particular (ethical) stance appears as the precondition for Koselleck’s attempt to historicize and delimit the structural features of enlightenment ethics *in general*.

There are two reasons why a contemporary readership might find Koselleck’s lack of prescription troubling. Firstly, the demand for clearly elaborated ethical prescriptions that produce quantifiable results is a feature of what Allen Ansgar calls the *Poujadiste* research culture in modern anglophone universities, but not of

<sup>2</sup> Niklas Olsen ‘Carl Schmitt, Reinhart Koselleck and the foundations of History and Politics’ in *History of European Ideas* 2011, 37(2): 202.

<sup>3</sup> Olsen, *ibid.* 202-203.

<sup>4</sup> *CC*, 5.

the environment Koselleck worked in.<sup>5</sup> The idea that *CC* is obligated to produce a clear ethical stance says more about the inclinations of our contemporary scholarship than it does about Koselleck's early work. With such a demand, we project our own concerns where they do not belong: Koselleck never claimed to answer this need, and in fact, gives us good reasons to mistrust it in ourselves. Secondly, therefore, the demand for ethics is an instance of precisely the pathological tendency that Koselleck diagnoses. With this demand, one makes critique and its ethical guidelines appear as the be-all and end-all of intellectual activity. As Gregg Lambert puts it (albeit whilst discussing other authors), in such cases, one operates under 'a self-imposed obligation [...] a blackmail of cheeriness that characterises much of what is called contemporary "critical theory"'.<sup>6</sup>

How, then, can *CC* assist us in answering the opening question (*must we think of global crises as global crises?*), and what alternatives to this 'blackmail' does it make possible? Here, I propose to use Koselleck's history of the enlightenment to re-think what theory can do besides merely proposing problems and solutions. The key thing, I suggest, is to develop the suggestion latent in *CC* that critique remains caught within an eschatological worldview. Michel Foucault's readings of Kant and Baudelaire in "What is 'Enlightenment?'" are instructive here, so I will also use them alongside to flesh out some of what is missing from Koselleck's *CC*. Further, by drawing upon religious scholarship (particularly J.J. Collins) it will be possible to illustrate homologies between the narrative structure of enlightenment thought and specific religious doctrines. The point to be grasped is that, whilst post-critical philosophy has been rooted in a secularised eschatology (whatever form that may take), it need not be so to the exclusion of all else.

It should be noted that I am not trying to argue that the absence of a positive ethical standpoint is a general feature of Koselleck's work, but only to show that it is a feature of *CC* that is relevant to our opening question. Similarly, in citing Foucault's "What is Enlightenment" or other texts, it is not a matter of reconstructing his overall position, but only of what is pertinent to the limits of critique as a world-view. It is of little importance what Koselleck or Foucault have to say *in general* about ethics, since the main purpose of this article is not to produce an exegesis nor a commentary on these authors. Rather, these texts will be instrumental *for us* in reframing *our* world-view so as to see beyond the limitations of "enlightenment" "critique" and "ethics". Hence, this article goes beyond Koselleck, Foucault or the others, insofar as what their texts effectively say may not be what was intended by the authors themselves. The main claim of this paper, then, is that it is possible to reframe our understanding of "global crises" in other terms.

<sup>5</sup>Allen, A. "Barthes, anti-intellectualism, and the academy." *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* (2023).

<sup>6</sup> Gregg Lambert, *Return Statements, "Sapere Aude?"* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016) 34.

Hence, In the final parts of the essay, I will argue, more positively, that there exists at least one alternative mode of philosophising in this context, in particular, something I call “experiment”. To experiment, here, is to entertain open-ended questions without seeking to resolve them, something intolerable from the critical-eschatological worldview. I appeal to this experimental approach as one that permits the reader and the writer to risk outcomes whose instrumental, moral, or spiritual value cannot be fixed in advance by predetermined objectives or ethical criteria. Whether it be Koselleck’s refusal to prescribe a cure to the Enlightenment’s ‘pathology’ or Foucault’s concept of the ‘experience book’, to experiment is to elicit profoundly unpredictable effects, and to invite readers to dwell in a world where such and effects are possible.

### ***BEGRIFFSGESCHICHTE AND THE TEMPORAL STRUCTURE OF CRISIS***

#### *D) Temporality, syntax and eschatology*

The first thing is to turn to Koselleck’s analysis of the enlightenment’s pathogenesis. As we will see, the pathogenesis in question is tied up with Koselleck’s account of how the enlightenment thinkers conceptualised time, and how this gave rise to their experience of temporality. According to Koselleck, each historical period experiences its own characteristic temporality, arising both from its discourse and its technological conditions. Koselleck’s CC tends to emphasise the former: the focus is predominantly upon how the enlightenment temporality is both created and expressed in contemporaneous texts. The textually-emergent concept of “History” elaborated in the Enlightenment philosophers’ writing is what gives rise to their contemporaneous, “pathological” experience. Only Koselleck’s later remarks will clarify how CC reaches its conclusions about an entire epoch’s experience of time whilst drawing its evidence from such a limited number of texts.

However, it is important to understand that whatever gave rise to the enlightenment’s conception of “History” and “crisis”, it should not be understood purely in terms of concepts or a priori conditions of possibility. As Niklas Olsen has pointed out, despite the proximity between Heidegger and Koselleck, it would be hasty to say the latter inherited the former’s apriorism.<sup>7</sup> This becomes clear, for example, in Koselleck’s discussion on the invention of the mechanical clock in ‘Time and History’, which he claims initiated a new experience of working life:

a long term process of increasing acts of abstraction designed to remove humans from what was naturally pregiven to them [...] divesting the course of everyday life of

<sup>7</sup> Niklas Olsen ‘Carl Schmitt, Reinhart Koselleck and the foundations of History and Politics’ in *History of European Ideas* 2011, 37(2) 201, 205-206.

its natural preconditions, a process that has been interpreted as both a relief and a burden.<sup>8</sup>

Here, Koselleck departs from Heidegger in proposing that practices, artefacts, and discourses concretise certain experiences and interpretations of time as-such. Concepts in the sense of “conceptual history” are not only a matter of discourse, but part of a broader picture that involves tangible objects, practices and technologies (e.g. the mechanical watch). Hence, within Koselleck’s ontology of history, there is no need for abstractions regarding Dasein’s concern with its own being, temporality, or historicity.<sup>9</sup> Existential structures are not the primary condition upon which temporal experience is based. Rather, an epoch’s temporality is the result of the artefacts (including, but not limited to texts/language) in which its concepts of time are expressed, measured, and disseminated. Of course, at the point of writing *CC*, Koselleck had not articulated the methodological principles of his mature work. Yet, even at this early stage, he summarises the thesis of *CC* in terms of the tangibility of concepts and the future expectations they engendered: ‘In the eighteenth century, utopian planning for the future had a specifically temporal historic function [...] Philosophers of history *prepared* and *made available* the concepts by which the rise and role of the bourgeoisie of that time were justified’.<sup>10</sup> This making-available of concepts can be taken in the same sense that mechanical watches, printing presses and other technological artefacts ‘made available’ radically new ways of engaging with the world. Another key example would be the wider availability of printing technology in the 18th century. As Melvin and Michaela Richter note, Koselleck sees the democratisation of political concepts (for example) as resulting from the efficiency of the new technology, accelerating the proliferation of books and pamphlets during this time.<sup>11</sup> The spread of concepts depended on the physical availability of texts, and upon the novel technologies used to make them.

That is not to say that Koselleck’s ontology of history explains concepts entirely by reference to pre- or non-linguistic processes, *à la* Marxist base and superstructure. For Koselleck, the conceptual articulation of temporal experience is not reducible to extra-discursive forces such those mentioned above. Concepts and things are ontologically distinct from one another, yet cannot be disentangled without impoverishing historical analysis. This aspect of Koselleck’s ontology of history is articulated most clearly in “*Begriffsgeschichte* and Social History”:

<sup>8</sup> Koselleck, ‘Time and History’ from *The Practice of Conceptual History* trans. Kerstin Behne (Stanford University Press: 2002)104.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* trans. Joan Stambaugh (SUNY Press, 2010) 11, 224-225.

<sup>10</sup> *CC*, 6. My emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> Melvin Richter and Michaela W. Richter. “Introduction: Translation of Reinhart Koselleck’s ‘Krise,’” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 2 (2006) 343–56 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30141881>).

Without common concepts there is no society, and above all, no political field of action. Conversely, our concepts are founded in sociopolitical systems that are far more complex than would be indicated by treating them simply as linguistic communities organised around specific key concepts.<sup>12</sup>

A given historical occurrence cannot be reduced from a culture's understanding of it to the extra-linguistic processes (social, economic or otherwise) contemporaneous with it. There can be no reference to an extra-discursive reality for the historian, except through the filter of language, concepts and political expectations that contemporaneously construct it. Conversely, the concepts analysed by *Begriffsgeschichte* would lack any interest if they did not express anything about a pre-linguistic reality of events, objects, actions, or experiences. This is how we are to understand Koselleck's emphasis on text, particularly in *CC*: it points towards 'the autonomous power of words, without whose use human actions and passions could hardly be experienced, and certainly not made intelligible to others'.<sup>13</sup> Words and texts serve as the locus of *temporal* experience for Koselleck, as opposed to the physical human being who is subjected to various external stimuli, one after another. Koselleck's attention is fixed on the nexus of the social, technological and conceptual, even if the last is emphasised over the others.

Already, in *CC*, this emphasis is clear, and Koselleck's text-focused approach opens the distance necessary to critique the Enlightenment concept of History inherited by the 20<sup>th</sup> century superpowers, as expressed in their ideologies. As he writes, 'the present tension between two superpowers, the USA and USSR, is a result of European history. Europe's history has broadened; it has become world history and will run its course as that, having allowed the world to drift into a state of permanent crisis.'<sup>14</sup> For Koselleck, it is no longer possible to engage with ideology (left, right or otherwise) at face-value, because the 'world history' which it refers to is no longer the history inhabited by Koselleck nor us as readers. The concept of 'world history' is taken, instead, as symptomatic of a pathological process. Hence, in the introduction to *CC*, Koselleck promises to describe how the concept of world history became 'available' as the basis of a meaningful worldview. He asserts: 'All citations and occurrences could easily be exchanged for others without disturbing the course of the investigation'.<sup>15</sup> Rather than analysing the language of any single author, Koselleck describes the language that came to be shared amongst the Enlightenment's key thinkers, so as to delimit - and so as to place at a distance - the temporal experience it gave rise to.

<sup>12</sup> Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History" in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. (United Kingdom: Columbia University Press, 2004) 75.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *CC*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> *CC*, 8-9.

This enables us to better understand Koselleck's lack of ethical prescriptions, especially in contrast with his near contemporaries. Once again, this approach puts Koselleck both close and far from Heidegger. In Heidegger's earlier writing, the concept of authenticity/inauthenticity is to be sharply distinguished from any form of ethical evaluation, the former being ontological, the latter being a merely ontic mode of understanding. The typical ontic understanding of the world 'demands [...] a material ethics of value as opposed to a merely formal one'.<sup>16</sup> This is instantiated, according to Heidegger, in the everyday 'expectation' in which 'the horizon of interpretation of the commonsense way of taking care of things [...] forces Dasein to be subsumed under the idea of a governable course of business'.<sup>17</sup> In other words, ethics, for Heidegger, is something that it is possible to assume a distance from; it is not for the phenomenologist to propose any specific 'course of business', but only to describe the 'merely formal' possibility of such a thing. Koselleck, however, recognises the impossibility of this meta-linguistic gesture for any post-enlightenment theory. As we already saw, the genesis of the Enlightenment's concept of history is indissociable from its concrete processes (such as the emergence of printing presses, clocks, etcetera). Enlightenment experience gives rise to an ethical attitude. This does not imply a particular theoretical outlook (utilitarian, deontological, etcetera), but rather, a general tendency to evaluate history and its events in terms of "better" and "worse". Ontology of history cannot adopt a meta-position *above* this ethics/ideology because it has inherited the same conditioning factors and discursive concepts. Koselleck's response, as has been noted, is to withhold from any *positive* ideological-ethical prescription.

The same is true of Koselleck in relation to Heidegger's later position. In "Letter on Humanism", Heidegger denounces ethical discourse as 'the greatest blasphemy possible against being'.<sup>18</sup> To indulge in ethics is to value particular beings rather than Being, the typical gesture of the technological world-view. Ethics, in this sense, 'does not let being: be. Rather, valuing lets things: be valid - solely as objects of its doing'.<sup>19</sup> Here, of course, the irony is that Heidegger critiques critique, evaluates technological evaluation, and esteems what is supposedly beyond estimation, i.e. Being. By contrast, for Koselleck, the ethics of the enlightenment cannot be escaped simply by means of a refusal (or condemnation) of its ethical evaluations. What is possible for any philosophy (ontology of history) will be determined by its historical constraints and affordances. That is not to say no original thought is possible, but that there is no escaping from the *contemporaneous* "ontic" or "technological" viewpoint for

<sup>16</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 281 (294).

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Heidegger "Letter on 'Humanism'" Trans. Frank A. Capuzzi in *Pathmarks* ed. William McNeill (Cambridge University Press, 1999) 272.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

Heidegger, nor from the language and concepts Koselleck inherits from Enlightenment and critique. If Koselleck submits the current state of things to his ethical evaluations, that is an unavoidable consequence of being a (post-) enlightenment thinker. No appeal to “authenticity” as a positive disposition is possible, nor is there any privileged access to the truth of Being (or history) outside of its evaluation. Thus, if Koselleck lacks a positive ethical stance, he is nonetheless constrained to speak in ethical language.

What makes this language ‘pathological’, though? Koselleck’s answer points towards the enlightenment’s dichotomisation of power and reason, and his task in *CC* is to evaluate this worldview. As James Edwards puts it, *CC* is ‘a critique of ideologies – both of liberal capitalism and Soviet communism – premised on an anti-political humanism, to all intents and purposes secularised forms of Christian eschatology.’<sup>20</sup> The Enlightenment’s rhetoric posits an essential opposition, which values one term to the detriment of the other. Politics is presented as the capricious exercise of worldly power, whereas the ideal of Enlightenment is the rational government of individuals upon mutually agreed terms. To expand on Edwards’ suggestion, we might understand this ideal of an inter-subjective rationality as a secularised version of Christian *agape*. One may exchange the word ‘rationality’ for ‘love’ in 1 John 4:12 to grasp the point: ‘No one has ever seen God; but if we [are rational with] one another, God lives in us and his [rationality] is made complete in us.’<sup>21</sup> Modernity’s world-view might be considered eschatological in that its founding gesture, critique, sets up the expectation of a delivery from worldly crises, whether they be spiritual, social, or otherwise. This is to be achieved through the (re)establishment of a (prelapsarian) *ratio* between all human actors, and the devaluation of political authority as irrational and tyrannical. Yet in setting-up this dichotomy, critique fails to acknowledge the exercise of power involved in realising its ideal. The narrative of *CC* can be read as the history of this misunderstanding and its unintended consequences.

Koselleck’s recognition of *global crisis* as one historical discursive construction among others highlights the contingency of the fact it has become a predominant world-view. This is more explicit in ‘Time and History’, where Koselleck contrasts Kant’s world-historical viewpoint with other contemporaneous experiences expressed in the writing of Frederick the Great or Goethe.<sup>22</sup> However, if one were to understand Koselleck as offering no more than a critique-of-critique here, the result would be a sterile questioning of the reader’s relationship with themselves, with the equally sterile expectation of a determinate answer. For instance, more recent work such as Janet Roisman’s *Anti-Crisis* offers an analysis of crisis-

<sup>20</sup> Jason Edwards, “The ideological interpolation of individuals as combatants; an encounter between Reinhart Koselleck and Michel Foucault”. *Journal of Political Ideologies* Feb 2007 12 (No.1) 51.

<sup>21</sup> 1 John 4:12 (New International Version).

<sup>22</sup> Koselleck, “Time and History”, 112-113.



discourse in terms of the political interests of those who employ its rhetoric, and in this regard seems to echo some of Koselleck's analysis.<sup>23</sup> Yet, Roisman's analysis seems to fall into a circle whereby global-critique is globally-critiqued, and in which crisis-rhetoric itself is unselfconsciously identified as the positive object of critique. It is the absence of any definite ethical stance (such as being "anti-crisis") that preserves Koselleck from this circularity - *CC* does not leave the impression of having issued any particular instruction to the reader. Rather, the effect of the book is to leave the reader in a state of perplexity as to what to do with its analyses. It is my contention that this effect is precisely wherein its *experimental*/value lies.

### *II) The birth of secular critique from biblical interpretation*

We alluded to the fact that Koselleck's work has been interpreted as a critique of Enlightenment's eschatological presuppositions, for the understanding of which, we may follow Koselleck's narrative in *Critique and Crisis*. Firstly, it is important to note that critique and enlightenment are not synonymous for Koselleck. Rather, critique, as a pre-existing attitude or scholarly approach, came to be closely associated with Enlightenment because of its entanglement with the religious context of the 17th century. Koselleck notes that the term *criticism* entered into French and English language during this period, having the sense of 'judgement and learned scholarship'; thus, 'when the philological approach was expanded to Holy Scripture, this process, too, was called criticism'.<sup>24</sup> During this pre-enlightenment period, it was understood that 'Criticism [...] stood in the service of the religious parties'.<sup>25</sup> For two figures, Louis Cappel and Richard Simon, the attempt to interpret the Bible rationally, through a comparison of its textual variants, was vital for achieving an adequate understanding of its meaning. A fateful moment arrived when Simon suggested Cappel's comparison of different translations undermined the Protestant belief in the primacy of the Bible's text. This new critique was taken as a threat by Protestant, but also Catholic authorities, since it threatened the notion of religion as revealed: 'a new front was formed, remarkable for the fact that the spokesmen of the warring churches were confronted by a common enemy.'<sup>26</sup> Although one was supposed to 'put the new art of criticism into the service of the Church, [...] Simon had shifted the criterion of truth from revelation to the sphere of clear and rational - and for him this meant critical - thought.'<sup>27</sup>

For those early critics, the emphasis on investigation over orthodoxy allowed biblical interpretation to be seen as a transgression of the novel against the

<sup>23</sup> Janet Roitman, *Anti-crisis* (Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> *CC*, 105.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

traditional.<sup>28</sup> Another key figure for Koselleck here is Pierre Bayle. For Bayle, criticism was not simply a matter of textual comparison, but of arriving at truth by submitting the Bible itself to rational scrutiny. The radicalisation of such an approach, according to Koselleck, entailed the extension of critique beyond the Bible, into other spheres of knowledge.<sup>29</sup> As the scope of rational inquiry was expanded, unending self-critique emerged as a quintessential trait of eighteenth-century intellectual life. Importantly for Koselleck, the early critics (of whom Bayle is taken to be typical) came to experience time in a very particular way, in which ‘reason forever [...] ran up against contradictions which *gave rise to new contradictions*,’ and in which ‘*reason disintegrated*, as it were, into a *constant exercise of criticism*’.<sup>30</sup>

Over the course of the next century, critique as a cultural current became increasingly entangled with the quasi-Christian ideal of spiritual enlightenment-as-equality. This ideal was fostered within the secret guilds, and later, was emulated by the new critics.<sup>31</sup> For Koselleck, the culmination of this process is to be found in Immanuel Kant’s famous *Critiques*: ‘Criticism, which had initially kept itself apart from the state so as to function unimpededly, now, by virtue of its own authority, eradicated the boundary line it had once drawn’.<sup>32</sup> As observed in ‘Time and History’, Kant’s moral philosophy exemplifies the difference between modern and pre-modern experiences of time, since it ‘assumes the future will be different from the past because it is supposed to be different’.<sup>33</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, criticism was no longer a matter of arriving at an adequate understanding of anything in the present, such as a text. For the likes of Kant, there could be no critical understanding of a static present; the relationship between past and future was a progression from problem to solution, problem to solution. It was not simply that the present could only be understood in terms of what it is not. Rather, this lack was experienced from the quasi-Christian, Enlightenment point of view as the privation of a utopia yet-to-come. For Kant, the future could not be anything other than different from the past: ‘the future in fact implies different and new things which cannot be entirely derived from previous experience’.<sup>34</sup> According to Koselleck, this experience is still ours in some sense: ‘Kant addresses a specifically historical time, one that it is possible to experience only in our *Neuzeit*, in contrast to earlier ages.’<sup>35</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 106-107.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid..

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 87, 98.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>33</sup>Koselleck, ‘Time and History’, 113.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

These observations are summarised in *CC*, as the vertiginous result of the intensification and expansion of the critical attitude into all aspects of culture:

The self-assurance of criticism lay in the connection of the critic to the yet-to-be-discovered truth. [...] Criticism transformed the future into a maelstrom that sucked out the present from underneath the feet of the critic. In these circumstances there was nothing left for the critic but to see progress as the temporal structure appropriate to his way of life.<sup>36</sup>

Since Bayle, to pose as a critic has been to lay claim to a future which the critical endeavour is supposed to bring about. However, it has been to do so knowing such an endeavour has no endpoint. For the Enlightenment thinkers, not only were texts subject to critique, but now, so was the entire world of human endeavour. The scope of the new critique expanded to include everything, including the absolutist states of 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, whose relative tolerance of Masons and other guilds had provided the conditions under which the Enlightenment's utopian aspirations were possible.<sup>37</sup> Such a situation fuelled the critic's misplaced *hauteur*: 'In every instance the self-made link to the future enabled the rational judge to become a critic of the present.'<sup>38</sup> Koselleck notes an ambiguity in the new experience of time: Enlightenment critique had imposed a responsibility to bring about the future by seeking out the 'yet-to-be discovered truth'.<sup>39</sup> Yet, this future began to appear inevitable, since in the worldview typified by Kant, Voltaire and others, critique necessarily implies progress. Koselleck objects to this sensibility as ironic at best (e.g., Voltaire's 'sovereign irony and ironic sovereignty').<sup>40</sup> At worst, the result was a hypocrisy in which the public/private distinction enabled the critic to entertain a 'full belief in a sovereignty which it [they] in fact did not possess'.<sup>41</sup> Enlightenment critique now claimed that 'power is identical with the abuse of power' at the same time as conferring upon the critic 'the right to subject the universe to his verdict'.<sup>42</sup>

According to Koselleck, then, the Enlightenment's experience of time came to be characterised by an unceasing disavowal of the critic's own circumstances. Hence Koselleck's remark in the introduction: 'the present crisis stems from a mainly Utopian self-conception on the part of the philosophers of history – Utopian because modern man is destined to be at home everywhere and nowhere.'<sup>43</sup> By gradually subsuming critique (considered merely as the scholarly attitude of the 17th century exegetes) within its religious self-understanding,

<sup>36</sup>CC, 109.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 110-119

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 118-119.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 5.

Enlightenment projected itself into an imaginary future over which its spurious universalism gave it moral claim. Again, one failed to acknowledge that an apolitical future (whether socialist, liberal, republican or otherwise) would be possible only on condition that political power be exercised.

For Koselleck, then, Enlightenment critique is eschatological in its devaluation of present political conditions as worldly impurity. Enlightenment is a mode of thinking which prevents an immanent understanding of particular power-struggles because all such states-of-affairs can only appear as the negative signs of a transcendent, idealised future. Critique prevents philosophy from understanding *what is* because it points ceaselessly towards *what is not yet*.

### ESCHATOLOGY AS ENCODED IN THE SYNTAX OF CRITIQUE

Up to this point, we have made various allusions to Enlightenment-critical experience as a veiled form of Christian eschatology. The first, most obvious objection arises that such a critique is overly vague: it does not specify what is meant by ‘eschatology’, nor any of the more specific elements of Christian doctrine contained in this concept (notwithstanding our brief allusion to 1 John). Further, if the term ‘Enlightenment’ collects together such a wide variety of authors and positions, one may ask how any single aspect of Christian doctrine may be attributed to all of them. Secondly, one may wonder what exactly is meant by saying that Enlightenment is a ‘veiled’ eschatology, i.e. by what process is it veiled, and how does it continue to manifest in this veiled form. In this section I propose to flesh-out the suggestion that Koselleck’s history critiques Enlightenment’s concealed eschatology. I will do this by relating totemic Enlightenment figures and ideas to their eschatological correlates, in such a way as to show how the latter informs the discursive structure of the former. In the following, then, I will also draw on scholarship from philosophy of religion and biblical criticism to give more precision to Edwards’ and Koselleck’s own analyses.

It will not be helpful, here, to comb over *CC* for allusions to eschatology, but to look outwards and try and pinpoint specific religious notions which this apparently vague suggestion might be directing us towards. I propose to focus, in particular, on the idea that Enlightenment philosophy *made available* the key *terms* of critique. One might observe that to address global crises (spiritual, moral, political...), is to speak a language with its own special grammar. Through its syntax, critique punctuates and shapes one’s idea of reality, enabling one to construct phenomena *as* critical. This *shaping* has been made possible by the use of a literary form readily available to the biblical critics of the early enlightenment and to those immediately after: it rehearses biblical narratives and interpretations in its construction of states-of-affairs as crises. My analysis here contrasts with that of Andrew Simon Gilbert, who has argued that “crisis” is best understood as a

conceptual paradigm devoid of specific ideological content. According to Gilbert, the crisis 'paradigm' functions by constructing different interpretations of social reality and desirable behaviour using a common vocabulary whose ostensive meaning is not predetermined.<sup>44</sup> I agree with Gilbert's claim that the word *crisis* lacks its own fixed semantic content. Nevertheless, I hold that Koselleck's historical analysis indicates that, even if it lacks any predetermined referent, the narrative structure of enlightenment thought retains a Christian-eschatological character that colours its content, whatever that may be in any given case.

Christianity represents certain ideas in terms of the literal occurrence of certain events such as miracles, disasters, creation myths, or apocalyptic narratives. Even when the significance of these events is not understood in literal terms, the mode by which Christianity attempts to convey certain ideas involves the use of particular narrative forms, paradigmatically those found in the Bible. Superficially, Enlightenment critique tends to divest itself of supernatural referents. Yet it parallels biblical narrative forms, and the interpretative strategies applied to it, in its representation of time, history, personal identity, and ethical responsibility. In what follows I will identify three concepts of Christian eschatology that are embedded into the grammar of critique: apophatic theology, prophecy, and divine judgement (of course, this is not meant to be exhaustive). I will argue these concepts are contained in the genre of apocalyptic religious texts, as defined by biblical scholar J.J. Collins.<sup>45</sup> Thus, taking Koselleck's position a little further, Enlightenment critique may be considered as a secularised variation on the apocalyptic genre as it appears in the Bible and other early Christian texts.

Here I wish to introduce Foucault's 'What is "Enlightenment"?' essay. Though I am conscious of the work of other scholars who have put Koselleck into conversation with Foucault, I am not interested in methodological comparisons or similarities in their historical analyses here.<sup>46</sup> Rather, I propose to fill the gaps in Koselleck's analysis with the observations of another historian of similar methodological inclinations. Thus, Although Foucault's reading of Kant and Baudelaire does not make the comparison between Enlightenment and eschatology in the manner of Koselleck, it does emphasise aspects of critical thought which rehearse the structure of the eschatological concepts mentioned above. This enables us to highlight the homologies between: i) critique's negativism and apophatic theology; ii) critique's understanding of necessity and contingency and the paradoxes of prophecy in monotheistic religion; iii) the critical *ethos* and the concept of divine judgement; finally, iv) critique's construction of the autonomous subject and Christian apocalypticism.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Simon Gilbert, *The Crisis Paradigm* (Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2019) 8-9.

<sup>45</sup> John J. Collins, "Introduction. Towards the Morphology of a Genre." *Semeia* 14 (1979).

<sup>46</sup> Elias Palti "Koselleck - Foucault: The Birth and Death of Philosophy of History" in *Philosophy of Globalisation* Ed. Concha Roldán, Daniel Brauer and Johannes Rohbeck (De Gruyter: Berlin, 2018) 409-422; Edwards, "The ideological interpolation". 49-66.

### *D) Enlightenment critique as apophatic theology*

It is by virtue of the critical worldview that *crises* appear *as* crises, rather than as neutral events. Even if critique retains an evaluative neutrality with respect to its objects, the rationale in which those objects are conceived of as being of interest is framed in terms of a *lack* or a *need*. In our time, it would be considered eccentric to describe, for example, the coronavirus pandemic as a neutral occurrence; or as a repetition of a mythical event; or again in the manner of a *historia magistrae vitae*.<sup>47</sup> Instead, the way in which these phenomena appear as objects of our interest is that of the problem either *a long time in the making* or as a problem *without precedent*. Even a brief look at the titles of some Covid 19 related scholarly articles reveals how frequently both these categories are invoked (I cite some here).<sup>48</sup> Even if these reactions appear opposite, they both frame experience with reference to a progressivist experience of time in which lack engenders novelty. Each crisis has, as if by logical necessity, a cause and a solution; with each resolution, new crises will be engendered. Following our Covid 19 example, we might point to the plethora of literature in both sciences and humanities which describe health inequalities, improper use of personal data, *etcetera* in precisely terms of this temporality (i.e. as ‘unprecedented’, ‘expected’ or otherwise). As of August 2023, a search on google scholar using the terms ‘health inequality covid 19’ returns 410,000 results; a similar search using the terms ‘data ethics covid 19’ returns over 3 million.<sup>49</sup>

Yet, insofar as the solution to any given crisis always remains incomplete, Enlightenment critique rehearses the features of apophatic theology (I am not original in describing post Kantian-philosophy as so many variations on a negative theology).<sup>50</sup> In the context of Christian thought, apophatic theology is in dialectical tension with cataphatic theology.<sup>51</sup> This relationship is elaborated most famously in the writings of neoplatonic philosopher Pseudo-Dionysius. Janet Williams explains

<sup>47</sup> Koselleck, ‘Time and History’, 112-113.

<sup>48</sup> Yan, Zheng. ‘Unprecedented pandemic, unprecedented shift, and unprecedented opportunity.’ *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* 2, no. 2 (2020): 110; Kumari, Tamanna, and Vineeta Hukla. ‘Covid-19: Towards confronting an unprecedented pandemic’ in *International Journal of Biological Innovations* 2, no. 1 (2020): 1-10; Nkengasong, John N. ‘COVID-19: unprecedented but expected’ in *Nature Medicine* 27, no. 3 (2021): 364-364.

<sup>49</sup> [https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as\\_sdt=0%2C5&q=health+inequality+covid+19&btnG=](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=health+inequality+covid+19&btnG=number+of+results+listed+immediately+under+the+search+bar;) number of results listed immediately under the search bar; [https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as\\_sdt=0%2C5&q=data+ethics+covid+19&btnG=](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=data+ethics+covid+19&btnG=); both accessed 27/09/2023.

<sup>50</sup> Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God: What Religion Really Means* (United Kingdom: Random House, 2011) 225; Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude* trans. Ray Brassier (Continuum: 2008) 46-50.

<sup>51</sup> Mark Johnson, ‘Apophatic theology’s cataphatic dependencies.’ *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 62, no. 4 (1998) 519.

that for Pseudo-Dionysius, cataphatic statements about God proceed by an enumeration of the positive qualities of the divine, such as God's beneficence, power, justice, *etcetera*, or else by the use of images, symbols, and metaphors. Yet, as Williams explains, the cataphatic is always in tension with apophatic disclaimers regarding the inability of any metaphor or image to capture God's essence.<sup>52</sup> In our case, just as apophatic theologies attempt to approach the divine through constant deferral, denial or qualification, so critique implies that no full grasp of truth (concerning, for example, the ideal *polis* or, indeed, the ideal response to a future pandemic) is possible. This is true insofar as the present constantly reappears in the guise of a crisis, i.e., as the *lack* of an ideal state-of-affairs. For the critic, the ideal, like God, is both immanent and transcendent: one may give a positive description of a preferred reality, but only by acknowledging its lack in the present time. Critique rehearses the dialectic between apophatic and cataphatic theology, since it proceeds by opposing *what is* to *what is not yet*.

This lack reappears as a gap between future expectations and current reality, much as religious experience poses a gap between mundane language and ineffable divinity. Similarly to Koselleck, Foucault notes, in his readings of Kant and Baudelaire, that the gap between experience and expectation finds expression in the continual confusion between what is the case and what ought to be the case: 'Kant defines *Aufklärung* in an almost entirely negative way, as an *Ausgang*, an 'exit,' a 'way out.'<sup>53</sup> Critique seeks to produce the future through a negation of – or exit from – present reality, which is experienced as spiritually lacking ('immaturity').<sup>54</sup> For Kant, the negation of the present is to be instantiated in public use of reason, which 'can be exercised in broad daylight, while individuals are obeying [the law] as scrupulously as possible.'<sup>55</sup> The purpose of this activity is (as Koselleck saw) to bring about utopian, universalist aims: 'that the political principle that must be obeyed itself be in conformity with universal reason.'<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Foucault shows that for Baudelaire, the revolt against, 'vulgar, earthy, vile nature', is a *utopian* ("no place") gesture in the most literal sense: 'Baudelaire does not imagine that these have any place in society itself, or in the body politic. They can only be produced in another, a different place, which Baudelaire calls art.'<sup>57</sup> This space, in the way Baudelaire understands its function, mirrors the 18<sup>th</sup> century masonic lodges as described by Koselleck.<sup>58</sup> The lodge and Baudelaire's

<sup>52</sup> Janet Williams, 'The Apophatic Theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite-I.' *The Downside Review* 117, no. 408 (1999) 158-9.

<sup>53</sup> Michel Foucault 'What is "Enlightenment"?' trans. Catherin Porter in *The Foucault Reader* ed. Paul Rabinow (Vintage: 1984) 34.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 42.

<sup>58</sup> CC, 88-89.

notion of *art* both represent an apolitical space inside of, dependent upon, yet somehow isolated from, the public realm; one in which the artist (or freemason) shields themselves from the consequences of their innovation.

It is possible to see apophatic theology embedded into the structure of enlightenment experience in its confusion between *ought* and *is*. Enlightenment may be conceptualised as an asymptotic movement (Kant's 'exit') from a condition of imperfection towards one of perfect knowledge and action, or else as the unending qualification of all previous statements about *the True, the Good, the Beautiful*.<sup>59</sup> According to Foucault, Kant's attempt to 'exit' means submitting publicly to current political circumstances, 'obeying as scrupulously as possible', whilst privately inhabiting a realm of pure rationality, hoping that the two can be made to coincide ('the contract of rational despotism with free reason').<sup>60</sup> For Baudelaire, the attitude of modernity is premised upon a delivery from mundane existence, 'vile nature', into a similarly abstracted, apolitical space called 'art'.<sup>61</sup> In the same way that apophatic theologies deny the adequacy of discursive knowledge of God, so the outcome of Kant's and Baudelaire's *ethos* is constantly deferred. Baudelaire's ideal of the artist's life, Kant's ideal of the enlightened society and the God of apophatic theologies all act as conceptual placeholders for an experience devoid of any tangible, sayable features.

One may object that Kant and Baudelaire are a very small sample upon which to make such generalisations – we will return to this. For now, one can reply that the sample is at least a little larger than those two: what is true of Kant and Baudelaire is true of Foucault himself, insofar as he considers himself an inheritor of this *ethos*. Foucault's *ethos* is eschatological in the most basic sense of understanding history as a series of events leading towards a desired end-state, even if that state is a circular 'critique of our historical era'.<sup>62</sup> The inability of this critique to arrive at a positive description of its objects (neither of the present nor of the future) exemplifies the apophatic aspect of this enlightenment eschatology perfectly. On one hand, even if critique is 'a patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty', the question remains unanswered and unanswerable as to what that form is.<sup>63</sup> To do so would negate the formal liberty which one aspires to. On the other hand, this unanswerability testifies to critique's fundamental emptiness.

<sup>59</sup> Janet Williams, *Ibid.* The conical metaphor is also employed by Pseudo-Dionysos to describe the *via negativa*.

<sup>60</sup> Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", 37.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 42.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.



*II) Critique as prophecy*

Even when it makes no explicitly theological references, critique has the characteristics of religious *prophecy*. One may understand prophecy as the linguistic articulation between actual and (divinely) preferred circumstances. As Scott A Davidson states, ‘In the great monotheistic religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), for instance, a prophet is taken to be a person who makes God’s will particularly clear, whether or not this involves making predictions about the future.’<sup>64</sup> This relationship between actuality and prophecy is posed in terms which impose a responsibility upon the addressee for a state of affairs which may be either apocalyptic or redemptive. One may be delivered from undesirable circumstances through heeding the (prophetic) message, or else experience the catastrophic results of failing to do so. Importantly, prophecy articulates this relationship in terms of the modality (necessity *versus* contingency) of these states-of-affairs. God’s will may appear from one context as necessity, but from others, paradoxically, it appears as a contingency. As Clark Pinnock puts it, ‘Some passages [of the Bible] can be read to support God’s determining all things. Others, with equal strength, stress the significant freedom of human beings. A tension is allowed to stand in the biblical text; a definitive resolution is nowhere attempted.’<sup>65</sup>

A similar tension arises in the idea of the critic’s ethical responsibility for the inevitable future. On the one hand, the grammar of critique implies future states-of-affairs are necessary because crisis and resolution are dialectically opposed. Yet, the purpose of critique is often to highlight that future outcomes are to some extent contingent upon the behaviour agents in the present. Thus, a homology exists between the paradox of religious prophecy as disclosing the necessity of contingent events (God’s will), and secular critique’s disclosure of the future as at-once necessarily different and contingent on ethical attitudes it endorses. Critique superimposes the necessity of certain outcomes onto its understanding of the process of deriving truth from the rejection of falsehood. What some might be content to regard as a mystery in a religious context is disavowed by enlightenment critique in the formula that *for every problem there is a solution*. Yet the paradox of prophecy remains in the enlightenment’s confusion between (dialectical) logic and ethics. Once again, as Koselleck remarks concerning Kant, one ‘assumes the future will be different from the past because it is supposed to be different’.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Scott A. Davison, ‘Prophecy’ The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/prophecy/>.

<sup>65</sup> Clark Pinnock, ‘God Limits his Knowledge’ in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, eds. Feinberg, John, Norman Geisler, Bruce Reichenbach, and Clark H. Pinnock (InterVarsity Press, 2009) 143.

<sup>66</sup> Koselleck, ‘Time and History’, 113.

Obliquely, Foucault also observes that Enlightenment *ethos* sets up a paradox between contingency and necessity. In his readings of both Kant and Baudelaire, he argues that enlightenment should be considered as an *ethos* rather than an epoch:

I wonder whether we may not envisage modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history [...] a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. A bit, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an *ethos*.<sup>67</sup>

[...] the thread that may connect us with the Enlightenment is [...] the permanent reactivation of an attitude – that is, of a philosophical *ethos* that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.<sup>68</sup>

The term *ethos* suggests a normative force is implicit in this attitude, a call-to-action addressed to a particular audience. Baudelaire is said to exemplify this *ethos*, since for him, the ‘deliberate attitude of modernity is tied to an indispensable asceticism’.<sup>69</sup> This asceticism ‘imposes “upon its ambitious and humble disciples” a discipline more despotic than the most terrible religions’, a discipline which ‘compels him to face the task of producing himself’.<sup>70</sup> Returning to the quote above, the *telos* of this ascetic attitude is the ‘permanent critique of the present’, one which appears both in Kant’s rejection of self-imposed heteronomy and in Baudelaire’s ethics of continual self-reinvention.<sup>71</sup> The enlightenment *ethos* is not only a matter of entertaining one-or-another vision of the future. It is also a self-imposed attitude through which the critic takes up the task of realising that vision.

The enlightenment attitude (insofar as Kant’s and Baudelaire may be taken as exemplary) rehearses the prophetic aspect of Christian belief, in the sense just outlined. As Foucault points out, Kant’s vision ‘is presented [...] in a rather ambiguous manner. He characterises it as a phenomenon, an ongoing process; but he also presents it as a task and an obligation.’<sup>72</sup> Prophecy and enlightenment represent *what is not yet* as a paradoxical inevitability for which one is contingently responsible. It may be objected that such a prophetic attitude is limited to Kant and Baudelaire, and that we can make no further generalisations about it. But this would be to overlook that the point of Foucault’s essay itself is to endorse such an attitude. Indeed, a quote we already saw embodies this tension perfectly (‘a patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty’).<sup>73</sup> The aims of critique are contingent upon one’s ‘patient labour’; yet, at the same time, one anticipates with

<sup>67</sup> Foucault, ‘What is “Enlightenment”?’, 39.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

‘impatience’ an imminent ‘liberty’, much as Christian eschatology asserts the imminence of God’s design.

### *III) Critique as Holy Judgement*

To differentiate between “crises” and “critiques” is to construct a dichotomy between the subjects and predicates of crisis, (the *agent* and the crisis which they *enact*) on one side, and the subjects and predicates of critique (the *critic* and the *diagnosis* of a given crisis) on the other. Critique has come to imply the necessity of prescriptions, norms, or duties through which crisis might be resolved, or at least conceived of as resolvable. As noted above, it has become the responsibility of the Enlightenment critic not only to see what is missing from the present but to project this desideratum into the future for the benefit of humankind. Within the critical worldview, the critic acts upon the present (or at least the reader) in order to bring about a hoped-for future.

Correlatively, within this world-view, there must be some agency responsible for engendering the situations that appear as *crises*. This is true even in those cases where one does not attribute volition or self-consciousness to the thing in question. The grammar of enlightenment discourse leads one to speak (if not to believe) as though an institution can be *responsible* for human suffering in the same way a sea current is *responsible* for patterns of coastal erosion, a virus is *responsible* for a disease, a chemical reaction *responsible* for ozone depletion or an autonomous computer programme *responsible* for a labour surplus. Critique has made it possible to say one thing at the semantic level whilst implying the opposite at the level of its grammar. One speaks of aleatoric, impersonal processes whilst separating the subjects and objects of these occurrences, and the qualities and value-judgements one may attribute to them. To put a biblical spin on it, the grammar of enlightenment implies the finality of a judgement to the extent that, through its grammar, it ‘separates the sheep from the goats’, the subjects from the objects, and the good actors from the bad.<sup>74</sup> This it does even when one professes to be agnostic about whether such distinctions exist mind-independently.

We can once again turn to Foucault himself for an instance of this. In the preceding, we noted that Foucault’s ideas concerning the enlightenment *ethos* are addressed to the reader as a call-to-action. If the reader is supposed to take it upon themselves to carry out the ‘patient labour’ of enlightenment, the question is who, or what, are they to perform this labour upon? In a sense, the subject and the object of critique are the same thing. As Foucault states:

<sup>74</sup> Matthew 25:33 (New International Version).

the historical ontology of ourselves has to answer an open series of questions; [...] How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?<sup>75</sup>

On the semantic level, Foucault's idea of an enlightenment *ethos* avoids the conspiratorial trope of attributing responsibility for the global problem of current conditions to any particular *them* whose 'power relations' *we* are submitted to. Nevertheless, Foucault's essay refers continually to a subject (of power relations, of knowledge, *etcetera*). Although he does not talk as if these things bear moral responsibility for the current condition of things, they nonetheless serve – in the grammar of Foucault's thought – as the singular agents behind the crises that manifest in mundane experience, in which we come to be 'constituted as moral subjects'. In a key moment, Foucault writes:

we have been able to see what forms of power relation were conveyed by various technologies (whether we are speaking of productions with economic aims, or institutions whose goal is social regulation, or of techniques of communication): disciplines, both collective and individual, procedures of normalization exercised in the name of the power of the state, demands of society or of population zones, are examples.<sup>76</sup>

If economic aims, institutions, disciplines, states, and societies are mere 'examples', what is the overarching phenomenon to which Foucault is drawing our attention? He clarifies that this multifarious critique proceeds as if directed at one thing: 'The *homogeneity* of these historico-critical analyses is thus ensured by this realm of practices, with their technological side and their strategic side'.<sup>77</sup> Catherine Malabou's reading of this text indicates a similar tension. On one hand, the purpose of genealogy and archaeology foregrounded by Foucault is to refute the idea that the social/political phenomena in question have a singular meaning. Yet the meaning of Foucault's analysis remains 'irreducible' insofar as it posits power relations as its singular object, i.e. as 'that which does not allow itself to be assimilated to any empirical determination'.<sup>78</sup>

Yet, Foucault's way of expressing himself here ('the homogeneity of these [...] analyses') indicates a recognition, on his part, that the unity of the phenomenon in question (i.e., power relations) is more a function of the critical perspective itself than of the real-world occurrences in question. Thus, it is not so much that Foucault's analysis clings to the belief in an irreducible meaning, as per Malabou;

<sup>75</sup> Foucault 'What is "Enlightenment"?' 49.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* My emphasis.

<sup>78</sup> Catherine Malabou, *Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality* trans. Carolyn Shread, (Polity Press 2016) 117.

rather, methodology is in tension with the demand for 'homogeneity' imposed by the syntax of global critique. As Foucault states, archaeology, as a methodology, 'seek[s] to treat the instances of discourse [...] as so many historical events'; likewise the task of genealogy is to 'separate out [...] the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think'.<sup>79</sup> Yet where these methodologies aim to separate what is multiple, the grammar of critique necessitates the postulation of an abstracted, homogeneous entity: *power relations*, a metaphysical doer-behind-the-deed.

#### *IV) Critique as apocalyptic eschatology*

*Semeia* 14 published in 1979 consists of a very large study of early Christian, Jewish, and Gnostic texts, and attempts to derive a set of features that define, or at least characterise the general aspects of a genre it calls *apocalyptic*. Up to this point we have already mentioned some of these features of apocalyptic literature in relation to critique: apophatic theology as parallel with the critic's perpetual deferral of the ideal; the prophetic disclosure of God's will as parallel with the critic's superimposition of necessity and contingency; holy judgement as parallel with the critic's discernment of the objects of her (moral) critique.

Here I wish to bring these features of Enlightenment critique together in the more general Christian-eschatological theme of *apocalypse*. In particular, I highlight three of the key themes described in J.J. Collins' description of the 'master paradigm' of apocalyptic literature as characteristic of secular enlightenment discourse:

7 *Eschatological crisis*. This may take the form of 7.1 *Persecution* and/or 7.2 *Other eschatological upheavals* which disturb the order of nature or history. 8. *Eschatological judgement* and/or *destruction*. This is brought about by supernatural intervention. It comes upon 8.1 *Sinners*, usually oppressors, but in Gnostic texts, the *ignorant*. [...] 8.3 *Otherworldly beings*, e.g. the forces of Satan or Belial, or other evil powers. 9. *Eschatological salvation* is the positive counterpart of eschatological judgement.<sup>80</sup>

The three key points in this narrative framework, *crisis*, *judgement*, and *salvation*, mirror the three features of enlightenment grammar described above. As Collins is at pains to point out, these features are to some degree a construct of the modern religious scholar's efforts to clarify a typology of religious texts. Nevertheless, if we take Koselleck seriously about the historical foundations of the modern world-view, it should be clear that the relationship is circular. That is, contemporary religious scholarship, as a product of enlightenment, constructs the apocalyptic genre according to the syntax we have been describing: a syntax which

<sup>79</sup> Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", 48.

<sup>80</sup> J.J. Collins, "Introduction" 7.

rehearses the features of the apocalyptic genre in its very structure. Thus, we can mitigate Collins' concerns by recognising simultaneously that Christianity is to some extent a scholarly construct, but also the indirect source of this construct.

As we have already seen, the secularised eschatology of critique appears in terms of the following ideas: i) history is punctuated by *crisis points*, ii) one may arrive at a *judgement* concerning the subjects and objects of such crises, and iii) the resolution of crises (*salvation*) is a matter of personal responsibility for those who are aware. One understands, for example, that there is nothing apocalyptic or conspiratorial about observing health disparities between different demographics resulting from various governments' Covid 19 measures.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, one is led to speak as though i) the appearance of these disparities is a crisis-point, ii) as though there are certain (human or non-human) agencies behind this crisis, and iii) as though *we who know* are responsible for its resolution. In speaking thus, there is an implicit moral division between those who will remedy the situation, and those who caused it – even if those turn out to be the same group of people, or no-one in particular. Take the following example from a paper on coronavirus and data ethics by Anca Yallop and Omid Aliasghar:

in times of crisis, it is vital that organisations address the growing concerns around privacy and security of personal data by designing effective data governance frameworks that go beyond a mere compliance with existing policies and prevailing data privacy and protection laws to ensure data security and protection for all stakeholders.<sup>82</sup>

There are no particular individuals addressed here (only amorphous 'organisations' and 'stakeholders'), nor are any praised, blamed or otherwise. Nevertheless, these multifarious entities are granted a form of agency which, in circumstances construed as 'times of crisis', is the 'vital' responsibility of a quasi-impersonal subjectivity. This is the same feature that we have observed in the case of Kant, Baudelaire, and Foucault. In all cases there is an agent behind the *crisis* who may or may not turn out to be identical with the *critic* themselves (e.g. Foucault's talk of 'subjects who exercise or submit to power relations').<sup>83</sup> One is called upon to take an ethical stance in response to all such bifurcations, effectively to place oneself on the "right" side of history.

<sup>81</sup> See note 39.

<sup>82</sup> Anca C Yallop, Omid Aliasghar, "No business as usual: a case for data ethics and data governance in the age of coronavirus." *Online Information Review* 44, no. 6 (2020) 1217-1221.

<sup>83</sup> Foucault 'What is "Enlightenment"?', 49.

## CONCLUSION

*I) The necessity of qualifying Koselleck's and Foucault's methodologies*

The most obvious objection to these analyses is that neither I, Koselleck nor Foucault have a right to such generalisations, given the limited scope of our sources; further, that what goes for Kant and his contemporaries does not necessarily go for any of their modern forebears. As La Vopa noted in his review of *CC*, Koselleck's arguments rests upon the reading of only a small handful of authors, and mostly by doing so through the lenses of a certain reading of Kant.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Koselleck's claim, that his chosen sources could be substituted without altering the result, tacitly admits this limitation: the enlightenment-critical framework, and its inherent ambiguity between moral and historical necessity, is not a substantive claim attributable to any particular author. The same limitation naturally applies in our own case: in trying to outline some of the more specific features of critique-as-eschatology, we have only been able to draw on a very small number of sources to substantiate our claims. Here I hope to offer some considerations to mitigate these possible objections.

Firstly, our analysis of global critique means that any appeal to Koselleck's ontology of history (but also Foucault's archaeology/genealogy) needs to be qualified.<sup>85</sup> If seeing things from the Enlightenment world-view predisposes one to critique *globally*, we will not have gained any meaningful perspective by appealing to yet another *global* method. It makes little sense to appeal to Koselleck's categories in isolation from his ontology of history, given that he considered crisis as a structural element of a modernity that understands itself as global. However, as I have argued, ontology of history need not be understood as an aprioristic account of history. Rather, I take Koselleck's histories to be *ontological* insofar as they concern the "Being" of those "beings" - physical, man-made objects - that characterise a given period's experience of time. The ontology of history is about how "beings" (words on pages, books, mechanical watches, or any *tangible* object) condition the ways in which it is possible to be concerned with "Being", i.e. in which it is possible to relate one's conscious activity to the passing of time.<sup>86</sup> This was contrasted with an ontology consisting of metalinguistic *abstractions* (such as Heideggerian "existentiell") whose relation to concrete experience is left undetermined. Thus, the idea that crisis is a structural element of modernity has been left intact in my analysis, the only qualification being that overarching claims about *Sattelzeit* are balanced by recognising the impossibility of an exhaustive

<sup>84</sup>Anthony J. La Vopa, "Conceiving a public: Ideas and society in eighteenth-century Europe." (1992) 86.

<sup>85</sup> Koselleck's letter to Schmitt, quoted in Olsen, *ibid.* 21; Gilbert, *ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Melvin Richter, Michaela Richter. "Introduction: Translation of Reinhart Koselleck's 'Krise,'" in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 349.

historical survey. The word “modernity” can be taken instead as a heuristic tool, rather than a monolithic object of study.

Secondly, if the enlightenment mindset is not attributable to any particular author, one might object that Koselleck’s methodology, in which all utterances are interchangeable, is wholly artificial, and so is the eschatological “syntax” we described above. The writings of Cappelletti, Simon, Bayle, Kant, Voltaire, Baudelaire, or any of our other examples are obviously not identical with each other in terms of their content. The Enlightenment is not a *thing* susceptible to ostensive definition like a microbe under a lens: indeed, according to our reading, Koselleck appears to be less interested in defining history in terms of important dates or events than the experience that can be extracted from a body of key texts. However, this experience lacks any *a priori* structure that all the authors mentioned above would satisfy, or that any of them would neatly and unproblematically conform to. The problem is that if the Enlightenment experience were strictly definable in terms of a set of grammatical norms, there would be no meaningful discourse outside of its perfect systematicity, which is empirically false. As Koselleck himself notes in ‘Time and History’, Kant’s experience of time existed alongside Goethe’s and Frederick the Great’s. Yet, nothing about this prevented these authors/individuals from being intelligible to one other, to themselves, or to us. The problem with understanding our syntax as *normative* is that it gives the counterintuitive idea that critique is incapable of reconciling itself to non-critique, as if prospective readers would be incapable of reconciling different registers within (say) Voltaire’s texts, or between Voltaire’s texts and those of Goethe and Frederick the Great.

Thus, I propose that we take Koselleck’s insistence on the ‘unity of the enlightenment’s occurrence’ in a different way. Koselleck’s description of Enlightenment temporality is not to be taken as a set of *a priori* normative principles that the enlightenment authors implicitly understood themselves as adhering to. Similarly, the syntax we described is an approximation, rather than a set of norms which all texts must adhere to in order to count as critical. Our ‘grammar’ should not be taken as a set of transcendental conditions of Enlightenment critique, but rather as a description which will apply more-or-less in different cases. This is the same problem that we have pointed out in Foucault’s construction of his historico-critical methodologies as directed towards a homogenous target. If the singular objects of critique are a mystification generated by the grammar of critique, then attempts to derive univocal ethical positions from them simply carry this mystification further. This is especially so in the case of authors who never prescribed any particular ethics to their readership. It is this reflexive gesture of offering ethics as a cure for global crises, that I hope to have gained some distance from in the writing of this essay.

Similar reservations might well be voiced in the case of Foucault, who, like Koselleck, questions enlightenment and critique on their own terms.



*Begriffsgeschichte* or archaeology-genealogy cannot be discarded, simply because they are critical discourses. The point is rather that the critique, taken to its ultimate conclusion, must criticise its own normative commitments as the leftovers of a pre-critical, mythological worldview. The question of what is left, after this is achieved, is implicit in Foucault's *The Order of Things*. There, Foucault explains that despite appearances to the contrary, 'Modern thought has never, in fact, been able to propose a morality'.<sup>87</sup> Where classical reflection derived its ethics from what it took to be the natural order of things, modern thought reduces ethics to the non-ethical, 'any imperative is lodged within thought and its movement towards the apprehension of the unthought'.<sup>88</sup> Ethics is understood "transcendentally" as a normative condition of human cognition (practical reason), rather than as an aspect of mind-independent reality. At the same, ethics is "empirically" reduced to contingent processes (physiology, economic processes, linguistic developments) that have nothing to do with moral agency. On the face of it, this aspect of modern thought implies 'an imperative that haunts thought from within; [...] given currency in the form of ethics, politics [...] or the mere consciousness of performing', in history, a bureaucratic function'.<sup>89</sup> Yet, the execution of this moral imperative is an impossibility, since "man" can only be grasped through its relation to that which is excluded from ethical discourse: 'fundamentally, modern thought is advancing towards that region where man's Other must become the Same as himself'.<sup>90</sup> The human must be seen through the non-human, and in so doing, the concept of *normativity* (ethical, cognitive or otherwise) must disappear behind a new, unfamiliar grammar which either reduces thought to its empirical substrate, or else to the play of a symbolism without referent (*The True, The Good, The Beautiful*).

## II) *Philosophy as experimentation*

What value is there in determining that the structure of enlightenment thought is bound up with theological aspirations which it believed itself to have overcome?

Niklas Olsen remarks upon the optimism he sees as latent in Koselleck's *Critique and Crisis*. Though the work has been read as a work of conservatism because of Koselleck's proximity to Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger, Olsen argues that, in fact, Koselleck's motivations for writing *CC* were different from his contemporaries. To place the quote at the start of this essay in context:

the normative implications were not explicitly spelled out in the analysis: it was simply left to the reader to decipher Koselleck's perspective on how secular

<sup>87</sup> Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things* (Routledge 2008) 357.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

justifications for individual freedom might be handled successfully in modern politics, that is, how the entry of morality into politics can be solved in a peaceful and pragmatic manner by striking a proper balance between the two opposites and by acknowledging the *conditio humana*.<sup>91</sup>

A similar set of objections and defences are raised in the case of Foucault, whose apparent pessimism and lack of a clear ethical stance in earlier work earned him accusations of conservatism from Jürgen Habermas, amongst others.<sup>92</sup> The typical strategy for responding to this has been to argue that Foucault is, in fact, part of the enlightenment tradition, and that his critique is tacitly oriented by ethical commitments.<sup>93</sup> This strategy is ineffective because it assumes that enlightenment may only be evaluated in enlightenment terms. Effectively, it gives into the famous “blackmail” of the Enlightenment: ‘either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of its rationalism [...]; or else you criticize the Enlightenment and then try to escape from its principles of rationality’.<sup>94</sup> One accepts the first option for fear of the second, and thus, the necessity of projecting one or another ethical position onto a given theorists’ writing has become self-evident.

We return to the question which this paper opened with: why should the promise of a transcendence of the actual present by an absent future be allowed to dominate philosophical thought (*must* we think of global crises *as* global crises)? The question is insistent given that the authors in question are the ones who have shown the universalist pretences of such a world-view to be historical contingencies, often with disastrous – or at least, unintended – consequences.

There is at least one way of answering which I only begin to outline here. The value of philosophical endeavour cannot be determined in advance; one may refuse the blackmail of the enlightenment by denying that philosophy ought to generate any desirable outcomes in particular. Let us call this the *experimental* mode of doing philosophy, by contrast with the ubiquitous critical-normativist mode. The meaning and value of philosophy would then be its results, whether intended or not, helpful or hindrance, deadly or life-enhancing. As Nietzsche puts it, ‘these philosophers of the future may have a right – it might also be a wrong – to be called *attempters*’.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Niklas Olsen “Carl Schmitt, Reinhart Koselleck and the foundations of History and Politics” 202-203.

<sup>92</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Polity, 2007) 238-266.

<sup>93</sup> Oliver Roberts-Garratt, “The Philosophy of the Early Foucault (1949-1955).” PhD thesis, Exeter university (2022) 24, 41-47.

<sup>94</sup> Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 43.

<sup>95</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche *Beyond Good and Evil in Basic Writings of Nietzsche* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 2000) 242.

I have already noted that in Koselleck's case there is a provocative refusal to resolve what he describes as 'pathology', to halt the process he calls the pathogenesis of the enlightenment, or to correct the eschatological worldview that set it in motion. At length, this essay has shown what it is that Koselleck is pointing to with these gestures, and the various reasons why the request for a cure - or an ethical position - is met with silence. Koselleck's silence I take as an experiment in subtraction. It asks what happens when we are prevented from filling that silence with ready-made answers, whether in the form of expert opinions, ethical-ideological prescriptions or religious formulas. It asks what happens when we cease to take these things at face-value, and what the effect of that experience is for different readers. Finally, it may also be asking what happens when we allow the pathology in question to run its course. Koselleck's hypothesis is expressed exactly as such, 'the result *may well be* to blow up mankind'.<sup>96</sup> It is not my place in this essay to predict the results of these experiments, to evaluate the possible outcomes, nor to confirm or deny Koselleck's hypothesis.

Foucault is more explicit in this regard, and indicates for himself the idea of philosophy as an exercise in which the resulting change is one that cannot necessarily be foreseen in all its details, and which need not have any instrumental value to be counted a success:

When the book [*Discipline and Punish*] came out, different readers [...] delivered this peculiar judgement: "The book is paralysing. It may contain some correct observations, but even so it has clear limits, because it impedes us; it prevents us from going on with our activity." My reply is that this reaction proves that the work was successful, that it functioned just as I had intended. It shows that people read it as an experience that changed them, that prevented them always from being the same or from having the same relation with things, with others that they had before reading it [...] And the book worked towards that transformation. To a small degree, it was even an agent in it. That is what I mean by an experience book, as opposed to a truth or a demonstration book.<sup>97</sup>

This is not to say that Foucault intended to produce any particular kind of experience or transformation for his readers. If, as he claims, the book had been successful, and had functioned as intended, that is simply because it produced a transformation. If philosophy as critique has the aim of producing something better (or rather, *less bad*), philosophy as experimentation lacks any pretension to know what 'better' means. It has only the aim of producing something different - it is in this sense that inflicting impediments and paralyses may be considered a success. As the etymology of the word indicates, to *experiment* is precisely to

<sup>96</sup> Koselleck, CC, 5. My emphasis.

<sup>97</sup> Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault" in *Power: the essential works* 3 ed. James D. Faubion (Penguin, 2000) 245-6.

make such attempts, or to take such risks.<sup>98</sup> To experiment with philosophy would be to forego any prejudice about what might be counted better or worse. Philosophy would then be the *love of wisdom* concerning things which one could not have anticipated in advance.

There is little use in characterising this *experimentation* in terms of “post-Kantianism”, or “post-Enlightenment”, for to do so is merely to define it negatively. It is not a question of experimentation superseding or overcoming critique; experimentation does not replace enlightenment or respond to it dialectically. To invoke experimentation as an alternative mode of seeing the world is not to reject or deny that *it can* be seen in terms of a critique or crisis; it is simply to point out that the critical mode of interpreting the world does not have a monopoly on philosophy. Critique might yet be indispensable to philosophy; all I argue is that it need not sit in the throne of The Master that it claims to have toppled and discredited (the ‘ironic sovereignty’ of the sovereign ironist).<sup>99</sup> Experimentation is *not necessarily* a form of post-critical philosophy; we are not compelled to adopt an experimental understanding of philosophy just because this cannot be encompassed by critique, nor are we compelled to abandon critique as such. Experimentation, as a form of reflection outside of (or next to) critique is not *required*, nor is it *necessary*, nor is it an inevitable consequence of the critique-of-critique carried out by Koselleck or Foucault. Foucault, for his part, moved from experimental philosophy to critique, and back again, one moment attempting to provoke ‘limit-experiences’ for his readers, the next extolling the merits of the enlightenment and its *ethos*. There is nothing to say that one mode replaced or improved upon the other. Necessity is not the mother of invention, here.

It is enough that experimentation be a possibility, and that we recognise this possibility as present in Foucault, Koselleck, and in the work of other authors as yet unmentioned. The answer to the question “must we think of global crises as global crises?” would then be “not necessarily.”

<sup>98</sup> See entry for “per-3” The American heritage dictionary of Indo-European roots ed. Calvert Watkins (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000) 66.

<sup>99</sup> CC, 117.

# ***IL FUTURO NON PUÒ INIZIARE STUDIO SU ACCELERAZIONE, FINE DELLA STORIA E DE-FUTURIZZAZIONE***

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## **ABSTRACT**

The essay aims to analyse why the question of 'acceleration' has acquired a problematising mood, in the Foucauldian sense, in our contemporary times, and why a connection between 'acceleration', the 'end of History' and the 'de-futurisation of the future' can be found and be functional to the reproduction of the form of life of neo-liberal capitalism. The analysis starts with a discussion of the philosophy of the accelerationism and Hartmut Rosa's social philosophy of acceleration, and then moves on to the way in which the Anthropocene – the age of the unfolding ecological crisis, in its connection with all other crises of contemporaneity (economic, social, political, of the human condition) – questions the criteria with which Modernity has thought and thinks about its historical and temporal experience and structures. Drawing on the analyses of Reinhart Koselleck, Niklas Luhmann and Hans Blumenberg – how the temporal structures of Modernity were constructed, why the future cannot begin and the reasons for today's disorientation – the essay aims to understand the possibilities of another way of thinking about historical and temporal experience, something like a revolution of time itself.

## **KEYWORDS**

Acceleration, Rosa, Accelerationism, The End of History, Future

## **1. PERCHÉ L'ACCELERAZIONE**

Può sembrare quasi una banalità affermare che viviamo nell'epoca dell'accelerazione sociale dispiagata<sup>1</sup> e di quella che è stata definita "mobilitazione totale"<sup>2</sup>: esempi in questo senso si possono ritrovare nella vita quotidiana tardo-moderna così come ragionando sulla sempre più rapida trasformazione degli apparati tecnologici e dei ritmi della vita sociale. È un dato di fatto *tutto moderno*

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. H. Rosa, *Beschleunigung. Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2005; Id., *Accelerazione e alienazione. Per una teoria critica del tempo nella tarda modernità* (2010), tr. it. Einaudi, Torino 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. M. Ferraris, *Mobilitazione totale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2015.

(come vedremo) che la vita quotidiana – sia nel *vissuto* sia quando *pensata* attraverso le concettualizzazioni delle scienze umane e sociali – sia costantemente determinata da accelerazioni di processi *vissuti* e *pensati* sempre più come autonomi (trovano la “norma” in se stessi) e automatizzati (trovano la ragione del “movimento” in se stessi). A un livello più alto di astrazione possiamo dire che l’esperienza *vissuta* e *pensata* dell’accelerazione rappresenti l’indizio più rilevante del fatto che esistono forze immanenti nella storia o, meglio, che la storia sia una forza immanente e irresistibile, in grado di determinare trasformazioni sempre più rapide: l’accelerazione è una sorta di indicatore epistemologico del cambiamento *vissuto* e *pensato* come necessario, mentre l’agire umano – etico e politico – può in certi casi assumere caratteristiche catecontiche o in altri casi di vera e propria fede nell’avvento di un avvenire già *prescritto* *dale* e *pre-iscritto* nel presente.

Proprio per questo, la Modernità (con tutti i suoi corollari, variamente definiti: post-modernità<sup>3</sup>, sur-modernità<sup>4</sup>, modernità liquida<sup>5</sup>, e così via) ha la caratteristica di presentarsi sempre come un “tempo nuovo” rispetto al passato e come un “temponuovissimo” in vista di un compimento nel futuro, vale a dire contemporaneamente come una nuova epoca, la prima cosciente di sé, a tal punto che «la categoria storica del nuovo e della novità è (...) monopolizzata (...) in un modo che è psicologicamente comprensibile ma teoreticamente illegittimo»<sup>6</sup>, e come un nuovo modo di intendere il tessuto temporale e storico stesso come ingiunzione perenne a un intervento su di esso in vista di una sua realizzazione pensata come necessaria. Anzi, è possibile affermare che la Modernità si presenti come un’autocomprensione della propria dimensione temporale e storica, sempre allo stesso tempo *nuova* e *nuovissima*, una sorta di “missione” perenne o di “mobilitazione totale”, proprio nel momento in cui ridefinisce il tessuto temporale e storico della sua esperienza e dell’esperienza umana stessa come processo unico e uni-direzionale. L’idea di una Storia universale, a cui tutte le storie devono in qualche modo essere ricondotte, svanendo nella propria unicità, sembra essere il portato fondamentale di questa rivoluzione del tempo e della

<sup>3</sup> Il riferimento è ovviamente a J.-F. Lyotard, *La condizione postmoderna* (1979), tr. it. Feltrinelli, Milano 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Se il “luogo antropologico” è identitario, relazionale e *storico*, i nonluoghi della surmodernità perdono la profondità della durata storica e non integrano il passato ma lo classificano, depotenziandolo, esclusivamente come “luogo della memoria”. Cfr. M. Augé, *Nonluoghi. Introduzione a una antropologia della surmodernità* (1992), tr. it. Elèuthera, Milano 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Z. Bauman, *Modernità liquida* (1999), tr. it. Laterza, Roma-Bari 2011. Il sociologo di origini polacche ha indagato specificamente la questione del tempo e della scomparsa del futuro nella contemporaneità in Id., *Retrotopia* (2017), tr. it. Laterza, Roma-Bari 2017.

<sup>6</sup> R. Koselleck, *Quanto è moderna l’età moderna?* (1990), in E. Cicchini, G. Gisondi (a cura di), *La modernità in questione. Studi e testi su* La legittimità dell’età moderna *di Hans Blumenberg*, IISF Press, Napoli 2022, pp. 315-336, qui p. 324.

storia che va sotto il nome di Modernità<sup>7</sup>: la sua espressione fondamentale si è avuta nel XIX secolo, ma nonostante le varie crisi vissute da questo paradigma nel corso della storia del '900, e nonostante l'impatto degli studi postcoloniali, nel senso comune e nella pratica politica sembra comunque ancora connotare il nostro tempo. La categoria di "contemporaneità del non-contemporaneo" o di "non-contemporaneità del contemporaneo"<sup>8</sup> non sembra aprire alla pensabilità di temporalità multiple<sup>9</sup>, nel senso che non sembra essere in grado di costituire un nuovo "spazio d'esperienza" e nuovi "orizzonti di aspettativa"<sup>10</sup>, a partire dai quali pensare la prassi etica e politica. L'accumulazione illimitata di capitale necessita di una Storia universale, di un'idea di progresso uni-direzionato, e di un'accelerazione costante come esperienza fondante la possibilità stessa dell'esperienza: la globalizzazione, in questo senso, sembra rappresentare una validazione storico-empirica di questo percorso ma anche il suo limite determinante, nel momento in cui non c'è più Esterno da globalizzare e da "espropriare/valorizzare", o in cui trasferire esternalità negative<sup>11</sup>, e la "crisi

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. R. Koselleck, *Storia. La formazione del concetto moderno* (1975), Clueb, Bologna 2009, e Id., *Geschichte (storia), Geschichten (storie) e le strutture formali del tempo*, in Id., *Futuro passato* (1979), Marietti 1820, Genova 1996, pp. 110-122.

<sup>8</sup> Si tratta di un'idea sulla quale Reinhart Koselleck torna spesso, cfr. (oltre ai testi citati nella nota precedente) la discussione contenuta in R. Koselleck, C. Meier, *Progresso* (1975), Marsilio, Venezia 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Qualsiasi cosa si voglia intendere per "temporalità multiple", a partire dalla constatazione antropologica di diversi ritmi storico-sociali, l'ipotesi di Koselleck sembra essere chiara: una molteplicità di temporalità e di ritmi può essere concepita e concepibile soltanto a partire da un'unità di misura - *unità*, dunque *unica* - che permette di misurare le differenze e le non-contemporaneità. La domanda di fondo sarebbe, allora: a partire da "cosa" si è contemporanei o non-contemporanei? Si tratta di un problema con il quale si è confrontato anche lo strutturalismo lévi-straussiano, rischiando di inciampare, perché sottolineare la storicizzazione del tempo nella Modernità porta già-sempre con sé il pericolo di una lettura evoluzionista (o di un "progresso"): «Non si dovrebbero fare distinzioni fra società "senza storia" e società "con storia", perché tutte le società umane hanno una storia ugualmente lunga, che risale alle origini della specie. Ma, mentre le società cosiddette primitive sono immerse in un fluido storico al quale si sforzano di essere impermeabili, le nostre società interiorizzano, per così dire, la storia per farne il loro motore di sviluppo. Vi è una doppia differenziazione, di ordine di grandezza e di complessità di combinazione» (C. Lévi-Strauss, *Primitivi e civilizzati* (1961), Rusconi, Milano 1970, p. 28; cfr. anche Id., *Razza e storia; Razza e cultura* (1971), Einaudi, Torino 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Il riferimento è ovviamente a R. Koselleck, "*Spazio di esperienza*" e "*orizzonte di aspettativa*". *Due categorie storiche*, in Id., *Futuro passato*, cit., pp. 300-322. In riferimento alla relazione tra "accelerazione" e "futuro" torneremo più avanti su questa famosa distinzione koselleckiana.

<sup>11</sup> Sulla questione della "globalizzazione" - la trasformazione del Pianeta in Globo - come limite invalicabile oltre il quale la Modernità non può andare (nonostante la sua attitudine al superamento di ogni limite), soprattutto in relazione alla crisi ecologica dispiagata, cfr. K. Saitō, *Il Capitale nell'Antropocene* (2020), tr. it. Einaudi, Torino 2024.

ecologica” rappresenta il sintomo fondamentale di una crisi epocale eco-socio-riproduttiva<sup>12</sup>.

La prospettiva da cui muove questo studio è allo stesso tempo quella di definire le ragioni della nascita di questo modo di intendere il tempo e la storia – prospettiva (per certi versi) *genealogica* – nella sua connessione con la dimensione dell’accelerazione, dal punto di vista storico-concettuale e fenomenologico, ma anche quella di definire in che modo una trasformazione così radicale del tessuto temporale rappresenti la determinazione fondamentale della nostra esperienza e del modo di fare esperienza – e dunque dei processi di soggettivazione dell’umano della Modernità dispiegata – definendo le ragioni per cui *diveniamo ciò che siamo* o, per meglio dire, non *possiamo* smettere di divenire ciò che *dobbiamo* essere. Il nodo centrale di cui questo contributo rappresenta un seppur parziale tentativo di comprensione è rappresentato dalla sempre più accresciuta difficoltà nel pensare l’avvenire (questioni di etica e giustizia intergenerazionale), il fatto che sembra che il futuro non possa iniziare<sup>13</sup>: la tesi è che i processi di accelerazione sociale, tecnologica e dei ritmi di vita sono processi cumulativi che hanno permesso l’articolazione della “Storia” con la “fine delle storie”, mentre il compito dinanzi alla crisi epocale che stiamo vivendo dovrebbe essere quello della “fine della Storia” in vista di una liberazione delle potenzialità plurali delle “storie”<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Sull’intersezione tra le differenti forme che assume la crisi contemporanea della forma-di-vita capitalista cfr. N. Fraser, *Capitalismo cannibale. Come il sistema sta divorando la democrazia, il nostro senso di comunità e il pianeta* (2022), tr. it. Laterza, Roma-Bari 2023.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. N. Luhmann, *The Future Cannot Begin: Temporal Structures in Modern Society*, cit. Discuteremo in corso d’opera alcuni passaggi di questo saggio, soprattutto per quanto concerne la necessità, propria delle società complesse, di una de-futurizzazione del futuro.

<sup>14</sup> Può essere utile un rapido chiarimento terminologico sulle parole che utilizzeremo in questo studio. Per “Storia” intendiamo l’idea tutta moderna di una storia con la “s” maiuscola come processo universale che proietta le forme di sviluppo occidentale sul resto del mondo, *costringendolo* a seguire il medesimo corso; la “Storia”, in connessione con l’accumulazione illimitata di capitale, nella sua storia (con la “s” minuscola) ha prodotto una divisione del mondo tra paesi sviluppati (dunque, avanzati lungo l’*unica* linea del tempo e della storia) e paesi non sviluppati o in via di sviluppo (dunque, in stadi meno avanzati lungo l’*unica* linea del tempo e della storia), *nascondendo* di fatto il processo – dunque: la storia (con la “s” minuscola) – per cui i paesi sviluppati lungo la linea della “Storia” lo sono proprio a partire da un mantenimento in uno stadio arretrato dei paesi non sviluppati. Questo processo ha raggiunto il suo compimento, ma probabilmente anche la sua fine, con la globalizzazione avanzata e la crisi ecologica. Per “storie” al plurale e con la “s” minuscola intendiamo i differenti flussi storici ed evenemenziali che caratterizzano le differenti esperienze sociali nel mondo, che presentano ritmi diversificati e tendono a resistere alla *reductio ad unum* della “Storia”. Per “fine della Storia” si intenderà dunque il programma di superamento della rappresentazione moderna, propria della forma-di-vita capitalista, del flusso storico. Per “fine delle storie” si intenderà il processo che ha condotto la “Storia” a cannibalizzare le altre storie nel lungo percorso della Modernità e della forma-di-vita capitalista: si tratta comunque di una fine che non può raggiungere pienamente la sua fine, ma resta sotto forma di “missione” della Modernità.



## 2. ACCELERAZIONISMI VARI

La Modernità, che si produce a partire dall'esperienza dell'accelerazione declinata nei termini *etici* di “progresso” (o, nel suo rovescio, di “regresso”), rappresenta un'esperienza condivisa nel senso comune – chiunque esperisce, anche all'interno della propria esistenza, un'accelerazione costante nelle trasformazioni tecnologiche, sociali e dei ritmi di vita –, ma anche un quadro interpretativo che data la sua nascita in parallelo e in connessione con quello delle scienze umane e sociali alla fine del XIX secolo.

L'impatto della forma-di-vita capitalista, basata su processi di sfruttamento e di espropriazione<sup>15</sup>, è percepito immediatamente come un qualcosa che impone e determina un cambiamento dell'esperienza del tempo e della storia: questo è ravvisabile in Marx e Engels, che sottolineano la netta cesura tra le società precapitaliste e la società capitalista nella maniera mediante la quale quest'ultima impone una rivoluzione in cui tutto ciò che precede deve dissolversi (ciò che sarebbe stato definito poi come “distruzione creatrice”<sup>16</sup>, i cui effetti nelle condizioni di possibilità dell'esperienza temporale e storica delle popolazioni oggetto di queste “distruzioni” è facilmente intuibile), in Durkheim che cerca di definire la dimensione crescente dell'anomia nelle società contemporanee attraverso una sempre maggiore difficoltà da parte degli attori sociali nell'adattarsi ai cambiamenti sempre più accelerati dei ritmi della coesione sociale, in Simmel che analizza, nella sua sociologia urbana, l'intensificazione/accelerazione della vita nervosa e le sue conseguenze sociali, e in Weber che, nella sua analisi dell'etica protestante, si interroga sullo spirito del capitalismo nella sua connessione con una particolare disciplina temporale, a partire da una gestione efficace ed efficiente del tempo e dal posizionamento delle esperienze di vita all'interno di una particolare storia della salvezza individuale<sup>17</sup>. L'idea che la forma-di-vita capitalista e la Modernità implicino la costituzione di corpi docili ai ritmi temporali della produzione e del consumo è centrale nelle riflessioni foucaultiane sulle società disciplinari del capitalismo industriale (e non solo)<sup>18</sup>, così come risulta efficace dal punto di vista descrittivo il concetto bourdesiano di *habitus*, che si definisce nei

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. N. Fraser, *Capitalismo cannibale*, cit., e Id., *Capitalismo. Una conversazione con Rahel Jaeggi* (2018), tr. it. Meltemi, Milano 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Il riferimento è chiaramente J.A. Schumpeter, *Capitalismo, socialismo e democrazia* (1942), tr. it. Meltemi, Milano 2023. Il ritorno nelle librerie italiane di questo libro, proprio in questo periodo, è un segnale chiaro della percezione di un'intersezione tra le varie forme di crisi nella nostra contemporaneità, soprattutto – e ancora una volta – della relazione tra piano dell'economico e piano del politico.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. H. Rosa, *Accelerazione e alienazione*, cit., pp. 5-9.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. M. Foucault, *Sorvegliare e punire. Nascita della prigione* (1975), tr. it. Einaudi, Torino 2004, laddove parla, discutendo la produzione di “corpi docili” ai nuovi ritmi sociali della Modernità capitalista, di “tempo disciplinare” che coordina “l'impiego del tempo”, “l'elaborazione temporale dell'atto”, “l'articolazione corpo oggetto” e “l'utilizzazione esaustiva” (ivi, pp. 162-170).

termini di “storia incorporata” di disposizioni a partire dallo scarto fondamentale tra le strutture oggettive in trasformazione e le percezioni soggettive che ne hanno coloro che agiscono<sup>19</sup>. Insomma, si può affermare che con la Modernità dispiegata si assiste, nel senso comune e negli studi filosofici, storici, antropologici e sociologici, a una crescita dell'importanza di ciò che possiamo definire il tessuto temporale dell'esperienza, così come all'idea che la temporalità propria della Modernità sia una temporalità in accelerazione.

Questa rappresentazione sembra essere del tutto evidente. Ma cosa evidenzia davvero questa evidenza? E, in secondo luogo, la crescita di interesse negli ultimi anni di una riflessione sull'accelerazione rappresenta semplicemente un ritorno alle origini della Modernità – un discorso sui fondamenti – oppure segnala che *qualcosa sta cambiando*, il fatto che *oggi* viviamo una fase particolare di questo processo, un momento in cui *l'accelerazione diviene problema*, nel senso foucaultiano della *problematizzazione*, come qualcosa che racconta la soglia di una crisi allo stesso tempo dei dispositivi di sapere-potere e della sostanza etica dell'umano contemporaneo<sup>20</sup>? La nostra tesi è che *l'accelerazione diviene problema* nel momento in cui la forma-di-vita capitalista che non può che fondarsi, temporalmente e storicamente, sull'accelerazione (forma di manifestazione del progresso, ma meno connotata semanticamente ed eticamente in termini di “emancipazione”) entra in contraddizione con sé stessa rischiando di minare dalle fondamenta le possibilità della sua stessa riproduzione.

Qualche segnale che, nel nostro tempo di crisi globale (ecologica, politica, economica, sociale e socio-riproduttiva), si senta la necessità di ri-comprendere nuovamente il significato dell'accelerazione, sintomo dunque di una *problematizzazione* crescente, lo troviamo nel senso comune, a partire dalla crescita del disagio psicologico soprattutto nelle generazioni più giovani, disagio che affonda le sue radici nell'esperienza temporale della forma-di-vita tardo-capitalistica fondata sulla prestazione<sup>21</sup> – il marketing del Sé e l'accrescimento del proprio “valore di portafoglio”<sup>22</sup> – e sul fatto che non sembra più possibile leggere

<sup>19</sup> Si potrebbero citare molti testi del sociologo francese, ma dove la questione della “temporalizzazione” viene posta in maniera più articolata è in P. Bourdieu, *Meditazioni pascaliane* (1997), tr. it. Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2024.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. M. Foucault, *Discorso e verità nella Grecia antica* (1983), tr. it. Donzelli, Roma 2005, e Id., *L'uso dei piaceri. Storia della sessualità 2* (1984), tr. it. Feltrinelli, Milano 2004.

<sup>21</sup> La connotazione della forma-di-vita del capitalismo neoliberista come “società della prestazione” soprattutto nella sua connessione con il disagio psicologico sempre più diffuso si trova tematizzata nei libri di Byung-Chul Han (cfr. almeno B.-C. Han, *Topologia della violenza* (2011), tr. it. nottetempo, Milano 2020, dove si parla di “società della depressione”, e Id., *Società della stanchezza* (2016), tr. it. nottetempo, Milano 2020) e in M. Fisher, *Realismo capitalista* (2009), tr. it. Nero, Roma 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Su questi passaggi è molto puntuale l'analisi contenuta in W. Brown, *Il disfaccimento del demos. La rivoluzione silenziosa del neoliberismo* (2015), tr. it. LUISS University Press, Roma 2023.

l'accelerazione dei ritmi di vita nei termini connotati eticamente di "emancipazione" e "progresso" umano verso la felicità e il benessere<sup>23</sup>; ma lo troviamo anche negli studi specialistici, almeno all'interno di due importanti movimenti di pensiero, oggi particolarmente attivi e che, proprio per questo, sembrano rispondere a un'esigenza epocale. Dal punto di vista della percezione, l'eziologia fondamentale di questa sintomatologia è da ritrovarsi in quelli che possiamo definire i due eventi-processi che maggiormente preoccupano l'umano contemporaneo, sullo sfondo di una crisi generalizzata della forma-di-vita capitalista: l'intelligenza artificiale - l'ultima manifestazione del potere tecnologico in relazione all'umano - e la crisi ecologica - l'ultima manifestazione del potere della natura in relazione all'umano.

Semplificando al massimo, come riflessione tutta interna alle società "avanzate", abbiamo da un lato - a partire dagli anni '90 - la fortuna del cosiddetto *accelerazionismo*, filosofia nata in Inghilterra nel momento in cui (e come reazione al fatto che) si è potuto ritenere che la storia fosse finita grazie al trionfo definitivo della Storia, e dall'altro il rinnovato interesse per il tema dell'accelerazione - in connessione con un altro tema, non più particolarmente alla moda, l'alienazione - nella filosofia sociale di uno degli ultimi rappresentanti della Scuola di Francoforte, Hartmut Rosa.

Il sintomo epocale sembra essere il crescente impatto della tecnologia - come potenza accelerante - nella sua connessione con i processi produttivi e riproduttivi. Nell'accelerazionismo<sup>24</sup> - costellazione articolata, ma per certi versi speculare alla Modernità - c'è l'idea che la tecnologia acquisisca sempre maggiore centralità, nella vita quotidiana e nell'universo simbolico tardo-moderno, a partire dal momento in cui tutte le grandi utopie novecentesche (o "grandi narrazioni", come direbbe Lyotard<sup>25</sup>) sono crollate, lasciando macerie e rovine difficilmente

<sup>23</sup> Riteniamo che "progresso" e "emancipazione", nell'epoca del neoliberismo e della società della prestazione, non solo sul piano comunitario o delle relazioni internazionali, non rappresentino più le "risposte" a determinate domande sociali su "felicità" e "benessere", ma che esse siano diventate parole vuote anche dal punto di vista dello sviluppo "individuale". Su quest'ultimo passaggio cfr. H. Rosa, *Accelerazione e alienazione*, cit., pp. 89-96.

<sup>24</sup> Il modo migliore per approcciare questa wave filosofica è confrontarsi con l'ottima antologia di R. Mackay, A. Avanessian (eds.), *Accelerate. The Accelerationist Reader*, Urbanomic 2014, dove si effettua una genealogia di lungo periodo (a partire da Karl Marx e Samuel Butler) e si arriva fino agli ultimi sviluppi connessi al "manifesto per una politica accelerazionista" di Williams e Srnicek. In lingua italiana troviamo M. Pasquinelli (a cura di), *Gli algoritmi del capitale. Accelerazionismo, macchine della conoscenza e autonomia del comune*, Ombre corte, Verona 2014. Per una critica articolata dell'accelerazionismo cfr. B. Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism*, Zero Books, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Senza citare nuovamente il saggio forse più noto del filosofo francese, può essere utile sottolineare come Lyotard rappresenti una delle fonti riconosciute dell'accelerazionismo, non tanto sulla questione della *condizione postmoderna*, ma su quella della *jouissance* (cfr. J.F. Lyotard, *Economia libidinale* (1974), tr. it. Pgreco, Milano 2012). L'idea è la seguente: la categoria marxiana dell'alienazione non ha alcuna realtà perché non esiste alcuna natura umana originaria; l'unica

identificabili. La nostra tesi è che l'accelerazionismo non rappresenti davvero una risposta possibile alla fine delle "grandi narrazioni", ma piuttosto segni il prevalere di una specifica "grande narrazione", risultata vincente alla fine del XX secolo, quella della Storia, e che ha avuto la capacità di mostrarsi non più come una "narrazione" della realtà ma come la realtà stessa: se dal punto di vista storico-politico, nella specifica temporalità moderna, una "narrazione" nel senso di Lyotard (possibile, tecnicamente, soltanto a partire da una Storia al singolare e con la "s" maiuscola) ha avuto sempre a che vedere con la dimensione del "dover-essere", nella condizione attuale tardo-moderna essa si mostra come l'unica realtà possibile, l'unico "essere" possibile, a cui ogni dover-essere deve deterministicamente conformarsi *per esistere*. Nell'epoca delle grandi narrazioni, quale fosse la sostanza della Storia – e quale il ruolo eventualmente trasformativo delle "storie" – era ancora in discussione, nell'epoca dell'accelerazione come problema il determinismo storico assume una tonalità inconfutabile: la tecnologia – intesa anch'essa in termini di determinismo tecnologico – ne è la dimostrazione.

L'accelerazionismo, in questo senso, riesce a riflettere perfettamente una particolare fase di autocomprensione tardo-moderna della dimensione temporale, nella misura in cui – questo il corollario alla nostra tesi – la fine delle "grandi narrazioni" non si è mai fino in fondo determinata, ma è stata soltanto declinata in termini differenti, attraverso processi di naturalizzazione che hanno "nascosto" la dimensione prettamente storico-politica delle trasformazioni. La fase neoliberista della forma-di-vita capitalista è una "grande narrazione" che, imponendosi come l'unica realtà possibile, intende portare a compimento il processo (coloniale e neocoloniale) di "fine delle storie"<sup>26</sup>. La "grande narrazione" della fase neoliberista della forma-di-vita capitalista, fondata sull'accelerazione dei processi produttivi, tecnologici, culturali e dei ritmi di vita, accelerazione che – in quanto accelerazione – procede a una velocità sempre maggiore, sembra non permettere la possibilità di elaborazione (o addirittura di sopravvivenza) di "altre storie" possibili.

La relazione tra "accelerazione" e "utopia" – due dei più importanti concetti che determinano l'esperienza temporale e storica della Modernità – rappresenta

"economia" di cui è possibile parlare è quella "libidinale", dove esistono soltanto corpi desideranti e nessuna purezza perduta da riacquisire; nello sfruttamento si prova *jouissance*, si gode segretamente dello sfruttamento capitalistico perché il capitalismo è comunque liberazione del desiderio; il capitalismo, come hanno spiegato Deleuze e Guattari, è una forza allo stesso tempo di deterritorializzazione e riterritorializzazione – accelera i processi di liberazione dei flussi desideranti – anche se occorrerebbe mantenere nell'accelerazione soltanto il primo dei due processi. L'accelerazione – anche quando esaspera le condizioni di sfruttamento capitalistico – è da considerarsi comunque positiva.

<sup>26</sup> È ritornato di moda, in tempi di crisi ecologica e crisi globale della forma-di-vita capitalista, il motto "è più facile pensare la fine del mondo che la fine del capitalismo": questa maggiore facilità è dettata dal fatto che *oggi* – al di là del grado di consapevolezza sociale – *pensiamo* e *viviamo* sempre più alla fine della storia.

così un nodo decisivo, nell'accelerazionismo e in generale nell'autorappresentazione dell'Umano occidentale e moderno. Secondo Koselleck, la temporalizzazione dell'utopia (e della distopia come sua reazione complementare) acquisisce senso – storicamente e concettualmente – soltanto in connessione con un processo di temporalizzazione della Storia universale e del suo percorso autonomizzato e automatizzato<sup>27</sup>, in cui l'Esterno e l'Altro non solo sono ricondotti all'Interno e al Medesimo ma di fatto non possono esistere più. Nonostante l'accelerazionismo nasca dalla fine delle utopie novecentesche, esso si nutre comunque della dimensione utopica/distopica, così come del tessuto temporale e storico tipico della Modernità, a tal punto che sembra che l'accelerazionismo condivida con esso la medesima impostazione, non essendone né una deviazione né un superamento ma un portare alle più estreme conseguenze il discorso stesso della Modernità. Secondo Koselleck, l'utopia in senso moderno (temporalizzata) può esistere soltanto in connessione con la costituzione della “Storia”, e dunque sarebbe incapace di narrare il radicalmente Altro, in quanto già sempre pensata all'interno del percorso del Medesimo. Preliminarmente possiamo affermare che l'utopia, come portata della Modernità, può acquisire la sua potenzialità, soltanto nel momento in cui riattiva i processi immaginativi di elaborazione di “altre storie” possibili<sup>28</sup>.

L'accelerazionismo si presenta dunque come una sorta di prodotto del post-modernismo, nel momento in cui il mondo e i flussi sempre più globalizzati del capitale sembrano raccontare la fine delle storie: nell'analisi del contemporaneo non sarebbe più possibile disgiungere la riflessione sulla tecnologia e la riflessione sulla forma-di-vita capitalista, e l'orizzonte che li comprende non può che essere quello dell'accelerazione. Ciò che è stato definito “realismo capitalista” può ricoprire tutto l'orizzonte del pensabile grazie ai processi sempre più accelerati delle tecnologie produttive e riproduttive, dei sistemi culturali e dei ritmi di vita<sup>29</sup>. La relazione tra “accelerazione” e “fine delle storie” è uno dei motivi del fallimento dell'accelerazionismo nel suo tentativo di pensare il futuro. Se è

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. R. Koselleck, *L'utopia del tempo*, in Id., *Il vocabolario della modernità*, tr. it. il Mulino, Bologna 2009, pp. 133-154. Sulla possibilità di ripensare l'utopia come potenza divergente in grado di permettere un riesame di alcune categorie della Modernità (“progresso” e “rivoluzione”), ci permettiamo di rinviare a D. Salottolo, *L'Antropocene, la crisi ecologica e l'(im)possibile utopia: per un'analisi concettuale dei limiti dell'esperienza temporale della Modernità*, in V. Cavazzino, F. Morleo (a cura di), *Oltre le parole. Informazione e disinformazione nelle pratiche discorsive della contemporaneità*, Meltemi, Milano 2024, pp. 25-43.

<sup>28</sup> Potrebbe sembrare superfluo – ma per noi comunque utile – sottolineare il fatto che, all'interno di questo studio, intendiamo discutere dei problemi connessi al tessuto temporale e storico della Modernità non con l'attitudine arcaizzante del “paradiso perduto” (in quanto appartenente anch'esso al movimento uni-direzionale della temporalità propria di noi moderni) ma con l'idea che occorra comunque lavorare all'interno delle categorie moderne, cercando modalità che permettano una “rioccupazione di senso” di problemi – enormi, giganteschi, fino alla catastrofe possibile – aperti dalla Modernità.

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. M. Fisher, *Realismo capitalista*, cit.

possibile dire che, nella sua elaborazione, la tecnologia acquisisce un posto centrale, rappresenta il vero motore dell'accelerazione, è almeno altrettanto vero che l'accelerazionismo è una filosofia della tecnica che, lungi dal raccontare l'origine genealogica del fatto tecnico nei processi di ominazione e nei suoi riposizionamenti storici e temporali<sup>30</sup> o nei suoi modi di esistenza<sup>31</sup>, si accontenta di mostrarne la sua centralità oggi, cercando semplicemente di definire gli orizzonti che si dischiudono a partire da un processo tecnologico autonomizzato e automatizzato, *vissuto* e *pensato* come deterministico. Le ragioni di questa autonomizzazione e automatizzazione non vengono quasi mai toccate, i risvolti etici neppure, e sia che venga letto nei termini di una forza caotica (in alcuni autori addirittura qualcosa che denota un'estraneità e un'alterità assolute, una forza impersonale e "cosmica"<sup>32</sup>), sia che lo si legga come estrema manifestazione del potere prometeico dell'umano, in chiave tecno-entusiasta<sup>33</sup>, senza più alcuna forma di "vergogna prometeica" o di inquietudine per il "dislivello"<sup>34</sup>, il processo tecnologico è visto in un modo o nell'altro come qualcosa di per-sé rivoluzionario: la tecnologia, l'accelerazione dei suoi processi, sarebbe l'unica forza in grado allo stesso tempo di permettere (o superare) l'accumulazione (che tende all'infinito) di capitale e di portare l'umano in una nuova condizione (post- o trans-umana), all'interno di una società alla fine libera di dispiegare pienamente il suo potenziale<sup>35</sup>. Il cosiddetto accelerazionismo di sinistra, cercando un dialogo con l'approccio marxista, punta sul fatto che le vere potenzialità dell'accelerazione non

<sup>30</sup> Cfr. almeno B. Stiegler, *La colpa di Epimeteo. La tecnica e il tempo vol. I* (1994), tr. it. Luiss University Press, Roma 2023.

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. G. Simondon, *Del modo di esistenza degli oggetti tecnici* (1958), tr. it. Orthotes, Napoli-Salerno 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Si tratta della terza forma riconosciuta di accelerazionismo (al di là di "destra" e "sinistra"), il cosiddetto *Unconditional Accelerationism*, una mescolanza di filosofia anti-umanistica, di *amor fati* nietzschiano (l'accelerazione è un destino e bisogna amarla), un atteggiamento di "non intervento" nella realtà da intendersi allo stesso tempo come un richiamo al "fai ciò che vuoi" e al "lascia andare". L'elaborazione teorica di questa "tendenza" dell'accelerazionismo è ancora embrionale (cfr. Xenogothic, *Fragment on the event of "unconditional acceleration"*, xenogothic.com, 22 aprile 2018; E. Berger, *Unconditional Acceleration and the Question of Praxis: Some Preliminary Thoughts*, deterritorialinvestigations.wordpress.com, 29 marzo 2017; V. Garton, *Unconditional accelerationism as antipraxis*, cyclonotrope.wordpress.com, 12 giugno 2017).

<sup>33</sup> Cfr. A. Williams, N. Srnicek, *Manifesto per una politica accelerazionista* (2013), tr. it. in M. Pasquinelli (a cura di), *Gli algoritmi del capitale*, cit., pp. 17-28.

<sup>34</sup> Il riferimento è ovviamente a G. Anders, *L'uomo è antiquato I. Considerazioni sull'anima nell'epoca della seconda rivoluzione industriale* (1956), tr. it. Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Il "potenziale" è già sempre inserito nella dinamica autonomizzata e automatizzata della Storia e della tecnologia - e l'unico potenziale da attuare è già prescritto e pre-iscritto nei processi della Storia e della tecnologia. Sembra essere finita, oggi, l'epoca in cui si poteva ancora dire, con lo scrivano Bartleby, *I would prefer not to*, come vera e propria espressione della potenza-di-non (cfr. G. Agamben, *Bartleby o della contingenza*, in G. Agamben, G. Deleuze, *Bartleby. La formula della creazione*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2012; Id., *La potenza del pensiero* (1987), in Id., *La potenza del pensiero. Saggi e conferenze*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2005).

sono ancora pienamente dispiegate perché frenate dal sistema capitalistico – quest’ultimo sarebbe una sorta di organismo parassitario che, per riprodursi e mantenersi in vita, non può che sfruttare quelle stesse potenzialità, ma come una forza catecontica che frena il vero ed *emancipatore* dispiegamento della Modernità; il cosiddetto accelerazionismo di destra, invece, ritiene che il sistema capitalistico non sia il problema ma la soluzione, in quanto è l’unico sistema che può costantemente garantire il processo di accelerazione – anche in questo caso ci sono forze catecontiche che frenano il pieno dispiegamento delle potenzialità della Modernità, si tratta delle forze democratiche e dei saperi indigeni e “selvaggi”. Dovrebbe essere evidente dalla nostra analisi che le due visioni si oppongono soltanto sulla superficie, condividendo la medesima base strutturale.

Se dunque nell’accelerazionismo si mostrano secolarizzazioni tardo-moderne di alcune matrici temporali moderne di origine teologica – il millenarismo (come relazione tra *katechon* e *eschaton*) e la specifica escatologia gnostica –, nella riflessione di Hartmut Rosa, il problema dell’accelerazione è in stretta connessione con il problema dell’alienazione, ed è nella tensione tra questi due concetti che si gioca la partita della tarda Modernità. L’attitudine della riflessione rosiana può essere sintetizzata con questa citazione: «Il soggetto moderno può (...) essere descritto come condizionato in maniera minima da regole e sanzioni etiche, e quindi essere considerato “libero”, sebbene sia strettamente regolato, dominato e oppresso da un regime temporale per lo più invisibile, depoliticizzato, indiscusso, sottoteorizzato e inarticolato (...) la logica dell’accelerazione sociale»<sup>36</sup>. Il problema in questo senso è immediatamente morale e riguarda la sostanza etica dell’umano contemporaneo: il “totalitarismo” dell’accelerazione sociale è il fatto fondamentale delle più gravi forme di alienazione sociale, e queste ultime rappresentano il freno principale alla possibilità di realizzare il principio etico di una “vita buona” nelle società tardo-moderne.

La domanda di Rosa ricalca per certi versi quella di Koselleck: se quest’ultimo si chiedeva se ci fosse accelerazione *della* storia o *nella* storia<sup>37</sup>, il primo si chiede se ci sia accelerazione *della* società o *nella* società. L’accelerazione è forse un processo unificante (che produce, dunque, un *concetto* unificante) che definisce il tessuto storico (Koselleck) e sociale (Rosa) del nostro tempo, oppure denota soltanto processi di alcuni fenomeni interni a un tessuto storico e sociale più o meno stabile? Differentemente dall’accelerazionismo, Hartmut Rosa distingue – almeno dal punto di vista analitico – tre forme di accelerazione che caratterizzano l’epoca tardo-moderna: quella tecnologica, quella dei mutamenti sociali e quella

<sup>36</sup> H. Rosa, *Accelerazione e alienazione*, cit., p. VIII.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. R. Koselleck, *Is there an acceleration of history?* (1976), in H. Rosa, W.E. Scheuerman (eds.), *High-speed society: social acceleration, power, and modernity*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009, pp. 113-134; Id., *Raccourcissement du temps et acceleration. Contribution à l’étude de la sécularisation* (conferenza pronunciata nel 1985 – prima pubblicazione 2000), in “Écrire l’histoire”, 16, 2016, pp. 27-48.

dei ritmi di vita. Queste tre forme hanno velocità di accelerazione differenti, ed in questo consiste la problematizzazione della “condizione umana” tardo-moderna. In linea con le interpretazioni della Modernità come contrazione del presente<sup>38</sup> e compressione spazio-temporale<sup>39</sup>, e riprendendo alcuni elementi della dromologia viriliana<sup>40</sup>, secondo Rosa l’impatto dell’accelerazione tecnologica lo si ha a partire da un cambiamento nelle forme di orientamento nel mondo, che non sarebbero più guidate dalla dimensione spaziale ma da quella temporale. Si tratta dunque di una accelerazione *nella* società, che produce contemporaneamente un’accelerazione *della* società, vale a dire il «tasso crescente di trasformazione dei modelli di rapporto sociale, delle forme della prassi e della sostanza della conoscenza (rilevante per la prassi)»<sup>41</sup>. L’accelerazione non riguarderebbe semplicemente il cambiamento dei modelli e degli stili, ma *il fatto che il cambiamento debba cambiare in modo sempre più accelerato*. C’è accelerazione della società nella misura in cui «*l’accelerazione sociale è definita da una crescita nei ritmi di decadenza dell’affidabilità di esperienze e aspettative e dalla contrazione degli archi temporali definibili come “presente”*»<sup>42</sup>, empiricamente tutto questo è riscontrabile nelle strutture di base delle società moderne, gli ambiti della “famiglia” e del “lavoro”: le esperienze di cambiamento in questi ambiti sono rapidamente passate dall’essere intergenerazionali al divenire prima generazionali e oggi intragenerazionali.

La “contrazione del presente” presenta il proprio conto anche per quanto riguarda l’accelerazione dei ritmi di vita, caratterizzata dalla percezione diffusa di una “scarsità di tempo”, come condizione umana determinante. Il primo ad accorgersi di questa caratterizzazione (l’«*aumento del numero di singole azioni o esperienze in un’unità di tempo*»<sup>43</sup>) e il suo impatto sulla costituzione “nervosa” della psiche individuale dell’umano della Modernità, come abbiamo già visto, è stato il sociologo tedesco Georg Simmel. Eppure, si potrebbe ritenere, in maniera un po’ semplicistica, che grazie all’accelerazione tecnologica – il fatto che tutta una serie di processi centrali nella vita moderna possano essere compiuti più rapidamente – si produca abbondanza di tempo e non scarsità. In modo ancora più netto di quanto faccia Rosa, occorre sottolineare come questo presunto paradosso sia facilmente spiegabile mostrando l’intima connessione tra la logica dell’accumulazione illimitata di capitale (economico, innanzitutto, ma anche culturale, sociale, politico) e la logica dell’accelerazione sociale: accrescere i profitti – crescita che tende all’infinito – non può che realizzarsi tramite

<sup>38</sup>Cfr. H. Lübbe, *The contraction of the present* (1992), in H. Rosa, W.E. Scheuerman (eds.), *High-speed society: social acceleration, power, and modernity*, cit., pp. 159-178.

<sup>39</sup>Cfr. D. Harvey, *La crisi della modernità* (1990), tr. it. il Saggiatore, Milano 2015.

<sup>40</sup>Cfr. ad esempio P. Virilio, *Vitesse et politique: essai de dromologie*, Galilée, Paris 1977.

<sup>41</sup>H. Rosa, *Accelerazione e alienazione*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>42</sup>Ivi, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup>Ivi, pp. 15-16.



un'accelerazione dei processi produttivi (e, sempre di più, anche di consumo) per unità di tempo. Nella fase neoliberista della forma-di-vita capitalista, questo risulta essere particolarmente evidente: produttività e crescita non solo devono accelerare costantemente per mantenere alti (e accelerare la crescita de) i saggi di profitto, ma questi principi di azione devono diffondersi sempre di più in tutte le pratiche di vita, anche quelle extra-economiche, divenendo una vera e propria razionalità complessiva, anche laddove implicano/impongono dal punto di vista etico azioni non immediatamente monetizzabili<sup>44</sup>. La “mobilitazione totale” trova il suo punto d'appoggio proprio su questo.

Se dunque la Modernità è caratterizzata da una sorta di “necessità” della crescita economica che *produce, si riflette nella* ed è contemporaneamente *prodotta dalla* accelerazione, la teoria critica di Hartmut Rosa è utile nel mostrare come la tecnologia non sia in sé la causa dell'accelerazione sociale (come invece sembra ritenere l'accelerazionismo): come aveva già notato Koselleck, agli albori dell'età moderna, prima dell'invenzione della macchina a vapore o del telegrafo – prime fondamentali accelerazioni tecnologiche nella produzione, nei trasporti e nella comunicazione –, era già fortemente sentita l'esigenza di velocizzare tutti i processi dello scambio sociale, in una fase però in cui non si era realizzata ancora una totale de-naturalizzazione del tempo, in cui non si era ancora creata una temporalità sociale come dimensione separata dalla temporalità naturale. Se è vero che è soltanto con la Rivoluzione Industriale che un'accelerazione del tutto de-naturalizzata è potuta divenire “un principio esperenziale generale”, l'origine storico-concettuale del concetto esperenziale e d'aspettativa di accelerazione è da trovarsi precedentemente e altrove<sup>45</sup>.

Secondo Hartmut Rosa, l'accelerazione sociale e l'accelerazione tecnologica sono la conseguenza, innanzitutto, del principio della competitività, in un primo momento interno al mercato capitalistico e poi esondato in tutti gli ambiti della vita sociale: la società moderna e la forma-di-vita capitalistica sono guidate da una competizione che si realizza nella forma della “prestazione”, da definirsi come «*lavoro compiuto nell'unità di tempo*»<sup>46</sup> e, anche se la dimensione della prestazione è spesso definita come determinante soltanto nelle società tardo-moderne o neoliberiste<sup>47</sup>, essa rappresenta una delle ragioni strutturali della logica

<sup>44</sup>Sulla forma-di-vita del capitalismo neoliberista come razionalità complessiva, cfr. lo studio fondamentale di M. Foucault, *Nascita della biopolitica. Corso al Collège de France 1978-1979*, tr. it. Feltrinelli, Milano 2005, e per una versione più “aggiornata” P. Dardot, C. Laval, *La nuova ragione del mondo. Critica della razionalità neoliberista* (2013), tr. it. DeriveApprodi, Roma 2019, e W. Brown, *Il disfaccimento del demos*, cit.

<sup>45</sup>Cfr. R. Koselleck, *Is there an acceleration of history?*, cit., p. 121.

<sup>46</sup>H. Rosa, *Accelerazione e alienazione*, cit., p. 25.

<sup>47</sup>Cfr. M. Foucault, *Nascita della biopolitica. Corso al Collège de France (1978-1979)*, cit., e il commento a queste lezioni in W. Brown, *Il disfaccimento del demos*, cit., soprattutto pp. 45-99, ma anche l'intera opera del filosofo di origine coreane Byung-Chul Han, ad esempio B.-C. Han, *Psicopolitica* (2014), tr. it. Nottetempo, Milano 2016 (oltre ai testi già citati nella nota n. 22).

dello sfruttamento e dell'espropriazione e della dimensione dell'accelerazione sociale. In un certo senso, si tratta di un *circolo*: 1) la necessità della prestazione spinge a un più di velocità, dunque all'accelerazione, 2) l'accelerazione porta all'accrescimento delle potenzialità (vissute come necessità) della prestazione, 3) prestazioni sempre più numerose ed efficienti portano all'accumulazione di capitale che spinge a nuove accelerazioni - *e così via*. Nella forma-di-vita capitalista la "scarsità di tempo", sulla base di accelerazione e "fine delle storie", è strutturale (pur definendosi storicamente in forme differenti). Figura per certi versi catecontica nei confronti del circolo prestazione-accelerazione-accumulazione è stato il *welfare state*: come nota Rosa, appoggiandosi a studi quantitativi, la percezione individuale di un'accelerazione sociale cresce in misura direttamente proporzionale ai tagli allo stato sociale e all'ingresso in contesti lavorativi e di vita in cui a prevalere sono gli elementi più competitivi e precarizzanti. L'eliminazione progressiva del *welfare state* - di questo *potere che frena* - proprio della fase neoliberista attuale serve a "realizzare" la Storia, riattivando a pieno regime il ciclo di prestazione-accelerazione-accumulazione.

Un'ulteriore funzione dell'accelerazione sociale è data dal fatto che «nella società moderna e secolarizzata (...) funge da equivalente funzionale della promessa (religiosa) della *vita eterna*»<sup>48</sup>: la ricerca della realizzazione in *questa* vita e contemporaneamente la discrepanza sempre maggiore tra le esperienze possibili nel tempo percepito del mondo e quelle effettivamente realizzabili nel tempo della vita individuale, come caratteristica del tessuto temporale della Modernità<sup>49</sup>, avrebbero prodotto una richiesta sempre maggiore di "accelerazione del ritmo della vita". L'efficacia della vita moderna si misurerebbe nei termini di una sempre maggiore realizzazione di possibili esistenziali. L'accelerazione dei ritmi di vita sarebbe una sorta di *tanato-tecnica*, un modo per allontanare - *banalizzandola* - la morte<sup>50</sup>: i "possibili esistenziali" della tarda Modernità si misurano con la capacità di *consumare*, ma il consumo, slegato da ogni dinamica di crescita del Sé nei termini di "emancipazione" e "progresso" verso la felicità e il benessere, non conduce a una soddisfazione esistenziale. È un dato di fatto empirico che oggi, nonostante la crescita dei consumi anche negli strati sociali meno abbienti, la depressione e il *burn-out* rappresentino, meglio di ogni altra cosa, il *mood* epocale: la sostanza etica della tarda Modernità si definisce nei termini di una rincorsa al consumo, caotica e frammentaria, e contemporaneamente nella definizione di un marketing del Sé in vista dell'accrescimento del proprio "valore di portafoglio", dinamiche che non permettono la costruzione di un Sé solido e permanente. Secondo Rosa, si tratterebbe di una risposta - la risposta moderna -

<sup>48</sup> H. Rosa, *Accelerazione e alienazione*, cit., p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> Cfr. H. Blumenberg, *Tempo della vita e tempo del mondo* (1986), tr. it. il Mulino, Bologna 1997.

<sup>50</sup> Cfr. su questo punto Z. Bauman, *Paura liquida* (2006), tr. it. Laterza, Roma-Bari 2009.

al problema della finitudine umana e della morte. E anche in questo caso si attiverebbe un *circolo*: tutto ciò che permette di “guadagnare tempo” e dunque di accrescere la realizzazione di possibili, dunque di accelerare dal punto di vista esistenziale, porta a un’accelerazione nella crescita quantitativa di opzioni possibili nel mondo. Quanto più si accelera nei ritmi della vita quotidiana e si cerca di realizzare esperienze e possibili, tanto più le opzioni crescono: questa è la tragedia etica dell’umano nell’epoca dell’accelerazione sociale dispiegata. Quella che Hartmut Rosa definisce “tragedia” non sta soltanto nel moltiplicarsi delle opzioni, ma nel fatto che, per quanti possibili si possano realizzare nella vita, la percezione della propria esistenza non è vissuta e pensata in movimento e in crescita.

Dunque, prim’ancora della definizione neoliberista delle persone come “capitale umano”, l’accelerazione del ritmo di vita mostra le stesse dinamiche dell’esigenza produttiva di un’impresa capitalista: al capitalista non è concesso di fermarsi, *deve* accelerare, perché la “stasi” in un sistema di accumulazione infinita, equivale a una “perdita”; inoltre, a causa delle accelerazioni degli ultimi decenni, come nessuna azienda può scegliere davvero liberamente il proprio percorso di sviluppo perché deve tenere presenti i ritmi di innovazione dei concorrenti e i parametri di successo, così le persone non sembrano più essere enti dotati di autonomia morale, non scelgono più i fini della propria esistenza e i mezzi per raggiungerli, ma tendono esclusivamente a rafforzare la propria posizione all’interno di un meccanismo di competizione. Il disagio psicologico sempre più diffuso soprattutto tra le generazioni più giovani non è connesso soltanto all’accelerazione dei ritmi di vita, ma al fatto che questa “accelerazione” non può essere letta più nei termini di un “progresso” esistenziale, di un’“emancipazione”, ma come un cambiamento che non ha una direzione definita e si mostra come frenetico e insensato. È in questo senso che l’accelerazione sociale risulta essere una forma attiva della “fine delle storie” anche nelle vite individuali – in termini viriliani, l’accelerazione nasconde in realtà un’inerzia polare<sup>51</sup> – perché il cambiamento accelerato avviene in superficie, in maniera frenetica e caotica, e la sua stessa velocità crescente rende sempre più invisibili le strutture di fondo, che invece restano immutate, così come frenesia e caos in superficie e stasi in profondità non permettono lo sviluppo esistenziale della vita dei singoli. Del resto, come nota Koselleck dal punto di vista storico e storiografico, gli eventi, *le cose che accadono*, perdono sempre più la loro consistenza, quando non possono essere integrati all’interno di una Storia con la “s” maiuscola<sup>52</sup>: come abbiamo visto, viviamo nell’epoca in cui sembra essere possibile soltanto *una* “grande narrazione”, divenuta realtà, che è poi la storia

<sup>51</sup> Cfr. P. Virilio, *L’Inertie polaire*, in Reinhard Mucha: *Glabeck: Musée national d’art moderne*, Éditions du Centre Pompidou, Paris 1986.

<sup>52</sup> Cfr. R. Koselleck, *Il caso come residuo motivazionale nella storiografia*, e Id., «*Età moderna*» (Neuzeit). *Sulla semantica dei moderni concetti di movimento*, in Id., *Futuro passato*, cit., rispettivamente pp. 135-150 e pp. 258-299.

dell'accumulazione illimitata e accelerata del capitale, a tal punto che anche l'interpretazione degli eventi di ciò che chiamiamo attualità diviene sempre più difficile, quanto più essi divergono dai binari dell'unico percorso possibile (autonomo e automatizzato) – gli eventi “attuali” necessitano tutt'al più di aggiustamenti per essere re-integrati nel flusso, altrimenti rappresentano semplicemente “devianze” patologiche o da patologizzare<sup>53</sup>. Questa è un'ulteriore ragione per cui tra “accelerazione” e “fine delle storie” c'è una relazione così stretta. Se l'accelerazione dunque è connessa alla “fine delle storie” e porta a compimento la Storia, moltiplicando lo spazio dei possibili soltanto lungo la linea pre-iscritta e prescritta del “progresso” (che sempre meno è vissuto in termini etici e di crescita esistenziale), occorre adesso approfondire alcuni aspetti del rapporto tra “accelerazione” e “futuro”.

### 3. “ACCELERAZIONE”, “FINE DELLE STORIE” E “FINE DELLA STORIA”

Se la problematizzazione dell'accelerazione è così centrale oggi, è perché la crisi ecologica in atto interroga in profondità le condizioni di possibilità della nostra stessa esistenza materiale. L'Antropocene, nonostante la sottocommissione di stratigrafia abbia bocciato la proposta di una sua introduzione come nuova “era geologica” successiva all'Olocene<sup>54</sup>, interroga in profondità il progetto della Modernità e con esso la sua dimensione temporale e storica. Innanzitutto, sembra che noi moderni e occidentali non abbiamo altro modo di interrogare l'Antropocene e la crisi ecologica, dal punto di vista storico-temporale, se non richiamando secolarizzazioni di concetti temporali teologici di matrice cristiana. E in questo senso sono tre le rappresentazioni principali<sup>55</sup>. La prima è l'ecomodernismo con la sua fiducia nel “progresso” e il suo tecno-entusiasmo (che richiama da vicino certe posizioni dell'accelerazionismo), esso potrebbe essere

<sup>53</sup>In questo senso, la crisi ecologica rappresenta davvero una soglia: si tratta di un processo che entra in contraddizione con l'accelerazione – letta nei termini di accumulazione illimitata di capitale – ma sembra che non la si possa affrontare se non nei termini di “aggiustamenti di percorso” (*green deal*): c'è sicuramente un'astuzia del capitale, ma questa astuzia è possibile “immaginarla” soltanto all'interno di una Storia con la “s” maiuscola e alle sue forme secolarizzate di teodicea. Un'astuzia che sembra sempre più pendere dal lato *de-mens* dell'umano (il riferimento, poco più che evocativo, è a E. Morin, *Il paradigma perduto. Che cos'è la natura umana?* (1973, 1979), tr. it. Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2020).

<sup>54</sup> Per una discussione sul significato di questa “boccatura”, che sembra confermare come la scienza sia sempre politica, cfr. P. de Jouvancourt, *Qui a tué l'Anthropocène?*, in “Terrestres”, 8 avril 2024, liberamente consultabile al seguente link: <https://www.terrestres.org/2024/04/08/qui-a-tue-lanthropocene/> (link consultato il 7 novembre 2024). Del resto, già qualche anno fa Bruno Latour ironizzava sul fatto che qualcosa come “lo spirito del (nostro) tempo” potesse essere deciso da una sottocommissione di stratigrafia (cfr. B. Latour, *Face à Gaïa: Huit conférences sur le Nouveau Régime Climatique*, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond / La Découverte, Paris 2015).

<sup>55</sup> Cfr. D. Rothe, *Governing the End Times? Planet Politics and the Secular Eschatology of the Anthropocene*, in “Millennium: Journal of International Studies”, 48 (2), 2019, pp. 143-164.

definito millenarista, perché compito dell'Umano<sup>56</sup> dovrebbe essere quello di accorciare il tempo e *accelerare la fine* per entrare finalmente nel Regno del buon Antropocene, del mondo completamente gestito e guidato dall'Umano<sup>57</sup>. La seconda, definita “eco-catastrofismo”, vale a dire la teoria che muove dal reperimento e dalla gestione dei *planetary boundaries*, sembra invece porre l'Umano già nel “tempo della fine” e la funzione dell'Umano sarebbe catecontica, un potere che frena – che *deve* frenare – l'avvento dell'Apocalisse (climatica)<sup>58</sup>. La terza è rappresentata dal “realismo planetario”, la cui dimensione potrebbe essere definita post-apocalittica, nel senso di un racconto in cui l'Apocalisse è già avvenuta e compito dell'Umano sarebbe quello di imparare a sopravvivere/vivere alla fine dei mondi e delle storie, a loro volta un mondo e una storia che però non rappresentano la realizzazione di un Regno<sup>59</sup>. Sembra chiaro dunque che, seppur in maniera molto stilizzata, queste tre reazioni-rappresentazioni della “crisi ecologica” e dell'Antropocene non si discostano dall'idea moderna della “Storia”, e di qui la loro inefficacia nel pensare *altri futuri possibili*.

Ci si muove dunque, anche per quanto riguarda l'Antropocene e la crisi ecologica, in un immaginario segnato da una dimensione teologico-politica di origine cristiana. L'accelerazione è un concetto e una prassi che si possono ricondurre alla medesima matrice, ma c'è una soglia che occorre analizzare e che Reinhart Koselleck sembra identificare con precisione. Occorre seguire una

<sup>56</sup> Un'altra precisazione sull'utilizzazione di alcuni termini all'interno di questo studio. Per “Umano” con la “u” maiuscola intendiamo la rappresentazione di un principio universalistico secondo il quale – in stretta correlazione con la “Storia” perché suo attore principale – esisterebbe un solo modo determinante di essere umani ed è il modo occidentale, *l'Umano a cui tutti gli altri umani devono tendere*. È chiaro, come abbiamo già visto, che la costruzione dell'Umano si è avuta a partire dalla separazione tra l'Umano occidentale, unico vero attore della Storia, e altre umanità residuali, separazione costruita su sfruttamento ed espropriazione: gli occidentali possono essere Umani nella misura in cui gli altri umani restano in stato di soggezione (ma sognando di divenire Umani).

<sup>57</sup> Il Manifesto Ecomodernista può essere consultato (in varie lingue) al seguente link: <http://www.ecomodernism.org/> (link consultato il 7 novembre 2024).

<sup>58</sup> Cfr. J. Rockström et al., *A Safe Operating Space for Humanity*, in “Nature”, 7263, 2009, pp. 472-475; W. Steffen et al., *Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet*, in “Science”, 6223, 2015, pp. 736-746.

<sup>59</sup> Tralasciando il survivalismo più estetizzante, troviamo ad esempio la costellazione della cosiddetta *collapsologie* (cfr. P. Servigne, R. Stevens, *Comment tout peut s'effondrer. Petit manuel de collapsologie à l'usage des générations présentes*, Seuil, Paris 2015 e P. Servigne, G. Chapelle, R. Stevens, *Une autre fin du monde est possible*, Seuil, Paris 2018), ma anche l'ultima Haraway (cfr. D. Haraway, *Chthulucene. Sopravvivere su un pianeta infetto* (2019), tr. it. Nero, Roma 2019). La questione non consiste ovviamente nel negare che dovremo ben presto imparare a vivere nell'Antropocene della crisi ecologica, con tutti i problemi che ciò comporterà, ma il fatto che Haraway bypassa completamente la fase di transizione e immagina direttamente un futuro “post-apocalittico” condito da incubi neomalthusiani (per una critica al neomalthusianesimo ritornante ciclicamente, cfr. Z. Bauman, *Vite di scarto* (2004), tr. it. Laterza, Roma-Bari 2007, e in modo ancora più radicale J.W. Moore, *Oltre la giustizia climatica. Verso un'ecologia della rivoluzione*, tr. it. Ombre corte, Verona 2024).

rapida ricostruzione storico-concettuale. Lo storico e filosofo tedesco si chiede infatti se l'accelerazione sociale rappresenti una secolarizzazione dell'immagine dell'accorciamento del tempo apocalittico, per cui dal punto di vista concettuale – e della sua efficacia simbolica – sarebbe un'eredità cristiana trasposta nella Modernità<sup>60</sup>. La risposta non è semplice, o diretta, perché l'elemento da tenere presente è dato dal passaggio dall'escatologia al progresso, da un percorso che mira alle ultime cose a un percorso che mira all'accrescimento illimitato. Per cogliere l'importanza decisiva dell'accelerazione – nella sua contraddizione che, in tempi di crisi ecologica, rischia di essere esiziale – occorre mostrare innanzitutto come le forme di secolarizzazione di concetti teologici cristiani e la loro trasposizione nel mondo moderno rappresentino una rinuncia alla rigorosa separazione tra un mondo dell'aldiqua e un mondo dell'aldilà, tra eternità e mondo: tutto ciò che accade nel tempo storico deve trovare la sua soluzione nel tempo storico, non può trovarla più in una narrazione che vede l'eternità e Dio come il momento risolutivo delle storie umane. La conflittualità interna alle vicende umane non si manifesta più attraverso l'opposizione tra aldiqua e aldilà, opposizione spaziale, ma tra passato e futuro, opposizione temporale, che determina il fatto fondamentale che la mondanizzazione diviene temporalizzazione. Ed è qui che entra in gioco l'esperienza e la concettualizzazione dell'accelerazione, la quale permette di identificare un'esperienza del tempo differente dal tempo dei ritmi naturali e di accedere al tempo storico, in modo tale che la dottrina dei due mondi sia sostituita dalla storia e dal tempo storico anche come fondamento delle pianificazioni politiche e dell'organizzazione sociale. L'accelerazione mostra così il suo aspetto immediatamente “anfibo”: da un lato permette la ri-occupazione di senso della storia della salvezza cristiana, non destabilizzando l'universo simbolico occidentale nella prima Modernità; dall'altro si mostra come forza impersonale, che fin quando la visione del mondo cristiana è ancora, seppur laicizzata, dominante nell'universo simbolico occidentale può ancora infondere nella “Storia” e nell'idea di “progresso” una dimensione etica di “emancipazione” e “realizzazione”, ma nel momento in cui la “Storia” sembra imporsi e realizzarsi (nell'epoca della globalizzazione) può mostrarsi per quello che è, una forza automatizzata e autonomizzata in vista dell'accumulazione illimitata di capitale.

Il passaggio è dunque più netto di quanto si possa ritenere: l'accorciamento del tempo apocalittico, in quanto extra-storico, diviene accelerazione intra-storica, il soggetto non è più Dio ma l'uomo, ed è l'uomo che sente il dovere dell'accelerazione nei processi di dominio della natura e di trasformazione della società. Si tratta di pura e semplice secolarizzazione? La risposta di Koselleck è articolata: è affermativa per la dimensione di “speranza” che accompagna il progresso verso un “Regno” in cui ci sarebbe felicità e benessere per un numero

<sup>60</sup> Cfr. R. Koselleck, *Raccourcissement du temps et acceleration*, cit.

sempre maggiore di persone (l'ambigua promessa della Modernità occidentale, a cui noi occidentali crediamo sempre meno, ma che permane seppur sempre più debolmente soprattutto al di fuori dell'Occidente<sup>61</sup>), e per il fatto che la storia abbia senso soltanto se al suo interno è possibile trovare una finalità (il “progresso” è allo stesso tempo il mezzo e il fine della storia, anche oggi che è sempre meno connotato eticamente); ma è negativa perché il nocciolo duro dell'esperienza moderna dell'accelerazione non è più deducibile da premesse teologiche, è un'esperienza del tutto nuova, davvero umana troppo umana<sup>62</sup>. È questa contraddizione di fondo – tra una secolarizzazione di concetti temporali cristiani e una ri-occupazione di senso a partire da uno spazio di esperienza completamente mutato – a fare dell'accelerazione sociale il luogo d'emergenza della problematizzazione della condizione umana nella Modernità e, ancor di più, nella tarda Modernità (*l'accelerazione accelera sempre di più*), e delle sue difficoltà nell'affrontare la sfida epocale del cambiamento climatico. Il concetto di “accelerazione”, come il concetto di “crisi”, mantiene soltanto la struttura temporale dell'abbreviazione apocalittica del tempo, ma non il contenuto semantico: l'accelerazione è un'esperienza concreta del mondo storico, è dunque un concetto di “esperienza” e non di “aspettativa”, ed è questo che permette l'emancipazione dall'origine teologica<sup>63</sup>.

La crisi ecologica, dunque, rappresenta anche e soprattutto una crisi dell'Umano occidentale e del progetto della Modernità. L'Umano occidentale fatica a riconoscere che il senso complessivo della Storia degli ultimi cinque secoli – “Storia” che si è costituita come orizzonte pratico in opposizione sia alle storie degli altri sia alle storie di ciò che sarà pensato come ambito ontologico separato,

<sup>61</sup> Cfr. le acute analisi sulla questione contenute in D. Chakrabarty, *La sfida del cambiamento climatico. Globalizzazione e Antropocene*, tr. it. Ombrecorte, Verona 2021. Per una prospettiva più radicale cfr. A. Ghosh, *La maledizione della noce moscata. Parabole per un pianeta in crisi* (2021), tr. it. Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2022.

<sup>62</sup> Cfr. R. Koselleck, *Raccourcissement du temps et acceleration*, cit., p. 42.

<sup>63</sup> La posizione di Koselleck, nel dibattito su “secolarizzazione” (Löwith e Schmitt) e “rioccupazione di senso” (Blumenberg), è particolarmente complessa: Blumenberg, in *La legittimità dell'età moderna* (1974, tr. it. Marietti, Genova 1992, pp. 37-39), critica l'idea della trasposizione dei concetti teologici nei concetti moderni che, secondo la sua lettura, sarebbe presente appunto in Löwith e Schmitt ma anche nella prima opera di Koselleck, *Critica illuministica e crisi della società borghese* (1959, tr. it. Il Mulino, Bologna 1972). Koselleck, in una lettera inedita a Blumenberg del 1975, attua un vero e proprio ridimensionamento della sua teoria della secolarizzazione, sostenendo una vicinanza alla posizione blumenberghiana, soprattutto a partire dal fatto che nella storia accade sempre di più o di meno di quanto contenuto nelle circostanze passate (cfr. anche R. Koselleck, *Sulla disponibilità della storia*, in Id., *Futuro passato*, cit., pp. 223-238). Koselleck, comunque, non abbandona del tutto la posizione di Löwith, nella lettera sottolinea come, nonostante le distinzioni tra escatologia e progresso siano chiare dal punto di vista teoretico, dal punto di vista storico-empirico, fenomenologico, ci sono formule di trasmissione intermedie che non sono già più soltanto determinazioni del pensiero teologico ma non sono del tutto ancora concetti indipendenti della Modernità (per la discussione di questa lettera cfr. G. Imbriano, *Le due modernità. Critica, crisi e utopia in Reinhart Koselleck*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2016, pp. 335-354).

la Natura, in quanto “Storia” dell’Umano occidentale pensato sempre più come universale e autonomo nei confronti della Natura – non può più essere ricondotto a un percorso già segnato, prescritto e pre-iscritto: l’“emancipazione”, pensata nei termini di un’emancipazione dalla Natura (ridotta a rubinetto di risorse e scarica di rifiuti o, specularmente, godimento estetico e estetizzante), e il “progresso” difficilmente possono essere ancora considerate strade per il raggiungimento di una forma diffusa di “benessere”. La promessa della Modernità, fondata su un determinato modo di intendere il tessuto temporale e storico, non può essere mantenuta, qualora anche fosse una reale promessa: come l’accelerazione sociale, nei vissuti degli umani della tarda Modernità, non può più costituire la base per la costruzione di un percorso di vita segnato dal “progresso” materiale ed esistenziale, così il progresso sociale complessivo non sembra più costituire un percorso verso un maggiore benessere collettivo. Se è vero che la “credenza” nel “progresso”, comunque sempre attiva nel senso comune, era già andata in crisi nel XX secolo – la Prima Guerra Mondiale, il nazismo e la burocratizzazione del genocidio, la bomba atomica sono tutte tappe di questa messa in discussione – e la “credenza” in un percorso che avrebbe portato un “benessere” diffuso, “credenza” che come abbiamo già detto fa ancora una certa presa nei paesi cosiddetti emergenti, non può realizzarsi *se tutta la popolazione mondiale pretendesse di vivere (dal punto di vista dei consumi energetici e di beni) come vive oggi un qualunque cittadino occidentale non necessariamente benestante*, allora è altrettanto vero che la questione ecologica oggi sembra indicare un orizzonte di crisi in grado di chiarire tutte le contraddizioni profonde del progetto della Modernità e della forma-di-vita capitalista: sfruttamento ed espropriazione, produzione economica e riproduzione sociale, razzismo, sessismo e patriarcato, crisi della democrazia e crisi geopolitica<sup>64</sup>. La crisi globale del progetto della Modernità e della forma-di-vita capitalista è una crisi del suo tessuto temporale e storico: Koselleck si chiede, in tempi poco sospetti, se con la crisi ecologica, sia ancora possibile accelerare, e se questa accelerazione non si stia davvero trasformando in una sorta di ritorno dell’acceleramento del tempo apocalittico. L’Umano si sta dirigendo verso la fine? Koselleck, con attitudine da storico, si chiede se l’esperienza dell’accelerazione sia stata soltanto una tappa, una fase

<sup>64</sup> Rimandiamo nuovamente a N. Fraser, *Capitalismo cannibale*, cit., e, seppur con qualche tabù linguistico-concettuale persistente, anche a B. Latour, N. Schultz, *Facciamoci sentire! Manifesto per una nuova ecologia* (2022), tr. it. Einaudi, Torino 2023. Si tratta di una sorta di svolta anti-capitalista di Bruno Latour, il quale non aveva mai fatto segreto della sua idiosincrasia nei confronti dei marxismi di qualunque genere, e nell’argomentazione ma anche nel titolo originale dell’opera (*Mémo sur la nouvelle classe écologique*) ritorna al concetto di “classe”. A proposito di tabù linguistici, interessante notare come nella traduzione italiana del titolo (in generale poco felice) la parola “classe” sia del tutto scomparsa.



transitoria, dopo la quale occorrerà pensare nuove relazioni tra durata e sopravvivenza, modificazione e cambiamento<sup>65</sup>.

La morale di questa “storia” sarebbe la seguente: l’Umano occidentale, divenuto sempre più globalizzato, scopre, proprio nel momento in cui avrebbe raggiunto la sua massima potenza – il pianeta, anche dal punto di vista geofisico e climatologico, dipenderebbe oramai dall’Umano, massimo dominatore della Natura e del tutto emancipato e autonomo – di essere particolarmente “dipendente”, se vogliamo “non libero” nel senso moderno della parola, per cui non sarebbe più in grado davvero di proseguire lungo il cammino pre-iscritto nella (e prescritto dalla) “Storia”. La contraddizione fondamentale nel modo con cui si affronta la crisi ecologica sta proprio in questo: le condizioni di possibilità dell’esistenza storica e temporale dell’Umano moderno (sempre più globalizzato) prevede il dominio sulla Natura e sul “futuro”, perché il futuro è costruito nel presente, anzi è estensione del presente lungo il percorso già segnato dal progresso e dall’accelerazione, mentre le condizioni di possibilità dell’esistenza *tout court* dell’Umano moderno (sempre più globalizzato) dipendono da una messa in discussione radicale della sua “Storia”, del proprio tessuto temporale e storico. Questa rimessa in discussione non riguarda soltanto la storia degli orrori commessi dall’Occidente nelle varie fasi espansive della sua “Storia” e dunque della forma-di-vita-capitalista (un’attitudine *genocidaria*), ma dovrebbe essere la rimessa in discussione della “Storia” come flusso uni-direzionato e contemporaneamente la definizione di altre possibilità di esistenza storica. Siamo da tempo nell’epoca della fine delle storie<sup>66</sup>, ma ancora non nell’epoca della fine della “Storia”: per riattivare la potenza delle “storie” – nuovi modi di intendere la relazione tra durata e sopravvivenza, come direbbe Koselleck – occorre che la “Storia” finisca. La “Storia” oggi, come abbiamo visto, è ancora la “grande narrazione” del neoliberismo, e quest’ultimo sembra rappresentare la fase *finale* della forma-di-vita capitalista, laddove per “finale” possiamo intendere “ultima”, che ha raggiunto il/la suo/sua “fine” (e ancora una volta occorrerebbe misurare il portato “escatologico” di questa interpretazione).

Se la possibile “fine della Storia” ha a che vedere con la crisi ecologica, è anche vero che la “nascita della Storia” con la “s” maiuscola è contemporanea alla “grande partizione” che, in Occidente, ha posto l’Umano e la Natura su due fronti ontologici contrapposti<sup>67</sup>: la Natura è il regno del necessario, della materia e della

<sup>65</sup> Cfr. R. Koselleck, *Raccourcissement du temps et acceleration*, cit.

<sup>66</sup> Sono molte le “storie” e i “mondi” che l’Occidente ha portato alla “fine” durante le distruzioni creatrici dell’esperienza coloniale. La “fine del mondo” è consustanziale al capitalismo: se in passato ha segnato la fine di innumerevoli mondi e storie, oggi sembra che possa mettere in discussione la persistenza del mondo *tout court*.

<sup>67</sup> Si tratta di un tema centrale nella maggior parte delle riflessioni odierne sulla “crisi ecologica”. Fondamentale (e seminale) è sicuramente A.N. Whitehead, *Il concetto di natura* (1920), Grenelle, Potenza 2020, e in generale tutta la sua produzione filosofica. La questione è stata rilanciata negli

ciclicità immanente, l'Umano è il regno della libertà, dello "spirituale" (in senso hegeliano) e della costruzione di senso trascendente. La Storia della Modernità è la storia dell'emancipazione dell'Umano dalla Natura: quanto più l'Umano si libera dalle costrizioni della Natura, tanto più cresce la sua libertà e spiritualità; la spiritualità dell'Umano, nato dalla partizione, è data dalla dimensione della "valorizzazione", e la Natura deve essere messa a valore – "violata" come direbbe Francis Bacon – per la crescita dell'Umano. L'evento della "grande partizione", stabilizzato con la Rivoluzione Scientifica e momento culturale aurorale per le prime espressioni della forma-di-vita capitalista<sup>68</sup>, ha avuto un impatto decisivo anche sulla costituzione dell'esperienza temporale e storica tipica della Modernità: la storicizzazione del "tempo" può avvenire soltanto attraverso la costruzione di un modo di vivere il tempo che sia sempre più slegato dalle esigenze cicliche della Natura, e la storicizzazione del "tempo" – come tempo che va gestito e organizzato, come tempo che non semplicemente scorre ma che *deve* scorrere in un determinato modo e con un determinato *ritmo* – rappresenta il portato fondamentale della Modernità. La storicizzazione del tempo, che fonda la "Storia", è un processo "violento": secondo Koselleck, il quale è sempre molto oscillante nel rapporto tra le parole e le cose (se le cose determinano le parole c'è un eccesso di marxismo, se le parole determinano le cose c'è un eccesso di credenza simbolica<sup>69</sup>), la "Storia" come percorso prescritto e pre-iscripto di "progresso" è stata fondata anche e soprattutto a partire dall'esperienza coloniale di espropriazione, laddove si costituisce il principio determinante in vista del dominio sulla pluralità, la *contemporaneità del non-contemporaneo*<sup>70</sup>. La "Storia" è la grande narrazione della forma-di-vita capitalista, nella misura in cui è la "grande narrazione" di come l'Umano occidentale ha sottomesso la Natura e il resto degli umani (ridotti allo "stato di natura", *naturalizzati*) per cui la Storia è

ultimi tempi in ambito sociologico e antropologico: cfr. ad esempio B. Latour, *Non siamo mai stati moderni* (1991), tr. it. elèuthera, Milano 2016, dove il sociologo e filosofo sottolinea come sia proprio la "grande partizione" tra natura e cultura a rendere già-sempre impossibile la realizzazione della Modernità; P. Descola, *Oltre natura e cultura* (2005), tr. it. Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2021; E. Viveiros de Castro, *Metafisiche cannibali. Elementi di antropologia post-strutturale* (2009), tr. it. Ombrecorte, Verona 2017. La questione è ribadita dal punto di vista storico, economico-sociale e politico da J.W. Moore, *Antropocene o Capitalocene? Scenari di ecologia-mondo nell'era della crisi planetaria* (2016), tr. it. Ombrecorte, Verona 2017 e da N. Fraser, *Capitalismo cannibale*, cit. C'è comunque chi vede il superamento della dicotomia natura-cultura come esito pericoloso (e non "critica") del capitalismo neoliberista: cfr. L. Pellizzoni, *Cavalcare l'ingovernabile. Natura, neoliberalismo e nuovi materialismi*, Orthotes, Napoli-Salerno 2023.

<sup>68</sup> Cfr. J.W. Moore, *Ecologia-mondo e crisi del capitalismo. La fine della natura a buon mercato*, tr. it. Ombrecorte, Verona 2015; Id., *Antropocene o Capitalocene?*, cit.; Id., *Oltre la giustizia climatica*, cit.

<sup>69</sup> Cfr. R. Koselleck, *Storia dei concetti e storia sociale*, in Id., *Futuro passato*, cit., pp. 91-109; Id., *La storia dei concetti e i concetti della storia*, in Id., *Il vocabolario della modernità*, cit., pp. 27-47.

<sup>70</sup> Vedi le note 8, 9, 10 del presente saggio.

sempre “Storia Universale” nella misura in cui è “Storia dell’universalismo”. La “Storia” prevede, però, anche la partecipazione di più popoli al medesimo e unico processo, ma le Storie come “tradizioni” – necessariamente *inventate*, come sottolineava Hobsbawm<sup>71</sup> – non si oppongono davvero all’idea di una Storia unidirezionale nella misura in cui, essendo la Storia divenuta la forma di legittimazione dell’agire sociale e politico, anche la costruzione dei nazionalismi contrapposti persegue la medesima logica di “emancipazione” e “realizzazione” – soltanto le storie che non seguono questo percorso sono “fuori dalla Storia”. La “Storia”, infine, è oggi la grande narrazione di un Umano unificato nel globo dei flussi di capitale, in cui la linea dello sfruttamento e dell’espropriazione passa oramai all’interno e non divide più da un esterno – la fine della relazione Interno-Esterno, Medesimo-Altro, è una conseguenza della globalizzazione ma lo è anche la fine della “grande partizione”. La “Storia” neoliberista, e l’Umano che intende “produrre”, non ripete semplicemente la triangolazione progresso-emancipazione-benessere a partire dalla “grande partizione”, perché quella che un tempo è stata definita “astuzia del capitale” sta già lavorando a forme di superamento della dicotomia Umano/Natura, laddove può essere valorizzata, mentre la mantiene attiva in altri settori e nell’immaginario. Questa “astuzia del capitale” è resa possibile dalla sua “Storia”, che si configura come storia della fine delle storie degli altri, e sembra svelare – nelle forme in cui approccia la “crisi ecologica” e le “crisi geopolitiche” globali – come la promessa della Modernità, benessere e felicità per un numero sempre crescente di individui nel mondo, fosse per l’appunto soltanto una “promessa” che nascondeva un’“astuzia”.

#### 4. IL PROBLEMA DEL “FUTURO”

Il passaggio che vorremo ora analizzare è il seguente, se sia possibile innanzitutto la pensabilità di un avvenire – un a-venire – che non sia prescritto e pre-iscripto dalla “Storia” accelerata del nostro tempo. Il problema dei “futuri” è il grande problema del nostro tempo, perché dalla nostra analisi non sembrano esserci le condizioni di possibilità della loro pensabilità: il *presentismo* (nei termini temporali del “presente” e nei termini spaziali della “presenza”) rappresenta uno dei nodi centrali della riflessione sulla giustizia intergenerazionale dal punto di vista etico, politico e giuridico<sup>72</sup>. Come abbiamo visto, l’Età della Storia con la “s” maiuscola rappresenta anche un programma di “fine delle storie”, e il futuro può essere rappresentato esclusivamente come ciò che sarà lungo il percorso segnato dall’accelerazione – che *accelerando* progressivamente, *accelerazione come*

<sup>71</sup> Cfr. E.J. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (a cura di), *L’invenzione della tradizione* (1983), tr. it. Einaudi, Torino 2002.

<sup>72</sup> Cfr. F.G. Menga, *L’emergenza del futuro. I destini del pianeta e le responsabilità del presente*, Donzelli, Roma 2021.

*operatore di determinismo*, lascia sempre minore spazio per una divergenza temporale – e non come “avvenire”, vale a dire come ciò che viene incontro, da intendersi nei termini di una dislocazione del legame tra Storia e emancipazione/autonomia (così come viene pensata dalla Modernità). La crisi ecologica in atto manifesta pienamente questa contraddizione tra “futuro” e “avvenire”: troppo presi dall’avverare il futuro prescritto e pre-iscritto, non si è in grado di pensare l’avvenire come divergenza. Dal punto di vista etico riusciamo a pensare le future generazioni soltanto all’interno del percorso già stabilito dalla “Storia” e dalle sue accelerazioni e non come qualcosa che già viene incontro, in modo radicalmente altro. La pensabilità di un’etica e di una giustizia intergenerazionali sono strettamente connesse alle condizioni di possibilità della temporalità e storicità, e dunque all’idea di futuro e avvenire, che la Modernità produce<sup>73</sup>.

Occorre dunque chiarire qual è la relazione tra “accelerazione” e “futuro”. Reinhart Koselleck introduce le categorie di “spazio di esperienza” e “orizzonte d’aspettativa” come categorie formali che «riflettono (...) un dato umano di carattere generale (...)», che «rimandano a una struttura antropologica presupposta, senza la quale la storia non è possibile e neanche pensabile» e come determinazioni trascendentali della storia per cui «le condizioni di possibilità della storia reale sono, insieme, le condizioni della sua conoscenza»<sup>74</sup>. L’elemento davvero rilevante è che qualunque “esperienza storica” non riguarda soltanto il passato ma ha sempre a che vedere con un certo rapporto tra passato e futuro, nella tensione del presente. L’“esperienza” può essere allora definita come un “passato presente”, in cui tutta una serie di eventi sono stati inseriti e possono aprirsi al ricordo – non c’è in questo senso distinzione teorica tra l’elaborazione conscia e eventuali manifestazioni inconscie – e in cui soprattutto l’esperienza personale contiene già sempre le esperienze di altri, attraverso la mediazione delle

<sup>73</sup> È possibile così pensare anche la fortuna del movimento filosofico (e non solo) del cosiddetto “lungotermismo”, il quale dovrebbe invece rappresentare una risposta al “presentismo” (cfr. W. MacAskill, T. Pummer, *Effective Altruism*, in H. LaFollette (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, New York 2020; W. MacAskill, *What We Owe The Future*, Basic Books, New York 2022). Il punto di partenza del lungotermismo di MacAskill è semplice e si fonda su una sorta di “matematica morale”: la sopravvivenza a lungo termine dell’umanità deve avere precedenza morale rispetto alla diminuzione della morte e della sofferenza nel presente e nel futuro prossimo; la ragione è altrettanto semplice: gli umani del futuro saranno in un numero decisamente più ampio rispetto agli umani del presente o del futuro prossimo. Salvare oggi un milione di vite e accrescere dello 0,0001 per cento la probabilità di un’estinzione umana prematura è un errore: *moralmente*, bisogna lasciare morire quel milione di persone. Lo spettro del neomalthusianesimo si aggira in queste riflessioni. La morale individuale e l’etica diventano comunque una questione di calcolo matematico sul lungo periodo. Per il nostro discorso, è utile sottolineare come il “presentismo” e il “lungotermismo” siano in realtà speculari: in entrambi i casi, *il futuro non può iniziare* perché pensato esclusivamente come estensione del presente e delle sue forme; entrambe le impostazioni non possono “immaginare” la fine della Storia e della forma-di-vita capitalista.

<sup>74</sup> R. Koselleck, “*Spazio di esperienza*” e “*orizzonte di aspettativa*”, cit., p. 303.

generazioni e delle istituzioni sociali e culturali. L'“aspettativa” può essere invece definita come un “futuro presente”, in cui gli eventi a-venire costituiscono il presente nella misura in cui sono accompagnati da un'attesa caratterizzata da speranze e paure, desideri e volontà, ma anche da curiosità e analisi razionali; anche in questo caso l'aspettativa è un modo di relazionarsi alla temporalità allo stesso tempo soggettivo e intersoggettivo. Queste forme di azione del passato e del futuro sul presente sono ciò che costituisce, secondo Koselleck, il “tempo storico”. Se questo vale dal punto di vista “trascendentale”, la vera soglia è rappresentata dalla Modernità, l'epoca in cui «la differenza tra esperienza e aspettativa aumenta progressivamente», per cui «l'età moderna può essere concepita come un tempo nuovo solo da quando le aspettative si sono progressivamente allontanate da tutte le esperienze fatte finora»<sup>75</sup>. L'alterazione di questo “ritmo”, tale dissonanza rappresenta la condizione umana moderna e tardo-moderna, che oggi sembra aver raggiunto il suo limite “tragico”. Il modo mediante il quale i moderni – e sempre di più i tardo-moderni – pensano temporalmente e storicamente il proprio essere-nel-mondo come relazione esistenziale tra un'esperienza e un'aspettativa è dettato dall'accelerazione, l'unica potenza che può dare al “progresso” la sua caratterizzazione tipicamente moderna. L'accelerazione in questo senso è differente sia dal semplice “cambiamento” sia dal semplice “progresso” o, per meglio dire, li connota in senso specificamente moderno: da un lato, l'accelerazione è una delle forme che assume, dal punto di vista fenomenologico, la de-naturalizzazione del tempo, vale a dire il fatto che l'Umano fa l'esperienza del suo “essere storico e temporale” in una maniera sempre più indipendente dai ritmi naturali producendo, attraverso pratiche di *dressage*, sempre più pervasive nuovi ritmi vitali; dall'altro, e come abbiamo visto, lungi dall'essere semplicemente una secolarizzazione del principio apocalittico e cristiano dell'accorciamento del tempo come pre-fissato da una forza fuori dalla storia e che avrebbe portato fuori dalla storia, l'accelerazione si manifesta con una necessità teleologica interna alla storia e come qualcosa che può determinare le fortune empiriche dell'idea di progresso<sup>76</sup>. Soltanto l'accelerazione permette di comprendere come ha funzionato e “funziona” il progresso – e soprattutto in che senso, nonostante il discredito odierno della nozione, esso sia ancora attivo come principio interno della tarda Modernità e ai tempi dell'Antropocene: non si tratta semplicemente di un procedere in una direzione, perché la direzione è già sempre dettata (il senso-direzione della Storia non può e non deve mutare) e *deve* sempre presentare accrescimenti progressivi all'interno della medesima unità di tempo; è in questo senso che l'accelerazione è sempre qualcosa di qualitativamente differente rispetto al semplice “cambiamento” o al “progresso” (inteso come andamento regolare di un

<sup>75</sup> Ivi, p. 309.

<sup>76</sup> Cfr. R. Koselleck, *Is there an acceleration of history?*, cit.

qualcosa): l'esperienza dell'accelerazione è possibile – e valutata positivamente – soltanto quando si accompagna a un incremento, e se è vero che il “cambiamento” è una categoria che ritroviamo in ogni esperienza storica, «ciò che è moderno è il cambiamento che suscita una nuova esperienza temporale: soprattutto, che qualcosa cambi più rapidamente di quanto ci si potesse aspettare o di quanto precedentemente si fosse fatta esperienza»<sup>77</sup>.

L'esperienza della Modernità mostra tutta la sua complessità – e la sua strada bloccata nella pensabilità del futuro – proprio perché da un lato scava un solco sempre più profondo tra passato e futuro, e dall'altro impone di vivere e agire in vista del superamento a livello esistenziale del dislivello tra esperienza e aspettativa. Il dislivello, continuamente rilanciato dall'accelerazione, è ciò che è stato pensato come “Storia” in generale e la sua qualità è dunque il “progresso”. L'esperienza dell'accelerazione crea, dal punto di vista della relazione tra passato (esperienza) e futuro (aspettativa), la “Storia”; la “Storia” diviene la qualità del dislivello sempre crescente tra esperienza e aspettativa, evocando il programma di una fine di tutte le altre storie possibili. La ragione è che l'accelerazione ha la caratteristica di accelerare sempre (altrimenti sarebbe puro e semplice cambiamento) e dunque contiene in sé la contrazione sempre maggiore del presente – dunque: dell'esperienza come passato presentificato e dell'aspettativa come futuro presentificato – per cui consegna la dimensione degli eventi e l'apertura all'avvenire a un percorso già pre-iscritto, autonomizzato e automatizzato. Nella tarda Modernità, proprio in quanto l'accelerazione accelera, le caratteristiche temporali e storiche della Modernità raggiungono quello che potrebbe essere un punto di non-ritorno: l'impossibilità che il futuro possa iniziare. E in tempi di crisi ecologica questa impossibilità potrebbe essere esiziale.

Dunque, l'accelerazione ha a che vedere, in qualche modo, già-sempre con il futuro, ma sembra incapace di cogliere l'avvenire. Occorre però effettuare un passaggio ulteriore. Riprendendo una nota distinzione di Luhmann<sup>78</sup>, possiamo dire che l'accelerazione ha a che vedere contemporaneamente con ciò che può essere definito “futuro presente”, in termini luhmanniani l'insieme delle passioni (credenze, aspettative, paure, speranze) che definiscono nel presente le immagini del futuro, vale a dire l'orizzonte di aspettativa koselleckiano, e con ciò che può essere descritto come “presenti futuri”, vale a dire il prossimo presente che si cerca di prevedere e indirizzare. Quello che caratterizza il Moderno, dunque, è la tensione costante tra queste due forme di modellizzazione del futuro, e l'accelerazione ha un effetto su entrambe le forme e sulla loro relazione, di fatto riducendo la loro (possibile) distanza e restringendo sempre di più la potenza del “futuro presente” nei confini dei “presenti futuri” che l'accelerazione promette di raggiungere sempre più rapidamente. Per Luhmann una certa de-futurizzazione è

<sup>77</sup> Ivi, pp. 124-125.

<sup>78</sup> Cfr. N. Luhmann, *The Future Cannot Begin*, cit.

un'esigenza connessa ai sistemi complessi – ridurre le virtualità intrecciate del “futuro presente” e dei “presenti futuri” – dovuta proprio alla complessità delle relazioni interne al sistema (maggiore complessità/maggiori pericoli). Nei tempi della crisi ecologica dispiegata, e nonostante essa, questa esigenza sembra assumere i contorni di un destino imm modificabile.

La condizione temporale dei Moderni è, come abbiamo visto, la percezione di una sempre maggiore scarsità di tempo, sia del tempo della vita che del tempo del mondo: la tensione della dimensione utopica/distopica del “futuro presente” è sempre più ridotta dalla necessità di pre-indirizzare i “presenti futuri”. La riduzione progressiva dell'orizzonte di aspettativa nel mondo delle relazioni concrete ha fatto la fortuna del genere letterario della *science fiction* – espressione del bisogno tutto moderno di rilanciare la potenza del “futuro presente” nella determinazione dei “presenti futuri”, mescolando le due potenze che, invece, secondo Luhmann subiscono una sempre più netta biforcazione, l'attitudine utopica/distopica come manifestazione del futuro come “futuro presente”, cioè come futuro esistente soltanto nel presente ma giammai utilizzabile in un “presente futuro”, e i “presenti futuri” che, muovendo dal bisogno di ridurre la complessità dei possibili nei sistemi sociali complessi della Modernità, contemporaneamente abbracciano una dimensione di “determinazione” o “determinismo” (spesso indirizzato dalla tecnologia) e definiscono catene di eventi interconnessi che hanno il compito di de-futurizzare il futuro. Il fatto stesso della Modernità si gioca su questa differenza che deve rimanere differenza, anche quando si presentano mescolanze di queste due attitudini: dal punto di vista etico-politico, si tratta della distanza tra “predire il futuro” e “creare il futuro”, e sia la “predizione” che la “creazione” hanno un aspetto utopico/distopico e un aspetto tecnico-tecnologico, e l'articolazione tra le due è ciò di cui la Modernità necessita per ridurre il numero potenzialmente infinito di possibili che i sistemi sempre più complessi possono predisporre. Una certa de-futurizzazione del futuro è necessaria affinché un sistema sociale complesso possa articolare la propria azione nel presente, ma se la scarsità del tempo è una percezione costante per i Moderni, il vero nodo rispetto al “futuro presente” della catastrofe ecologica è che l'accelerazione sembra sempre più ridurre la possibilità di avere-tempo-per; se un sistema complesso necessita di un tanto di “determinismo” (naturalculturale) per funzionare, la potenza del negativo e del deviante necessitano invece di tempo. Luhmann ci permette di cogliere un aspetto determinante del tessuto temporale e storico della Modernità: i sistemi sempre più complessi, proprio perché maggiore complessità significa maggiori “futuri possibili”, devono necessariamente de-futurizzare il futuro, in modo da poter mantenere i sistemi funzionanti. Significa, all'interno del nostro discorso, che, finché la necessità del sistema complesso nel quale siamo immersi resterà intoccabile, il futuro difficilmente potrà iniziare, il futuro come possibilità altra rispetto a quella intrinseca ai sistemi complessi e alla “grande narrazione” della

Modernità. Luhmann non sembra lasciare molto spazio alla possibilità di futuri altri.

La de-futurizzazione del futuro è dunque il rovescio speculare della “progettabilità del futuro”: ciò che Koselleck chiama la “disponibilità della storia”<sup>79</sup> è il processo mediante il quale il futuro diviene “progettabile” nella misura in cui la distanza che lo separa dal presente, nonostante possa sembrare da un lato “accrescibile” illimitatamente e dall’altro ignoto perché non più *pre-iscritto nella e prescritto dalla* “storia della salvezza” e dall’escatologia, si determina a partire dalla scelta e dall’azione umane attuali. Il fatto dell’illimitatezza e dell’infinitizzazione del processo del progresso ha dunque due ragioni: la prima – sottolineata da Blumenberg – ha a che vedere con la delusione dinanzi al fatto che le promesse della Modernità non possono essere mantenute e quindi possono essere costantemente rilanciate, nascondendo il fatto fondamentale che questa forma specifica di infinitizzazione non è una secolarizzazione dell’infinito di Dio ma l’ammissione che il senso della storia è irrimediabilmente perduto<sup>80</sup>; la seconda – strettamente connessa alla prima – riguarda il piano materiale della globalizzata forma-di-vita capitalista che necessita dell’illimitato e dell’infinito della proiezione futura delle possibilità di profitto, per cui non necessita più di un senso della storia e tende a de-futurizzare l’avvenire. La soglia rappresentata dall’Antropocene, che è qui per restare, sembra mettere in discussione l’intero impianto dell’esperienza storica e temporale, e contemporaneamente la base materiale che ha prodotto tale esperienza e le categorie della sua pensabilità. Sembra essere anche, per certi versi, una possibilità davvero *altra e nuova*.

La nostra analisi sembra condurre all’idea che, *rebus sic stantibus*, l’inefficacia degli interventi per contenere la “crisi ecologica” siano connessi – dal punto di vista storico-concettuale e fenomenologico – a un’idea di temporalità e storicità deterministiche e che non permettono la possibilità della divergenza temporale. La contrazione del presente in connessione con una presentificazione che paradossalmente lancia la sua ombra sia sul passato che sul futuro sembrano indicare che *il futuro non può iniziare*. Le esperienze dell’accelerazione, nella Modernità e oggi sempre più (l’accelerazione accelera per definizione), sono

<sup>79</sup> «Mentre, per duemila anni, nel patrimonio culturale del mondo mediterraneo-occidentale aveva dominato la convinzione che *le storie si narrano* e che possono anche essere indagate e registrate, solo a partire dal 1780 circa si cominciò a pensare di poter *fare storia*. Questa formula suggerisce un’esperienza moderna e, ancor più, un’attesa moderna: che l’uomo sia sempre più capace di programmare la storia, e anche di realizzarla» (R. Koselleck, *Sulla disponibilità della storia*, cit., p. 225).

<sup>80</sup> Cfr. H. Blumenberg, *La legittimità dell’età moderna*, cit., pp. 83-93. Viviamo esattamente nell’epoca in cui questa impossibilità diviene particolarmente evidente: l’accrescimento delle disuguaglianze a livello globale, la crisi della democrazia e la crisi ecologica testimoniano proprio di questa promessa non mantenuta. L’Antropocene, l’epoca che riassume tutte queste crisi, è testimonianza anche del fatto che non si sta procedendo verso il meglio – ed è esperienza vissuta e pensata nel presente che sembra cancellare ogni possibile orizzonte di aspettativa.



molteplici: le descrizioni di Hartmut Rosa sono molto precise – accelerazione tecnica, culturale e dei ritmi di vita – così come il problema stesso dei ritmi differenti tra le accelerazioni in questi ambiti. E l'accelerazione non può che divenire, nel momento in cui si presenta come problematizzazione, un concetto particolarmente alla moda e, in senso koselleckiano, già sempre impregnato di “politica”: una delle lezioni che ci consegna Koselleck è che, nella Modernità, il “tempo” è una questione politica. La connessione tra l'idea di progresso e l'idea di accelerazione è centrale per comprendere il modo con cui gli Umani esperiscono il passaggio del tempo nella Modernità, e l'accelerazione è ciò che dà immediatamente all'esperienza del progresso un “valore”, il fatto fondamentale che non si procede e basta, ma si procede sempre verso un meglio nonostante alcuni mali necessari e per un certo verso funzionali. L'accelerazione sembra acquisire già-sempre un valore “progressivo” e “emancipatore”. In questo senso, ragionando in termini di accelerazione, *accelerare* sembra sempre avere un valore positivo, mentre *decelerare* sempre un valore negativo, conservativo, o qualora si proponga di invertire la marcia, reazionario. Il nodo è che i nostri concetti etico-politici di progressivo e conservatore/reazionario sorgono in maniera sovrastrutturale proprio dalla percezione di un tempo della storia che accelera. È un circolo vizioso: la storia accelera – sembra accelerare – per ragioni interne, e l'accelerazione diviene l'unità di misura del cambiamento. Ma quando si accelera si accelera sempre in una direzione: si segue un cammino; quando si decelera si decelera sempre sul medesimo cammino; quando si inverte il corso della marcia lo si fa sempre lungo la stessa strada. Il discorso sull'accelerazione sembra essere così, nel vero senso della parola, una strada bloccata. Ed è proprio così che *il futuro non può iniziare*.

In Reinhart Koselleck c'è una saldatura tra “accelerazione” e “crisi” – e dunque con ciò che possiamo chiamare “fine del futuro”. L'idea è che – al di là di secolarizzazione e ri-occupazione di senso – l'abbreviazione apocalittica del tempo si è realizzata nell'accelerazione tecnica: la domanda è fino a che punto sia possibile accelerare, fino a che punto il tempo possa essere accorciato e il futuro de-futurizzato, e se il processo storico dell'accelerazione possa raggiungere un punto limite, nel momento in cui la pressione temporale storica diviene sempre più simile a quella che si ritrova nel millenarismo dell'abbreviazione apocalittica. Ciò che salda dimensione teologica e storica è l'esperienza della crisi possibile: se «l'abbreviazione cosmica del tempo, che avrebbe dovuto precedere il giudizio universale, non ha esaurito il senso del concetto di crisi» e se «l'accelerazione del mondo moderno, sul cui contenuto reale non sussiste alcun dubbio, può essere intesa come crisi», allora «è chiaro che occorrono decisioni che, scientificamente o meno, intenzionalmente o meno, stabiliscano se e come sia o non sia possibile la sopravvivenza su questo pianeta»<sup>81</sup>. Nelle conclusioni del saggio sulla crisi del

<sup>81</sup> R. Koselleck, *Crisi*, in Id., *Il vocabolario della modernità*, cit., pp. 95-109, qui p. 106.

1986, Koselleck presenta «un'ipotesi temporale del tutto nuova», attraverso la delineazione di alcune «curve temporali esponenziali», dalla comparsa dieci milioni di fa del primo antropoide, all'interno di una storia del pianeta di oltre 5 miliardi di anni, fino alla condizione umana presente, attraversando gli ultimi due milioni di anni in cui si è verificata la lenta ominazione, gli ultimi seimila anni della civiltà urbana, arrivando agli ultimi trecento anni della società industriale e alle accelerazioni storiche conseguenti: accelerazione e crescita profilano «un limite che non potrà mai essere oltrepassato da alcun progresso tecnico e scientifico» e a questo si aggiunge che «la potenza autodistruttiva dell'umanità autonoma si è moltiplicata»<sup>82</sup>. A partire da questa ipotesi, Koselleck parla di *katechon* e della necessità di un *potere che frena*, ma questa risposta per certi versi tipica della teologia politica e della teoria della secolarizzazione non sembra convincere lo stesso Koselleck quando, poche righe più avanti, afferma che «forse la risposta alla crisi sta nel cercare stabilizzatori ricavabili dalla lunga durata della storia dell'umanità, così come si è svolta finora»<sup>83</sup>. La soluzione alla “crisi” dell’“accelerazione”, dunque, non sembra potersi trovare facilmente al di fuori delle categorie temporali e storiche della Modernità: Koselleck risulta diviso tra un ricorso tutto moderno al *katechon* e l'idea che il futuro contiene sempre di più o di meno rispetto alle condizioni passate da cui si può produrre; da un lato un determinismo storico e tecnologico, dall'altro la potenza del futuro di divergere.

Proviamo allora, anche noi, a mettere in campo un'ipotesi temporale del tutto nuova. Cosa avverrebbe all'accelerazione se si decidesse di scartare di lato? È possibile sfuggire alla trama del progressivo-conservativo-reazionario scartando di lato? E uno scarto di lato, non essendo né progressivo né conservatore né reazionario, cosa sarebbe? Il problema è dunque quello del presente, come posta in gioco prim'ancora del passato<sup>84</sup> e del futuro<sup>85</sup>. A sfumare è dunque il presente –

<sup>82</sup> Ivi, pp. 107-108.

<sup>83</sup> Ivi, p. 108.

<sup>84</sup> L'ossessione nei confronti della storia e del passato, nel XIX secolo, era dovuta alla prima grande impattante esperienza dell'accelerazione tecnologica e sociale. Le inquietudini “inattuali” di Nietzsche hanno proprio questo significato, con l'ipertrofia della coscienza storica a perdersi è il presente nella sua capacità trasformativa e di *fare storia*. Come afferma il filosofo inattuale: «Proprio accanto all'orgoglio dell'uomo moderno sta la sua *ironia* su se stesso, la sua consapevolezza di dover vivere in uno stato d'animo storicizzante e quasi crepuscolare, la sua paura di non poter ormai salvare nel futuro niente delle sue speranze e forze giovanili. Qua e là si va ancora oltre, fino al *cinismo*, e si giustifica il corso della storia, anzi tutto lo sviluppo del mondo, esclusivamente per la comodità dell'uomo moderno, secondo il canone cinico: proprio così doveva accadere, come va proprio ora; così e non diversamente doveva divenire l'uomo, come gli uomini sono ora, e nessuno deve ribellarsi a questo “deve”» (F.W. Nietzsche, *Sull'utilità e il danno della storia per la vita* (1874), tr. it. Adelphi, Milano 2021, p. 75).

<sup>85</sup> Altra ossessione tipica della Modernità. È possibile leggere la nascita della fantascienza e della distopia nel XIX secolo proprio a partire dall'accelerazione, nella misura in cui si accelera sempre in una direzione, lo scarto laterale non è possibile, anche quando non è chiaro quale sia la direzione che l'accelerazione ha preso. In questo senso, tra gli archetipi della “fantascienza”, non possiamo

contratto – insieme al passato, che è mera testimonianza del cammino che ci ha condotto qui – mai divergente (e di qui l'ossessione per la storia, tipica del XIX secolo, e non solo), e al futuro, che è ignoto soltanto nella misura in cui la strada è già-sempre segnata ma può andare soltanto in una direzione – che ci sia un masso a un certo punto o un precipizio-abisso, che la strada semplicemente finisca o duri per sempre non è dato saperlo ma cambia anche poco a causa della presentificazione e della de-futurizzazione.

L'epoca dell'accelerazione è già-sempre l'epoca della “fine delle storie”, la freccia del tempo incontra la circolarità del tempo nella misura in cui la direzione è segnata e il percorrerla costantemente assume una forma ripetitiva – non c'è differenza nella nostra storia, ma soltanto una strana ripetizione che non differenzia ma tutt'al più innova. In questo senso è possibile e utile tornare al dibattito su cos'è o cosa può essere rivoluzione oggi: locomotiva della storia o freno di emergenza della storia<sup>86</sup>? Rivoluzione oggi sembra poter essere solo lo scarto laterale dove il cammino non è stato ancora segnato, sfondare il guard-rail (sopravvivendo, grande difficoltà), e vedere cosa c'è e cosa accade, uscire dal mondo democriteo della necessità ed entrare nel mondo lucreziano dell'inclinazione – o scarto nel corso dell'accelerazione. Più marxiana o più benjaminiana questa idea della rivoluzione? Quando si scarta di lato non si accelera né si decelera – perché non si è più lungo la linea dell'accelerazione – si può anche non frenare, ma si rallenta nello scarto – un freno “naturale” in un certo senso – ma la direzione intrapresa può essere poi approcciata nuovamente accelerando? Dove non c'è strada segnata non c'è tecnicamente accelerazione, perché la necessità dello scarto è costante.

Vivere nell'Antropocene della crisi ecologica significa vivere al di là di accelerazione e decelerazione – al di là di progressismo e conservatorismo/reazionario – significa dover imparare a scartare costantemente. Significa reinventare la nostra presenza temporale nel mondo, ripensare la nostra condizione umana radicalmente, proprio nel senso arendtiano di ripensare “lavoro”, “opera” e “azione” (società, tecnica e politica)<sup>87</sup>, a partire da altre coordinate e ripensando le condizioni di possibilità della nostra esistenza temporale e storica. Qualunque “rivoluzione” – se mai ce ne saranno – non potrà prescindere da questo, sarà una rivoluzione *nel* tempo e *del* tempo.

non trovare il “Libro delle macchine” di Samuel Butler (cfr. S. Butler, *Erewhon* (1872), tr. it. Adelphi, Milano 2020, in particolare pp. 172-201).

<sup>86</sup> Si tratta della famosa affermazione benjaminiana: «Marx dice che le rivoluzioni sono la locomotiva della storia universale. Ma forse le cose stanno in modo del tutto diverso. Forse le rivoluzioni sono il ricorso al freno d'emergenza da parte del genere umano in viaggio su questo treno» (cfr. W. Benjamin, *Sul concetto di storia* (1940), in Id., *Opere complete VII. Scritti 1938-1940*, tr. it. Einaudi, Torino 2006, pp. 483-517, qui p. 497).

<sup>87</sup> Il riferimento è ovviamente a H. Arendt, *Vita activa. La condizione umana* (1958), tr. it. Bompiani, Milano 2006.

## 5. UNA POSTILLA BLUMENBERGHIANA

Le conclusioni del paragrafo precedente meritano un ulteriore approfondimento, affinché non restino soltanto buone intenzioni etico-politiche. Ricominciamo. Sembra che le nozioni di “progresso”, “emancipazione” e “rivoluzione” abbiano perso la loro efficacia nel rispondere a determinate domande che la crisi epocale dell’Antropocene sembra porre. La nostra ipotesi è che nell’epoca della crisi ecologica dispiegata – crisi che incrocia e ri-significa anche le altre crisi correlate (economica, sociale, politica, della condizione umana) – quella specifica “immagine del mondo” che definisce le condizioni di possibilità della pensabilità del Sé e del mondo sia entrata in crisi, una crisi che sempre di più produce un bisogno di senso. L’accelerazione che, come abbiamo visto, rappresenta il motore che ha dato avvio alla Modernità – e alle sue sovrastrutture di senso – non è più in grado di definire gli orizzonti di senso che possono permettere agli umani una costruzione del Sé e del mondo: disagio psicologico – depressione e *burn-out* nell’iperaccelerata società della prestazione – e disagio ecologico – crisi del principio di precauzione, fine dell’idea di un’autonomia dell’umano dalla natura – sono i sintomi di un’incapacità di orientamento nel mondo. Il mondo sta diventando sempre più estraneo, il Sé sempre più frammentario e caotico. *Viviamo nello spaesamento.*

Comprendere la continuità/discontinuità epocale rappresentata dalla Modernità significa anche pensare – nel momento di una crisi epocale – alle possibili continuità/discontinuità che ci aprono a un “dopo” della Modernità, da non pensarsi nei termini già evocati di post-modernità, sur-modernità o modernità liquida: l’accelerazione ha contratto a tal punto le determinazioni temporali da non permettere più né una ri-comprensione del passato che vada al di là di un riconoscimento antiquario di qualcosa che ha già-sempre preparato il presente, né una ri-apertura del futuro al di là di quanto pre-iscritto e prescritto sulla base di un sostanzialismo storico che può pensare solo il cambiamento di una sostanza e non il rinnovamento dell’arredo storico, sociale e ontologico, né tantomeno un’ontologia dell’attualità come divergenza dal cammino uni-direzionale della Storia e compito etico-politico nei confronti del passato e del futuro<sup>88</sup>.

Come ha sottolineato Blumenberg, ogni svolta epocale – la fine di un’immagine del mondo e la nascita di una nuova – non rappresenta né la prosecuzione lungo un cammino prescritto e pre-iscritto da un sostanzialismo

<sup>88</sup> Di “ontologia dell’attualità” parla Michel Foucault (cfr. M. Foucault, *Che cos’è l’Illuminismo?* (1984), in Id., *Archivio Foucault 3. 1978-1985. Estetica dell’esistenza, etica, politica*, tr. it. Feltrinelli, Milano 1998, pp. 217-232; e Id., *Il governo di sé e degli altri. Corso al Collège de France (1982-1983)*, tr. it. Feltrinelli, Milano 2009, pp. 11-47). Abbiamo discusso la questione in D. Salottolo, *Temporalizzazione, autocomprensione storica e cancellazione del futuro nell’Antropocene. una riflessione etico-politica a partire da Koselleck e Foucault*, in “Etica&Politica”, XXV, 2023, 3, pp. 339-371.

storico<sup>89</sup> né un'assoluta frattura che produce il radicalmente nuovo come *creatio ex nihilo*: ciò che va analizzato è il garbuglio di continuità e discontinuità tra le epoche. La discontinuità è l'elemento determinante per comprendere la "legittimità" della Modernità: Blumenberg, nella sua critica al modello della secolarizzazione, sottolinea la necessità di superare un'idea sostanzialistica della storia – il cui difetto principale è che «il successo teoretico si fa dipendere dalla dimostrazione di costanti nella storia»<sup>90</sup> – la quale impedirebbe di vedere il "nuovo" e la "discontinuità" che un'epoca rappresenta rispetto a un'altra; ritenere che l'idea di "progresso" (così come l'accelerazione di cui abbiamo discusso) sia una ri-trascrizione, sul piano dell'immanenza, della trascendenza dell'escatologia del Cristianesimo primitivo, impedirebbe di comprendere la radicalità della Modernità nel suo porsi come una "risposta" storica nei termini di "autoaffermazione umana" nei confronti dell'"assolutismo teologico" tardo-medievale, un'immagine del mondo il cui motore è un Dio arbitrario e incomprensibile<sup>91</sup>. Ma la "discontinuità" rappresentata dalla Modernità – e in generale da ogni nuova epoca rispetto alla precedente – non è assoluta, perché c'è anche un processo di continuità: «che il nuovo della storia non possa essere di volta in volta qualcosa di arbitrario, ma sia soggetto a un rigore di aspettative e bisogni precostituiti rappresenta la condizione grazie alla quale possiamo avere qualcosa come una conoscenza della storia»<sup>92</sup>. Si tratta dello stesso discorso fatto da Koselleck quando afferma che nel presente c'è sempre qualcosa in più rispetto a quanto si possa dedurre semplicemente dalle condizioni del passato: su questo punto, Blumenberg risulta essere particolarmente convincente quando mostra come la continuità della storia sia data, non da una sostanza che si espone storicamente e si realizza all'interno di un processo finalizzato (questa stessa concezione deriva dalla Modernità e dalla sua particolare coscienza storica e temporale, *oggi in crisi*), ma, dal punto di vista fenomenologico, a partire da aspettative e bisogni che derivano dall'epoca in via di superamento e si trovano pre-costituiti nella nuova epoca, ponendo domande a cui la vecchia epoca non riesce più a dare risposta. Queste "domande" non riguardano determinati

<sup>89</sup> Si tratta dell'impostazione blumenberghiana che, rileggendo la distinzione cassireriana tra "sostanza" e "funzione", critica il teorema della "secolarizzazione" di Löwith e Schmitt come forma (post-hegeliana) di sostanzialismo storico (cfr. H. Blumenberg, *La legittimità dell'età moderna*, cit.). Per un approfondimento critico sul rapporto tra "secolarizzazione" e "legittimità" cfr. E. Cicchini, G. Gisondi (a cura di), *La modernità in questione. Studi e testi su La legittimità dell'età moderna di Hans Blumenberg*, cit., in particolar modo E. Cicchini, *Legittimità della secolarizzazione*, ivi, pp. 27-51, dove si limita il portato della critica di Blumenberg.

<sup>90</sup> H. Blumenberg, *La legittimità dell'età moderna*, cit., p. 35

<sup>91</sup> Cfr. ivi, pp. 130-240 (la seconda parte dal titolo *Assolutismo teologico e autoaffermazione umana*). Come avremo modo di mostrare a breve, la Modernità nasce dallo spaesamento dell'assolutismo teologico occamistico così come il mito sorge dallo spaesamento angosciante e paralizzante dell'assolutismo della realtà nella fase di ominazione.

<sup>92</sup> Ivi, p. 502.

“contenuti” – vale a dire di volta in volta concetti o teorie – ma *esigenze* di sapere che definiscono i contorni di un’interpretazione che dia senso al mondo e al Sé. Il fenomeno dell’accelerazione, che stiamo cercando di elaborare all’interno di questo studio, nel modo in cui ha permesso allo stesso tempo la nascita e la crisi di una serie di nozioni, dal “progresso” alla “rivoluzione” passando per l’“emancipazione”, non sembra essere più in grado di dare una risposta di senso allo spaesamento della condizione umana contemporanea: dal punto di vista individuale, il “progresso” o l’“emancipazione” non sembrano più indicare il percorso di costruzione del Sé – il caos e la frammentarietà delle esperienze di vita, l’accelerazione dei ritmi e delle trasformazioni, pone l’individuo dinanzi all’incapacità di dare un senso alla propria esistenza e al proprio agire, al di là di un’accelerazione nei consumi (di merci, esperienze, relazioni affettive, etc.), la conseguenza è empiricamente riscontrabile nell’accrescimento quantitativo dei fenomeni depressivi e di *burn-out*; dal punto di vista sociale e storico, non sembrano essere più chiavi di lettura utilizzabili per comprendere la direzione – dunque il *sensu* – che il vivere in comune sta prendendo: la crisi ecologica, e le crisi interrelate, così come, dal punto di vista della riflessione, i problemi connessi alle varie forme di accelerazionismo, sembrano indicare uno spaesamento epocale che, nei termini blumenberghiani di una logica ermeneutica di domanda e risposta, può indicare il fatto fondamentale, che tali risposte non rispondono più ai bisogni e alle aspettative degli umani dei primi decenni del XXI secolo. Blumenberg utilizza a tal proposito il concetto di “ri-occupazione”: il “nuovo” deve ri-occupare con una nuova “immagine del mondo” lo spazio lasciato vuoto dalla crisi di senso che ha determinato la fine del “vecchio”. L’Antropocene rappresenta una svolta epocale, *è lo spaesante a partire dal quale una nuova immagine del mondo potrebbe costituirsi*<sup>93</sup>.

C’è una grande *impasse*. Dinanzi alla difficoltà di pensare il “futuro” e dunque il “nuovo” nel senso blumenberghiano (non l’innovazione in senso meramente tecnologico e strumentale), la difficoltà riguarda la posizione del “presente” nel momento della svolta epocale. Il problema non è di poco conto: la Modernità sarebbe la prima epoca che ha storicizzato il tempo – nel senso di una temporalità umana separata dalla temporalità naturale – e dunque rivendica allo stesso tempo l’autocoscienza storica e la produzione del nuovo, rispetto alle epoche differenti. La Modernità è cosciente di Sé ed è proprio perché è autocosciente che può progettare il nuovo come compito ed esigenza morale. Il problema si pone in

<sup>93</sup> “Potrebbe”, non necessariamente “dovrebbe”: innanzitutto perché il funzionalismo storico blumenberghiano non permette di pensare alcuna finalità nella storia – ogni epoca, una volta insediatasi, proietta a posteriori sull’epoca o sulle epoche precedenti la propria immagine del mondo, questa l’*apparenza* di finalismo che è sempre riscontrabile ed è sempre “ritornante” nella storia della cultura; in secondo luogo perché – a causa di determinate contingenze storiche – potrebbe non essere possibile. Nei prossimi paragrafi proveremo a discutere proprio quest’ultimo aspetto.

questi termini: un'epoca autocosciente può produrre una svolta epocale? Ci troviamo in un *cul de sac* hegeliano: l'epoca dell'autocoscienza storica è anche e *necessariamente* l'epoca della fine della storia? Se il presente trova la sua propria funzione nella misura in cui rappresenta la risposta che ri-occupa il senso lasciato vacante dalla vecchia immagine del mondo, i bisogni e le aspettative presenti – quando è manifesto il processo – hanno ancora la potenza di evocare una nuova immagine del mondo o possono già-sempre essere ricondotte al modello in crisi? Il percorso di ri-occupazioni non ha alcuna finalità, non è (non potrebbe essere) progressivo o finalizzato, ma concerne ri-posizionamenti che si producono comunque storicamente: anche se forse non piacerebbe a Blumenberg, la sua riflessione – come del resto quella di Koselleck (al quale probabilmente anche non piacerebbe) – è indubbiamente materialista nella misura in cui parte dalla materialità dei bisogni e delle aspettative – umane, troppo umane – per definire le ragioni del senso di un'epoca e delle direzioni delle grandi trasformazioni epocali. Ma un'epoca consapevole di sé stessa – che rivendica la sua differenza con il passato, e che su questa differenza continuamente rilanciata, l'accelerazione, ha costruito il proprio senso del mondo – può produrre una nuova immagine del mondo? O questa “nuova” immagine del mondo rischia sempre di essere inserita nel dispositivo “innovatore” della Modernità, dunque lungo la linea pre-iscritta e prescritta dalla Modernità stessa e dal progresso?

La risposta a questa domanda non è semplice, ma rappresenta sicuramente una delle “domande” – forse la “domanda” che contiene il senso della crisi epocale e della svolta epocale – a cui la Modernità non riesce più a dare una risposta: l'epoca dell'Antropocene dovrà prenderla sul serio, perché rappresenta il compito etico e politico che la crisi epocale ci pone. Nel primo capitolo di *Elaborazione del mito*, Blumenberg, ripercorrendo il processo di ominazione, richiama un elemento originario – o, per meglio dire, inconcettuale – la relazione tra l'assolutismo della realtà, l'aprirsi del mondo nella sua mancanza di senso all'animale umano, e l'angoscia (*Angst*), come intenzionalità della coscienza – oramai distaccata dal mondo – senza un oggetto, come ciò che «rende equivalente l'intero orizzonte, come totalità delle direzioni dalle quali “qualcosa può sopraggiungere”»<sup>94</sup>. Una “situazione” di questo tipo sarebbe stata insostenibile per l'animale umano e, come con determinati processi avviene nella psiche individuale, anche a livello di specie, si sono attivati alcuni dispositivi – i primi – di razionalizzazione dell'angoscia in paura di qualcosa di determinato/delimitato: «la supposizione del familiare per il non familiare, delle spiegazioni per

<sup>94</sup> H. Blumenberg, *Elaborazione del mito* (1979), tr. it. Il Mulino, Bologna 1991, p. 26. Questa forma di “spaesamento” per certi versi originaria, anche se blumenberghianamente viviamo già-sempre al di qua dell'assolutismo della realtà, l'origine restando per sua “natura” inattingibile, non è però strutturale: ogni crisi epocale produce uno “spaesamento” specifico, orientato dai bisogni e dalle aspettative maturate nell'epoca al tramonto.

l'inesplicabile, dei nomi per il non nominabile»<sup>95</sup>; il dispositivo determinante è la nominazione – l'efficacia simbolica e terapeutica di cui ebbe a parlare anche Lévi-Strauss<sup>96</sup> – perché «ciò che i nomi hanno reso identificabile viene spogliato della sua estraneità per mezzo della metafora, e reso accessibile nel suo significato raccontando delle storie»<sup>97</sup>. Il “lavoro del mito” ha innanzitutto questa funzione terapeutica, rappresenta il primo momento di quell'arte di vivere che l'umano ha dovuto costruire in un mondo all'interno del quale non aveva più una relazione basata sull'immediatezza della risposta e di cui necessitava per abbattere l'assolutismo della realtà e *avere un mondo*. Questa primissima soglia – o, per meglio dire, ciò che c'è prima di questa soglia, prima dell'inizio dell'abbattimento dell'assolutismo della realtà – non è per Blumenberg attingibile: *l'umano è quell'animale che già-sempre occupa di senso il mondo per sfuggire all'angoscia*.

La domanda fondamentale di cui si cerca la risposta, in modi sempre differenti e a partire dalle domande collaterali che ogni epoca produce, è il modo di dare senso al mondo e al Sé, rendendoli familiari, nominabili e riconoscibili nelle loro forme, almeno *fino a un certo punto*. «L'uomo è sempre al di qua dell'assolutismo della realtà», dice Blumenberg, «ma non acquista mai completamente la certezza di aver raggiunto il punto critico della propria storia oltre il quale la relativa predominanza della realtà sulla coscienza e sul destino si è capovolta nella supremazia del soggetto»<sup>98</sup>. La Modernità – e l'accelerazione come suo motore materiale e di senso – ha promesso il raggiungimento di questo *punto critico*, ma la crisi ecologica e l'Antropocene – che sono qui per restare – hanno dimostrato il fallimento di questa promessa/pretesa. Cosa resta, dunque, della Modernità dinanzi a questo fallimento?

L'epoca dell'Antropocene, proprio perché la crisi ecologica pienamente dispiegata sembra avere un valore “cosmico”, qualcosa in grado di mettere in discussione il tutto dell'umano e della realtà, rischia di ricondurre l'umano nuovamente in quella fase di angoscia primordiale, ma *consapevole*, e di assolutismo della realtà, *quando il pericolo è assoluto e può giungere da tutte le direzioni*. Ma le svolte epocali sono ri-occupazioni di senso: dinanzi a ciò che potrà determinarsi come catastrofe, sussiste sempre la prestazione originaria dell'umano – la capacità di porre le domande finché le risposte non si costruiscono all'interno di un orizzonte di senso. Difficile dire se la consapevolezza della Modernità di essere l'epoca che deve occupare sempre il nuovo consapevolmente, potrà essere un freno, ma quello che è certo è che il compito etico e politico – nell'epoca dell'accelerazione e dell'Antropocene – sarà quello di definire i contorni di una nuova esperienza storica e temporale in grado

<sup>95</sup> Ivi, pp. 27-28.

<sup>96</sup> Cfr. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Antropologia strutturale* (1964), tr. it. il Saggiatore, Milano 2009, in particolar modo il saggio *L'efficacia simbolica*, pp. 210-230.

<sup>97</sup> H. Blumenberg, *Elaborazione del mito* (1979), cit., p. 28.

<sup>98</sup> Ivi, p. 32.



di dare senso al mondo e al Sé, *a partire dalle domande della Modernità rimaste senza risposta*. Non ci è dato sapere se una ri-occupazione di senso possa essere un progetto consapevole, ma quello che dimostra la morsa dell'accelerazione della crisi ecologica, è che l'umano deve ri-occupare la domanda sul nuovo contingente e deviante, mediante una ri-occupazione delle domande che – fondamentali per la Modernità e per l'umano – non trovano più una risposta adeguata. Progresso, emancipazione e rivoluzione possono sembrare parole-concetti fuori tempo massimo, ed è vero che nella tarda Modernità non sembrano trovare più spazio, definire un senso, restano però le domande che la nuova epoca ci pone. Il futuro potrà iniziare quando saremo in grado di trovare nuove risposte, *radicalmente altre*.

S y m p o s i u m

Stefano Anastasia, *Le pene e il carcere*, Mondadori Università, Milano 2022



# DIRITTI UMANI E PARADIGMA SECURITARIO

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## ABSTRACT

Human rights are an effective tool in the fight against the injustices of the prison system in our contemporary societies. Yet, they can only become so if they are extended not only to the rights of liberty, within which the neoliberal discourse would like to restrict them, but also to social rights. Without this extension, the distance between the human rights discourse and the predominant repressive paradigm narrows dangerously, as shown by the way in which legitimate concern for victims has fueled this paradigm, and as also shown by the paradoxical resistance that this paradigm opposes to certain extensions of the power to punish, such as the introduction, in Italy, of the offence of torture, and the strengthening of criminal policies against sexist and sexual violence.

## KEYWORDS

Human Rights. Criminal Justice. Neoliberalism

1. Il libro di Stefano Anastasia, limpido nelle sue argomentazioni, ineccepibilmente informato, si offre come un indispensabile viatico per chi voglia comprendere e valutare le più recenti politiche criminali delle nazioni occidentali, in particolare dell'Italia. Procedendo sicuro lungo un itinerario sia descrittivo che normativo, l'autore dimostra la lampante contrarietà del nostro sistema carcerario con i diritti umani. Come dimostra la giurisprudenza recente, le corti, anche internazionali, volte a tutelarli vanno dunque considerate un prezioso ed efficace strumento di lotta contro le ingiustizie subite dalle persone detenute.

In questa breve nota, non intendo ripercorrere tale itinerario, che mi ha perfettamente convinto. Piuttosto, mi propongo di tornare su due aspetti del libro che mi hanno incuriosito e che, forse (ma forse anche no), meriterebbero di essere ulteriormente approfonditi. Leggendo *Le pene e il carcere*, infatti, sono stato portato a riflettere su due contrasti, o due tensioni, tra orientamenti penali diversi e discordanti che si incrociano nel nostro presente. Nel libro il primo contrasto è esplicito; implicito il secondo.

Al primo è apertamente dedicato l'intero libro, il cui scopo principale è proprio quello di illuminarlo. Secondo Anastasia, come appena ricordato, due sono

gli aspetti che caratterizzano l'odierna situazione dell'istituzione penale nei Paesi liberaldemocratici. Per prima cosa, e in primo piano, l'inflazione carceraria, l'ossessione repressiva. In altri termini: l'ideologia panpenalistica, secondo la quale gran parte dei maggiori problemi delle nostre società andrebbero risolti con lo strumento poliziesco e penale. E dall'altra parte, in controluce o in controcanto, la possibile delegittimazione del sistema penale democratico in nome dei diritti umani. Da una parte, il cupo paradigma securitario; dall'altra, il luminoso umanesimo penale: i due aspetti, in tensione l'uno con l'altro, convivono nelle istituzioni punitive del nostro presente.

Il secondo contrasto si manifesta nella curiosa parabola che compie il libro: il quale inizia con una considerazione negativa sull'"ampliamento dell'aera degli illeciti penali" (p. 39), chiudendosi però con un giudizio positivo sul recente inserimento, nell'ordinamento penale italiano, di una nuova fattispecie criminale (il reato di tortura).

Nelle pagine che seguono, tornerò su questi due contrasti: sul primo, per provare a ridimensionarne la radicalità e, dunque, anche il significato; e sul secondo per difenderne la coerenza.

2. Innanzitutto, mi chiedo se la contrapposizione fra ossessione securitaria e discorso umanitario sia davvero così netta e assoluta – e se, conseguentemente, dobbiamo davvero fidare nel secondo per correggere e riformare le istituzioni ispirate dalla prima. Vorrei suggerire che, invece, il paradigma repressivo fa leva proprio su quello umanitario, interpretato però in un determinato modo. Per contrastare efficacemente la *doxa* panpenalistica, è dunque forse controproducente appellarsi *tout court* al discorso umanitario: occorre, anzitutto, cambiarne il significato (o ristabilirne il vero significato).

Per illustrare questa idea, possiamo partire da una delle tendenze recenti più vistose della giustizia penale nei Paesi liberaldemocratici: l'attenzione alle vittime, che si manifesta non solo nei discorsi, ma anche nella pratica giudiziaria, attraverso i tentativi per inserire negli ordinamenti penali procedure o dispositivi ispirati alla giustizia riparativa. Ebbene, non è chiaro se tale tendenza rientri nell'uno o nell'altro aspetto evidenziati da Anastasia: la repressione securitaria, o il garantismo umanistico. Piuttosto, sembra chiaro che rientri invece sia nell'uno che nell'altro.

Da un lato, infatti, è superfluo ricordare come il discorso securitario del populismo penale sfrutti continuamente i normali, legittimi sentimenti di compassione verso le vittime di reati: l'ansia per le vittime, dunque, pare riconducibile, secondo ogni evidenza, alla svolta punitiva. Dall'altro lato, però, questa tendenza va ricollegata, senza dubbio, anche con l'altra caratteristica del nostro tempo, cioè l'istanza umanitaria o umanistica, se non altro alla luce della concomitanza storica tra la nascita dei diritti umani e "l'invenzione della compassione" (Hunt 2007). Ma se un elemento così rilevante degli sviluppi recenti della giustizia penale dipende in egual misura dalle sue due maggiori caratteristiche, facendo sfumare i confini che

li separano, forse vuol dire che queste caratteristiche non sono così diverse l'una dall'altra, in modo così nitido come poteva sembrare.

Per comprenderne la ragione, bisogna tornare alle origini della svolta punitiva, seguendo la brillante, precisa ricostruzione storica offerta da Anastasia. Tutto è iniziato quarant'anni fa, nella seconda metà degli anni Ottanta dello scorso secolo: con la legislazione sulle droghe. L'obiettivo politico era quello di controllare meglio la marginalità sociale: e lo strumento prescelto fu quello della repressione poliziesca e penale. Tale improvvisa guerra alle droghe affonda le radici nel trapasso dal *welfare state* al neoliberalismo. Le analisi di Zygmunt Bauman sulla modernità liquida, ricordate da Anastasia, consentono infatti di chiarire il nesso tra neoliberalismo e repressione penale: il disorientamento politico creato dal primo provoca una domanda di sicurezza che si realizza in forme di democrazia immediata e di esternalizzazione identitaria del rischio e della violenza. In altri termini (e in estrema sintesi), ecco dunque come le cose sono andate (e come vanno tutt'ora): il neoliberalismo non può produrre il discorso della sua legittimazione, visto che, invece, tende a distruggere le ragioni stesse dell'adesione al suo modello, in particolare da parte dei segmenti più svantaggiati della società; e quindi si trova continuamente ad affrontare un problema, squisitamente gramsciano, di egemonia culturale o ideologica, che a partire dagli anni '80 dello scorso secolo ha risolto, o cercato di risolvere, con il discorso della legge e dell'ordine.

Occorre tuttavia andare più in là. E osservare come tale discorso della legge e dell'ordine abbia portato a mettere in primo piano i diritti fondamentali di libertà, dalla proprietà privata all'integrità del proprio corpo, scindendoli dai diritti sociali, pure altrettanto fondamentali, ma considerati estranei alla logica stessa dei diritti (Whyte 2019). Travisato e travestito in questo modo, il discorso umanitario poteva allora venire in aiuto del paradigma repressivo, o forse addirittura generarlo: focalizzando, anche giustamente, l'attenzione sulle vittime dei reati, ma obliterando completamente la tragica, travagliata realtà sociale che fa da sfondo ai reati stessi; e orientando le decisioni politiche verso il penale, piuttosto che verso il sociale. Ci si può chiedere, pertanto, se il discorso umanitario e il richiamo alla dignità umana possano davvero bastare a mettere in crisi il paradigma securitario e l'ondata punitiva che ne è risultata. Proprio quel discorso, infatti, è stato strumentalizzato dal discorso neoliberale che sta alla base di quel paradigma: e mi chiedo se sia strategico contestare un discorso con lo stesso strumento di cui si è servito. Per riuscire in questa strategia, bisogna invece non solo richiamare la centralità dei diritti, ma portare avanti, contemporaneamente, una vera e propria battaglia culturale, ricordando come nei diritti umani rientrino anche i diritti sociali, come il diritto alla salute (che è oggetto di un bellissimo capitolo del libro di Anastasia), il diritto all'educazione, il diritto a una vita decente ecc. Il discorso umanitario spesso non contempla né rivendica tali diritti: condivide con il mercato neoliberale un universalismo astratto che ignora le differenze strutturali e di partenza.

Ecco come da questo paradigma umanitario, fortemente sostenuto dal discorso neoliberale a giustificazione del proprio operato, è scaturita l'attenzione alle vittime, il discorso vittimario. Del quale, allora, la svolta punitiva e l'inflazione carceraria possono essere considerate uno degli effetti collaterali: almeno nel senso che da quell'attenzione e da quel discorso sono state facilitate, alimentate, consolidate. In campo penale, del resto, la cosiddetta preoccupazione "vittimaria" era del tutto legittima: tendeva a colmare una lacuna oggettiva del processo penale, ereditata dal rito inquisitorio, e cioè l'assenza di ogni partecipazione delle vittime all'azione penale, dalla denuncia alla sentenza. Ma poi si è espressa in un discorso astratto sull'essere umano in generale, prescindendo totalmente dai profili sociologici (in senso ampio) dei criminali (nonché delle loro vittime), e escludendo dal novero delle "vittime" ogni "vittima" dell'ordine economico e sociale. L'universalismo astratto del discorso vittimario poteva allora servire da supporto alla retorica securitaria, perché cancellava la dimensione tragica, nel senso più autentico del termine, di ogni caso penale – dove, anche se in misure certo diverse, magari diversissime, e con diversi parametri di valutazione, ci sono spesso (ma non sempre, com'è ovvio ed è meglio ricordarlo, a scanso di equivoci) soltanto vittime. Non occorre pertanto rifiutare in blocco la cura dovuta alle vittime, ma piuttosto integrarla con un discorso più ampio sui diritti sociali, sostituendo l'universalismo astratto con un universalismo concreto. Temo, altrimenti, che il discorso umanitario – interpretato (e frainteso) dal neoliberalismo –, anche se magari utile per combattere, ad esempio e soprattutto, l'ergastolo, in quanto pena diversa dalle altre (e sulla quale il libro di Anastasia contiene pagine davvero bellissime), risulti poco utile invece (se non controproducente) nelle lotte per migliorare le condizioni dei detenuti e, in generale, a favore di pene rispettose dei diritti umani.

Nella battaglia culturale per un ripensamento delle forme sanzionatorie, il discorso dei diritti è certamente chiamato a svolgere un ruolo primordiale: ma a patto che si estenda a tutti i diritti umani, compresi quelli sociali che ne fanno parte integrante sin dalla loro formulazione illuministica (Spitz 2022). Come dimostra Anastasia, in sede giurisprudenziale tale estensione è già spesso in atto: ad esempio nel caso del diritto alla salute; ma sono acquisti fragili, se non poggiano su convinzioni più ampiamente, pubblicamente condivise. In un secondo tempo, e a patto di essere saldamente imperniato su questo discorso, un prezioso aiuto può allora essere fornito dal discorso utilitaristico, declinato in chiave negativa come faceva già Beccaria: un discorso che dimostra come le pene severe alimentino la criminalità e, dunque, come l'accanimento repressivo non faccia che provocare altre vittime. L'ergastolo, ad esempio, contrario ai diritti umani più fondamentali, è parte di un sistema che poggia soltanto sulla legge del più forte, alimentando il risentimento dei soggetti più svantaggiati: *“Chi ha fatte queste leggi? Uomini ricchi e potenti, che non si sono mai degnati visitare le squallide capanne del povero [...]”*, secondo le parole che Beccaria attribuiva ai poveri che vivono sotto la minaccia del patibolo (Beccaria 1764-66, p. 234).

3. Passo al secondo punto: cioè alla richiesta, espressa da chi è pure preoccupato dall'inflazione securitaria, di nuove fattispecie di reato (come quello di tortura, finalmente accolto nel codice penale italiano). Questo secondo contrasto è un altro tratto tipico di alcune lotte sociali, politiche e giuridiche del nostro tempo: vorrei ricordare, in particolare, come si manifesti soprattutto, oggi, nelle lotte intorno ai reati sessuali. Da queste lotte partirò dunque, sia pure brevemente, per illustrare questa seconda tensione, che emerge, come ricordato, dal percorso compiuto dal libro di Anastasia.

Come l'attenzione alle vittime, anche quella ai reati sessuali, sia nei discorsi che nella pratica legislativa e giurisprudenziale, sembra rientrare, a prima vista, nella svolta punitiva: basta pensare alle richieste che prevedono l'introduzione di nuove fattispecie di reato, la ridefinizione legislativa di reati già presenti, l'allungamento dei termini di prescrizione, l'inasprimento delle sanzioni comminate. Da tale dominante "femminismo punitivo" che, in linea con la svolta repressiva delle società contemporanee, intende contrastare la "cultura dello stupro" e della "scusa" con più pene e con pene più severe, si sono giustamente discoste varie autrici femministe (Taylor2018; Gruber2020; Davis, Dent, Meiners, Richie2022).

Giustamente, non c'è dubbio. Ma, pur condividendo queste critiche, è lecito ritenere che i legittimi risentimenti contro il privilegio di impunità che hanno goduto e godono ancora molti aggressori sessuali rientrino anche, e forse soprattutto, in un altro processo, che è quello dei progressi del diritto penale come "legge del più debole" (Ferrajoli 1985; 1989). Ricollegando tale questione con quella precedente, si può infatti osservare come l'attenzione ai reati sessuali abbia permesso di conferire finalmente uno statuto giuridico di vittima a chi prima ne era escluso, o perché nel codice non venivano contemplate le violenze che la vittima aveva subito, o perché essa non sapeva di aver subito delle violenze illegali, o perché dalle forze di polizia non veniva ascoltata come avrebbe dovuto esserlo.

È vero, come diceva Montesquieu, che la civiltà di un Paese si misura dalla mitezza e moderazione del suo ordinamento penale: quindi, anche dalla riduzione dell'area degli illeciti penali (Montesquieu 1721, lettera 78 [80 nell'ed. postuma], pp. 225-229). La riduzione delle fattispecie di reato è perciò tutt'uno con il processo di civilizzazione. Questa preziosa osservazione va però integrata, anche alla luce di tutto quello che c'è stato di buono nell'evoluzione dei sistemi penali da due secoli a questa parte. Nel processo di civilizzazione, infatti, si sovrappongono in campo penale due processi che vanno in senso contrario: a quello di decriminalizzazione delle azioni indifferenti si sovrappone un processo inverso di criminalizzazione delle violenze coperte o rese invisibili dai poteri, dalle forze sociali dominanti o da ideologie discriminatorie. In tali violenze rientrano sia le torture eseguite dalle forze dell'ordine, sia le aggressioni ordinarie e meno ordinarie compiute dagli uomini sul corpo femminile.

Su questo aveva già attirato l'attenzione la tradizione illuministica, nonostante fosse preoccupata soprattutto dalla depenalizzazione di molti reati puniti come tali



nelle legislazioni di antico regime. In questa tradizione, com'è noto, poco si parla di un *dovere* di punire, anche perché nel modello imposto da Beccaria le punizioni rispondono a imperativi strategici o prudenziali, non a imperativi etici. Ma ogni tanto emerge l'espressione; ed è notevole come emerga sempre a proposito di reati commessi dai più forti.

Così, a due riprese la Dichiarazione dell'89 menziona l'idea di un dovere di punire, ma sempre contro i più forti e potenti: nell'articolo 7, là dove si dice che "Quelli che sollecitano, emanano, eseguono o fanno eseguire degli ordini arbitrari, devono essere puniti", e nell'articolo 9, là dove si dice che "se si ritiene indispensabile arrestar[e un uomo], ogni rigore non necessario per assicurarsi della sua persona deve essere severamente represso dalla legge". Il principio è formulato con più nettezza ancora nella Dichiarazione del 1793, dove si legge nell'articolo 31: "I delitti dei mandatari del popolo e dei suoi agenti non devono mai essere impuniti". Anche questo aspetto dei diritti umani merita di essere ricordato, per richiamare l'attenzione del diritto penale anche verso i delitti dei potenti e, più in generale, verso quello che Luigi Ferrajoli chiama «crimini di sistema» (Ferrajoli 2019; 2021; 2022).

4. Indispensabili, nella lotta contro le ingiustizie del nostro sistema carcerario, sono dunque, indubbiamente, i diritti umani: come giustamente, ineccepibilmente illustrato da Anastasia. Ma, aggiungerei, a patto di ridare loro la definizione che avevano nelle loro prime formulazioni illuministiche: dove con *diritti* si intendevano non solo i diritti di libertà, ma anche i diritti sociali; e non solo, in egual misura, i diritti di tutti, ma anche, proporzionatamente, quelli dei più deboli.

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# IL “NUOVO GRANDE INTERNAMENTO” INTORNO A NEOLIBERALISMO, ANGOSCIA SECURITARIA E PASSIONE PUNITIVA

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the investigation conducted by Stefano Anastasia in *Le pene e il carcere*, delving into the political and economic causes that the Author identifies as underlying the transformations of penalty over the past three decades through reference to the relationship between neoliberalism and authoritarianism. An attempt will be made to show that, contrary to what is normally believed, today's regressive populism is not so much the effect of the crisis of neoliberal hegemony, but rather a continuation of neoliberal policies, and that the use of penal policies as tools for managing the political and social anxiety created by the crisis can only increase, due to the difficulty of reaching a new compromise between capital and labor.

## **KEYWORDS**

Internment, Neoliberalism, Regressive Populism, Social Insecurity, Political Anxiety

Prima di entrare nel merito degli argomenti che intendo discutere del lavoro di Stefano Anastasia, a mo' di avvertenza al lettore premetto che questo intervento sarà ancora più cupo, per così dire, rispetto all'itinerario tracciato in *Le pene e il carcere*. Perché all'interpretazione di Anastasia del fondamento delle trasformazioni della penalità negli ultimi trent'anni, già piuttosto drammatica, andrò ad aggiungere degli elementi che credo intensifichino questo tenore, concentrandomi sul rapporto tra il neoliberalismo e l'ansia di sicurezza, l'ansia punitiva che caratterizza il nostro presente, dunque sul rapporto tra neoliberalismo e populismo, in cui mi sembra che le polarizzazioni identitarie che, tra le altre cose, contraddistinguono il populismo penale, e a cui Anastasia dedica interessanti pagine, rischiano fortemente di radicalizzarsi.

Partirò da un'osservazione che Anastasia svolge nel secondo capitolo del suo lavoro e che ritengo importante, relativa a quella che potremmo definire la

straordinaria resistenza della prigione in un tempo in cui sembrava che si potesse e si dovesse farla finita con questa forma di pena, legata com'era a quella che Michel Foucault aveva definito *società disciplinare* (Foucault 1993). Nuove tecnologie di potere e nuovi modi di produzione legati al superamento del fordismo sembrava rendessero superata la forma-prigione. Invece, la prigione ha resistito, sebbene mutando alcuni suoi caratteri. E Anastasia scrive infatti che il carcere contemporaneo sembra fine a se stesso, come luogo in cui rinchiudere quelle che definisce, con Bauman e Papa Francesco, vite di scarto (p. 21). Come se la prigione tornasse a svolgere una mera funzione repressiva, di esclusione e contenimento di un'umanità inutile e improduttiva, e non mirasse più cioè a essere un potere positivo animato dalla volontà di produrre determinate forme di soggettività attraverso le tecniche disciplinari. Per simbolizzare questo stato di cose, è tuttavia ancora a Foucault che Anastasia, con Christie (1994), sceglie di rinviare, mutuando la nozione di *grande internamento* dal grande lavoro foucaultiano che aveva al suo centro la funzione di esclusione, vale a dire la *Storia della follia* (Foucault 1998).

Al riguardo, Anastasia mi sembra molto vicino alle tesi sulla penalità neoliberale di Loïc Wacquant, secondo il quale, esattamente, “en lieu et place du dressage censé façonner des ‘corps dociles et productifs’ postulé par Foucault, la prison contemporaine vise à la neutralisation brute, à la rétribution aveugle, et au simple entreposage des corps” (Wacquant 2013). Tuttavia, a differenza di quanto fa Wacquant con eccessiva leggerezza, Anastasia non nega alcune fondamentali tesi di *Sorvegliare e punire*. Quando parla infatti dello straordinario aumento della popolazione carceraria in Italia come di una “variante nazionale di un più ampio processo storico” (p. 21), ricomprendendo in questo “nuovo grande internamento” non solo le prigioni, ma anche le REMS e i centri di detenzione amministrativa per i migranti, Anastasia sostiene esplicitamente che “l’immagazzinamento dei corpi incarcerati rende più intellegibile quel *continuum* di cui scriveva Foucault e che oggi si può tracciare lungo tutto l’arco delle forme della privazione della libertà, oltre i confini delle mura penitenziarie, fino a comprendere i centri di detenzione per migranti e le istituzioni della terapia coatta, come le Residenze per l’esecuzione delle misure di sicurezza” (p. 20). Sempre diversamente da Wacquant, poi, credo che Anastasia riconosca la permanenza di una delle principali funzioni che *Sorvegliare e punire* attribuiva alle pratiche penali, vale a dire la loro selettività sociale, e che concorderebbe pertanto con questa risposta di Didier Fassin ad Alberto Sobrero: “La prigione nasce, come scrive Michel Foucault, in un periodo, il ‘700 e poi soprattutto l’800, ove l’aumento delle disuguaglianze produce classi lavoratrici miserabili che sono viste e denunciate, secondo la formula di Louis Chevalier, come classi pericolose. [...] Si ritrova oggi la stessa maniera di gestire, attraverso il sistema penale, quella che in passato veniva chiamata ‘la questione sociale’. Nonostante le disparità economiche non cessino di aumentare, come i lavori di Thomas Piketty hanno

dimostrato, la risposta politica poggia sempre più sullo ‘Stato penale’, che fa ricorso alla polizia, sollecita i giudici, ed infine rinchiede i condannati, e sempre meno sullo Stato sociale, le cui risorse diminuiscono sotto l’ingiunzione del neoliberalismo. Pertanto, più che individuare in questa evoluzione le contraddizioni della modernità, occorre probabilmente riconoscerci una certa coerenza della logica punitiva che è messa in atto nei confronti delle popolazioni rese più fragili dalla precarietà economica, dalla marginalizzazione territoriale e dalla discriminazione razziale” (Sobrero 2019).

Ad ogni modo, Anastasia illustra in modo chiaro ciò che ha determinato l’emergenza penitenziaria e la maggiore severità dei castighi che si è concretizzata in questo nuovo grande internamento (p. 43), dovute a politiche che hanno ampliato “il raggio d’azione del diritto penale e irrigidito le modalità esecutive della pena”, all’incremento “dei reati denunciati, giudicati e condannati”. E riconosce la causa di queste politiche nel mutamento dell’opinione pubblica, che sul finire del XX secolo è divenuta più affamata di pena e di sicurezza, soprattutto nei confronti dei cosiddetti marginali, mentre i governi e i parlamenti cavalcavano (e cavalcano) questi sentimenti per rilegittimarsi a fronte della loro incapacità di performances significative. È questa domanda di sicurezza, “strategicamente orientata” da attori politici e sociali (p. 47), a muovere il sistema penale, a determinare gli usi populistici del diritto penale.

Al riguardo mi sembra che Anastasia ponga due domande. Innanzitutto, da dove deriva questa domanda di sicurezza? E perché i sistemi politici non sono più capaci di performances significative e cercano di rilegittimarsi attraverso la risorsa simbolica della lotta contro il crimine?

La risposta, la medesima per entrambe, secondo Anastasia va ricercata nella vittoria del neoliberalismo e nel conseguente tramonto del modello di protezione sociale del Novecento, vale a dire nella fine dell’età dell’oro del compromesso occidentale tra capitale e lavoro. È l’egemonia neoliberale che ha prodotto la domanda di sicurezza e la sua manipolazione ad arte, due fenomeni che, come giustamente sottolineato da Fassin, caratterizzano quello che lo studioso francese definisce *momento punitivo* e che non vanno disgiunti (Fassin 2018, p. 15).

Tutto ciò genera un nuovo disagio della civiltà e una solitudine totale dei cittadini, scrive Anastasia, rispettivamente, con Zygmunt Bauman lettore di Freud (Bauman 1999) e con Robert Castel (2004). La domanda di sicurezza è infatti una “reazione sociale alle sofferenze che maturano” (p. 52) all’interno della struttura sociale e politica dell’ultimo trentennio, in cui il neoliberalismo puntando sulla libertà genera un’insicurezza sociale diffusa, e il ceto politico è stato sostanzialmente “esautorato nel governo dei processi macroeconomici”, perché i regimi democratici sono stati spolicizzati: “Secondo l’ideologia neoliberale, ai pubblici poteri spettano unicamente le responsabilità inerenti alla tutela dell’ordine e della sicurezza pubblica, di modo che il mercato e il merito

individuale possano dispiegarsi liberamente e offrire maggiore ricchezza all'intera società" (p. 23).

A partire da questo momento è riemersa una sorta di moralizzazione della politica, con le categorie morali come quelle di colpa e di pena a sostituire valori e interessi in conflitto tra di loro. Questa moralizzazione è infatti una "spoliticizzazione del conflitto" sociale e rappresenta uno dei caratteri più importanti dell'egemonia neoliberale. Anastasia fa riferimento all'egemonia berlusconiana, ma ritengo che a sinistra le cose non siano andate diversamente.

Ebbene, premetto di concordare con l'analisi di Anastasia e di apprezzare il modo in cui tematizza la politicità del diritto penale, e nel caso specifico il peso "della trasformazione dei sistemi politici e dei regimi democratici post-novecenteschi sui relativi sistemi penali" (p. 58). Perché questo mi sembra essere il nucleo del suo impianto, nel quale ancora una volta si può riconoscere Wacquant e in particolare la sua tesi per la quale l'emergenza punitiva contemporanea corrisponde a una strategia di governo che mira a compensare l'insicurezza sociale determinata dalla fine delle misure di regolazione keynesiana dell'economia (Wacquant 2010).

Quello che vorrei provare ad approfondire ulteriormente è però il rapporto tra neoliberalismo e populismo. Se interpreto bene, per Anastasia i populismi sono un effetto della globalizzazione neoliberale "sulle forme della politica e della pratica democratica" (p. 63), nella misura in cui il neoliberalismo avrebbe spoliticizzato le pratiche di governo, come sostiene rinviando a Chantal Mouffe (2018). Ma non è affatto detto che i populismi odierni rappresentino la reazione alla crisi dell'egemonia neoliberale.

Secondo la griglia interpretativa di Anastasia l'uso populistico del diritto penale può essere di destra o di sinistra, progressista o conservatore, a seconda dei nemici da criminalizzare che individua. Ora, è certamente vero che esiste un populismo di sinistra indirizzato alla democratizzazione dell'economia. Da un lato, tuttavia, mi sembra che le attuali condizioni storiche di possibilità di un movimento populista siano prevalentemente di tipo regressivo, perché il neoliberalismo ha prodotto delle soggettività angosciose e insicure per le quali è difficile pensare a un progetto comunitario, mentre è facilissimo identificarsi con un capo (se politico o d'azienda a quest'altezza storica non fa differenza). Dall'altro, la spoliticizzazione delle pratiche di governo relative all'economia, o in altri termini il contrasto ai processi di democratizzazione dell'economia tipici delle politiche neoliberali restano un processo politico in senso pieno, che non esclude il ricorso populistico alle politiche penali.

E oggi si afferma uno specifico populismo neoliberale, autoritario, tradizionalista e ultracapitalista, che viene esplicitamente rivendicato e teorizzato da quanti sostengono che esso sia la sola via attualmente praticabile per salvare il capitalismo liberale. Questo appello al popolo neoliberale, promosso da autori come Hans-Hermann Hoppe (2017), è alla base dell'odierno odio della

democrazia. Sebbene appaia come una novità storica, figurando ad esempio tra i principali riferimenti economici del conservatorismo ultraliberale e tecnocratico di un Nick Land (2013), in realtà riattiva una tradizione neoliberale piuttosto risalente, piegandola in una direzione nettamente conservatrice e reazionaria.

Ebbene, se è innegabile che gli ultimi vent'anni hanno visto una critica crescente dell'egemonia neoliberale aprirsi con le rivoluzioni conservatrici di Thatcher e Reagan, c'è da dubitare che questa sia in crisi a partire dalla crisi finanziaria del 2007-2008.

Al di là del fatto che lo spostamento da forme di governo della povertà e della marginalità di tipo sociale a forme di governo di tipo repressivo è un fenomeno che si registra ben prima della crisi del 2008, come Anastasia peraltro rileva in molte pagine del suo lavoro, non è difficile osservare che le politiche neoliberali sono state rilanciate dai populismi in Occidente.

Mi sembra pertanto plausibile sostenere che il populismo, almeno quello di destra, resti perfettamente neoliberale, e che anzi sia stato e sia esattamente lo strumento per mantenere in vita il neoliberalismo in un momento di crisi economica. In fondo, tanto l'opposizione populistica al neoliberalismo, quanto quella neoliberale al populismo, sono esclusivamente retoriche.

Per dare un fondamento storico e teorico a questa tesi, si pensi a tutti i casi in cui il liberalismo economico è stato promosso o imposto attraverso forme di autoritarismo politico, da quelle esplicitamente dittatoriali, come in Cile, a quelle apparentemente più morbide, come la costituzione economica dell'Unione Europea. Senza ovviamente identificare neoliberalismo e fascismo, va poi rilevato che, oltre ad opporsi ai totalitarismi, il neoliberalismo ha sempre valutato positivamente i fascismi come forme che hanno salvato la civiltà europea dal pericolo comunista; così già per Mises, secondo il quale “Es kann nicht geleugnet werden, daß der Faszismus und alle ähnlichen Diktaturbestrebungen voll von den besten Absichten sind und daß ihr Eingreifen für den Augenblick die europäische Gesittung gerettet hat. Das Verdienst, das sich der Faszismus damit erworben hat, wird in der Geschichte ewig fortleben” (Mises 1927, p. 45), per arrivare in anni più recenti a Rothbard, che in occasione del primo governo Berlusconi elogia la politica economica del primo fascismo e scrive: “The militant Fascist movement succeeded in saving Italy from two monstrous evils: revolutionary Communism and revolutionary anarcho-syndicalism. This preservation and defense was its great achievement” (Rothbard 1994, p. 8). Non è poi un mistero che Hayek preferisse le dittature liberali ai regimi democratici che intervengono nell'economia.

Ebbene, non mi sembra che il nostro presente nazionale rappresenti un'eccezione rispetto a questo quadro storico e teorico, come vorrei provare a mostrare facendo una breve premessa in rapporto con l'analisi di Anastasia.

Il progetto neoliberale si afferma dopo la cosiddetta età dell'oro del Welfare del Novecento e si fonda essenzialmente sul superamento del modello di protezione sociale realizzatosi in quest'epoca e valorizzato da Anastasia, poiché

questo modello determina un carico enorme sulle strutture statali da parte della società. La costituzione economica neoliberale fa perno infatti su dispositivi giuridici e politici che mirano a impedire l'influenza democratica sui processi economici. Il neoliberalismo è, tra le altre cose, anche questo. E ciò ha prodotto dopo il 2008 quello che Castel descrive come il ritorno della precarietà e dell'insicurezza delle classi popolari: un ritorno più intenso in rapporto alla precarietà storica di queste stesse classi, perché preceduto da una stagione di sicurezza, e di conseguenza molto più difficile da accettare, in quanto i sistemi statali di protezione sono stati ormai interiorizzati dagli individui, all'opposto di quando si riteneva che l'insicurezza sociale fosse un destino comune e dunque un carattere ineluttabile della condizione popolare (Castel 2015).

Ho sempre creduto che questa tesi di Castel renda conto di come la convinzione di essere lasciati ai margini, esposti e incapaci di controllare il proprio futuro, sia all'origine del sentimento di abbandono e di risentimento di quei gruppi sociali e di quegli individui che, in passato socialmente assicurati, vengono a trovarsi sovraesposti e indeboliti. E credo che questo spieghi anche l'ansia, l'angoscia politica, che abilmente manipolata diventa centrale nelle politiche penali contemporanee.

Il populismo caratteristico del nostro presente non è una reazione di segno contrario al neoliberalismo, non fuoriesce affatto dalla governamentalità neoliberale, perché i governi populistici odierni continuano a combinare forme di autoritarismo politico e liberalismo economico, tendenti a privatizzare lo spazio dell'economia e a impedirne la democratizzazione.

Si pensi al governo italiano attuale, che sfida a parole l'ordine neoliberale, ma poi rinomina il 'Ministero dell'istruzione' 'Ministero dell'istruzione e del merito', presenta un progetto di privatizzazione delle Poste italiane (come accaduto in Brasile con Bolsonaro), qualifica la tassazione come un "pizzo di Stato" (non diversamente da Milei, che la ritiene un furto), e aderisce entusiasta all'accelerazionismo capitalistico. Contemporaneamente insiste su una nuova moralizzazione della società e della politica, prova a rifondare l'identità italiana su un'iper-appartenenza mitica e a promuovere l'identificazione con i capi, offrendo alle infelicità sociali una compensazione tutta immaginaria, permettendo ai penultimi di fare la lotta agli ultimi, ma, come si sarebbe detto non molto tempo fa, lasciando inalterati i rapporti di potere e di produzione. In questo senso, non si può non concordare con Enzo Traverso quando afferma che "La meritocrazia formulata in termini neoliberali, cioè società di mercato e liberal-darwinismo, non rientra nel codice culturale del fascismo: statalista, autoritario, xenofobo, nazionalista e razzista anche nell'idea del Welfare. Oggi però il governo Meloni è l'espressione più vistosa di una tendenza verso il neo-liberalismo autoritario" (Traverso 2022).

È in situazioni politiche e sociali come quella presente che la situazione d'angoscia di cui sopra viene manipolata per creare capri espiatori quando non



vere e proprie vittime sacrificali, e porta gli individui ad accettare criteri di redistribuzione della ricchezza contrari ai loro interessi. Ma tutto ciò non fa che riattualizzare una tradizione risalente. L'autoritarismo ha infatti rappresentato anche storicamente una forma di canalizzazione delle crisi di governamentalità e delle crisi economiche che non ha intaccato i rapporti di produzione e ha radicalizzato i rapporti di potere esistenti.

Molti studi dimostrano che il neoliberalismo ha tratto dalla crisi della Repubblica di Weimar una serie di argomenti miranti a connotare lo Stato e le istituzioni in modo autoritario per impedire la partecipazione democratica al potere, nonché lo sviluppo di politiche di pianificazione; argomenti che i neoliberali hanno mutuato dalla critica schmittiana della socialdemocrazia weimariana, contro cui Schmitt promuoveva uno Stato forte che spoliticizzasse l'economia e governasse le masse con l'incremento di mezzi tecnici (Schmitt 2019). Il neoliberalismo, nel suo versante autoritario e antidemocratico, ha fatto propria una strategia schmittiana di governo della società attraverso la costruzione dei nemici del mercato (Brindisi 2022).

L'ipotesi che sottopongo ad Anastasia, dunque, è se ritiene possibile affermare che l'uso populistico del diritto penale, amplificando la minaccia del pericolo nel corpo sociale e radicalizzando le tecniche di controllo delle masse a fini di difesa della società, sia un modo per incanalare i disagi prodotti dalla crisi economica senza intaccare i rapporti di produzione o i rapporti di potere che fanno la specificità del neoliberalismo, ossia da un lato l'interventismo giuridico, politico e sociale volto a estendere la logica della concorrenza agli individui e alle istituzioni, come ha esemplarmente mostrato Foucault (Foucault 2005), dall'altro la gestione privatistica della politica sottratta ai processi democratici.

Mi sembra infatti che siamo esattamente in una situazione di questo genere, ossia in una “forme politique originale qui combine autoritarisme anti-démocratique, nationalisme économique et rationalité capitaliste” (Dardot, Laval 2019). Questa forma politica convive perfettamente con la regressione politica, identitaria e di genere, che sta investendo l'Occidente attraverso pratiche di cittadinanza gerarchizzate, e che le categorie di un grande esperto dell'uso autoritario del diritto come Franz Neumann rendono intelligibile, aiutandoci a capire quanto sia pericolosa la strada che stiamo percorrendo.

Rifacendosi a Freud, Neumann scriveva del rischio insito nel fare della paura di un pericolo l'elemento integratore di un sistema politico, come avveniva nei processi di identificazione regressivi con i capi, che manipolavano l'angoscia politica trasformandola in angoscia persecutoria, nella misura in cui, a fronte della decadenza di un gruppo (a causa di guerre, carestie, crisi economiche etc.), gli era “impedito di comprendere il processo storico in atto” attraverso un uso conspirativo della storia che personificava i processi storici e proiettava odi e paure su cospiratori e capri espiatori, i quali producevano un affetto angosciante che andava rimosso violentemente (Neumann 1973, pp. 123-127).

Ora, non intendo sostenere che siamo oggi in una situazione istituzionalizzata come quella descritta da Neumann in rapporto ai totalitarismi, ma le sue categorie ci aiutano certamente a capire che quello che è accaduto dopo la crisi di Weimar non è lontano dalla situazione che si è determinata dopo il 2008: perdita di status delle classi medie a seguito della crisi; senso di abbandono e risentimento da parte di individui e gruppi sociali prima socialmente protetti; uso cospirativo della storia mediante propaganda (il piano Kalergi di sostituzione etnica e di distruzione della civiltà occidentale); rabbia sociale contro cospiratori e capri espiatori (élite globale, migranti); rigetto del sistema politico; processi di identificazione regressivi con i capi; riaffermazione dell'autorità sociale della famiglia e della morale tradizionale, presuntamente minacciate nella loro esistenza; soluzioni estetizzanti di comunità fusionali (la nazione) fondate su una versione di sovranità neoliberale *sangue e suolo*.

Queste sono le ragioni che mi portano a dire che il quadro politico odierno è ancora più cupo di quello cui Anastasia attribuisce le cause dell'aumento della popolazione carceraria in Italia. Se è vero, come ho provato a mostrare, che vi è un rapporto tra la razionalità neoliberale e il populismo regressivo, allora mi sembra che sussistano tutte le condizioni per alimentare il circolo vizioso in cui populismo penale e neoliberalismo si rilanciano a vicenda. Questo circolo vizioso non fa, infatti, che accentuare le cause che Anastasia riconosce nello straordinario ricorso alle pratiche penali nel governo della società, che non dipendono da un aumento della criminalità, quanto piuttosto dalle politiche che presiedono al funzionamento dei castighi, dalla scelta di penalizzare i comportamenti di alcuni segmenti specifici di popolazione, che sono poi le varie categorie socio-economicamente più fragili e marginalizzate.

C'è infine un altro importante elemento che mi sembra contrastare attualmente quel rinnovamento del garantismo penale che Anastasia si augura, o, nei termini di Ferrajoli, l'affermazione di un diritto penale minimo che necessita di un diritto sociale massimo (Ferrajoli 2024, pp. 278-280). Poiché, se le tesi di Anastasia intorno alle cause storiche dell'uso populistico del diritto penale sono realistiche, e credo che lo siano, allora la ragione dei toni cupi che si prospettano per il nostro futuro è la seguente: un nuovo compromesso tra capitale e lavoro come quello che si augurava Castel (2015, p. 141) sulla scia di Polanyi è lontanissimo dal realizzarsi, prova ne sia che la pandemia non ha generato nessuna nuova solidarietà.

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# IL PROBLEMA DELLA PENA E LA DIFESA DEI DIRITTI UMANI. NOTE DI DISCUSSIONE, RILEGGENDO H. SPENCER

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## **ABSTRACT**

Interacting with the reflections proposed by Stefano Anastasia, regarding the theme of prisoners' rights, urged, in particular, by the problem of overcrowding, which has long afflicted the prison system, the article moves from some suggestions taken from Herbert Spencer's essay, *Prison Ethics*. It asks if a rethinking of the penal paradigm, more decisively than what has been done so far, according to the non-syncretistic but authentically synthetic logic of reparation, can let it possible to seriously take into account the rights of persons who have committed a crime. Moreover, it suggests that this should be done combining the reasons of humanitarianism and those of efficiency with the need for the defence of society, the respect for the personality of the convicted and the rights and duties of all citizens.

## **KEYWORDS**

Human Rights, Prison, Punishment, Restorative Justice, H. Spencer

## **1. CARCERE E DIRITTI: PROBLEMA POLITICO O FILOSOFICO?**

Con lo sguardo disincantato di chi da molti anni si occupa della realtà del carcere, Stefano Anastasia, nel quinto capitolo del recente volume *Le pene e il carcere*, affronta il tema dei diritti dei detenuti. Una questione che, improvvisamente, dopo un lungo periodo di disattenzione, ha assunto rilevanza centrale nella valutazione delle politiche e delle pratiche punitive, in Italia come in altri Paesi europei e negli Stati Uniti d'America.

L'Autore, introducendo l'argomento, già nelle premesse, scrive: "i diritti dei detenuti presi sul serio costituiscono un principio di erosione dell'istituzione

carceraria tanto quanto essa ne è naturalmente refrattaria, fondata com'è - al contrario - sulla loro limitazione, se non sulla loro negazione".

A tale proposito, mi sono domandata cosa significhi "prendere sul serio" i diritti delle persone che hanno commesso un reato. E mi pare, anzitutto, che a quest'espressione, la quale riecheggia il titolo dell'opera cui Ronald Dworkin deve la sua fama, sia sottesa un'esigenza che va oltre la necessità, teorizzata dal filosofo americano, di tutelarli all'interno degli Stati, oltretutto fuori e contro gli Stati stessi. Un'esigenza che contrasta, dunque, il suggerimento avanzato da Norberto Bobbio nel noto saggio *L'età dei diritti*, in cui sono raccolti vari interventi sul tema dei diritti fondamentali. In particolare in occasione del Convegno de L'Aquila del 1964, il filosofo torinese aveva sostenuto "l'illusione del fondamento assoluto" e dichiarato che "il problema di fondo relativo ai diritti dell'uomo è [...] non tanto quello di giustificarli, quanto quello di proteggerli. È un problema non filosofico ma politico". Un'affermazione questa che, come è stato osservato, sembra assestarsi su una linea di "pensiero debole", su una sorta di rinuncia a pensare in profondità una questione che, se correlata al tema della pena, si rivela particolarmente problematica.

Lo stato di emergenza in cui versa l'Italia, evidenziato emblematicamente, come ricorda Anastasia, dalla condanna emessa dalla Corte Europea dei Diritti dell'Uomo, interroga, infatti, radicalmente la legittimità e la sopravvivenza del nostro sistema carcerario. La giustizia penale italiana è stata considerata non compatibile con gli standard europei in materia di tutela dei diritti umani, a causa, soprattutto, del sovraffollamento carcerario, che da tempo la affligge e che l'Autore considera "fenomeno di superficie", alla cui origine individua una domanda sociale di controllo e di sanzione penale enormemente accresciuta negli ultimi decenni. Esso pone dunque un problema che sembra non poter essere inteso solamente come politico, bensì anzitutto come filosofico. Non occorre del resto indugiare sulla vasta e articolata letteratura scientifica nazionale e internazionale, che converge nel certificare la crisi della giustizia penale, per rendersi conto di come molti dei mali che affliggono il sistema derivino da aporie insite nel paradigma sottostante e, pertanto, qualsiasi tentativo di correggerne i sintomi, senza un riesame delle basi teoriche, sia destinato al fallimento e alla frustrazione.

La discussione sulla tradizionale amministrazione della giustizia penale, sugli "scacchi" cui è sottoposta e sulle "promesse" che non ha mantenuto, svela infatti la crisi del paradigma cosiddetto "reo-centrico", il quale, paradossalmente, si è rivelato inadeguato a tutelare proprio l'autore del reato dal pericolo di un sistema punitivo umiliante e invasivo, oltre che a favorirne il ritorno in società in condizioni di legalità e autonomia.

Se, allora, come suggerisce Thomas Kuhn, lo stato di crisi di un paradigma corrente che abbia accumulato contro di sé un numero sufficiente di anomalie può essere superato quando nuove idee, a volte scartate in precedenza, sono

messe alla prova e formano un nuovo paradigma, mi chiedo se un'alternativa praticabile possa delinearci seguendo alcune suggestioni che offre la (ri)lettura del saggio di Herbert Spencer, intitolato *Prison Ethics*, pubblicato originariamente nella *British Quarterly Review*, nel luglio 1860. In esso si può cogliere, infatti, un originale contenuto di rilevanza filosofico-politica, che forse non è solo mero esercizio di “archeologia” mettere in risalto.

## 2. LA PROPOSTA SPENCERIANA DI “ETICA CARCERARIA”

Come precisato nella *Autobiografia* dell'autore, quel saggio era “evolutivo nello spirito” e intendeva discutere la moralità e gli effetti del trattamento umano o disumano sul prigioniero, avanzando una proposta di “etica carceraria”, le cui conclusioni derivavano dalla considerazione dei fenomeni sociali come una categoria non distinta da quella dei fatti naturali. Il filosofo inglese vi affronta la questione in termini radicali, risalendo cioè ai principi primi che governano la vita intersoggettiva e antecedono quindi, e dunque limitano, ogni volontà particolare (compresa quella dello Stato).

Ci proponiamo – scrive – di studiare il trattamento dei criminali, in primo luogo, stabilendo quelle esigenze temporanee che finora hanno impedito e impediscono ancora, in parte, l'instaurazione di un sistema giusto. [...] Tuttavia, per quanto irraggiungibile sia la pura rettitudine, e continuerà a esserlo a lungo, dobbiamo tenere d'occhio la bussola che ci dice dove essa si trova; oppure vagheremo altrimenti nella direzione opposta. Infatti, se l'equità astratta si fosse unita all'opportunità immediata nell'elaborazione della disciplina dei detenuti, non solo sarebbero state evitate sofferenze, degrado e morte; ma coloro che furono responsabili di tali atrocità, non sarebbero essi stessi imputabili di crimine, come oggi li riteniamo.

Muovendo dall'osservazione del fatto che una prolungata negazione dei rapporti umani produce non di rado follia o imbecillità, e che su coloro che rimangono sani di mente, la sua influenza deprimente comporta quasi necessariamente un grave indebolimento, fisico e mentale, che li rende “inabili al crimine tanto quanto all'industria”, Spencer solleva contro il metodo dell'isolamento carcerario l'obiezione che l'effetto prodotto sulla natura morale si rivela opposto a quello, auspicato, di una vera riforma. Egli considera il crimine un fenomeno “antisociale”: stimolato da sentimenti egoistici, il cui “naturale inibitore è la simpatia”, che viene indebolita da qualunque cosa impedisca la partecipazione sociale.

“Come si può dimostrare”, si chiede allora il filosofo inglese, “che questi sistemi penali sconsiderati siano ingiusti? Qual è il metodo che permette di dire

quale tipo di punizione è giustificata dalla moralità assoluta e quale no?”. La risposta è chiara:

Se la vita è il nostro scopo legittimo e se la moralità assoluta significa conformità alle leggi della vita completa, e la vita dipende dal mantenimento di alcune relazioni naturali tra le azioni e i loro risultati, esigere che non vi sia alcuna violazione di tale connessione naturale significa esigere che le leggi della vita siano rispettate.

Poi esemplifica:

“se la respirazione non fornisce ossigeno al sangue, come dovrebbe fare normalmente, ma fornisce invece anidride carbonica, ne consegue rapidamente la morte”. Come la vita del corpo dipende, dunque, dal mantenimento delle connessioni stabilite tra le cause fisiologiche e le loro conseguenze, così avviene anche nei processi sociali, ove “l'equità non pone alcun limite a quella libertà di azione che la natura spinge ogni individuo a rivendicare, salvo la libertà d'azione degli altri individui”.

Pertanto, finché il singolo cittadino persegue l'oggetto del suo desiderio senza diminuire l'eguale libertà di tutti gli altri di fare altrettanto, la società non può interferire nei suoi confronti. Nessuna sanzione legale può giustamente essergli inflitta. Ma quando, con omicidio, furto, o aggressione, ha oltrepassato questi limiti, “la comunità è autorizzata a porlo sotto il suo controllo”.

Da tale giustificazione sorgono poi altri due interrogativi: “qual è la portata legittima della coercizione?” ed “è possibile avanzare determinate richieste nei confronti del reo?”.

Riguardo al primo, Spencer risponde che quando una delle condizioni essenziali al mantenimento della vita sociale è stata trasgredita, è necessario richiedere al trasgressore che “riporti le cose il più vicino possibile allo stato in cui si trovano in precedenza”; egli è, dunque, giustamente tenuto a rimediare, per quanto possibile, al male che ha fatto. In secondo luogo, precisa che la moralità assoluta non prevede alcuna restrizione ulteriore: nessuna inflizione gratuita di dolore, nessuna punizione vendicativa. E argomenta come segue:

Poiché si insiste sulla libertà di compiere le leggi della vita, affinché la somma della vita sia la più grande possibile, ne consegue che la vita del delinquente deve essere presa in considerazione come una voce di questa somma. Dobbiamo permettergli di vivere nel modo più completo possibile per quanto riguarda la sicurezza sociale. Si dice comunemente che il criminale perde tutti i suoi diritti. Questo può essere così secondo la legge, ma non è così secondo la giustizia.



Coloro – aggiunge – che non ritenessero opportuno essere così rispettosi delle pretese di un delinquente, dovrebbero seguire con umiltà la lezione della Natura, le cui punizioni non sono né maggiori né minori di quelle che derivano dal funzionamento naturale delle cose.

A Spencer sembra evidente, cioè, che se la società eccede il limite di infliggere altre sofferenze oltre a quelle implicate nel rimediare, per quanto possibile, al male commesso, essa si pone ingiustamente contro il criminale. Pertanto

il governo che, proteggendo i cittadini dall'omicidio, dalla rapina, dall'aggressione o da altre aggressioni, dimostra di avere la funzione essenziale di assicurare a ciascuno il libero esercizio delle proprie facoltà entro i limiti assegnati, è invitato, nell'adempimento della sua funzione, a mantenere questa libertà; e non può abrogarla senza invertire la sua funzione, e diventare aggressore invece che protettore.

Dopo aver affermato, dunque, che l'equità vieta di punire colui che abbia commesso un crimine altrimenti che facendogli subire le conseguenze naturali del proprio comportamento, Spencer, nel passaggio successivo della sua argomentazione, precisa che queste ultime, se applicate rigorosamente, sono comunque piuttosto severe. Non soltanto, infatti, le leggi della moralità assoluta impongono all'autore del reato un risarcimento, ma esse autorizzano a rifiutargli il sostegno gratuito, esigono cioè ulteriormente che egli provveda al proprio mantenimento. Spiega che

“se il criminale non si mantiene, commette indirettamente un ulteriore crimine. [Poiché] invece di riparare la breccia che ha aperto nelle condizioni per completare la vita sociale, egli la amplia”.

È probabile – chiosa, in conclusione – che qualsiasi sistema oggi realizzabile non sia all'altezza dell'ideale delineato. Può darsi, cioè, che in molti casi l'applicazione della restituzione o del risarcimento sia impraticabile, come d'altro canto, il totale automantenimento può comportare in talune circostanze per il criminale una punizione troppo grave da sopportare. Ma ribadisce che tali carenze non influiscono sulla disamina dei requisiti di un sistema penale assolutamente equo, in modo “che, tenendo sempre presente l'ideale, ciascuno cambiamento che apportiamo sarà finalizzato alla sua realizzazione”.

Finché – commenta infatti il filosofo inglese, dopo aver richiamato la testimonianza di varie esperienze carcerarie, da quella della direzione, tra il 1835 e

il 1850, del carcere di Valencia, da parte del colonnello Manuel Montesinos, a quella della gestione della colonia agricola, situata a Mettray, nel dipartimento Indre e Loira, creata, nel 1839, come riformatorio per minorenni, o ancora al "sistema dei marchi" adottato dal capitano Alexander Maconochie, nell'isola di Norfolk – un aggressore non soffre altro che i mali che sono naturalmente risultati dalla sua cattiva condotta – finché percepisce che i suoi simili non hanno fatto più di quanto fosse necessario per autodifesa – non ha scuse per la rabbia; ed è portato a contemplare il suo crimine e la sua punizione come causa ed effetto. Ma se gli vengono inflitte sofferenze gratuite, si produce un senso di ingiustizia. Si considera un uomo ferito. Nutre animosità contro tutti coloro che gli hanno riservato questo duro trattamento. Contento di ogni supplica per dimenticare il danno che ha fatto agli altri, si sofferma invece sul danno che gli altri hanno fatto a lui. Nutrendo così un desiderio di vendetta piuttosto che di espiatione, rientra nella società non migliore ma peggiore, e, se non commette altri crimini, come spesso fa, è trattenuto dal motivo più basso: la paura.

Spencer sottolinea, in particolare, l'importanza del carattere volontario della disciplina carceraria, dettata dalla moralità assoluta. A nulla serve, a suo giudizio, costringere il reo a lavorare per riparare al danno commesso; perché quando costui sarà nuovamente libero da ogni coercizione esterna tornerà probabilmente a comportarsi come in precedenza. L'unica coercizione che egli avvertirà una volta uscito dal carcere sarà quella interiore. Ed egli si sforzerà liberamente di lavorare solo quando sarà posto nelle condizioni dettate dall'equità.

Osserviamo, dunque, anzitutto, come la proposta spenceriana si articola su due livelli: nell'immediato, essa assume i criteri di una morale provvisoria (*relatively right*), che cerca di fornire un significato accettabile all'atto con cui il potere costituito priva un soggetto del godimento di alcuni diritti che normalmente sarebbe suo compito tutelare, opponendosi alla pretesa indebita di organizzare la potestà punitiva dello Stato come un potere arbitrario, ma non rinuncia a pensare più radicalmente anche nei termini di una morale assoluta (*absolutely right*) cui, per essere tradotta efficacemente nell'esperienza, occorre un tempo più lungo di quanto sia consentito dall'urgenza di dare una risposta alle prevaricazioni dell'ordinamento penalistico vigente.

Essa riflette, inoltre, una teoria della giustizia sociale in cui coesistono in modo coerente due elementi: uno egualitario, inerente ai limiti della sfera d'azione di ciascuno e l'altro disegualitario, inerente ai benefici, proporzionati alla propria condotta. La spinta morale che il principio di efficienza, radicato nel secondo elemento, possiede, di fatto rafforza la rivendicazione morale dei diritti individuali, radicati nel primo.

I diritti individuali –scrive – sono deducibili dalle connessioni stabilite tra i nostri atti e i loro risultati. E come certamente ci sono condizioni che devono essere soddisfatte prima che la vita possa esistere, così certamente ci sono condizioni che devono essere soddisfatte prima che la vita completa possa essere goduta dai rispettivi membri di una società; e quelle che chiamiamo esigenze di giustizia rispondono semplicemente alla più importante di tali condizioni.

Il saggio restituisce, d'altra parte, nel complesso un'immagine del filosofo inglese non del tutto aderente a quella vulgata, quale "darwinista sociale" ultra-individualista, poiché di fatto avanza una proposta che poggia su una concezione dell'individuo non puramente atomistica, ma che presuppone l'integrazione sociale; ossia una proposta nella quale non solo l'individuo non è concepito come un essere isolato e anzi l'isolamento è considerato causa di uno sviluppo stentato, ma nella quale la dignità umana e l'autonomia del singolo sono protette dall'applicazione da parte del potere politico della legge della pari libertà.

Vi traspare inoltre la consapevolezza che la forza, sotto forma di punizione, non importa quanto severa, non riuscirà a reprimere la criminalità e che la carcerazione può considerarsi alla stregua di una azione violenta tanto quanto la condotta che intende punire, e che il metodo più efficace per reintegrare il reo nella società è quello orientato nella direzione del superamento del paradigma della mera punizione.

Spencer non suggerisce semplicemente di mitigare la crudeltà del sistema carcerario esistente, ma delinea una visione che, pur embrionalmente, si inserisce nella cornice concettuale della giustizia riparativa, nella misura in cui essa è volta, da un lato, a offrire, a chi sbaglia, la garanzia di non venire sottoposto a limitazioni della propria soggettività che siano parzialmente o totalmente slegate rispetto all'esigenza di fargli assumere la piena responsabilità degli esiti lesivi della propria condotta, e, dall'altro, a tutelare l'esigenza legittima della difesa della società, la quale se trascurata concorre a generare quell'aumento della domanda di controllo, di cui parla Anastasia, rinvenibile alla base del fenomeno del sovraffollamento carcerario, che a sua volta si traduce in una negazione della dignità umana.

Come è stato messo in luce dai suoi sostenitori, l'idea della giustizia riparativa può favorire, infatti, l'ideazione di una modalità sanzionatoria più umana e, allo stesso tempo, più produttiva di conseguenze utili per tutti i soggetti coinvolti dall'ingiusto evento delittuoso. La forza dell'idea della pena come riparazione va ravvisata nella sua capacità di offrire una risposta giusta e insieme utile, superando così una antica e forse non ancora sopita diatriba fra le ragioni dell'efficientismo e quelle dell'umanitarismo. Oltre al necessario rispetto per i diritti della vittima, essa intende restituire dignità al reo e coinvolgere tutta la società nella costruzione di

un ponte che salda il tessuto sociale dove si era prodotta la frattura del reato. Ad essa si ispirarono, come noto, i primi VORP *Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programmes*, nati negli anni Settanta del secolo scorso, la cui diffusione nella prassi e nel dibattito nordamericani è all'origine di quel ripensamento della pena in senso *restorative* di cui il saggio di Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, è considerato uno dei primi "manifesti".

### 3. PER UNA DIFESA DEI DIRITTI DEL REO FONDATA SULLA PENA COME RIPARAZIONE?

Pur essendo dunque per alcuni aspetti il "fedele riflesso del suo ambiente storico", Spencer stabilisce uno stretto legame tra due esigenze estremamente attuali: da un lato, accoglie la richiesta di giustizia e di responsabilizzazione dell'autore del reato, e dall'altro, pone seri interrogativi in merito all'umanità dei trattamenti a cui quest'ultimo venga sottoposto, mostrando come, nell'immediato, gli stessi elementi costrittivi, se orientati verso la finalità ricostruttiva, possono essere vissuti non unicamente come modalità afflittive, cosa che, ancora di rado, accade nel sistema presente. La differenza della modalità dinamica, positiva, di responsabilizzazione del reo suggerita, se confrontata, ad esempio, con l'attuale periodo di prova cui è subordinata la decisione per il rilascio, basata esclusivamente sulla "buona condotta", cioè, sull'acquiescenza passiva alla disciplina carceraria, risulta infatti di tutta evidenza.

Se non si incorresse in un evidente anacronismo si potrebbe dire che, rileggendole riflessioni spenceriane, pare di sentirvi riecheggiare le parole contenute in un breve studio di Giorgio Del Vecchio, il quale si richiamava allo "spirito di giustizia in una società eticamente sana", che, più delle pene, vale "a far sentire al colpevole la necessità di riabilitarsi, il che può avvenire soltanto col ravvedimento interiore e colla riparazione del danno, cose - scriveva l'illustre filosofo del diritto - che mal si ottengono per mezzo di carceri e supplizi".

A differenza tuttavia delle premesse da cui muove Del Vecchio, critico come noto nei confronti del positivismo filosofico, il principio informatore delle riflessioni spenceriane è, come già accennato, quello dell'evoluzione, che il filosofo inglese applica senza soluzione di continuità a tutte le manifestazioni della realtà e che spiega in termini di equilibrio.

"Il benessere di qualsiasi corpo vivente - si legge nei *Principi di Etica*-dipende dalla dovuta proporzionalità delle sue diverse parti ai loro diversi doveri". E se riferita al contesto sociale, l'evoluzione è considerata un processo conforme alle leggi naturali, eppure derivante dagli sforzi volontari dei cittadini, tra i quali vanno annoverati anche gli autori di reato.

"Ci siamo occupati unicamente dei diritti dei cittadini e dei condannati nella loro reciproca appartenenza": scrive, infatti, Spencer nel saggio considerato, ove il

tema della tutela dei diritti naturali soggettivi di matrice liberale si fonde in maniera ibrida con una sensibilità filosofica positivista, orientata verso un modello di giustizia penale più efficace ed efficiente nel perseguire obiettivi avvertiti come legittimi dal contesto sociale e nel contempo, per riprendere una felice espressione di Albin Eser, più “a misura d’uomo”.

Ed è proprio la sottolineatura allora di questa duplice correlazione intrinseca, tra diritti e doveri oltretutto tra la vittima e il reo, che può offrire spunti fecondi di riflessione a chi intenda tenere seriamente conto dei diritti delle persone che abbiano commesso un reato, suggerendo come ciò sia possibile tramite un approccio che, più decisamente di quanto fatto ad oggi, incentri la costruzione penale nella logica, in cui quella correlazione è espressa in maniera non sincretistica ma autenticamente sintetica, sottesa al principio della riparazione. Il legislatore italiano, in particolare, benché abbia introdotto, ancora nel 2014, l’istituto della messa alla prova per gli adulti, legandolo a finalità riparatorie, si è infatti mostrato sinora restio ad attuare riforme di ampio respiro volte ad accogliere in modo strutturato i principi della *restorative justice*.

Sebbene dunque sia stata rilevata l’estrema difficoltà, sul piano dell’ideazione prima ancora che su quello operativo, di tradurre il fine della riparazione in una serie di provvedimenti normativamente prevedibili ed effettivamente eseguibili, tale difficoltà, come rilevava del resto lo stesso Spencer, nulla toglie al valore del principio, il cui riconoscimento è premessa al miglioramento, nella misura in cui consente di fondare la critica ai sistemi vigenti e di delineare prospettive che fungano da antidoto alla “schiavitù legale” (*legal bondage*), per usare ancora una volta le parole del filosofo inglese, del carcere, alle sue contraddizioni e a quegli “errori giganteschi che si commettono quando i dettami dell’etica astratta vengono ignorati dalla legislazione”.

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# RIDEFINIZIONE DEL POPULISMO PENALE E SENSIBILITA' ABOLIZIONISTA

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## **ABSTRACT**

Anastasia's book offers stimulating keys to understanding today's demagogic uses of criminal justice and the dynamics that characterize the crisis in the prison system. A decisive chapter is dedicated to penal populism, should not be referred to a specific justicialist ideological movement that identifies the criminal repression of crimes as its sole purpose. More widespread than is generally thought, it also resonates within the intermediate bodies of democratic regimes themselves. The book gives an account of a complex of actors, motivations and objectives of the possible and actually practised uses of law and criminal justice. The author's reflections are part of the criminal guarantee movement and participate in an abolitionist sensibility, which is manifested both in the radical questioning of the current model of repression and punishment of crimes, and in the search for alternative solutions to those advocated by neo-liberal penal policies, which feed the same feeling of insecurity that they claim to want to curb.

## **KEYWORDS**

Penal Populism, Political Consensus, Criminal Law and Justice, Penal Abolitionism

Il libro di Stefano Anastasia offre delle stimolanti chiavi di lettura per comprendere gli odierni usi demagogici della giustizia penale e le dinamiche che caratterizzano la crisi del sistema penitenziario. Il volume descrive il sostanziale fallimento dell'istituzione carceraria attraverso una disamina critica che concerne sia il tema della conformità della pena detentiva con i criteri costituzionali (art. 27, comma 3, rispetto della dignità e rieducazione del condannato propedeutiche al suo reinserimento sociale), sia quello dell'efficacia nel garantire la pubblica sicurezza: non solo il carcere, così com'è congegnato, non ottempera alla funzione preventiva della pena, come testimonia ogni anno lo spaventoso tasso di recidiva (60% nel 2024), ma è una macchina patogena che fabbrica dolore fisico e psichico, dissipa il tempo vitale del detenuto e ne annienta l'autostima e la considerazione di sé.

La decostruzione delle ragioni del fallimento dell'incarcerazione quale forma penale degradante per l'umanità dei detenuti e danno saper la sicurezza dei cittadini conduce Anastasia a ravvisare nel clima politico globale degli ultimi decenni, caratterizzato dall'affermazione via via più marcata del populismo penale nel discorso pubblico e normativo, una delle cause principali che permettono di spiegare lo stato di crisi in cui verte il sistema penitenziario nei regimi democratico-costituzionali contemporanei, e in particolare nel contesto italiano. Sovraffollamento, promiscuità, autolesionismo, suicidi: la fotografia del degrado delle nostre carceri è impietosa. Ma come spiegare che le celle della Repubblica tracimino di tossicodipendenti, stranieri, malati di mente, delinquenti di strada e altri soggetti di varie forme di devianza? La spiegazione non viene individuata da Anastasia in un fantomatico aumento dei reati, visto che negli ultimi tre decenni la criminalità è calata: "la svolta punitiva" che è in atto in Italia dai primi anni Novanta non ha una correlazione con l'andamento degli indici di delittuosità [Anastasia, 2022, p. 39]. L'inflazione carceraria ha dunque cause diverse, e scaturisce piuttosto dal combinato disposto di tre fattori: la dismissione progressiva, promossa dall'ideologia neoliberale, dei programmi di protezione sociale rivolti ai cittadini meno abbienti, infermi, disabili e anziani; una maggiore percezione di insicurezza da parte dei cittadini che si traduce in una domanda di rafforzamento del controllo sociale; e poi, appunto, la strumentalizzazione populista del diritto e della giustizia penale.

Proprio al concetto di penal punitiveness è interamente consacrato il quarto capitolo del volume, intitolato "Politica e giustizia penale al tempo dei populismi", ovvero nell'epoca del trionfo di un orientamento di politica criminale di tipo espressivo, incentrato sul principio della zero tolerance e sintetizzato nel sintagma anglofono Law and Order. Questa ideologia del binomio "Legge e Ordine", nata nel Nord America e capace di diffondersi rapidamente in Europa, non solo raccomanda che la minima devianza sia oggetto di procedimenti penali che trovano nell'incarcerazione la risposta più consona, ma celebra il diritto penale come il mezzo ideale per reprimere il dissenso e assicurare i cittadini in preda a sentimenti sociali di insicurezza, inquietudine e insoddisfazione, spesso rappresentati ed enfatizzati dai mass media come giustificati e diffusi. Essa mira, in ultima istanza, "a guadagnare voti piuttosto che a ridurre i tassi di criminalità o promuovere giustizia" [Roberts, Stalans, Indermaur, Hough 2003].

Anastasia sottolinea, dunque, come le trasformazioni della legislazione penale cui abbiamo assistito negli ultimi quattro decenni non possano essere pienamente comprese senza tener conto della peculiare dimensione politica che le sottende. L'intelligibilità stessa dell'uso demagogico del diritto e della giustizia penale richiede un'analisi del nesso tra penalità e politicità: il cambiamento nel modo di usare le pene è figlio di un periodo temporale in cui la stretta relazione tra sistemi politici e mondo della comunicazione di massa tende a snaturare il funzionamento tradizionale dei regimi democratici in materia di gestione della

delinquenza. La meccanica del populismo penale ruota attorno ad alcune caratteristiche essenziali: in primo luogo, il racconto giornalistico-televisivo del delitto, che spesso ne enfatizza la brutalità per aumentare le vendite o gli ascolti. Un'ampia copertura mediatica riservata ai fatti di cronaca (siano essi veri o fittizi, come nel caso delle serie televisive), non solo permette al pubblico di seguire l'evoluzione dell'inchiesta e del processo, ma crea nei lettori-spettatori un effetto voyeuristico di fascinazione nei confronti del fenomeno criminale. Il secondo fattore è la strumentalizzazione politica, a fini elettoralistici [Fiandaca, 2013], dell'emozione punitiva e dell'insicurezza percepita, pur smentita dai dati statistici: l'inasprimento delle sanzioni rappresenta, allora, la promessa utilizzata per appagare la sete di vendetta degli elettori che si nutrono di cronaca nera [Salas, 2010]. Nel cercare di soddisfare e rassicurare l'opinione gioca un ruolo un terzo elemento che connota questo approccio demagogico, ovvero il fatto di privilegiare la dimensione simbolica della penalità a detrimento degli aspetti tecnici della legislazione e della giurisdizione, con il risultato che i provvedimenti normativi figli di questa logica pecchino talvolta di ragionevolezza giuridica, o si rivelino in palese contrasto con i criteri costituzionali o con le normative nazionali o internazionali vigenti, e finiscano per essere disapplicati dai magistrati [Garland, 2004]. Un quarto ma non meno importante fattore riguarda la centralità che, nella narrazione populista, assume la retorica di sacralizzazione della vittima, la cui sofferenza deve essere penalmente vendicata [Manconi, Graziani, 2020]. Viene caldeggiata, in questo modo, una concezione vendicativa del diritto di punire, incentrata sul male raddoppiato, che è a dir poco problematica: per un verso, la giustizia così intesa cessa di essere una virtù e diventa violenza. Ad esempio, con riferimento alla riforma della legittima difesa "domestica" promulgata dal governo giallo-verde Conte 1 (legge n. 36 del 26 aprile 2019) e propagandata mediante lo slogan "ogni difesa è legittima", si è cercato di accreditare la vittima di una sorta di sovranità punitiva, esercitabile sull'infrattore sino alla morte. Questa riforma ha tentato di eliminare la discrezionalità del giudice in ordine alla valutazione dei presupposti che rendono la reazione legittima, introducendo una presunzione di necessità della difesa quando il soggetto deve respingere "l'intrusione posta in essere, con violenza o minaccia di uso di armi o di altri mezzi di coazione" (art. 52.4), facendo passare il messaggio che fosse legittimo sparare all'individuo sorpreso a rubare nella propria casa [Notaro, 2020]. Per un altro verso, non va dimenticato che ci sono anche delle vittime che disprezzano la logica retributiva e vendicatoria e non sopportano il costo morale di chiedere l'infrazione di una sofferenza contro chi gliel'ha fatta subire [Mazzucato, 2018]. Infine, si potrebbe senz'altro aggiungere a questa lista un ulteriore elemento, che riguarda la tendenza a dissolversi, nella retorica e nella strategia del populismo penale, del vocabolo "proporzionalità": lo sconvolgimento dei principi su cui si basa lo ius puniendi liberale e garantista conduce, in ultima istanza, a forme di estremismo sanzionatorio [Pratt, 2007]. Si pensi, a titolo d'esempio, al recente articolo 5 del

decreto-legge del 31 ottobre 2022, n. 162, rubricato “Norme in materia di occupazioni abusive e organizzazione di raduni illegali”, che introduce l’articolo 434-bis del Codice penale: “Invasione di terreni o edifici per raduni pericolosi per l’ordine pubblico o l’incolumità pubblica o la salute pubblica”. Ribattezzato dai media come “norma anti-rave”, questo provvedimento promulgato dal Governo Meloni punisce non solo organizzatori e promotori, ma anche i partecipanti ai raduni illegali. La pena prevista per organizzatori e promotori è da tre a sei anni di reclusione e la multa da 1000 a 10000 euro. Un coro di critiche si è levato per denunciare non solo la mancanza di proporzione di queste sanzioni rispetto ad altre fattispecie di reato punite meno rigorosamente (omicidio colposo, percosse, minacce, stalking), ma anche per deplorare come la scelta sanzionatoria risulti eccessivamente severa rispetto alle legislazioni penali degli altri Stati europei [Forzati, 2022].

Contrassegnata dal consolidarsi di “politiche della paura” [Baratta, 2001] e dall’adesione al modello emergenziale di gestione dei problemi sociali mediante il diritto penale, questa fase storica viene designata da alcuni studiosi con le espressioni “momento punitivo” [Didier Fassin, 2018] o “momento populista” [Mouffe, 2018]: essa prende le mosse negli Stati Uniti d’America alla fine degli anni Settanta del secolo scorso, quando si registrò, da un lato, la delusione per i metodi di riabilitazione che avevano prevalso in nome del penal welfarism a partire dalla fine dell’Ottocento, e, dall’altro lato, l’arrivo al potere di Ronald Reagan, che generalizzò la politica repressiva amministrata a New York dal governatore Nelson Rockefeller [Christie, 1994]. Nel giro di tre decenni, il numero di persone incarcerate è aumentato di oltre quattro volte, superando la soglia dei due milioni, con una sovra-rappresentazione delle minoranze afroamericane. In Europa la tendenza è arrivata più tardi, anche se le prime avvisaglie erano già presenti negli anni Settanta. In Francia, ad esempio, essa fu maggiormente marcata sotto i governi di destra, ma non è stata arginata dai cambi di governo dopo l’arrivo al potere del socialista François Hollande. Negli anni Novanta la popolazione carceraria è triplicata nella Repubblica ceca, raddoppiata in Italia e nei Paesi Bassi. Il perimetro di questo “momento punitivo” non è dunque circoscritto ad alcune liberal-democrazie occidentali: l’uso demagogico del diritto e della giustizia penale costituisce invece una sfida globale alla razionalità penale liberale, umanista e garantista. Questa sfida diventa ancor più insidiosa dopo la cesura dell’11 settembre 2001: il rapporto tra libertà e sicurezza tende a squilibrarsi in favore di un nuovo ordine securitario, che promuove “un sistema penale disuguale e pesantemente lesivo dei diritti fondamentali” [Ferrajoli, 2018], che esacerba la paura collettiva nei confronti della delinquenza amplificando l’allarme sociale provocato dal crimine e incoraggia controriforme in materia di prevenzione e repressione del fenomeno criminale fortemente sbilanciate in favore del potere di punire.

Tuttavia, l'aspetto forse più stimolante di questo ricco quarto capitolo risiede nel raffinato tentativo teorico di conferire al sintagma "populismo penale" una definizione più ampia, capace di abbracciare le diverse pratiche populiste che investono la relazione tra democrazia e giustizia penale. Anastasia considera che l'espressione "usi populistici del diritto e della giustizia penale" abbia un duplice vantaggio: quello di non confinare la questione nello spazio angusto delle sole formazioni politiche cui siamo soliti attribuire l'etichetta del populismo penale; e quello di offrire un'ulteriore chiave analitica per comprendere l'uso demagogico del diritto penale da parte di soggetti e movimenti appartenenti alle istituzioni o alla società civile [per un avviso divergente sulla pertinenza di costruire una categoria "onnicomprendiva", si veda Cornelli, 2019].

Così ridefinito, il populismo penale può essere sia "di destra" che "di sinistra", sia "progressista" che "conservatore", a seconda del target verso cui si indirizza, ovvero delle funzioni cui intende assolvere [Anastasia, 2022, p. 80]. Se il target preso di mira sono alcuni facili bersagli eretti a capri espiatori come, ad esempio, gli immigrati clandestini o la devianza da criminalizzare e punire, l'uso demagogico del diritto penale è appannaggio della destra; mentre è generalmente di sinistra o 'anti-sistema' quando l'obiettivo è quello di incentivare la voglia di rivalsa sociale e il bersaglio sono le élites: si pensi, ad esempio alla riforma in tema di corruzione del già citato Governo giallo-verde Conte 1, denominata con la rozza espressione "spazzacorrotti", che, tra le altre cose, ha inasprito le pene accessorie interdittive, dilatato le fattispecie incriminatrici, creato un doppio standard attraverso l'esclusione delle misure alternative al carcere per i condannati in via definitiva ed esteso il regime ostativo ex art. 4-bis ordinamento penitenziario ai delitti contro la pubblica amministrazione [Fidelbo, 2020; Mongillo, 2019]). Se la funzione che assolve è di mantenere il consenso, la dinamica populista muoverà dall'area governativa di turno; se invece aspira a indebolire assetti di potere e preparare nuovi scenari, questa dinamica sarà azionata dalle fila dell'opposizione.

La ridefinizione proposta da Anastasia smentisce, dunque, il luogo comune secondo il quale l'uso populistico del diritto e della giustizia penale sarebbe unicamente appannaggio di partiti reazionari o di movimenti giustizialisti. In effetti, insidiose argomentazioni populiste sono rintracciabili anche in seno a movimenti della società civile che promuovono rivendicazioni emancipatrici. Un esempio che non figura nel libro di Anastasia ma che ha suscitato una viva discussione, occasionata dalla promulgazione della legislazione "Codice rosso" (legge 19 luglio 2019, n° 69), riguarda il trattamento penale da riservare alla violenza di genere e in special modo ai reati di femminicidio. Illustrativo di questo dibattito è il caso giudiziario di Antonio Gozzini, un ottantenne che nel 2020 ha confessato di aver ucciso la moglie, Cristina Maioli, insegnante in pensione di 79 anni, e che due anni più tardi è stato assolto "in quanto, al momento del fatto, non era imputabile per vizio totale di mente" determinato da un "delirio di gelosia". Quanto alla formula assolutoria, i giudici hanno chiarito che:

“la Corte non intende certo riservare all'imputato un salvacondotto o un trattamento indulgente a fronte della perpetrazione di un'azione orribile, ma semplicemente tener conto di un elementare principio di civiltà giuridica, quello della funzione rieducativa della pena, secondo cui non può esservi punizione laddove l'infermità mentale abbia obnubilato nell'autore del delitto la capacità di comprendere il significato del proprio comportamento” (motivazioni della sentenza della Corte di Assise di Brescia, Sezione I Penale, 21 dicembre 2020).

Le sentenze di assoluzione sono state molto contestate da attiviste dei movimenti femministi, avvocate e giornaliste perché, come disse il pubblico ministero che per Gozzini in primo grado aveva chiesto l'ergastolo, “il rischio è che passi il messaggio che qualsiasi uomo geloso può essere giustificato”. Al centro delle critiche vi è il legame diretto stabilito dalla sentenza tra gelosia e patologia, ma in maniera più generale sono state espresse riserve sulla minimizzazione della violenza contro le donne e sulla mancata conoscenza delle sue dinamiche anche dentro le aule di tribunale, né sono mancate certe forzature caricaturali, come chi ha voluto ricondurre il delirio di gelosia al delitto d'onore. Contro questa tendenza, si è distinto l'intervento dell'attivista e saggista Susanna Ronconi, che riflettendo sul rapporto tra femminicidio e non imputabilità, ha pubblicato un testo breve e lucido: “Femminicidio. Le donne rischiano il populismo penale?”. Nessuno prima di allora aveva puntato il dito sul rischio

“di un populismo penale femminile e femminista, intendendo per populismo penale la tendenza e la pratica di delegare al codice penale (e alla pena) il fronteggiamento di questioni sociali complesse, quali appunto quelle di genere, facendo inoltre prevalere una funzione simbolica del penale, e caricando di conseguenza ogni sentenza nel merito e ogni pena comminata di questa responsabilità simbolica. Il tema del populismo penale delle donne mi appare all'ordine del giorno, e più leggo dichiarazioni e reazioni alle sentenze e più me ne convinco” (Ronconi, 2020).

Ronconi prende esplicitamente di mira alcune proteste contro la sentenza della Corte di Assise di Brescia, ritenute “aprioristiche”, slegate “dall'accertamento dei fatti”, orientate verso “una sorta di giustizia sommaria, in cui i fatti e le responsabilità specifiche attribuite rischiano di essere dettagli poco significativi”. Alcune reazioni provenienti dal movimento delle donne non avrebbero saputo cogliere, nello specifico, la distinzione che separa la gelosia delirante, quale sintomo di una patologia psichiatrica, dalla gelosia come stato d'animo passionale. Gozzini, a seguito di varie perizie psichiatriche, non è stato ritenuto un uomo geloso, ma un uomo affetto da una patologia, il cui contenuto è la gelosia, che ne ha compromesso completamente la capacità di intendere e di volere. Tale distinzione, tra gelosia quale stato emotivo e delirio di gelosia, ha infatti assunto

una rilevanza determinante dal punto di vista giuridico. L'articolo 90 del codice penale dice che "gli stati emotivi o passionali non escludono né diminuiscono l'imputabilità". Il concetto di "imputabilità" è a sua volta spiegato all'articolo 85: "È imputabile chi ha la capacità di intendere e di volere": imputabilità e capacità di intendere (cioè di capire cosa si sta facendo) e di volere (cioè di volere gli effetti della propria azione) sono dunque sinonimi. La disposizione dell'articolo 90 si riferisce agli stati emotivi e passionali che sono verificabili in una persona sana e che, in quanto sana, è in grado di controllarli. E si dice che questi stati emotivi e passionali, come la gelosia, non possono incidere sull'imputabilità. Ma questi stessi stati possono assumere rilevanza come cause di esclusione o di attenuazione dell'imputabilità se dipendono da una vera e propria infermità di mente. L'articolo 88 del codice penale dice infatti che "non è imputabile chi, nel momento in cui ha commesso il fatto, era, per infermità, in tale stato di mente da escludere la capacità d'intendere o di volere". La chiosa di Ronconi è senza appello: "Gozzini non poteva essere giudicato a prescindere dalla considerazione della sua sofferenza psichiatrica. Nemmeno se il reato è il femminicidio" (Ronconi, 2020).

Irriducibile a un determinato partito politico giustizialista che individua nella repressione penale dei delitti la sua ragion d'essere; più diffuso di quanto si pensi generalmente, l'uso della propaganda penal-populista irrompe negli stessi corpi intermedi dei regimi democratici. Le pene e il carcere restituisce la complessità di questa categoria giuspolitica, gettando luce sui suoi attori, sulle sue motivazioni, sui suoi obiettivi e sui suoi strumenti. Come proteggersi da questo virus che infetta la cultura democratica dei sistemi politici liberali e garantisti? Se l'uso demagogico del diritto e della giustizia penale è diventato uno dei principali mezzi di legittimazione sociale a disposizione delle istituzioni nazionali, non sarebbe il caso di volgersi verso quelle dottrine abolizionistiche che rappresentano notoriamente il polo concettuale antinomico? Nel corso del sesto capitolo, intitolato "Giustificazioni e limiti del diritto di punire", pur soffermandosi sulla ormai pluridecennale crisi della giustizia penale ravvisabile in molti regimi democratico-costituzionali (dai fallimenti del penitenziario all'ipertrofia giudiziaria), e pur riconoscendo che l'attuale sistema giudiziario e penitenziario italiano,

"non riesce ad assolvere ai suoi scopi dichiarati (nel nostro caso, la prevenzione speciale positiva evocata dalla finalità rieducativa della pena scritta in Costituzione), né a garantire il divieto di trattamenti contrari al senso di umanità imposto dalla Costituzione e dalle Convenzioni internazionali" [Anastasia, 2022, p. 111],

Anastasia ribadisce la sua prossimità culturale all'impianto teorico del diritto penale minimo, fondato sugli assiomi del garantismo penale che si ispirano a loro volta alla civiltà giuridica dell'Illuminismo e che legittimano il diritto di punire

come limite al potere punitivo senza regole che verrebbe esercitato in sua assenza [Ferrajoli, 1989]. Senza perseguire il sogno dell'abolizionismo radicale [Hulsman, De Celis, 1982; Morris, 1995], che intende sovvertire il sistema penale nella sua interezza (polizia, tribunali, prigione), Anastasia sottolinea nondimeno alcuni meriti metodologici di questo indirizzo di pensiero: in primis, la capacità di criticare gli ordinamenti esistenti e di stimolare proprio la riflessione sulla legittimità del diritto di punire [Ricordeau, Charbit, Morisse, 2024]. Va del resto sottolineato come l'autore abbia lui stesso elaborato, insieme ad altri giuristi e sociologi, un'audace proposta riformatrice per rivoluzionare il sistema carcerario italiano, animata dall'ambizione di rendere progressivamente superflua ed eccezionale la reclusione. Tra le misure suggerite vanno menzionate la differenziazione delle pene, la depenalizzazione per i reati meno gravi, l'abolizione dell'ergastolo, l'applicazione di misure alternative a largo raggio, le sanzioni pecuniarie, l'esclusione dei minori dal carcere e la concessione dei domiciliari alle detenute con figli fino ai 10 anni [Manconi, Anastasia, Calderone, Resta, 2015]. Se invece "per abolizionismo non si intende un programma per l'eliminazione immediata della pena e del sistema della giustizia criminale, ma una specifica scelta analitica al cospetto della questione criminale e della risposta istituzionale" [Ruggiero, 2011], allora il volume di Anastasia *Le pene e il carcere* partecipa senz'altro di una sensibilità di questo tipo, che si palesa tanto nella messa in discussione degli attuali paradigmi securitari diretti a capitalizzare il consenso, quanto nella ricerca di soluzioni alternative rispetto a quelle propugnate dalle politiche penali neoliberali, accusate di alimentare quel medesimo sentimento di insicurezza che dicono di voler arginare.

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# TRE SPUNTI DI RIFLESSIONE ATTUALITA' DELLA PENALIZZAZIONE, DECLINO DEL WELFARE STATE E DESTATISTICALIZZAZIONE DEL DIBATTITO PUBBLICO

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## **ABSTRACT**

Stefano Anastasia's book offers three key reflections. The first concerns the expansion of penalization, which is increasingly presented as a solution to complex social issues, raising concerns about excessive criminalization. The second addresses the crisis of the Welfare State, where welfare policies have been progressively replaced by strategies of control and repression. Lastly, the third examines the reduction of statistical analysis of the public debate, highlighting how criminal law policies are increasingly driven by emotional narratives rather than empirical analysis.

## **KEYWORDS**

Welfare State, Penalization, Reduction of Statistical Analysis, social cohesion, populism

1. Il senso della pena e più in generale il senso del diritto e della repressione penale come tema proprio della storia del diritto e della filosofia del diritto, è stato affrontato, in ogni tempo, tanto forti sono le connessioni con la struttura della società e con la manifestazione più significativa del potere di chi infligge la punizione.

Lo storico Massimo Sbriccoli ha dato un contributo significativo all'analisi del diritto penale, interpretandolo come fenomeno storico e sociale strettamente connesso allo sviluppo dello Stato moderno. Egli ha evidenziato come il diritto penale si sia evoluto dalla vendetta privata, tipica delle società primitive, a una funzione pubblica gestita dallo Stato moderno. Con la modernità, questa trasformazione ha segnato una frattura nella nozione di diritto e di pena, rendendo il relativo diritto non solo uno strumento di repressione, ma anche una garanzia per la tutela dei diritti dei cittadini.

Secondo Sbriccoli, il diritto penale è in costante mutamento, perché cambia al mutare delle condizioni culturali e politiche di ogni epoca. In particolare, la nascita degli Stati moderni ha rappresentato una svolta cruciale: ha portato alla codificazione del diritto penale, alla progressiva umanizzazione della pena e al consolidamento del potere statale. In questo processo, il diritto penale ha svolto un ruolo chiave nella centralizzazione dell'autorità, contribuendo all'affermazione dello Stato come unica entità legittimata all'uso della legge.

Dal punto di vista teorico-giuridico, come recentemente hanno dimostrato Paolo Di Lucia e Lorenzo Passerini Glazel (*Hans Kelsen. Giustizia, diritto e realtà sociale*), giuristi, come l'austriaco Hans Kelsen, hanno sottolineato gli elementi di continuità tra gli ordinamenti giuridici premoderni e moderni. Secondo Kelsen, il tratto distintivo che accomuna tutti gli ordinamenti giuridici – primitivi e moderni, decentrati e accentrati – è la presenza di una sanzione per il comportamento contrario a quello prescritto, ovvero il carattere sanzionatorio del diritto.

Negli ordinamenti basati sulla vendetta di sangue, l'autotutela e il ricorso alla vendetta non sono considerati atti istintivi o antiggiuridici, ma costituiscono, secondo Kelsen, la prima vera e propria forma di sanzione giuridica. In questa prospettiva, non vi sarebbe alcuna discontinuità tra la vendetta di sangue nelle società primitive e la pena negli ordinamenti giuridici dello Stato moderno, poiché entrambe incarnano gli elementi essenziali del diritto, ossia quelli che accomunano tutti i sistemi giuridici.

Entrambe, infatti, rappresentano la tecnica specifica di un ordinamento coercitivo, ovvero quella tecnica *"che consiste nel suscitare la condotta umana socialmente desiderata attraverso la minaccia di una misura di coercizione, che deve essere eseguita in caso di condotta contraria"* (p. 175).

Dal punto di vista teorico-giuridico, per evidenziare gli elementi di discontinuità tra gli ordinamenti primitivi e quelli moderni, è necessario analizzare l'emergere progressivo dei momenti di differenziazione tra i sistemi basati sulla vendetta e gli ordinamenti penali moderni. Queste differenze si manifestano principalmente nella fase di applicazione del diritto, ovvero nel momento in cui la funzione di accertare l'effettiva sussistenza del fatto illecito viene affidata a un'"autorità oggettiva", come un tribunale (p. 190).

Secondo Kelsen, il passaggio più significativo nell'evoluzione delle procedure giuridiche risiede proprio nella centralizzazione di questa fase: l'attribuzione esclusiva a un organo specifico della competenza a eseguire la sanzione segna il distacco definitivo dai meccanismi di autotutela e di vendetta di sangue. In questo senso, il sistema penale moderno sostituisce i metodi di giustizia privata, diventando un elemento distintivo degli Stati moderni. Questa prospettiva, tuttavia, trascura l'idea del diritto penale moderno come meccanismo di limitazione della punizione arbitraria e della violenza privata.

Diversamente, per Sbriccoli, la vera frattura tra ordinamenti premoderni e moderni si realizza con l'affermazione della tutela dei diritti umani, che segna la

fine del carattere vendicativo della pena e trasforma il diritto penale in uno strumento di garanzia per i cittadini, anziché di mera repressione.

Tra gli elementi di discontinuità storicamente determinanti individuati da Sbriccoli e quelli di continuità teoricamente determinanti evidenziati da Kelsen, emerge con chiarezza il ruolo centrale della progressiva centralizzazione del potere statale. Tuttavia, ciò che resta in ombra in entrambe gli autori è il modo in cui il diritto penale viene giustificato nelle diverse epoche storiche, in particolare il cambiamento della sua legittimazione nel passaggio dagli ordinamenti premoderni a quelli moderni. Questo aspetto è fondamentale per comprendere non solo l'evoluzione strutturale del sistema penale, ma anche le trasformazioni ideologiche e normative che ne hanno accompagnato lo sviluppo.

Il diritto penale moderno si legittima proprio come argine al potere punitivo informale, una giustificazione che risulta difficilmente conciliabile con gli strumenti teorici di Kelsen. Secondo Kelsen, infatti, la vendetta non può essere considerata una forma di potere punitivo informale, poiché essa “soddisfa non solo un interesse individuale, ma anche un interesse collettivo” (p. 180), esercitando una funzione sociale preventiva. In questa prospettiva, la vendetta svolge un ruolo analogo a quello della sanzione, in quanto “*suscita la condotta umana socialmente desiderata attraverso la minaccia di una misura di coercizione, che deve essere eseguita in caso di condotta contraria*” (p. 180).

Il passaggio alla regolamentazione giuridica della punizione segna un'evoluzione fondamentale: il potere giuridicamente limitato non solo previene i delitti, ma impedisce anche l'applicazione di pene arbitrarie e ingiuste. In assenza del diritto penale moderno, frutto dell'illuminismo giuridico, il potere punitivo rimarrebbe privo di limiti e la pena conserverebbe la sua natura puramente vendicativa.

Se Hans Kelsen non offre strumenti adeguati a individuare i diversi modelli giustificativi necessari a rispondere alle domande sullo scopo del diritto penale, l'analisi storica di Sbriccoli, pur senza mettere al centro questa tematica, impone inevitabilmente di affrontarla. Sebbene la questione giustificativa non sia mai stata il fulcro della sua ricerca, il suo approccio storico rende impossibile ignorarla, offrendo una prospettiva dinamica e contestualizzata che manca nell'impostazione teorica di Kelsen.

Invece, recentemente è Stefano Anastasia, che nel suo ultimo libro *Le pene e il carcere*, ha posto il tema della questione della giustificazione del diritto penale tra i suoi obiettivi principali.

Oggi, nell'epoca dei populismi, l'analisi critica della giustificazione della penalizzazione assume un'importanza decisiva. Sempre più spesso si diffonde l'idea, ormai divenuta di senso comune, che l'espansione del diritto penale possa rappresentare la soluzione a tutte le problematiche sociali. In questo contesto, riflettere sulle ragioni che legittimano l'uso della sanzione penale è essenziale per contrastare una deriva che rischia di trasformare il diritto penale da strumento di

garanzia a semplice mezzo di repressione, svuotandolo della sua funzione limitativa del potere punitivo.

Stefano Anastasia, consapevole del fatto che il diritto è espressione della politica e che l'ordinamento giuridico formalizza le scelte politiche, non trascura il ruolo dell'uso politico del diritto. Come egli stesso osserva (*Le pene e il carcere*, p. 58), *"le trasformazioni della penalità non sono intelleggibili ignorando l'uso politico del diritto e della giustizia penale"*. Inoltre, tali trasformazioni *"non sono comprensibili sganciate dai cambiamenti avvenuti nei sistemi politici, nelle loro relazioni con il mondo della comunicazione, nella stessa natura dei regimi democratici"*.

Anastasia sottolinea inoltre che *"la storia dell'uso politico della giustizia penale è ben più antica delle sue declinazioni contemporanee, e anche più attuale della giustizia arbitraria dei sovrani"* (p. 80). L'uso politico della giustizia penale, infatti, non è una novità della modernità, ma è arrivato *"fin dentro la storia contemporanea degli Stati di diritto costituzionale, attraverso la selezione discrezionale dei beni meritevoli di tutela penale"* (p. 80). In questo senso, non vi sarebbe nulla di nuovo nell'impiego politico della giustizia penale, se non per un aspetto fondamentale: secondo Anastasia, ciò che caratterizza l'attuale fase storica è che i populistici non si nascondono più dietro l'astrazione della norma penale, ma individuano esplicitamente un bersaglio, un *nemico*, piuttosto che una condotta da criminalizzare.

Nel discorso populista, dunque, il *focus* si sposta dalla condotta criminale alla soggettività deviante, dando origine a quello che è stato definito *diritto penale dell'autore*, in contrapposizione al tradizionale *diritto penale del fatto*. Secondo Anastasia, questo cambiamento comporta la dissoluzione dei principi fondamentali del garantismo penale di tradizione liberale. Il diritto penale, nell'ottica populista, non avrebbe più la funzione di contenimento del potere punitivo, come teorizzato dalle concezioni del *diritto penale minimo*, ma si trasformerebbe in un dispositivo di esclusione e repressione mirata.

Il libro di Stefano Anastasia ci offre, tra gli altri, tre spunti di riflessione, che possono essere discussi in questa sede.

Il primo riguarda l'importanza che l'espansione della penalizzazione ha assunto nel contesto attuale. In un'epoca in cui il diritto penale viene spesso presentato come la soluzione a problemi sociali complessi, è essenziale interrogarsi sulle implicazioni di questa funzione e sui rischi di un'eccessiva criminalizzazione.

La seconda direttrice è legata alla crisi dello Stato sociale e al suo declino. Questo fenomeno ha reso il tema della penalizzazione sempre più centrale nel dibattito pubblico e politico, portando alla sostituzione delle politiche di welfare con strategie di controllo e repressione.

Infine, la terza direttrice riguarda la *de-statisticalizzazione* del dibattito pubblico e la delegittimazione dei dati di realtà. In un contesto dominato da narrazioni emotive e da una crescente sfiducia nei confronti dell'analisi empirica, le scelte

politiche in materia di diritto penale vengono spesso guidate da percezioni soggettive e strategie comunicative.

2. Negli ultimi decenni, le democrazie occidentali, inclusa l'Italia, hanno registrato un'espansione progressiva del diritto penale, un fenomeno che, a partire dal 2002, si è ulteriormente intensificato attraverso una crescente criminalizzazione di comportamenti e fenomeni sociali, come dimostrano le più recenti misure repressive adottate contro varie forme di dissenso politico. L'ampliamento del diritto penale avviene su due fronti principali: da un lato, mediante un'inflazione legislativa, con l'introduzione di un numero sempre maggiore di nuove norme punitive; dall'altro, attraverso l'ampliamento delle figure di reato, con la penalizzazione di condotte come l'organizzazione di *rave party* o la *gestazione per altri (GPA)*.

Questa espansione non si sta limitando a un semplice aumento della popolazione carceraria, ma riflette un fenomeno più ampio: la penalizzazione come strumento di controllo sociale. Se in passato il diritto penale moderno aveva la funzione di contenere l'arbitrio punitivo e di garantire la coesione sociale, oggi il suo ruolo appare profondamente mutato. La criminalizzazione viene sempre più spesso presentata come una panacea a qualsiasi problema sociale, contribuendo a rafforzare una dipendenza sistematica dalla repressione, che viene proposta come unica risposta politica.

Viviamo nell'era del *populismo penale* e della *democrazia consensuale*, fenomeni analizzati da Luigi Ferrajoli e ripresi da Stefano Anastasia con un approccio più attento alla concretezza dei dati di realtà. Un contesto in cui si manifesta un crescente bisogno di risposte emotive e rassicurazioni e in cui il diritto penale viene investito di significati simbolici e ideologici.

Anastasia evidenzia come *“l'uso simbolico del diritto penale sia diventato un capitale essenziale nella ricerca e nel consolidamento del consenso politico”* (p. 66). In questa prospettiva, *“si comprendono la centralità delle campagne di law and order nelle competizioni elettorali contemporanee e la pratica del governo attraverso la criminalità”* (p. 66). L'uso politico della giustizia penale si inserisce in una trasformazione più ampia dei sistemi democratici, sempre più orientati alla ricerca del consenso immediato. In questo scenario, il diritto penale diventa lo strumento più efficace per il consolidamento del potere, non più fondato su una *democrazia attiva*, ma su una *democrazia passiva*, in cui la volontà popolare non si esprime attraverso la partecipazione, ma per adesione.

Ferrajoli descrive questo passaggio come il tramonto della democrazia rappresentativa e l'ascesa di un nuovo regime *demo-consensuale*, un nuovo regime politico fondato sulla rilevazione del consenso popolare più che sull'esercizio del potere popolare. Se nel Novecento i partiti politici e i sindacati svolgevano una funzione pedagogica di mediazione tra cittadini e istituzioni, oggi questa intermediazione è venuta meno, lasciando spazio a un rapporto diretto tra

politica e opinione pubblica, spesso alimentato da dinamiche emozionali piuttosto che da un autentico confronto democratico. I movimenti e gli attori politici populistici si presentano come i più coerenti interpreti di questa trasformazione, facendo del diritto penale non solo uno strumento di repressione, ma anche un efficace mezzo di costruzione del consenso.

Il populismo contemporaneo si caratterizza per *“il perseguimento di un quadro di politiche penali finalizzato a guadagnare voti piuttosto che a ridurre i tassi di criminalità o promuovere giustizia”* (p. 69) e può essere inteso come *“una strategia in tema di sicurezza diretta a ottenere demagogicamente il consenso popolare, rispondendo alla paura generata dalla criminalità di strada, con un uso congiunturale del diritto penale, tanto duramente repressivo e antigarantista quanto inefficace rispetto alle dichiarate finalità di prevenzione”*.

Secondo Anastasia, la criminalità stessa sarebbe divenuta uno *strumento di governo sociale*, utilizzato per giustificare politiche penali repressive e per rafforzare il controllo sulle fasce più vulnerabili della popolazione. Il diritto penale, allora, non è più un mezzo di regolazione imparziale della giustizia, ma si trasforma in un dispositivo politico, modellato sulle esigenze del consenso elettorale, piuttosto che su un’effettiva razionalità giuridica e criminologica.

Il populismo penale impone ai governi un costante monitoraggio del sentimento collettivo e della percezione del rischio, che favorisce risposte politiche basate su strategie securitarie e punitive mentre la pena assume una funzione rassicurante, diventando uno strumento di legittimazione politica che rafforza la connessione tra populismo penale e consenso elettorale.

Un esempio emblematico di questa dinamica è la cosiddetta *“guerra alla criminalità”*, un’espressione che segnala una profonda trasformazione del diritto penale. In un autentico Stato sociale di diritto, il sistema penale dovrebbe svolgere una duplice funzione: da un lato, proteggere i diritti fondamentali attraverso la repressione dei reati; dall’altro, limitare l’abuso del potere punitivo per garantire un equilibrio tra sicurezza e libertà. Tuttavia, quando il legislatore trascura questa seconda funzione, il diritto penale si trasforma in un dispositivo bellico, in cui il cittadino non è più soltanto un soggetto di diritti, ma può essere ridefinito come un *nemico da neutralizzare* (cap. 4).

Come osserva Anastasia, si assiste alla sistematica identificazione di *“un nemico potente con i profughi che arrivano dal mare, con i tossici che ciondolano per le città, con gli autori di piccoli reati seriali”* (p. 75).

A questa logica appartiene anche la proliferazione di nuove figure di reato, come la criminalizzazione dei *rave party*, della *gestazione per altri (GPA)* e del dissenso politico. Si tratta di esempi emblematici di un processo di *espansione della penalizzazione*, in cui il diritto viene strumentalizzato per finalità politiche piuttosto che per una reale tutela sociale. Questo fenomeno, alimentato dal populismo, mina la razionalità del sistema penale e riduce lo spazio per soluzioni



giuridiche basate su principi garantisti, compromettendo l'equilibrio tra repressione e tutela delle libertà fondamentali.

Nelle società basate sul modello neoliberale, il criterio di *meritevolezza del castigo* finisce per fondarsi sulla presunzione che chi non è in grado di sfruttare le opportunità offerte dal sistema meritocratico debba inevitabilmente subirne le conseguenze. L'accesso alle opportunità viene teorizzato come universalmente garantito, ma chi non riesce a coglierle viene considerato responsabile del proprio fallimento e, di conseguenza, ritenuto meritevole di punizione. Questo approccio esalta le libertà individuali, trasformando ogni persona in un *imprenditore di sé stesso*: il successo è il frutto della capacità individuale di competere, mentre l'insuccesso diventa colpa dell'individuo e non della struttura sociale. Chi non riesce a adeguarsi a questa logica competitiva non viene sostenuto, ma disciplinato, penalizzato e, nei casi più estremi, incarcerato.

La penalizzazione assume così il ruolo di meccanismo di *esclusione sociale*, funzionale non più alla coesione della società, ma al mantenimento dell'ordine neoliberale. Il sistema penale, che dovrebbe garantire stabilità e coesione sociale, finisce invece per generare il risultato opposto: se si trasforma in uno strumento di vendetta e repressione indiscriminata, produce nel lungo periodo fratture profonde, alimentando sfiducia e contrapposizione sociale anziché promuovendo sicurezza e giustizia.

Il diritto penale si configura sempre più come uno *strumento di gestione simbolica della marginalità sociale*, riproducendo dinamiche arcaiche di esclusione e punizione. In particolare, esso richiama il *rito sacrificale della vendetta di sangue*, tipico delle società premoderne, mettendo in discussione quella cesura storica che la modernità e la centralizzazione del potere statale avevano prodotto. In questa prospettiva, la punizione riacquista un significato ancestrale, rinsaldando il legame tra giustizia e vendetta all'interno della cultura contemporanea.

La tradizionale distinzione tra i sistemi giuridici premoderni e moderni, basata sull'accentramento del monopolio punitivo da parte dello Stato, si assottiglia progressivamente. La penalizzazione, infatti, non si limita più a seguire principi razionali di deterrenza o riabilitazione, ma si allinea sempre più a un sentimento di vendetta diffuso nella società, rafforzando una logica punitiva arcaica e regressiva.

L'uso strumentale del diritto penale si alimenta, e al tempo stesso alimenta, un *desiderio di vendetta* che genera un circolo vizioso tra populismo e neoliberismo: il primo, facendo leva sulla paura e sull'insicurezza, promuove politiche repressive per consolidare il consenso; il secondo, attraverso la penalizzazione selettiva della marginalità, riproduce le disuguaglianze sociali e rafforza il controllo sulle fasce più deboli della popolazione.

Dai capitoli del libro di Anastasia dedicati alla giustizia penale nell'era dei populismi e alle giustificazioni del diritto di punire emerge con chiarezza come la

pena abbia ormai assunto un *valore rassicurante* per la società, alimentando pulsioni collettive di paura e vendetta. La funzione del diritto penale si è progressivamente trasformata, diventando sempre più uno strumento simbolico di controllo sociale piuttosto che un mezzo razionale di tutela giuridica.

Anastasia sottolinea con forza la necessità di contrastare questa deriva, distinguendo nettamente tra *diritto* e *potere di punire*. Per farlo, occorre riscoprire il *volto costituzionale della pena* e riaffermare una concezione umanizzata della sanzione penale, fondata sui principi del garantismo e della dignità della persona. Tuttavia, tra le pagine del suo lavoro emerge anche un ulteriore aspetto fondamentale: la convinzione che il rafforzamento dello *Stato sociale* sia una condizione essenziale per limitare l'espansione della penalizzazione e per ridurre il ricorso al diritto penale come strumento principale di gestione del disagio sociale. Senza un sistema di welfare solido e inclusivo, il rischio è che la repressione continui a sostituire le politiche di giustizia sociale, perpetuando un modello punitivo fondato sulla marginalizzazione e sull'esclusione.

3. Il secondo spunto di riflessione offerto dal libro di Anastasia riguarda proprio il *declino dello Stato sociale* e il conseguente spostamento del baricentro della sicurezza dal welfare sociale al *welfare penale*. La questione cruciale che emerge è perché l'opinione pubblica trovi rassicurante il modo in cui oggi viene gestita la giustizia penale. Se la risposta a questa domanda risiede nel progressivo smantellamento del welfare, diventa allora più chiaro il motivo per cui si sia affermata la logica della *criminalizzazione dell'emarginazione*.

Di fronte alla crescente incapacità dello Stato di rispondere alle richieste di sicurezza sociale, la repressione penale sembra l'ultimo baluardo percepito della sua presenza. Uno Stato del tutto deficitario nel garantire assistenza sociale si ripropone nella sua veste più rassicurante: quella del *paladino del welfare penale*, che trasforma l'emarginazione sociale in una minaccia da neutralizzare. La povertà, la precarietà abitativa, la marginalità economica vengono presentate non come problemi da risolvere con politiche sociali, ma come fonti di insicurezza pubblica da affrontare con strumenti repressivi.

In questa logica, la giustizia penale interviene su *imbrattatori, partecipanti ai rave parties, occupanti abusivi, questuanti, donne incinte o con figli piccoli in condizioni di precarietà, e soprattutto migranti*, identificati come elementi di disturbo e disordine. La repressione del malessere sociale diventa così un'operazione rassicurante, capace di soddisfare il bisogno collettivo di sicurezza proprio attraverso la *constatazione che lo Stato esiste e agisce*, seppur nella sua forma più punitiva.

In questa prospettiva, il diritto penale viene presentato come *uno strumento insostituibile per garantire la sicurezza*, in risposta ai diffusi sentimenti di insicurezza che attraversano la società. Tuttavia, questo processo non solo distorce il ruolo del diritto penale, trasformandolo in un dispositivo di controllo sociale

anziché di tutela giuridica, ma contribuisce anche a legittimare un modello di Stato che abdica progressivamente alla sua funzione sociale per concentrarsi esclusivamente sulla repressione.

Il rischio concreto è che la funzione tradizionale del diritto penale, ossia garantire la *coesione sociale*, venga ormai percepita come l'*ultimo baluardo dello Stato sociale*. Questo accade perché lo *statualismo penalistico* - ovvero l'idea di uno Stato che interviene attivamente attraverso la repressione penale - rischia di apparire come l'unico strumento ancora efficace per affrontare le ingiustizie sociali. In un contesto in cui lo Stato, incapace di fornire sicurezza sociale, ha trasformato il diritto penale in uno strumento di controllo della marginalità e il potere punitivo è diventato, paradossalmente, l'*ultima forma di assicurazione* che lo Stato offre ai suoi cittadini.

Questa dinamica si inserisce in un quadro più ampio: nel modello neoliberale contemporaneo, che esalta le libertà individuali e trasforma ogni individuo in un *imprenditore di sé stesso*, il sostegno dello Stato sociale viene progressivamente smantellato. Le risorse statali, invece di essere destinate al welfare e alla protezione delle fasce più vulnerabili, vengono dirottate verso altri capitoli di spesa, lasciando la repressione penale come unica risposta visibile e immediata alle paure e insicurezze della società.

La crisi dello Stato è strettamente legata alla trasformazione dei modelli di convivenza sociale, un cambiamento divenuto evidente già dalla fine del secolo scorso. In questo contesto, è mutata anche la *giustificazione del diritto penale*: mentre un tempo la risposta ai problemi sociali era ricercata attraverso strumenti di *giustizia sociale*, oggi la tendenza dominante è quella di affrontarli attraverso la *giustizia penale*.

Le richieste provenienti dalla società suggeriscono che le tensioni e le disuguaglianze non debbano più essere risolte con politiche di inclusione e riequilibrio, ma con misure punitive. Tuttavia, quando i governi riconoscono e assecondano il *bisogno diffuso di reazione violenta e di ritorsione*, il diritto penale assume forme sempre più repressive, e si trasforma in uno strumento di giustizia sostanzialmente *vendicativa e violenta*. Questa deriva porta a un paradosso: invece di limitare la violenza nella società - come storicamente giustificato dalla nascita stessa del diritto penale moderno - esso finisce per amplificarla, normalizzando una logica punitiva che alimenta la violenza nella società anziché mitigarne le cause.

La domanda sociale di *sicurezza* viene sempre più interpretata non come una richiesta di *sicurezza sociale*, ma come una *domanda securitaria*, la cui unica risposta sembra essere la giustizia penale. Le stesse istanze sociali non vengono più rivolte al sistema di giustizia sociale, ma direttamente a quello penale, che diventa il principale - se non l'unico - strumento attraverso cui lo Stato interviene nelle dinamiche di esclusione e disagio. E, viceversa, anche quando la società esprime una domanda di sicurezza sociale, i governi rispondono offrendo

sicurezza *dal rischio criminale*, spacciandola per una reale presa in carico delle richieste di aiuto provenienti dalla società stessa. Un esempio emblematico è la gestione della *carenza abitativa*: invece di investire nell'assegnazione di alloggi popolari a chi ne ha bisogno, la risposta è l'organizzazione sistematica di sgomberi delle case occupate, che trasforma un problema sociale in un problema di ordine pubblico.

In questo contesto, la pena finisce per assumere la funzione di una *forma surrogata di sicurezza sociale*: a una domanda di protezione e assistenza, lo *Stato securitario* risponde con la repressione, soddisfacendo così anche gli *appetiti vendicativi* diffusi nella società e alimentati da una *democrazia del consenso*, in cui il diritto penale viene percepito come l'unico strumento ancora efficace. La pena piace perché *rassicura*; appare come *l'ultima prestazione dello Stato* rimasta, l'unico retaggio di uno *Stato sociale di diritto* ormai in disfacimento.

Il diritto penale finisce, così, per essere percepito come *l'unico elemento del welfare che funziona*, con il carcere trasformato in una soluzione sistemica alla marginalità sociale. In questo senso, il sistema penale non è più solo un segmento dell'apparato giuridico, ma diventa un *pezzo centrale del sistema sociale complessivo*, l'ultima assicurazione che lo Stato sembra offrire ai cittadini.

Oggi assistiamo a un *ritrarsi del welfare* e a un'espansione della punizione: mentre la politica sociale diventa sempre meno generosa, la politica penale si intensifica, riducendo progressivamente l'aspetto umano delle politiche penali. Questo fenomeno evidenzia come *assistenza e punizione* siano ormai percepite come *due modalità alternative di governo della povertà* all'interno di una società civile.

È stato, peraltro, sottolineato da François Bonnet come esista una *relazione inversa tra la generosità delle politiche sociali e l'intensità della politica penale*. In altre parole, nei paesi in cui il welfare è forte e inclusivo, il sistema penale tende a essere più indulgente, mentre nei contesti caratterizzati da politiche sociali restrittive si registra un *alto tasso di incarcerazione e una maggiore espansione della penalizzazione*. Questo rapporto inverso dimostra come il diritto penale, lungi dall'essere un semplice strumento di giustizia, venga spesso utilizzato come *meccanismo sostitutivo del welfare*, con la repressione che prende il posto della protezione sociale.

Questa riflessione trova ulteriore conferma nelle pagine di Anastasia, che ci spingono a interrogarci su un punto cruciale: la società riconosce forse meriti ai governi e ai partiti politici che rafforzano le politiche penali perché, almeno in quel contesto, lo Stato appare presente e attivo? In altre parole, mentre il declino dello Stato sociale sembra inarrestabile – e la sua ristrutturazione non rientra nei piani delle forze politiche in una *democrazia del consenso* – le politiche repressive offrono un'illusione di stabilità e controllo, diventando l'unico ambito in cui lo Stato continua a manifestarsi con forza.

Un'analisi delle *correlazioni tra il restringimento del welfare e l'espansione della punizione*, soprattutto in società segnate da un progressivo abbassamento degli standard di vita delle classi lavoratrici e dall'impoverimento della classe media, potrebbe fornire strumenti essenziali per comprendere non solo le attuali giustificazioni della penalizzazione, ma anche la logica sottostante all'espansione del diritto penale.

Ciò porterebbe inoltre a una consapevolezza fondamentale: la gestione delle popolazioni *non più integrate* nei tradizionali meccanismi economici - quelle escluse dai mercati del lavoro, vittime della rottura del compromesso tra capitale e lavoro, che spesso esibiscono comportamenti percepiti come "sgradevoli" (come il vagabondaggio) - non può essere affidata esclusivamente al diritto penale. Considerarle una minaccia all'ordine sociale e rispondere con la repressione significa ignorare che *la reale sicurezza delle società contemporanee dipende dalla capacità di fornire risposte di welfare sociale*, piuttosto che dalla criminalizzazione della marginalità.

Se la domanda sociale di sicurezza viene sempre più interpretata come una richiesta di *giustizia penale* piuttosto che di *sicurezza sociale*, è essenziale contestare questa visione. Non basta una risposta meramente *tecnico-giuridica*; servono nuovi strumenti per *produrre giustizia sociale* e comprendere, in profondità le reali esigenze della società.

Oggi assistiamo alla *fine delle prestazioni sociali*, alla *perdita di status della classe media* e a un *risentimento crescente* dovuto alla mancanza di protezione. La precarietà e l'insicurezza che colpiscono le classi popolari generano una domanda continua di sicurezza, che viene sistematicamente canalizzata verso l'ampliamento del sistema penale. L'insicurezza sociale, in altre parole, viene trasformata in insicurezza criminale, per giustificare l'espansione di tale sistema.

Per invertire la rotta, è necessaria una *politica di ricostruzione dei legami sociali* e di rafforzamento delle relazioni di solidarietà all'interno della società. Bisogna rispondere alle domande sociali attraverso strumenti alternativi al diritto penale, affrontando alla radice la *crisi sociale* che alimenta l'espansione della penalizzazione. In assenza di una riforma in questa direzione, *il carcere e la penalizzazione continueranno a funzionare come l'unico sistema di disciplinamento dell'esclusione sociale*.

È necessario un cambiamento strutturale: infatti, *la sicurezza reale dipende dal rafforzamento del welfare e non dalla criminalizzazione delle marginalità*.

4. Per compiere questo passaggio, è fondamentale affrontare il *terzo e ultimo spunto di riflessione* proposto da Anastasia nel suo libro: la *destatizzazione del dibattito pubblico*. Il modo in cui la criminalità viene percepita e discussa nella società contemporanea non si basa sui dati reali del fenomeno, ma su una costruzione mediatica e politica che alimenta paure collettive e, di conseguenza, la domanda di sicurezza punitiva. L'uso politico della paura, in altre parole, sembra

aver delegittimato la statistica, alimentando il populismo penale e giustificando l'espansione del diritto punitivo.

Se i dati effettivi sulla criminalità fossero comunicati in modo corretto, la *produzione di paura* e la conseguente *ansia di sicurezza* si ridurrebbero sensibilmente. Come sottolinea Anastasia, *“la costruzione sociale dell'insicurezza soggettiva come paura di diventare vittima di reati, se non come percezione di esserlo già, costituisce un elemento essenziale dell'uso populista del diritto e della giustizia penale, che passa per la delegittimazione di ogni dato di realtà riguardante le effettive condizioni di rischio di esposizione a fenomeni criminali”* (p. 77).

Citando Anselmi, Anastasia evidenzia come la *destatisticalizzazione* riveli la natura retorica del *populismo penale*: le argomentazioni che animano il dibattito pubblico sono orientate a persuadere i cittadini piuttosto che a informarli correttamente. Questo meccanismo genera un *circolo vizioso*: la percezione distorta del rischio criminale alimenta *richieste di rassicurazione* a cui la politica risponde con *misure repressive*, senza però incidere sulle cause reali del disagio sociale.

Di fronte a questa dinamica, diventa evidente essenziale – come sostiene Anastasia – la reintegrazione dei dati reali nel dibattito pubblico per ridurre la percezione distorta della criminalità e per orientare le politiche verso soluzioni di prevenzione piuttosto che di repressione.

A questo punto si apre una questione cruciale: *come tornare ai dati statistici senza ideologizzarli?* In un contesto in cui la percezione della criminalità è costruita più su narrazioni mediatiche e politiche che su dati reali, la sfida è riabilitare l'uso della statistica come strumento di analisi razionale, evitando al tempo stesso il rischio che essa diventi un nuovo strumento di discriminazione.

Una domanda che potrebbe essere posta all'autore del libro, come spunto per ulteriori approfondimenti, riguarda proprio il rapporto tra *statistica, informatica e diritto penale*. Nonostante le critiche alla *giustizia penale predittiva* – che utilizza algoritmi e tecniche di profilazione per prevedere e prevenire crimini futuri – è possibile chiedersi se l'integrazione di questi strumenti possa, paradossalmente, *ridurre la penalizzazione della marginalità sociale* e quindi aprire la strada a una fase di *depenalizzazione*.

Certo, il rischio di derive tecnocratiche e di una nuova forma di *controllo sociale selettivo* – basato su logiche di *profilazione del rischio* – resta un aspetto che merita una riflessione approfondita. La domanda fondamentale rimane dunque se sia possibile *usare questi strumenti per una politica di sicurezza più giusta e inclusiva*, anziché per perpetuare le dinamiche punitive dello *Stato securitario*.

La *giustizia predittiva* rappresenta una delle innovazioni più controverse nel panorama giuridico contemporaneo: essa promette di *migliorare l'efficacia della prevenzione del rischio*, potenzialmente *riducendo la penalizzazione* e favorendo un approccio più mirato alla sicurezza, sebbene il principale rischio di questi

strumenti risieda nel modo in cui vengono addestrati: se gli algoritmi – come spesso accade – si basano su dati storici discriminatori finiscono per perpetuare e amplificare i *pregiudizi sistemici* già presenti nella giustizia penale.

Ma qui si apre una *provocazione* interessante: se fosse possibile sviluppare algoritmi *non discriminatori*, addestrati in modo da evitare i *bias* pregressi, il dato statistico dedotto dall'intelligenza artificiale potrebbe diventare uno *strumento utile per la prevenzione del rischio*?

Nel contesto della giustizia penale e della penalizzazione, ci si deve chiedere se l'impiego dell'informatica e della statistica per la valutazione del rischio possa limitare l'espansione del potere punitivo e favorire un maggiore sviluppo del diritto alla prevenzione del rischio. L'utilizzo di dati reali informatizzati potrebbe contribuire a ridurre le paure e le ansie sociali, diminuendo così la domanda di sicurezza indirizzata alla giustizia penale e riportando il dibattito sulla necessità di un rafforzamento dello Stato sociale.

L'intersezione tra informatica e statistica potrebbe confermare, con maggiore oggettività, che la marginalità economica e sociale non è automaticamente sinonimo di pericolosità. Di conseguenza, questa condizione dovrebbe essere affrontata attraverso strumenti di *giustizia sociale*, piuttosto che con soluzioni di *giustizia penale*. Il futuro della giustizia predittiva dipende, allora, dalla capacità di evitare *bias* discriminatori e di utilizzarla per fini preventivi anziché repressivi: un uso responsabile di essa potrebbe servire non tanto a rafforzare il controllo repressivo, quanto a guidare *politiche di prevenzione basate sul welfare*, identificando i contesti in cui è più urgente intervenire con misure sociali piuttosto che penali.

La crescente domanda di sicurezza alimenta, oggi, l'espansione del sistema penale, mentre la retorica della lotta al crimine viene utilizzata per consolidare il potere, spesso attraverso un uso autoritario del diritto. Per contrastare questa deriva, è fondamentale, quindi, ristabilire la funzione originaria della pena: garantire la coesione sociale, evitando che essa si trasformi in un mero strumento di controllo e repressione, come accaduto, negli ultimi decenni, anche nelle democrazie occidentali.

# LO STATO DELLE PRIGIONI E LE VIE PER USCIRNE REPLICHE E CONSIDERAZIONI

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## **ABSTRACT**

Answering his correspondents, the Author divides his reply into two parts: the first dedicated to the descriptive level, the other to the normative level. Under the first profile, the Author recalls the constitutive ambivalence of the modern penal system between law and revenge and the value of the symbolic capital of the penal system in the context of neoliberalism, the contemporary forms of passive democracy and the affirmation of populist ideologies, actors and political proposals. In the second part, the Author hopes for the refoundation of the system of execution of sentences starting from the recognition of all the fundamental rights of convicted persons in the perspective of the abolition of the prison institution.

## **KEYWORDS**

Abolitionism, Human Rights, Neoliberalism, Penal Ambivalence, Populism.

Accingendomi a replicare alle riflessioni che Le pene e il carcere ha suscitato in questo autorevole gruppo di colleghe e colleghi di diverse provenienze disciplinari, devo innanzitutto ringraziare ognuno di loro per l'impegno e gli stimoli che mi hanno dato, la direzione di *Etica & Politica* per aver deciso di ospitarle e Francesco Berti per aver promosso il seminario da cui esse traggono spunto.

I temi trattati sono molti e mi hanno restituito la complessità di un lavoro che un caro amico ha affettuosamente definito autobiografico (Pugiotto 2023), non solo perché ne ha visto dipanarsi gli argomenti nel corso del tempo, ma soprattutto perché corrisponde a una parte, tutt'altro che marginale, della mia esperienza di vita. Di questo, innanzitutto, sono grato ai miei e alle mie corrispondenti.

Proverò a interloquire con le loro osservazioni dividendo questo mio contributo in due parti: l'analisi della realtà (1.1 e 1.2), che costituisce l'oggetto principale di un libro che ho pensato innanzitutto come descrittivo; e poi le vie



per uscirne (2), che invece ho consapevolmente voluto mettere da parte nella mia scrittura («perché il penitenziario vive già di troppe aspettative normative deluse per aggiungerne altre», Anastasia 2022, 3), ma che ritornano, se non altro per la condivisione della funzione pubblica del lavoro intellettuale che ho con i miei interlocutori e che inevitabilmente ci spinge a pensare anche in termini normativi, a proposito di ciò che andrebbe fatto per sottrarsi alla spirale della contingenza.

### *1.1. L'ambivalenza del penale, tra diritto e vendetta.*

Sul piano descrittivo, non posso che partire dalle osservazioni di Costanza Margiotta sulla genesi della modernità penale. In particolare, Margiotta ritorna sulla fondazione moderna del penale attraverso il confronto tra l'analisi storica di Mario Sbriccoli e la costruzione teorica di Hans Kelsen. Sorprendentemente, è lo storico a sostenere la discontinuità tra vendetta privata e penalità moderna, frutto dell'affermazione della statualità, mentre nel teorico – secondo la ricostruzione che Margiotta mutua da Di Lucia e Passerini Glazel (2024) – ci sarebbe piuttosto una continuità della funzione sanzionatoria tra ordinamenti giuridici primitivi e moderni. Il tema è interessante, e illumina l'ambivalenza costitutiva del penale, dentro cui il diritto penale moderno si dibatte, con le migliori intenzioni, ma con la fortuna di Sisifo. Provo a spiegarmi.

E' indubbio che il diritto penale moderno si basi su una soluzione di continuità con le pratiche penali pre-moderne e che, almeno a partire dalle teorie illuministe, tale rottura aspiri a legittimare il diritto penale come “potere giuridico di contenimento” del “potere punitivo” che comunque sarebbe esercitato in sua assenza (Zaffaroni 2017), e dunque “anche” come “garanzia per la tutela dei diritti dei cittadini”, come scrive Margiotta. E però in quell' “anche” c'è tutto, perché rappresenta l'aspirazione normativa del penale come contenimento del potere punitivo presupponendone il suo esercizio come inflizione di sofferenza. Non diversamente la Costituzione italiana definisce limiti e scopi delle pene legali senza dire in cosa esse consistano, presupponendone una natura afflittiva che deve essere limitata e orientata per non trascendere la sua accettabilità sociale e dunque la sua legittimazione.

Teoricamente, dunque, la pena è la conseguenza sanzionatoria dell'in/adempienza al dettato normativo in questo campo del diritto, filosoficamente essa è lo strumento attraverso cui il diritto tenta di interrompere la riproduzione della violenza tra le parti e di contenerla entro limiti accettabili. Certo è che, per la sua natura sanzionatoria, dal punto di vista della teoria del diritto la pena non può che conseguire alla inadempienza della prescrizione e che, per la sua natura negativa (di sanzione negativa), non può che produrre deficit in capo al reo. Ma in questo modo la moderna pena giuridica riproduce mimeticamente la pena pre-moderna che andava sotto il nome di vendetta. La

differenza, dunque, tra prima e dopo, non è nella natura della pena, che è sempre una sofferenza inflitta intenzionalmente (Pavarini 1996), ma nel suo scopo e, quindi, nella sua legittimazione: se essa debba servire ad appagare la sofferenza delle vittime, a restaurare l'ordine infranto nella comunità o a interrompere il ciclo della violenza che una reazione sociale senza limiti porta inevitabilmente con sé. Il diritto penale moderno, nella tradizione illuminista, ha scelto di legittimarsi come strumento per la minimizzazione della violenza che ci sarebbe in sua assenza (Ferrajoli 1989), ma non ha mai potuto recidere quell'ambivalenza originaria, incarnata nella essenza della pena, di inflizione di sofferenza in capo al reo. La storia stessa del diritto penale, in fin dei conti, si può raccontare in due modi: come la fine della tradizione sacrificale della giustizia vendicativa o come la sua formalizzazione nella lingua del diritto. L'ambivalenza del penale si colloca esattamente qui, nel fatto che non possiamo negare né l'una né l'altra di queste narrazioni, per quanto esse possano sembrare in contraddizione tra di loro: il diritto penale pone termine alla giustizia penale arbitraria e sconfinata pre-moderna e ne iscrive le forme nelle procedure giuridiche moderne. Nella matrice e nella natura retributiva della pena, è un attimo che lo scopo di minimizzazione della violenza sia surclassato dai tradizionali scopi sacrificali, di appagamento delle vittime e/o di restaurazione dell'ordine perduto attraverso, appunto, la punizione del colpevole. E su questo crinale si gioca, non in astratto, ma in concreto, giorno per giorno, la realtà del diritto penale, ciò che esso effettivamente è, a dispetto o in ossequio alle migliori intenzioni. E ovviamente l'equilibrio contingente tra l'eterno ritorno della pena sacrificale e il diritto penale minimo non si determina (solo) nelle aule di giustizia, ma nella complessa dinamica della domanda e dell'offerta di giustizia (non solo penale) all'interno della società.

### *1.2. Populismi, panpenalismo e usi populistici del penale*

Qui si situa il secondo, decisivo passaggio del piano descrittivo. Posto che la pena è una inflizione di sofferenza nei confronti di singole persone, ciascuna individualmente giudicata responsabile di un danno alla comunità; posto che la pena si giustifica per il bene della comunità, individuato - secondo le diverse convinzioni morali di ciascuno - nella soddisfazione della vittima, nel ripristino dell'ordine, nella minimizzazione della violenza; posto che il tempo in cui viviamo è un tempo che fa ricorso alla pena e alle sue numerose varianti non penali (dalle diverse forme di internamento per motivi di salute a quelle per motivi di sicurezza, fino ad altre forme di stigmatizzazione dei comportamenti individuali) in una dimensione di scala che era sconosciuta alle democrazie occidentali nella seconda metà del Novecento; posto tutto ciò, come possiamo interpretare questo enorme cambiamento sociale, che usa gli strumenti del penale (o da essi mutuati), ma che non risponde esclusivamente alla logica interna della giustizia penale (più

reati, più processi, più condanne, più pene), quanto a più complesse domande di giustizia che si riversano sul penale?

Detto altrimenti, e forse più semplicemente, se è vero che viviamo un tempo di ritorno del penale, fino alla registrazione di quello che viene chiamato “panpenalismo”, secondo cui tutto ciò che è nella responsabilità pubblica può, se non deve, essere affrontato con gli strumenti del penale o di suoi succedanei, siamo semplicemente di fronte a un mutamento della cultura giuridica e politica o a una trasformazione sociale più profonda? E cosa ha indotto questa trasformazione?

La mia ipotesi (non nuova, riconosco) è che la rivitalizzazione e la nuova centralità del discorso penale siano legate all'affermazione del modello economico, sociale, culturale neoliberale, tanto che si potrebbe definire la società punitiva contemporanea l'altra faccia della società neoliberale, l'altra faccia della liberazione individuale da ogni vincolo sociale. L'altra faccia del modello competitivo basato sul merito individuale è infatti la responsabilità individuale del demerito e, innanzitutto, della incapacità di stare alle regole della gara e di rispettarle. Nel modello neoliberale a tutti sono astrattamente riconoscibili pari opportunità, salvo che poi chi si perde per strada si è perso per causa sua e ne deve pagare le conseguenze. Alla fine di questa parabola c'è lo scarto degli immeritevoli e il superamento dell'universalismo astratto della tradizione liberale, non nell'universalismo concreto di cui scrive – giustamente – Audegean, ma in un universalismo ristretto: l'universalismo dei meritevoli, che prelude al ritorno della dignità dei dignitari nella nuova forma, apparentemente democratica, dei titolari della dignità meritocratica.

Governare una società fondata sul principio di esclusione dei non meritevoli non è facile, soprattutto quando sopravvive l'idea democratica universalista e anti-aristocratica, secondo cui la cosa pubblica è di tutti, non solo dei migliori. Governare la società dell'esclusione richiede che alla competizione oligarchica tra i migliori faccia da contraltare la competizione per la salvezza dei peggiori. La società punitiva contemporanea, infatti, non si nutre, dell'odio di classe dei ricchi contro i poveri, come rappresentato nell'Ottocento dalla grande letteratura sociale europea, ma della guerra civile tra i poveri, dei penultimi contro gli ultimi, dei minimamente garantiti contro i non garantiti. I populismi contemporanei – assai diversi da quelli otto-novecenteschi, russi e latinoamericani, che comunque erano parte di un processo storico di allargamento della democrazia e della cittadinanza – sono la forma politica privilegiata di una concezione passiva della democrazia, di una democrazia che si manifesta non per partecipazione, ma per mera adesione alla proposta di altri. In questa nuova concezione della democrazia, gli attori politici hanno abbandonato i tradizionali *cleavages* ideali (progressisti *vs* conservatori) e sociali (liberali *vs* socialisti) che avevano caratterizzato le democrazie europee tra Otto e Novecento nel lungo processo storico di allargamento delle loro basi di massa, per disporsi lungo fratture identitarie (noi *vs*

loro, il popolo contro i suoi nemici). Se la democrazia è ridotta a registrazione del consenso popolare a fini di coesione e governo sociale, attori e ideologie populiste la fanno da padroni perché sono espressione dello spirito del tempo, perché si costituiscono sul discrimine che identifica il popolo come unità e vivono della mobilitazione permanente contro i suoi nemici, reali, potenziali o immaginari che siano.

In questo modello di democrazia, il penale costituisce una risorsa politica d'eccellenza per la sua carica simbolica che pesca nell'antico rituale sacrificale (l'ambivalenza di cui sopra) e discrimina tra i buoni e i cattivi, tra noi e loro, tra chi è "popolo" e chi non lo è o non merita di esserlo, e seduce la gran parte degli attori politici alla ricerca del consenso necessario all'affermazione di sé. Per questo io preferisco far riferimento agli usi populistici del diritto e della giustizia penale piuttosto che a una ideologia penal-populista a tutto tondo, non solo perché il penale è pur sempre uno strumento, non un'ideologia sadica del massimo bene nel massimo male (come sarebbe quella di un populismo che si qualificasse in quanto "penale"), ma proprio perché riconoscere la pluralità degli usi populistici del penale consente di riconoscerne traccia anche in quegli attori politici che mai si definirebbero "populisti", sia per ragioni culturali che per ragioni istituzionali. In questo modo, tra gli attori degli usi populistici del penale possiamo ricomprendere non solo i soggetti istituzionali che usano il proprio ruolo per consolidare la propria posizione di potere, il proprio ruolo o finanche la propria *mission* (si pensi, p. es., agli usi populistici del penale praticati dagli stessi attori istituzionali del sistema di prevenzione, accertamento e repressione dei reati, dalla magistratura alla polizia), ma anche i movimenti di cittadini che si costituiscono intorno ad alcune emergenze sociali e che per conquistare consenso usano il penale come veicolo di aggregazione e mobilitazione. E' il caso di movimenti ambientalisti o per i diritti civili e sociali che hanno fatto della rivendicazione punitiva dei propri avversari e delle loro condotte un elemento essenziale di mobilitazione. E' il caso di una parte dei movimenti femministi, non a caso definita punitiva (Pitch 2022, 53 e ss.), che ha fatto della mobilitazione per la repressione penale della violenza di genere, della prostituzione, della gestazione per altri elementi essenziali della propria proposta politica. In questa mobilitazione punitiva, scrive Philippe Audegean, c'è però anche una richiesta di tutela del tutto in linea con la teoria del diritto penale minimo come "legge del più debole", e dunque - nella configurazione del reato - della potenziale vittima di abuso altrui, siano esse le donne vittime della violenza maschile, le generazioni più giovani e quelle future vittime della distruzione dell'equilibrio nelle forme di vita sulla Terra, le comunità territoriali espropriate dalle organizzazioni criminali. Ma qui, infatti, bisogna saper distinguere tra le istanze di tutela compatibili con i principi del diritto penale minimo dalle ulteriori rivendicazioni punitive che - nella ricerca dell'allargamento del consenso alle proprie *issues* - adottano il gioco a somma zero della politica populista (noi vs. loro, la tua pena è la mia libertà) e chiudono la prospettiva di

trasformazione dei movimenti sociali nel campo ristretto del penale-simbolico, dimenticando il valore delle politiche economiche, sociali, culturali, ambientali, energetiche, urbanistiche, ..., che possono produrre quel cambiamento che è loro aspirazione costitutiva.

Sul rapporto tra neoliberalismo e populismo penale devo un chiarimento a Gianvito Brindisi, che ne presenta una interpretazione “ancor più cupa” della mia, immaginando – evidentemente – che io non escluda una possibile forma virtuosa di populismo. In proposito, Brindisi richiama il tentativo di teorizzazione di un “populismo di sinistra”, che pure c’è stato nel decennio scorso (Fraser 2017, Mouffe 2018) e lo associa a quel mio definire l’uso populista del penale potenzialmente sia di destra che di sinistra. Si tratta, in realtà, di cose per me molto diverse, innanzitutto perché si collocano su piani diversi: da una parte una proposta teorica, normativa, del dover essere della politica della sinistra (quella di Fraser e Mouffe, per esempio); dall’altra un’analisi della realtà, sociologica, delle politiche penali concretamente messe in atto (anche) da soggetti e culture politiche “di sinistra” (quella mia).

Quando io distinguo un uso populista del penale di destra da uno di sinistra faccio riferimento a pratiche politiche che possono avere target di mobilitazione “di destra” o “di sinistra”: da una parte gli estranei al popolo, in quanto stranieri o immeritevoli (poveri, tossici, malati di mente o altre forme di irregolarità sociale o individuale); dall’altra i potenti nemici del popolo, corrotti, profittatori e affamatori. Lungo questa linea di frattura è possibile distinguere un uso populista del penale di destra da un suo corrispettivo di sinistra, e in Italia, per esempio, abbiamo visto all’opera sia l’uno che l’altro, talvolta anche in simbiotica comunanza di intenti e divisione di compiti. Ma questa rilevazione di dati realtà, e il riconoscimento che anche da sinistra si è praticato un uso populista del diritto e della giustizia penale, non è un giudizio di valore, anzi. A mio modo di intendere, nell’uso populista del penale, la sinistra entra inevitabilmente in contraddizione con se stessa: alla obiezione di principio (liberale) secondo cui esso delegittima la concezione del diritto penale minimo come strumento di contenimento del potere punitivo, si aggiunge infatti quella di fatto secondo cui ogni mobilitazione penal-populista porta con sé una mobilitazione anti-politica che finisce per avvantaggiare sempre e comunque le forze economico-sociali che hanno il potere, e dunque la conservazione dello *status quo* e, con essa, lo squilibrio esistente delle risorse e del benessere sociale: più o meno ciò che io intendo essere la destra.

D’altro canto, condivido con Brindisi l’idea secondo cui i movimenti e le ideologie populiste contemporanee sono espressione della spoliticizzazione neoliberale e non una risposta a essa antagonista. A mio modo di vedere le teorie del cd. “populismo di sinistra” confondono populismo e partecipazione democratica, senza apprezzare la caratteristica peculiare dei populismi contemporanei, e cioè quella di essere attori politici e costrutti ideologici della democrazia passiva, cioè della democrazia come mera registrazione del consenso

nella competizione tra le elites per la conquista, la gestione o la conservazione del potere politico. Se la sinistra rimane legata a un progetto di rappresentanza di domande di eguaglianza e giustizia sociale a partire dalla presa di parola e da forme di auto-organizzazione dei meno abbienti e dei discriminati, essa non può avere alcuna chance di affermazione in forme di mobilitazione e di rappresentanza che, nella migliore delle ipotesi, considerano le disuguaglianze sociali seconde rispetto al conflitto identitario tra il “popolo” genericamente inteso e i suoi nemici esterni. Piuttosto, come stiamo drammaticamente osservando in diversi contesti nazionali - i populismi contemporanei possono avvicinarsi alla funzione svolta dai partiti fascisti nella prima metà del Novecento, quando - nella crisi della democrazia censitaria causata dall'affacciarsi nella sfera pubblica del movimento operaio e contadino - le forze della conservazione in Europa fecero affidamento su attori politici capaci di inquadrare le classi subalterne in movimenti nazionalistici da riversare contro i “nemici del popolo”, invece che contro i perpetuatori delle politiche della disuguaglianza.

## 2. RIEDUCAZIONE, DIRITTI E ABOLIZIONISMI.

L'analisi della realtà inevitabilmente ci porta sul piano normativo: e allora che ne facciamo del penale, della pena e del carcere? Il tema è posto con diversi accenti da quasi tutti i miei interlocutori e le mie interlocutrici. Partiamo, per esempio, da Costanza Ciscato, che mi sollecita a un confronto con la *Prison Ethics* di Herbert Spencer (1860), con i limiti del potere punitivo che essa delinea e con i doveri sociali alla riparazione del condannato che, nella reinterpretazione di Ciscato, prefigurano la responsabilizzazione su cui si muovono le teorie della giustizia riparativa, o forse è meglio dire della riparazione del danno come specifica forma della sanzione penale. La lettura è suggestiva. Ammetto che non conoscevo lo scritto di Spencer e che l'ho trovato di grande interesse, innanzitutto per quell'alternarsi di filosofia morale e di richiami all'analisi empirica dei sistemi punitivi dell'epoca e di quelle che ora chiameremmo le loro *best practices*. In particolare è interessante per l'epoca la dura critica alle condizioni detentive degradanti e alle punizioni smodate, la teoria della pienezza dei diritti dei detenuti e la scommessa sulla possibilità dell'affidamento del condannato a un garante della comunità. Interessante, ma fatalmente legato ai pregiudizi del tempo sui criminali provenienti dalla classe degli “oziosi” ai quali quella forma di correzionalismo laico e disciplinare sarebbe stato di fatto precluso, se non per pericolosità sociale o per titolo di reato (ipotesi già contemplate da Spencer), per inattitudine al lavoro e alla responsabilità di se stessi e per mancanza di garanti nel reinserimento lavorativo in comunità. Una storia d'altri tempi, interessante per la vigorosa perorazione dei diritti dei detenuti, ma troppo indifferente alle loro

condizioni materiali e sociali per poter essere presa in considerazione dopo l'emersione della "questione sociale" nella vecchia Europa.

Sotto questo profilo sono stimolanti le riflessioni di Audegean su umanitarismo, neoliberalismo e diritti sociali, che mettono in questione proprio l'ambiguità della *blindness* sociale dell'umanitarismo neoliberale. Non c'è dubbio che, paradossalmente, il discorso umanitario si sia affermato, a partire dagli anni Novanta del Novecento, insieme con il paradigma repressivo, di fronte al quale esso non poteva che essere ridotto alla tutela della nuda vita delle persone. La "giurisprudenza umanitaria", che ha visto le corti supreme e internazionali focalizzare le proprie decisioni sul divieto di trattamento contrari al senso di umanità, è allo stesso tempo conseguenza e reazione al *nothing works* (Martinson 1974) che ha accompagnato la fine del progetto di integrazione del penitenziario nel sistema di protezione sociale del welfare universalistico novecentesco, a sua volta eroso progressivamente dalla svolta neoliberale. Un diverso significato del discorso umanitario, come auspica Audegean, che tenga dentro tanto i diritti di libertà quanto i diritti sociali, e che dunque riconosca la radice discriminatoria del meccanismo penale, che non vede la condizione soggettiva delle persone che vi sono implicate (l'universalismo astratto), o forse la vede solo nella misura in cui ne fa bersagli da neutralizzare (l'universalismo ristretto di cui sopra), può fondarsi solo sull'universalismo concreto di cui scrive Audegean, che è iscritto nella tradizione del costituzionalismo novecentesco e, in particolare, nell'art. 3 cpv della Costituzione italiana, ma che è palesamente in rotta di collisione con la riduzione neoliberale della "sfera del non decidibile" (Ferrajoli 2007) al solo *habeas corpus* proto-moderno e non anche al "non decidibile che non" dei diritti sociali.

D'altro canto, in questa direzione va anche la lezione intersezionale del femminismo giuridico d'oltreoceano, che ci consente di dire che l'umanitarismo neoliberale non funziona neanche per quel tanto che promette di funzionare, appunto perché non riconosce l'incidenza delle condizioni soggettive e del contesto sociale nella tutela della persona. Un esempio per tutti: il Ministro della giustizia italiano, messo di fronte al crescente sovraffollamento penitenziario, rileva che ci sono troppe persone in attesa di giudizio, o che ci sono troppe persone che potrebbero accedere a misure alternative e che non lo fanno; è del tutto legittimo criticare la magistratura competente per quel che è nelle sue responsabilità, ma se non si guarda alla condizione soggettiva delle persone, al contesto da cui provengono, alle negazioni di diritti da esse subite, è mero *flatus vocii* invocare la riduzione della custodia cautelare in carcere o un più ampio ricorso alle alternative alla detenzione, perché la gran parte delle persone in custodia cautelare in carcere o in esecuzione di pene detentive che potrebbero essere scontate altrimenti non sono colletti bianchi, ma persone che per la loro identità sociale, di appartenenti a gruppi etnici minoritari e discriminati, di *homeless*, di consumatori di sostanze psicotrope, di malati di mente, sono state deliberatamente criminalizzate, spesso al fine di "ripulire le strade" dalla loro

presenza, se non dalla loro esistenza. Il risultato è, come è sotto gli occhi di tutti, che se diritti civili e diritti sociali non sono riconosciuti pienamente e congiuntamente nella integrità della persona umana, il risultato è che negando gli uni, si negano anche gli altri, e la promessa umanitaria neoliberale si mostra per quel che è: un meccanismo di esclusione di chi “socialmente” non può tutelare da sé i propri diritti civili.

Da qui viene, in fondo, la mia convinzione secondo cui il penale non si salva da solo, come il barone di Münchhausen, che si tirava fuori dalle sabbie mobili aggrappandosi ai propri capelli, ma solo nella misura in cui è parte di un più radicale ripensamento delle forme e delle garanzie dello stato costituzionale di diritto. Anche la suggestione di Costanza Margiotta nella direzione di un uso progressivo dei big data e dell’algoritmica, per la individuazione delle aree di sofferenza sociale su cui intervenire preventivamente, per evitare di doverci intervenire repressivamente, sta in questa prospettiva, di un rovesciamento del primato del mercato sull’umano che, ammettendo quello che nel libro chiamo “il principio del terzo escluso” (p. 23) troverà sempre più efficiente economicamente liberarsi del *bias* umano, piuttosto che valorizzarne le difformità o sostenerlo nell’integrazione.

Luigi Delia, infine, mi sollecita ancora sulla questione radicale della legittimità del penale, della necessità della sua sopravvivenza e dunque di quale abolizionismo sia possibile. Costretto a rispondere alla alternativa tra un diritto penale migliore e qualcosa di meglio del diritto penale, mi definirei agnostico. O meglio: direi di sì, che senz’altro bisogna cercare qualcosa di meglio del diritto penale, ma senza rinunciare a un diritto penale migliore per tutto quello che ne resterà, fin quando e per quanto di esso non potrà farsi a meno. Come accennavo più sopra, Audegean ricorda che nella prospettiva del diritto penale minimo non c’è solo la depenalizzazione dei reati minori, privi di reale offensività o a tutela di beni giuridici costituzionalmente irrilevanti, ma anche la necessità della nuova penalizzazione di condotte considerate lecite nel passato, dalla tortura alle minacce contro l’ecosistema, alle violenze contro le donne. Possiamo pensare di fare a meno della tutela penale in questi campi? No di certo, finché esisterà un diritto penale a garanzia dei diritti fondamentali della persona come singola e nella comunità. Altro è contestare l’uso populista del penale in materia sociale, ambientale o nelle relazioni tra i sessi, altro è immaginare che se ne possa fare a meno nella generalità dei casi che esso si trova ad affrontare. Il discrimine è nella consapevolezza dei limiti del penale, che è servito e serve a riconoscere il disvalore della devastazione ambientale, della violenza istituzionale, della violenza maschile contro le donne, ma non risolverà nessuno di questi problemi – come si è detto – senza politiche economiche, sociali, formative ed educative adeguate e senza la loro sedimentazione nella cultura del genere maschile, degli operatori di polizia, dell’intera umanità.



Diverso è invece il discorso sull'abolizionismo istituzionale, di quella istituzione storicamente determinata che è il carcere come luogo di esecuzione della pena. La distinzione è stata puntualmente individuata da Massimo Pavarini sin da un suo scritto del 1985: l'abolizionismo penale è “una critica radicale dell'intero sistema penale, unitamente a una proposta politica volta a ‘fare a meno’ del sistema della sofferenza legale”; l'abolizionismo istituzionale “circoscrive l'obiettivo della propria critica e della propria azione politica nei confronti della sola istituzione carceraria e di altre istituzioni penali segregative”. L'abolizionismo penale obbliga a pensare un'alternativa alla reazione sociale punitiva nei confronti delle offese alla comunità, l'abolizionismo istituzionale (carcerario) alle alternative a una specifica forma di punizione, peraltro relativamente recente nella storia dell'umanità. La distinzione tra i suoi diversi ambiti chiarisce e riduce la complessità di un indirizzo abolizionista, ma non lo semplifica fino a renderlo praticabile in tempi brevi e senza rischi. Certamente la reclusione come modalità esecutiva della pena non è coessenziale al diritto penale minimo: un diritto penale migliore può senz'altro poggiarsi su altre modalità esecutive della pena già previste negli ordinamenti di molti Stati nel mondo. Resta però il problema della reazione sociale alla violazione delle modalità punitive non detentive, se essa, al termine di una pur lunga serie di aggravamenti immaginabili, possa prevedere la reclusione; e resta il problema degli autori di reati violenti verso il prossimo e pericolosi per la collettività. Ma a ben vedere, in questo ultimo caso non stiamo parlando della esecuzione di una pena, ma della legittimità di una misura di prevenzione fondata, non già sul fatto commesso e giudicato, ma sul pericolo della commissione di un altro grave reato contro la persona o la collettività. Gherardo Colombo, introducendo la seconda edizione di *Abolire il carcere* (Manconi, Anastasia, Calderone, Resta 2022), confessa che sarebbe andato “ancora più in là” del nostro “programma minimo”: “avrei proposto di svincolare completamente il carcere dalla natura e dalla gravità del reato, e di legarlo esclusivamente alla pericolosità: in carcere ci sta solo chi è pericoloso e per il tempo in cui è pericoloso” (p. X). Questione assai rischiosa, come sa chiunque si sia mai affacciato sul ciglio delle misure di prevenzione o di quelle di sicurezza, ma che è giusto definire come tale, liberando l'esecuzione penale in senso stretto da responsabilità che non le sono proprie.

Certo è che la storia dell'abolizionismo, di qualunque abolizione di qualsiasi istituzione, materiale o immateriale, è una storia di pratiche, o non è. Dunque, se si vuole fare a meno del diritto penale, bisogna sperimentarsi su altre forme di composizione dei conflitti tra le persone e nella comunità, come immaginano le forme più radicali di giustizia relazionale, fino a intravedere la possibilità della rinuncia al ricorso all'autorità del giudice terzo. Se si vuole fare a meno del carcere, invece, abbiamo scoperto che non basta invocare le alternative, che in tutto il mondo occidentale negli ultimi quarant'anni sono cresciute insieme e non contro il carcere, ma occorre trovare un'altra leva. Per me l'unica resta una

interpretazione radicale e conseguente dell'idea della universalità dei diritti umani e della legittimità del carcere solo come restrizione della libertà di movimento (Ruotolo 2021, 254), da cui consegue la pienezza dei diritti dei detenuti non necessariamente limitati dalla impossibilità di movimento (salute, istruzione, lavoro, relazioni sociali e familiari, comunicazione e informazione, ...). Se questi presupposti sono fondati, le amministrazioni pubbliche sono obbligate a garantirne il godimento con i necessari investimenti in termini di risorse umane e finanziarie e a rinunciare all'esecuzione della pena della reclusione quando le risorse siano insufficienti, attraverso l'adozione di un numero chiuso penitenziario che tenga conto degli spazi e del personale effettivamente a disposizione di ogni istituto di pena. Se si assumessero i diritti delle persone detenute come vincoli non comprimibili in esecuzione penale, essi richiederebbero investimenti tali da porre fine all'internamento a basso costo della marginalità sociale e da rendere finalmente effettiva la riduzione della detenzione a quella *extrema ratio* della sanzione penale su cui diritto penale minimo e abolizionismo di percorso in fin dei conti convergono.

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V a r i a



# LA GIUSTIZIA RIPRODUTTIVA TRA ETICA E DIRITTO AI TEMPI DI RISCALDAMENTO GLOBALE E SESTA ESTINZIONE DI MASSA

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## **ABSTRACT**

This contribution is a genealogy of the claim for reproductive justice, from its beginnings to recent developments, particularly in feminist theories and movements and regarding their ethical concerns for parenting in safe environments. Its purpose is twofold: firstly to show how its first conceptualizations, which occurred within Black Feminism, were of an ethical-political type rather than juridical, concerning not only individual sexual and reproductive choices but also bodies, communities and lands exposed to environmental pollution; secondly, to understand how reproductive justice is taking shape both as an analytical grid and an increasingly less anthropocentric ethical-political instance, to the point of becoming multispecies and transpecies reproductive justice, which intends to address the responsibilities of some human beings in relation to global warming and sixth mass extinction.

## **KEYWORDS**

Reproductive justice, environmental justice; multispecies justice; neo-materialism; posthumanism

## **1. LA GIUSTIZIA RIPRODUTTIVA DALLE WOMEN OF COLOR ALLE SISTER SONG: DIRITTO ALL'AUTODETERMINAZIONE DI CORPI E TERRITORI**

Questo contributo è una genealogia della rivendicazione di giustizia riproduttiva, dagli albori ai recenti sviluppi in particolare nelle teorie e nei movimenti femministi. Il suo scopo è duplice: in primo luogo mostrare come le sue prime concettualizzazioni, avvenute in seno ai *black feminism*, fossero di tipo etico-politico più che normativo-giuridico, riguardando in particolare corpi e territori esposti all'inquinamento ambientale; in secondo luogo capire come quella della giustizia riproduttiva si sta configurando al contempo come griglia analitica e

istanza etico-politica sempre meno antropocentrica, fino a farsi giustizia riproduttiva multispecie e transpecie che intende mettere a tema le responsabilità di alcuni umani in materia di riscaldamento globale e sesta estinzione di massa.

La genealogia della giustizia riproduttiva e quella dei diritti riproduttivi si intersecano in più momenti e su più nodi, ma le due istanze, come stiamo per capire, si articolano dialetticamente e a partire da soggettività e terreni molto diversi. La storia dei diritti riproduttivi è legata in particolare alle spinte del movimento sullo sviluppo della popolazione mondiale e si muove su un terreno immediatamente normativo e giuridico (Luna & Luker 2013). Si può a ragione sostenere che i diritti riproduttivi siano stati inseriti nell'agenda politica internazionale con la risoluzione XXIII adottata dalla Conferenza Internazionale sui Diritti Umani Teheran nel 1968<sup>1</sup>. Anche la CEDAW del 1979 (Convenzione sull'eliminazione di ogni forma di discriminazione contro le donne) è un importante precedente della Conferenza del Cairo del 1994. L'espressione "diritti riproduttivi", infatti, compare per la prima volta nei documenti elaborati prima e dopo la Conferenza internazionale su popolazione e sviluppo, tenutasi al Cairo nel 1994 e promossa dal Fondo delle Nazioni Unite per la popolazione (UNFPA). Qui, come si apprende al Capitolo VII del documento finale della Conferenza, intitolato appunto "Diritti riproduttivi e salute riproduttiva", 179 paesi si impegnano a rendere la salute riproduttiva accessibile attraverso il sistema sanitario di base a tutti gli individui in età appropriata<sup>2</sup>.

La genealogia dell'istanza della giustizia riproduttiva è legata specularmente a quella dei diritti riproduttivi e si sviluppa negli stessi anni emergendo come rivendicazione dei movimenti femministi neri impegnati in un dialogo, non scevro da conflitti, con le Nazioni Unite e con la definizione di diritti riproduttivi assunta dopo la Conferenza ONU del 1994. I femminismi neri, infatti, sin dal primo momento, spostano dibattito e terreno di azione dal diritto all'etica, riportando al centro la necessità di dotarsi di politiche all'altezza delle sfide poste dall'aumento dei livelli di inquinamento dovuti all'industrializzazione. Riprendere questo dialogo conflittuale è d'interesse per la filosofia politica per l'emergere di concetti e pratiche etico-politiche di giustizia riproduttiva che tengano in considerazione al

<sup>1</sup>A Teheran le Nazioni Unite pongono per la prima volta l'equivalenza tra sviluppo economico di un paese e suo livello interno di accesso ai e tutela dei diritti umani, auspicando una riduzione della spesa militare in favore di quella sociale. Qui, riprendendo e facendo fare molti passi avanti rispetto alla Dichiarazione universale dei diritti dell'uomo (1948), la Conferenza Internazionale sui Diritti Umani afferma all'art. 15 che "Bisogna porre fine alla discriminazione di cui le donne sono ancora vittime in varie regioni del mondo. La condizione di inferiorità cui sono soggette le donne è contraria alla Carta delle Nazioni Unite e alle disposizioni della Dichiarazione universale dei diritti dell'uomo"; e all'art.16 che "I genitori hanno il diritto fondamentale di determinare liberamente e in maniera responsabile il numero dei figli e l'intervallo tra le nascite" (TdA); Nazioni Unite, Atto finale della conferenza internazionale sui diritti umani, [https://legal.un.org/avl/pdf/ha/fatchr/Final\\_Act\\_of\\_TehranConf.pdf](https://legal.un.org/avl/pdf/ha/fatchr/Final_Act_of_TehranConf.pdf) (consultato il 5 marzo 2024).

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/event-pdf/PoA\\_en.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/event-pdf/PoA_en.pdf) (consultato il 5 marzo 2024).

contempo salute umana e terrestre. Vedremo, infatti, che proprio dai movimenti femministi neri agli attuali femminismi per la giustizia riproduttiva multispecie, risuonano “interrogativi-ritornelli”<sup>3</sup> etico-politici di rilievo: il diritto è in grado di cogliere le differenze incarnate in corpi genderizzati e razzializzati secondo diverse assi di sfruttamento e valorizzazione? A fronte di sesta estinzione di massa e riscaldamento globale, può da solo il diritto garantire l’accesso a salute e autodeterminazione sessuale e riproduttiva, considerandole avulse da condizioni e contesto ambientale?

Pertanto, accingiamoci a capire come a partire da un insieme di rivendicazioni delle Women of Color<sup>4</sup> la giustizia riproduttiva sia divenuta sempre meno antropocentrica e sempre più multi- e transspecie, lasciandosi ibridare da e ibridando le istanze ecologiste e offrendoci così teorie e pratiche etico-politiche in grado di cogliere e rispettare le differenze di cui sono forieri i corpi, sempre considerati in relazione agli ecosistemi cui partecipano.

Mentre alla Conferenza del Cairo del 1994 si riunivano soprattutto donne bianche occidentali per redigere insieme la prima internazionale definizione giuridica di diritti riproduttivi<sup>5</sup>, nello stesso anno, a Chicago, le Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice, ponendosi in posizione esplicitamente critica rispetto alla Conferenza internazionale su popolazione e sviluppo<sup>6</sup>, stilavano un manifesto politico in cui coniavano l’espressione “giustizia riproduttiva”, partendo dalla loro locale esposizione ai rischi insiti nell’industrializzazione per collegarsi

<sup>3</sup> Proprio come in Deleuze e Guattari, qui gli interrogativi si fanno ritornelli connotandosi di un accento speculativo nella misura in cui rifiutano di chiudersi in se stessi. La parola *speculatio* in latino significa esplorazione, ragion per cui questi “interrogativi-ritornelli speculativi” muovono alla ricerca di discipline che aiutino la filosofia a cerchiare i limiti dello scrutabile per poi aprirli, allo scopo di “lasciare entrare qualcuno nel cerchio, chiamarlo” oppure di aiutarci a “uscire, gettarci verso l’esterno” (Deleuze & Guattari 2006: 460). Come vedremo dal secondo paragrafo in poi, infatti, per rispondere eticamente e politicamente a tali domande occorrerà non solo “lasciar entrare nel cerchio” della filosofia il diritto, ma anche esplorare i territori ibridi delle scienze della vita.

<sup>4</sup> Questa è infatti la prima definizione che si dà il movimento oggi noto come SisterSong: <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice/TdA>, (consultato il 5 marzo 2024).

<sup>5</sup> I diritti riproduttivi sono principi garantiti, sotto la fattispecie della norma, dai codici nazionali e internazionali, dai tribunali, dalle Corti, dagli enti governativi, si basano sul riconoscimento del diritto fondamentale degli individui di decidere liberamente e responsabilmente il numero e i tempi delle gravidanze, di avere informazioni e mezzi per farlo. Come si legge al Capitolo VII del documento finale della Conferenza del Cairo, “Diritti riproduttivi e salute riproduttiva”, i paesi sono chiamati a offrire a persone singole e/o in coppia, con particolare attenzione alle donne: pianificazione familiare, consulenza, informazione, educazione, comunicazione e servizi; servizi per la cura prenatale, assistenza post-natale, in particolare all’allattamento al seno; prevenzione e terapie della sterilità; interruzione volontaria di gravidanza; trattamento delle infezioni del tratto riproduttivo, prevenzione e cura delle malattie sessualmente trasmissibili, contraccezione.

<sup>6</sup> Nello stesso 1994 Sonia Corr  a dalle Barbados pubblicava *Population and Reproductive Rights: Feminist Perspectives from the South*, raccolta che emerge dal meeting internazionale del 1990 a Rio di DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), organizzazione che dall’India all’America Latina si   occupata di salute sessuale e riproduttiva e ambiente (Corr  a 1994).



alla globale vulnerabilità degli ecosistemi. La loro prima critica consisteva nel denunciare i meccanismi di esclusione di cui era foriera la Conferenza, in quanto “guidata da donne bianche e benestanti che non tutelavano i bisogni delle donne di colore e di persone trans e marginalizzate”<sup>7</sup>. Le Women of African Descent, tuttavia, non misconoscevano la portata centrale della Conferenza, cioè il pieno riconoscimento nei codici internazionali dell’autonomia della persona in materia di sessualità e riproduzione, intendendo piuttosto mettere l’accento sulle condizioni materiali che rendono possibile quell’autonomia e sul contesto ambientale in cui si articola. Le Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice prima e le SisterSong che seguono loro, poi, ribadivano e ribadiscono la necessità di riportare l’autodeterminazione al livello della persona sì, ma sempre relazionandola alle comunità e alle culture di appartenenza e provenienza, sempre cogliendo le intersezioni tra accesso ai servizi di salute sessuale-riproduttiva, classe, processi di razzializzazione e relativa esposizione a fattori di rischio ambientale, superando così i limiti dei femminismi bianchi (Ross *et al.* 2017)<sup>8</sup>.

Se l’accento al Cairo ricadeva sulla libertà di scelta, a Chicago era posto sul contesto e sull’accesso, il che implica anche un pieno riconoscimento della natura relazionale della salute sessuale e riproduttiva<sup>9</sup>. Inoltre, le Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice, al contrario dei femminismi bianchi, non si concentravano solo sulla legalizzazione di aborto e contraccezione, ma lottavano anche contro le politiche di sterilizzazione di matrice razziale<sup>10</sup>. Queste attiviste

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice/TdA>, (consultato il 5 marzo 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Ross fa risalire la teoria dell’intersezionalità a Sojourner Truth, scrivendo: “Le donne nere hanno utilizzato un’analisi intersezionale per combattere il razzismo da quando Sojourner Truth ha tenuto il suo discorso *Ain’t I a Woman?* durante una convenzione sui diritti delle donne del 1851” (Ross 2017: 314, TdA). Gli anni Ottanta del XX secolo si aprono con la pubblicazione nel 1981 di *Donne, razza e classe* di Angela Davis e si chiudono nel 1989 con la pubblicazione di *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* di Crenshaw, indispensabili per una bibliografia minima sull’intersezionalità, in particolare la giurista Kimberlé Crenshaw che ha per prima spiegato il modo in cui il diritto si rivela inefficace nel dirimere le discriminazioni nate al crocevia di molteplici fattori quali sesso, genere, etnia/provenienza/processi di razzializzazione, classe, religione, età, orientamento sessuale e disabilità.

<sup>9</sup> Torna su questo nodo anche Gaard (2010), vicina alla SisterSong nello spiegarci come i femminismi bianchi si siano a lungo attestati sul mero “diritto di scelta”, trascurando il fatto che tale diritto si iscrive in una morale individualista e prevede di preferenza una via risolutiva giuridico-medica privatistica.

<sup>10</sup> Loretta Ross, sterilizzata all’età di 23 anni, ha coniato il termine “riprocidio” (in inglese *reprocide*) per indicare il “genocidio commesso attraverso il controllo riproduttivo” (Ross 2017: 305) che dagli inizi del XX secolo colpisce in particolare donne nere e popoli di colore, ma anche donne marginalizzate e detenute. Dal caso *Buck v. Bell* del 1927 la sentenza della Corte Suprema ammise come legali le sterilizzazioni, anche quando non consensuali. Ancora dopo la sentenza *Skinner v. Oklahoma* del 1942, che stabiliva che la sterilizzazione non era più ammessa come misura preventiva per le persone condannate, vi sono molti casi di sterilizzazioni non consensuali di matrice razziale. Si legga il capitolo “riprocidio” in *Utero* di Hazard (2023) che le ripercorre fino ai

avevano del resto esempi precedenti cui ispirarsi<sup>11</sup>, cioè altri gruppi e coalizioni di donne che avevano lottato al contempo per il diritto a riprodursi e non riprodursi in un ambiente sano. Si ispiravano anche alla Dichiarazione universale dei diritti umani e ritenevano come le Nazioni Unite che i diritti sessuali e riproduttivi viaggiassero di pari passo con i diritti ambientali (Price 2010): “La giustizia riproduttiva per queste donne non riguarda semplicemente il diritto all’aborto; è profondamente intrecciata con la precarietà economica ed ecologica che deve essere ricondotta ai rapporti di forza passati e attuali” (Arguedas-Ramírez&Wenner 2023: 609, TdA). Di questa spiccata sensibilità per il diritto a diventare genitori e far crescere bambine/i in territori salubri potrebbe del resto essere causa la maggiore esposizione delle Women of Color ai fattori inquinanti, le quali insieme alle comunità afro-americane di appartenenza abitavano le periferie delle città fordiste nella seconda metà del XX secolo (Bryant & Mohai 1992; Bullard 1990; Bullard & Wright 2012). Ancora oggi, nella seconda decade del XXI, in luoghi quali la Cancer Alley<sup>12</sup> riprodurre la vita non è cosa né sicura né sostenibile. La statunitense “valle del cancro” è solo uno dei possibili attuali esempi dell’importanza del contesto da cui emergono le istanze della giustizia riproduttiva. Sono le comunità razzializzate, in particolare quelle afro-americane, infatti, le più esposte negli USA ai fenomeni che si possono definire di vero e proprio “razzismo ecologico”, così come a livello globale più esposti al razzismo ecologico sono “i soggetti sessualizzati, razzializzati e marginalizzati e le persone economicamente svantaggiate” (Braidotti 2023: 107).

Considerato l’acuito incrinarsi degli equilibri ecosistemici che oggi assume le fattezze di una vera e propria crisi climatica, la preoccupazione per la salute terrestre in relazione alla genitorialità arriva fino ai giorni nostri, come testimonia la prima frase che leggiamo sul sito delle SisterSong, eredi delle Women of Color dal 1997. Per loro, la giustizia riproduttiva consiste non solo nel poter esercitare “l’autonomia della persona” e nel poter decidere “se avere o non avere figli”, ma anche “nell’essere genitori di figli in comunità sicure e sostenibili”<sup>13</sup>. Il perché lo spiegano benissimo i diversi contributi allo studio sulle intersezioni tra femminismi neri e ambientalismo curato da Steady: molti sono i report ad

giorni nostri, fino al caso delle 40 donne migranti sterilizzate presso lo statunitense Irwin Detention Center.

<sup>11</sup> Si esprimeva sulle sterilizzazioni di matrice razziale già nel 1981 Angela Davis; si legga il capitolo “Razzismo, controllo delle nascite e diritti riproduttivi” di *Donne, razza, classe* ([1981]2018), cui rimandiamo anche per la storia dei femminismi neri in relazione ai diritti riproduttivi precedente al 1994.

<sup>12</sup> La zona lungo il fiume Mississippi, da New Orleans a Baton Rouge, abitata da comunità afro-americane, è inghiottita da impianti chimici altamente inquinanti (Castellón 2021). Nell’agosto 2018, l’EPA ha pubblicato i risultati del National Air Toxics Assessment (NATA) che dimostrano che il rischio di cancro è il più alto nel paese, cinquanta volte la media nazionale, [www.epa.gov/national-air-toxics-assessment/2014-national-air-toxics-assessment](http://www.epa.gov/national-air-toxics-assessment/2014-national-air-toxics-assessment) (consultato il 5 marzo 2024).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice/> TdA, (consultato il 5 marzo 2024).

attestare, dal 1987 a oggi, che le comunità razzializzate sono isolate nei luoghi più inquinati dall'industrialismo e devastati da guerre e tecnologie militari (Steady 2019; Benjamin 2022a). Un importante esempio è quello delle isole Marshall, le cui popolazioni native, come ricorda Benjamin, sono state esposte alla devastazione della salute di corpi e territori a causa della tecnoscienza militare al servizio della guerra nucleare. Ruha Benjamin, come le altre studiose e attiviste nere, mette bene a fuoco il nesso tra la violenza militare, la violenza ambientale e l'autodeterminazione sessuale e riproduttiva, spiegando che anche le tecnologie militari, come tutte le tecnologie industriali, vanno lette come “tecnologie riproduttive”: in particolare quelle militari sono “tecnologie riproduttive che riducono la capacità delle vittime di prosperare, moltiplicarsi, immaginare e creare il proprio futuro” (Benjamin 2022a: 65)<sup>14</sup>.

Le Women of Color e le SisterSong ci insegnano a tenere insieme giustizia sociale, giustizia riproduttiva e giustizia ambientale, per cogliere a pieno le intersezioni tra processi di marginalizzazione economica, di negazione dell'autodeterminazione e di maggiore esposizione a rischi per vita e salute, al fine di elaborare in comune pratiche etico-politiche capaci di contrastare “il carattere discriminatorio della politica ambientale” (Braidotti 2023: 107). Si evince dalla prima concettualizzazione della giustizia riproduttiva, nel saggio dal titolo *Conceptualizing Reproductive Justice Theory* scritto da Ross su invito diretto di Crenshaw, che la “giustizia riproduttiva prima di diventare una teoria è stata una pratica di attivismo intersezionale” (Ross 2017: 297). Dal saggio *Beyond the Trees: Stories and Strategies of Environmental and Reproductive Justice* capiamo meglio cosa si intende per comunità sicure e sostenibili e da quali contesti e soggettività emerge la rivendicazione etico-politica di giustizia riproduttiva. Qui Jiménez, Johnson e Page (2017) ci ricordano che loro, in questo caso le Women of Color insieme alle Indigenous Women, sono state e sono ancora troppo spesso chiamate a garantire la riproduzione biologica e sociale nelle catene del lavoro di cura globale<sup>15</sup>, ma non si limitano a questo. Conoscendo bene gli effetti del colonialismo e i suoi legami con l'economia capitalista, le autrici ricordano che lo sfruttamento in cui sono prese e la negazione di autodeterminazione non riguarda solo le persone umane, ma anche territori e animali più che umani, ecosistemi e risorse. Le Women of Color e le Indigenous Women sono “cresciute lottando contro l'inquinamento della rete fognaria comunale” che contaminava le loro

<sup>14</sup>Purtroppo troppi sono stati e sono ancora i popoli vessati proprio dal nesso tra violenza militare, ambientale, sessuale e riproduttiva: ai nostri giorni tale nesso si rende tristemente concreto in Palestina, dove il riprocidio, cioè il genocidio riproduttivo, si dà al contempo come ecocidio (Bosisio, Fragnito e Timeto 2025; Dalla Negra 2024).

<sup>15</sup>Il *frame* teorico sulle catene del lavoro di cura globale qui impiegato viene dall'opera seminale di Ehrenreich e Hochschild (2004); sulla storia dei diversi tipi di schiavitù, da quella agricola a quella domestica fino a quella riproduttiva, delle donne nere si legga il primo capitolo di *Donne, razza, classe* ([1981]2018).

comunità, oggi“lottano per l’acqua potabile, per l’aria pulita, per alloggi a prezzi accessibili e per l’accesso a un’assistenza sanitaria pubblica” (Jiménez *et al.* 2017: 613, TdA), senza dimenticare mai la connessione tra scala locale e globale. In primo luogo dalle Women of Color e dalle Indigenous Women impariamo a mettere l’accento sull’accesso alle condizioni di riproducibilità: l’accesso a cibo di qualità e acqua sicura è distribuito in modi altamente ineguali, proprio come l’accesso alla sanità e al diritto alla genitorialità, globalmente e localmente. In secondo luogo, dai saperi e dalle pratiche di cura contro l’esposizione alla tossicità industriale che queste donne hanno messo in campo per salvaguardare la salute delle proprie comunità, impariamo che è sempre possibile non lasciarsi ridurre allo statuto di “vittime ambientali”, ma trovare nei percorsi politici comuni la potenza immaginifica necessaria ad agire non solo per la riduzione e il risarcimento del danno, ma anche per la rigenerazione degli ecosistemi (Steady 2019).

## 2. LE INGIUSTIZIE RIPRODUTTIVE AI TEMPI DELLA SESTA ESTINZIONE DI MASSA E DEL RISCALDAMENTO GLOBALE

Il mio scopo è ora quello di provare a far luce sulle principali ingiustizie riproduttive e ambientali che caratterizzano l’attualità su scala globale, dal momento che nell’era geologica che è stata definita Antropocene pochi sono i luoghi non intaccati dall’inquinamento dovuto alla crescita illimitata del capitale<sup>16</sup>, per procedere poi a pensarne vie di fuga etico-politiche. Antropocene è “il nome proposto per la nuova era geologica definita dalla schiacciante influenza umana sulla terra”. Fu coniato negli anni Ottanta “dall’ecologo Eugene F. Stoermer e reso popolare all’inizio del ventunesimo secolo dal chimico atmosferico vincitore del Premio Nobel Paul Crutzen” allo scopo di mettere in luce come “gli impatti su larga scala derivanti da attività umane come l’estrazione mineraria, l’edilizia e la

<sup>16</sup>Sulla crescita oltre i limiti e sulle conseguenze ambientali dell’industrialismo si legga in particolare il capitolo primo “La vita oltre i limiti. L’invenzione della bioeconomia” in *La vita come plusvalore* (Cooper 2013). In questa accurata analisi il postfordismo non è letto come il sistema produttivo che ci libera dalla produzione industriale, ma come quello che ricollocandola e deregolamentandola “si concede di non curarsi del tutto degli effetti della produzione dei rifiuti” e può così “viaggiare di pari passo con un aumento dell’inquinamento industriale, come ben rappresentato dalle tonnellate di computer gettati via a causa dell’economia dell’informazione o dalle quantità di agenti chimici che possono essere riversati impunemente su colture geneticamente modificate, resistenti agli erbicidi” (Cooper 2013: 49). Secondo Cooper quello capitalista è un delirio caratterizzato da due poli antitetici, cioè “la spinta a superare i limiti e la necessità di ridefinirli sotto le vesti della scarsità” che vanno letti come “reciprocamente costitutivi” (Cooper 2013: 69). Si tratta dunque di rileggere marxianamente la tensione controproduttiva del capitale comprendendo la differenza fondamentale dell’attualità rispetto ai tempi di Marx, cioè il “fatto che oggi le tensioni del capitalismo si esplicano su scala globale, biosferica, e riguardano così lo stesso futuro della vita sulla Terra” (*Ibidem*).

deforestazione erano arrivati a superare gli effetti delle forze non umane” (Grusin 2017: vii, TdA). Oggi il termine Antropocene è impiegato per “riferirsi in modo più ampio agli effetti del cambiamento climatico e alla continua possibilità di una sesta estinzione” (Grusin 2017: vii, TdA)<sup>17</sup>. Il mio tentativo qui consiste, dunque, nel provare a fermare il pensiero di noi persone occidentali, abituate a vivere il tempo presente alla velocità di scorrimento dei contenuti multimediali dei nostri dispositivi informatici, sulla pervasività spazio-temporale del cambiamento biosferico che ci troviamo a fronteggiare, per immaginare un’etica che non ci consegni né all’eco-ansia né all’immobilismo, bensì che ricollochi le persone umane come una parte alla pari tra tante nella natura.

Secondo molte delle autrici che hanno ripreso il lavoro intersezionale delle SisterSong la portata dei fenomeni di devastazione ambientale è oggi globale e i suoi tempi sono geologici: sesta estinzione di massa e riscaldamento riguardano tutte e tutti, anche se i modi in cui incidono sulle vite umane e più che umane variano in base ai privilegi accordati dal sistema capitalista stesso<sup>18</sup>, ci interpellano dal passato anche se richiedono soluzioni al tempo presente a crisi climatiche che in futuro potrebbero persino peggiorare. Come spiega Alaimo infatti:

<sup>17</sup> Le scienze biologiche, geologiche e fisiche hanno coniato il termine Antropocene (Steffen *et al.* 2007) al fine di indicare un cambiamento su scala planetaria degli agenti determinanti l’articolarsi della vita sul pianeta, individuando nell’Uomo, non più negli elementi, la forza modellante del divenire terrestre. Le scienze politiche e sociali hanno in seguito provato a superare i limiti di questo concetto sin troppo universalizzante proponendo svariati altri neologismi. Non esiste, infatti, una supposta essenza propria a ogni persona umana che, tendendo alla distruzione degli ecosistemi, ci ha condotto sull’orlo di un precipizio. Non è l’umanità tutta ad aver intaccato la tenuta dell’Olocene. È più proficuo mettere a fuoco chi e perché tra le persone umane è diventata una forza capace di rimuovere più terra dalle montagne dell’azione degli agenti atmosferici. Ha dunque ragione chi come Moore preferisce definire quest’era come *Capitalocene* (Moore 2017), perché ha il merito di portare alla luce il complesso intreccio di fattori che ha condotto uno specifico tipo di uomo, l’*homo sapiens*, a diventare *homo oeconomicus* e il capitalismo a imporsi come economia egemone grazie alle tecnoscienze occidentali, all’agricoltura intensiva e alla produzione industriale.

<sup>18</sup> Chi scrive questo saggio, ad esempio, non ha lo stesso posizionamento delle SisterSong, che pur al loro interno ne hanno diversi. Da persona bianca nata e cresciuta in un paese europeo fino a oggi ho avuto il privilegio di una riproduzione non affetta da denutrizione. Non ho avuto il privilegio però di non essere esposta ad alti livelli di intossicazione. Sono nata e cresciuta tra due Terre dei Fuochi: la prima è quella tra Caserta e Napoli in Campania, la seconda quella di Milazzo e Messina in Sicilia. Situò l’analisi per far meglio comprendere in che modo i territori in cui si nasce e cresce influiscano sulla scelta dei temi di ricerca ma anche sul divenire dei desideri di genitorialità, sulle ansie e le paure connesse a sessualità e riproduzione nelle aree più sottoposte a processi di industrializzazione. Seguiamo qui la metodologia che Donna Haraway ([1984]2018) chiama dei saperi situati, metodologia che punta all’oggettività ma si radica nei corpi, molto vicina alla teoria del punto di vista di Sandra Harding (1986). Tenendo insieme le epistemologie dei saperi situati, del punto di vista e la teoria dell’intersezionalità impariamo che i saperi sono sempre incarnati in corpi genderizzati e razzializzati e in territori più o meno esposti a inquinamento.

Se i domini dell'etico e del politico, del personale e del pubblico, del domestico e del globale sono collassati l'uno sull'altro, si estenderanno, allora, anche attraverso l'impensabile scala dell'Antropocene, dal momento che il cambiamento climatico, l'acidificazione degli oceani, l'estinzione e la produzione di sostanze chimiche xenobiotiche fanno sì che il luogo dell'etica e della politica di ciascuna persona si ramifichi in vaste distese sia geografiche che temporali, interessando innumerevoli specie (Alaimo 2024: 53).

Le ingiustizie riproduttive vanno pertanto pensate anche come ingiustizie intergenerazionali in un arco temporale che tiene sempre insieme passato, presente e futuro (Balzano 2024). Occorre oggi non solo riparare le inique eredità dell'industrialismo ma anche “rispondere del futuro” imparando a evitare sia “presentismi” che “paternalismi” (Menga 2021a) aprendoci a quella “appellatività stessa dell'altro (dal) futuro” capace di “ingenerare, di volta in volta, il modo in cui la configurazione generativa dei soggetti intertemporalmente relati deve articolarsi” (Menga 2018: 279). L'insistenza sull'“alterità futura” che accomuna le filosofie politiche di Alaimo, Braidotti e Haraway, e le filosofie del diritto di Menga (2021b) e Rodotà (2012), si rivela qui dirimente per pensare sesta estinzione di massa e riscaldamento globale sulla scala temporale dei “futuri più remoti”, sottraendosi alla “tirannia dei contemporanei” (Menga 2018: 282)<sup>19</sup>.

I fenomeni menzionati da Alaimo – cambiamento climatico, acidificazione degli oceani, estinzione – ci esortano a liberarci dal giogo del presentismo e al contempo ci inducono a varcare i confini delle discipline. Per comprendere le scale spazio-temporali e le implicazioni delle ingiustizie riproduttive in termini intergenerazionali potrebbe risultare proficuo aprire qui una finestra transdisciplinare. Gli studi postumani<sup>20</sup> – in particolare quelli femministi che, come

<sup>19</sup> Le ingiustizie riproduttive sono sempre anche intergenerazionali tanto quanto infra e più che umane ed è per questo necessario continuare a interrogarsi circa i concetti di generazione, tempo, specie e soggetto con i quali pensiamo e agiamo il mondo. Rimando per chi volesse approfondire sulla giustizia intergenerazionale e ambientale e sui suoi peculiari concetti di futuro e responsabilità a Menga (2021b e 2024). Alla giustizia intergenerazionale la rivista “Etica e Politica” ha dedicato inoltre un Simposio dal titolo “Ferdinando G. Menga. Lo scandalo del futuro. Per una giustizia intergenerazionale” all'interno del numero XX/1 del 2018, mentre la Rivista di filosofia del diritto vi ha dedicato il numero 2/2021 dal titolo “Il diritto di fronte al futuro: le sfide della giustizia intergenerazionale” cui rimando per ulteriori approfondimenti.

<sup>20</sup> Gli studi postumani, fioriti in seguito alla nascita della corrente filosofica del postumanesimo, comprendono oggi molte altre discipline oltre la filosofia e, non limitandosi alle sole scienze umane e sociali, includono anche le scienze della vita e le scienze informatiche. Per una genealogia del postumanesimo che muova dai suoi antecedenti anti-umanisti e poststrutturalisti fino alle attuali declinazioni femministe si veda la trilogia *Il postumano* di Braidotti (2014, 2022, 2023), che offre anche una precisa cartografia transnazionale del proliferante campo di studi oggi auto-definitisi postumani. Braidotti ci ricorda inoltre che, pur essendo altamente transdisciplinari, gli studi postumani non trascurano la questione della postura filosofica da adottare: negli studi postumani la matrice filosofica è il postumanesimo non il transumanesimo, la postura è dunque post-antropocentrica e non androcentrica. Non li si consideri dunque come sinonimi, dal momento che le differenze tra i due sono notevoli. Il transumanesimo è infatti caratterizzato dalla volontà di

vedremo meglio nel terzo paragrafo, riprendono l'opera delle SisterSong per traghettare la giustizia riproduttiva dall'infra-umano al più-che-umano – sfumano, proprio come gli antecedenti studi di genere e postcoloniali da cui traggono origine, i confini tra *hard* e *human sciences* allo scopo non di “colonizzare il futuro” ma di conoscere il presente per rendersi, *oggi*, in grado di rispondere eticamente. La filosofia neo-materialista che informa gli studi postumani femministi sa già da molto tempo che l'etica si radica nella materia. Da Epicuro a Lucrezio passando per Spinoza per approdare alla sua ripresa poststrutturalista e femminista (Balzano 2018, Bennett 2023), i pensieri emergono all'incontro tra i corpi così come la conoscenza è possibile solo a partire da essi. Nella “convergenza postumana” la filosofia si confronta con le scienze della vita e le scienze del clima con uno spinoziano “desiderio di conoscenze adeguate” perché “l'estinzione deve essere riconosciuta per poter meglio essere evitata” (Braidotti 2022: 143-144). Immergiamoci, quindi, nella materia di sesta estinzione di massa e riscaldamento globale, per saggiarne seppur brevemente velocità ed entità, di modo da poter meglio comprendere poi, nel terzo paragrafo, da quali consapevolezze emerge la rivendicazione di giustizia riproduttiva transpecie.

Occorre in primo luogo ricordare che l'estinzione qui in discussione non riguarda la specie sapiens, nonostante le retoriche vitaliste di matrice nazionalista (Balzano 2021a), infatti, “da quando l'umanità ha raggiunto la cifra di otto miliardi, ogni discorso sull'estinzione sembra completamente fuori luogo” (Braidotti 2014:12). Eppure i discorsi *mainstream* sul cambiamento climatico non fanno che porre l'accento sui rischi per la generatività umana limitandosi a un futuro prossimo che ci obbligherebbe a salvare il pianeta *da e per* noi. A immergerci nella materia, come stiamo per fare, sembrerebbe però che un discorso più convincente sia quello post-antropocentrico di Menga per cui la responsabilità verso i futuri remoti, più che verso quelli prossimi, ci interpella fornendoci

la (dis-)misura stessa della nostra “capacità” generativa, cosicché “chi”, “quanto” e “se in generale” generare si rivela questione mai definita una volta per tutte. In linea con questa prospettiva, il massimo dell'obbligo di generatività potrebbe addirittura venire a coincidere con il massimo di una generosità contro-natura [...] che si trattiene dal generare e che decide contestualmente di concedere più spazio [...] ad alterità altre: come, ad esempio, a quella di soggetti non-umani (Menga 2018, 279).

potenziare le prestazioni umane e da una postura anti-ecologica che non tiene conto degli effetti che la crescita ininterrotta e l'allungamento indefinito della vita umana stanno già avendo sulle altre specie e sulla Terra, mentre il postumanesimo è caratterizzato dalla volontà di denunciare come dietro la pretesa universalità *dell'homo sapiens* si celi il particolare uomo bianco occidentale, accompagnata dalla consapevolezza che la specie umana non è superiore per natura a nessun'altra. Per approfondire sulle differenze tra postumanesimo e transumanesimo, ma anche interne al postumanesimo stesso si vedano: Balzano (2021a, 2021b); Santoemma(2020); Ferrando (2016).

L'insistenza sui futuri riproduttivi umani appare infondata quando si apprende che la giustizia intergenerazionale è tanto un'emersione di istanze infra-umane quanto un'emergenza interspecie: "l'immensa distruzione irreversibile è attualmente in corso, non solo per gli undici miliardi e rotti di persone che si ritroveranno sulla Terra verso la fine del XXI secolo, ma per un'infinità di altre creature [...]. L'estinzione non è una metafora [...]. Basta chiederlo a qualsiasi rifugiato di ogni specie" (Haraway 2019b, 146-147). La sesta estinzione di massa è un presente che minaccia le condizioni di pensabilità stesse di futuri altri che possano dirsi transpecie, nella misura in cui non riguarda solo i primati o la megafauna ma arriva a intaccare a ritmi senza precedenti interi ecosistemi, colpendo persino organismi unicellulari come le diatomee, da sempre fondamentali alla trasversale riproduzione del vivente (Balzano 2021a, 2024). Gli studi della IUCN provano la velocità della sesta estinzione asserendo che "l'attuale tasso di estinzione delle specie è 10.000 volte superiore al tasso naturale o di fondo" e stimando inoltre che "dal 1996 a oggi il numero totale di specie animali note minacciate è aumentato da 5.205 a 8.462"<sup>21</sup>. Tuttavia, la perdita di biodiversità che esperiamo oggi potrebbe essere addirittura maggiore, perché i report dello IUCN presentano non poche criticità. Se registrano con efficacia le perdite dovute alla caccia, non sempre riescono a fotografare i danni che il riscaldamento globale arreca a ecosistemi fondamentali come quelli delle barriere coralline, o i danni dell'antropizzazione dovuta all'incremento di monoculture e allevamenti industriali, che minano ecosistemi altrettanto cruciali come quelli delle foreste. Su questi dati e su come vengono costruiti e raccolti c'è dibattito, c'è chi sostiene che le stime dello IUCN siano al ribasso perché tengono in maggior conto le estinzioni tra vertebrati sottovalutando gli invertebrati, in particolare quelli marini. Se ci concentriamo sui molluschi, il secondo più grande *phylum* per numero di specie conosciute, si stima che "dal 1500 d.C. circa, tra il 7,5 e il 13% (150.000-260.000) di tutte i più di 2 milioni di specie conosciute si sono già estinte" e che "gli ordini di grandezza sono superiori di 882 (0,04%) a quelli della Lista Rossa" (Cowie *et al.* 2022). Un dato su tutti si rivela cruciale, un dato che inferisce una correlazione da prendere in analisi: da quando abbiamo cominciato a crescere senza limiti si estinguono 1.000 altre specie all'anno (Pimm *et al.* 2014).

Alcuni studi postulano una correlazione tra il fenomeno definito della Grande Accelerazione Umana e quelli della sesta estinzione e del riscaldamento globale

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.iucnredlist.org/> (consultato il 5 marzo 2024). La Lista Rossa della International Union for Conservation of Nature è stata istituita nel 1964, si tratta di un rapporto dettagliato circa lo "stato di salute della biodiversità mondiale" che offre "informazioni su portata, dimensione della popolazione, habitat ed ecologia, uso e/o commercio, minacce e azioni di conservazione" (TdA). Oltre a calcolare il tasso di estinzione, divide le specie di animali, piante e funghi in: "non valutate; carenti di dati, poco preoccupanti, minacciate, vulnerabili, in pericolo, in pericolo critico, estinte in natura ed estinte" (TdA).



(Kolbert 2014; Haraway 2019b), eppure questa correlazione resta da dimostrare e problematizzare. Sappiamo che quando l'Olocene è iniziato, 11.700 anni fa, erano sei milioni le persone umane sul pianeta. Fino al XX secolo l'Olocene ha manifestato una certa stabilità climatica, poi la popolazione umana è quadruplicata, passando dai 1.6 milioni di persone del 1900 agli 8 miliardi odierni – quasi 6 miliardi in più in meno di un secolo. Cosa ha permesso alla specie sapiens di accelerare fino a tal punto la propria riproduzione? La vita umana sulla terra ha iniziato a crescere vertiginosamente grazie al confluire degli sviluppi in medicina, agricoltura e industria (Diamond 1997; Cregan-Reid 2020), eppure chi scrive postula che non sia l'aumento di persone umane in sé il problema, bensì la stessa convergenza di scienze e tecnologie mediche, agricole e industriali che, insieme all'imporsi su scala quasi globale dell'economia capitalista, ha innescato il cambiamento climatico, oggi meglio definito come riscaldamento globale. Sul punto Wonders e Danner (2015: 402) scrivono: “Il cambiamento climatico è causato principalmente dai mutamenti di temperatura associati alla produzione di gas serra, conseguenza dell'attività antropica (umana), in particolare l'estrazione di combustibili fossili”. E infatti il XX secolo è proprio quello che ha visto un parallelo e proporzionale aumento di temperature e industrie basate su tali combustibili, dovuto all'alleanza, spesso rivelatasi nefasta, tra governi e multinazionali (Ruggiero & South 2013; Cooper 2013). Il XXI secolo non è da meno se consideriamo che ai suoi albori il *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* considerava come indicatore esclusivo dell'apocalisse la minaccia nucleare, ma dal 2007 si è visto costretto ad affiancarvi un indicatore altrettanto preoccupante, il riscaldamento globale. Oggi, 5 marzo 2024, l'Orologio dell'Apocalisse segna “90 secondi alla catastrofe” e gli/scienziati/e del *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* definiscono questa era come “la più pericolosa, senza precedenti nella storia”<sup>22</sup>.

Le temperature vengono registrate dal 1880 e tutti gli anni compresi tra il 2013 e il 2023 sono tra i più caldi mai registrati, come attesta il *Global Climate Record*<sup>23</sup>. I livelli di CO<sub>2</sub> hanno superato i valori soglia, siamo oggi a 419,13 parti per milione (ppm), mentre non dovevamo superare le 280<sup>24</sup>. La *World Meteorological Organization* (WMO) ci informa nel novembre del 2023 che i livelli di anidride carbonica sono più alti del 50% rispetto all'era pre-industriale e per questo i livelli del mare continueranno ad alzarsi e le condizioni meteorologiche diventeranno per noi sempre più avverse. Tuttavia la WMO non impiega solo il futuro nelle sue conclusioni, il tempo presente scelto per comunicare la drammaticità del caso è eloquente, secondo la WMO infatti “le

<sup>22</sup> *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/>(TdA) (consultato il 5 marzo 2024).

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/monthly-report/global/202310>

<sup>24</sup> *Scripps Institution of Oceanography* (California), *Carbon Dioxide in the Atmosphere Hits Record High Monthly Average*. <https://keelingcurve.ucsd.edu/2018/05/02/carbon-dioxide-in-the-atmosphere-hits-record-high-monthly-average/>(consultato il 5 marzo 2024).

condizioni meteorologiche estreme distruggono ogni giorno vite umane e mezzi di sussistenza”<sup>25</sup>.

Ed è a questo riguardo, al riguardo cioè della distruzione di vite e territori, che le questioni sollevate dai movimenti femministi che rivendicano giustizia riproduttiva si fanno interrogativi pressanti in altrettanti studi, e orientano le analisi fino a fornirvi una metodologia, quella dell’intersezionalità. Una volta compreso che la depauperazione di ecosistemi e persone è stata causata dal capitalismo della crescita illimitata, si tratta di capire quali vite e perché sono da esso distrutte, quali saperi scompaiono assieme a quelle vite, che ruolo hanno genere, classe, processi di razzializzazione e marginalizzazione, processi di alterizzazione e gerarchizzazione di specie più che umane nel selezionare l’accesso alla giustizia riproduttiva stessa. Il capitalismo, infatti, funziona discriminando e producendo disuguaglianze sociali. Su 8 miliardi di persone umane sul pianeta sono solo quelle che risiedono nei paesi più ricchi, la metà della popolazione globale, ad avere la responsabilità dell’80% delle emissioni totali<sup>26</sup>.

La crescita della popolazione in relazione al lasso di tempo in cui è avvenuta è un fatto, ma non è in sé il problema: lo diventa nella misura in cui metà di questa popolazione per lo più bianca e occidentale consuma e inquina facendo pagare all’altra metà il conto amaro della sua riproduzione. Consideriamo ad esempio quanto ci insegna l’Alleanza dei piccoli Stati insulari (AOSIS), un coordinamento intergovernativo di stati costieri e isole nato nel 1990, alle prese con le conseguenze politiche ed ecologiche del riscaldamento globale, i cui “39 paesi membri sono particolarmente vulnerabili ai cambiamenti climatici e ai suoi effetti sull’oceano, tra cui – insieme all’acidificazione e all’erosione costiera – l’innalzamento del livello del mare” (Balzano *et al.* 2022: 17). I paesi dell’AOSIS hanno a più riprese già dovuto rimediare ai danni loro inferti dalle colonizzazioni e oggi, pur avendo causato meno dell’1% delle emissioni mondiali di gas serra, si trovano costretti a fronteggiare i guai del riscaldamento globale: il livello del mare potrebbe aumentare di 2 metri entro il 2100 e di 5 metri entro il 2150. Se consideriamo che “se l’industria del cemento fosse un paese, sarebbe il terzo più grande emettitore di anidride carbonica al mondo con un massimo di 2,8 miliardi di tonnellate, superato solo da Cina e Stati Uniti”<sup>27</sup>, non possiamo non ritenere un’ingiustizia quella che oggi si vive ad Antigua e purtroppo più in generale in

<sup>25</sup> <https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/2023-shatters-climate-records-major-impacts>TdA (consultato il 5 marzo 2024).

<sup>26</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/inequality-co2> (consultato il 5 marzo 2024). Dobbiamo aggiungere che le disuguaglianze si ripropongono all’interno degli stessi paesi ricchi nord-occidentali, si pensi che in Europa il 41% dell’impronta di CO2 totale è da imputare all’1% più ricco della popolazione e al suo uso smodato dei jet come mezzi di trasposto (dei) privilegiati (<https://www.transportenvironment.org/discover/private-jets-can-the-super-rich-supercharge-zero-emission-aviation/>) (consultato il 5 marzo 2024).

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/feb/25/concrete-the-most-destructive-material-on-earth>(consultato il 5 marzo 2024).

tutto il Pacifico. E questo è del resto solo un esempio di quanto avviene fuori dall'occidente, ma anche qui in Europa le conseguenze del riscaldamento si acquiscono a "sud", cioè in territori già abusati e stressati dall'industrialismo prima e dal turismo di massa poi. Qui il pensiero corre alle isole del Mediterraneo, alle coste della Sicilia orientale già tendenti all'abbassamento: le Saline del fiume Ciane, arretrate già di quasi 70 metri, da qui al 2050 potrebbero essere del tutto sommerse, come la "riserva naturale orientata" di Vendicari (Anzidei *et al.* 2021).

Risparmiando a chi legge altri dati sui pericoli di annegamento al tempo del riscaldamento globale, perché è sufficiente allo scopo del saggio l'aver fermato il pensiero sulla relazione che intercorre tra industrialismo capitalista, sesta estinzione di massa e riscaldamento globale, nonché sulle diverse condizioni di ingiustizia che in questa congiuntura vivono corpi e territori, ma anche perché si ritiene qui che etica e politica possano beneficiare di un approccio transdisciplinare senza dover tuttavia cedere all'imperativo delle prove empiriche. La continua "richiesta di prove empiriche" infatti "può rivelarsi perversa, come se le persone assoggettate dovessero chiedere continuamente di essere ammesse nella categoria esseri umani, nella quale l'empatia è razionata e le domande di accesso sono regolarmente respinte" (Benjamin 2022a: 64). Una volta comprese le conseguenze della crescita illimitata del capitale, si può non indulgere oltre e ammettere che "per quanto importante" su un piano etico-politico lo scopo non consiste nel "disaggregare i grandi numeri e i modelli delle scienze del clima e della popolazione" (Haraway 2022: 105), quanto nel prenderli in considerazione per chiedersi in che modo ci relazioniamo a essi e in che tipo di concatenamenti affettivi sono e siamo prese/i. In termini spinoziani: l'importante è la conoscenza adeguata della materia che informa noi e i nostri affetti.

È probabile che la conoscenza di sesta estinzione di massa e riscaldamento globale metta in circolo passioni tristi, l'eco-ansia ne è solo un esempio (Sasser 2024), quanto è probabile che infonda passioni gioiose grazie alle quali "rielaborare collettivamente gli elementi negativi e proporre alternative" (Braidotti 2023: 145). Cadiamo nelle passioni tristi se pensiamo, erroneamente, al declino della vita sul pianeta e alla sua totale antropizzazione come ineluttabili perché legate a un'umanità che sarebbe in sé foriera di sola devastazione. Tuttavia, l'umanità non è connotata in essenza da alcunché e anche se alcune tra le persone umane sembrano avere una spiccata propensione alla fagocitazione perenne dell'esistente, molte altre sono dedite a tessere la trama di una giustizia riproduttiva transpecie. Questo mondo è così malmesso non perché, hobbesianamente, la cattiveria ferina sarebbe tratto umano universale, bensì perché i processi di soggettivazione nel dispiegarsi storico di capitalismo e governamentalità biopolitiche hanno avuto come risultato rapporti di forza asimmetrici, in cui solo alcuni umani hanno accesso a risorse e ricchezze mentre le altre persone, nel tentativo di riuscire ad accedervi, finiscono per desiderare le stesse posizioni del privilegio che hanno determinato la loro esclusione (Deleuze

& Guattari 2002; 2006). Inoltre, l'imporsi del capitalismo ha accelerato i processi di soggettivazione individualisti e androcentrici, e il paradigma dualista su cui si è eretto, restando in auge da Cartesio a noi, ha operato una scissione con effetto “a valanga”: dalla cesura mente-corpo all'opposizione Uomo-Natura abbiamo pensato l'esistenza umana come scissa dalla molteplicità dell'esistente. Il materialismo monista può forse aprire altre vie, se non altro la possibilità di pensare mente e corpo come un continuum, la nostra esistenza come parte di più larghi insiemi e il mondo come bene comune in condivisione con tutte le altre persone umane e più che umane (Lloyd 1994; 1996). E in effetti le concettualizzazioni della giustizia riproduttiva che ci accingiamo a incontrare sono attraversate da “forti correnti sotterranee spinoziane” (Braidotti 2023: 153). Le teoriche femministe neo-materialiste sanno, infatti, come sapeva Spinoza, che “il corpo umano ha bisogno per conservarsi di moltissimi altri corpi dai quali continuamente è come rigenerato” (parte II, proposizione XIII, quarto postulato, Spinoza [1677]2005: 149) e che per questo la giustizia riproduttiva infra-umana è tale solo quando è capace di andare oltre l'umano per comprendere la cura transpecie. Non si tratta, dunque, di abbandonare le persone umane per annullarsi in un'alterità che ancora una volta sarebbe così posta fuori di noi, bensì di pensare e curare l'alterità che è “già con, in noi” (Timeto 2020: 201).

### **3. LA GIUSTIZIA RIPRODUTTIVA MULTISPECIE E TRANSPECIE TRA ETICA E DIRITTO**

Come si pensa, dunque, la giustizia riproduttiva in un mondo surriscaldato e dalle fattezze “totalmente antropizzate, senza più alcun fuori” (Giardini 2013: 153)?

Si pensa, prima di tutto, in termini postantropocentrici, cioè non adottando l'umano come misura e beneficiario primo di tutte le cose. La giustizia riproduttiva viene per questo detta multispecie, l'iniziale rivendicazione delle SisterSong per l'esercizio dell'autodeterminazione sessuale e genitoriale in comunità sicure e sostenibili è stata slabbrata, divenendo prima “giustizia riproduttiva ambientale”<sup>28</sup>, poi “giustizia riproduttiva multispecie” e infine “transpecie”. Con “giustizia riproduttiva multispecie” e “transpecie” si intende non solo mettere a fuoco i modi in cui riscaldamento globale e inquinamento impattano sulla salute sessuale umana, ma anche ribaltare la prospettiva con postura postumanista, chiedendosi in che modo la riproduzione umana, oggi perseguita quasi globalmente tramite il sistema ri/produttivo capitalista, impatti sulla vita delle altre specie. Sono molte le femministe oggi impegnate su questi terreni. Gaard (2010) sembra porsi nel mezzo, sulla via della trasformazione della

<sup>28</sup> Sulla giustizia riproduttiva ambientale si vedano: de Onis(2012) e Dow & Julieta (2023).

giustizia riproduttiva ambientale in multispecie, mentre la Haraway di *When Species Meet* (Haraway 2008: 280) pare sia stata la prima a usare l'espressione "giustizia multispecie"<sup>29</sup>. Ci sono anche Clarke, Murphy, TallBear, Benjamin e tutte le altre autrici di *Making Kin. Fare parentele, non popolazioni*, volume collettivo in cui Clarke dichiara sin dall'introduzione che "il nostro obiettivo è la giustizia riproduttiva multispecie" (Clarke 2022: 6) e in cui Haraway così titola il suo saggio "Fare parentele nello Chthulucene: riprodurre la giustizia multispecie". Vi sono, inoltre, le autrici raccolte in *Conchiglie, pinguini, staminali*, su tutte Sturgeon che nel suo "Valori familiari tra pinguini" scrive di "giustizia riproduttiva ecologica" spiegando che "le dinamiche familiari e riproduttive umane agiscono con tutta evidenza un'importante influenza sulle questioni ambientali" (Sturgeon 2022: 168).

Nella cornice della giustizia riproduttiva multispecie e transpecie il riconoscimento dell'agentività più che umana viaggia di pari passo con il riconoscimento dell'impatto che sul pianeta ha la riproduzione di una certa parte di umanità, quella che per il proprio lusso produce più emissioni di altre, e si accompagna alla presa in carico da parte di queste/i umane/i della propria responsabilità. Questa giustizia non implica dunque uno sbrigativo decentramento dell'umano, come se il tanto atteso livellamento ontologico-politico tra esistenti ci sollevasse da ogni responsabilità. In particolare gli esseri umani industrializzati non possono con maestria teorica occultare, nel riconoscimento dell'agentività più che umana, l'intenzionalità propriamente umana di disporre delle risorse del pianeta per una crescita del capitale immotivatamente iper-accelerata. Qui ci viene in soccorso un'altra autrice neo-materialista che argomenta a favore della giustizia transpecie, Stacy Alaimo. Alaimo non incappa in quello che è un limite in altri neo-materialismi, distinguendosi per esempio da Bennett (2023): la sua operazione di livellamento ontologico tra esistenti non arriva fino al punto di ascrivere pari agentività a sacchetti, tappi e bottiglie di plastica. Mirabilmente Alaimo scrive, riflettendo sulla plastificazione degli oceani e la sesta estinzione di massa, che "la plastica non si produce, non si acquista, non si distribuisce e non si smaltisce da sola" e specifica che "ne sono responsabili gli esseri umani industrializzati" (Alaimo 2024: 251).

Potrebbe rivelarsi utile smagliare questa Alaimo e ampliarne la portata parafrasandola così: "il riscaldamento globale e l'acidificazione delle acque, il petrolio, la plastica e il plutonio non si sono prodotti da soli, non si acquistano, non si distribuiscono e non si smaltiscono da soli, ne sono responsabili gli esseri umani industrializzati". In sintonia con il neo-materialismo di Alaimo, Wonders e Danner vanno ancora più a fondo asserendo che se ci interessa ascrivere le responsabilità del danno da cambiamento climatico allora ogni eziologia possibile

<sup>29</sup> Questa la ricostruzione fatta nel volume che consiglio di leggere sugli sviluppi della giustizia multispecie di Chao Bolender e Kirksey dal titolo *The Promise of Multispecies Justice* (2022).

rimanda agli “uomini, soprattutto i bianchi eterosessuali più ricchi del Nord del mondo” dal momento che “hanno un’influenza sproporzionata sulle decisioni che determinano le cause, le conseguenze e le risposte al cambiamento climatico grazie al loro dominio sul processo decisionale economico e politico” (Wonders & Danner 2015: 403, TdA).

Questa insistenza dei femminismi per la giustizia riproduttiva multispecie e transpecie sull’individuazione della responsabilità non si spiega con una tensione unilaterale alla punizione dei colpevoli quanto con il desiderio di comprendere e sradicare le cause dell’ingiustizia. Tuttavia, perché giustizia riproduttiva transpecie sia fatta occorre anche non rinunciare alla riparazione, considerandola il livello zero: il minimo indispensabile è che chi è responsabile del danno ripari ripristinando la salute dei territori e di chi li abita. Questo tipo di giustizia è non punitiva ma non rinuncia per questo alla compensazione/riparazione/rigenerazione dei guai innescati dagli “umani industrializzati”, chiede che questi umani rendano conto del loro sistema riproduttivo in termini trasformativi, che si rendano disponibili a una decelerazione che sia defossilizzazione-deplastificazione-decarbonizzazione di quel sistema stesso. Un’altra voce che si leva in questo senso è quella di Benjamin che nella sua personale declinazione chiama la giustizia riproduttiva multispecie e transpecie “giustizia virale” e ancora ritiene che fare giustizia significhi “rintracciare responsabilità e riparare i danni, per quanto possa essere difficile, passati e in corso” (Benjamin 2022b: 227). E con forte tensione contraddittoria – Benjamin si dichiara femminista nera antipunitiva e anticarceraria – la stessa autrice ribadisce che non si tratta di attribuire colpe ma di individuare le persone che ammettendo la propria responsabilità si facciano carico dei percorsi di rigenerazione e cura necessari alla comune sopravvivenza. In lei la giustizia riproduttiva multispecie diventa un “approccio al cambiamento sociale” che “cerca di rigenerare le specie alienate, tutte le forme di vita ed esistenza di norma scartate e marginalizzate nel nostro sistema attuale” e prevede “risposte non carcerarie al danno, approcci non capitalisti all’assistenza sanitaria e diverse forme di mutualismo” (Benjamin 2022b: 13).

Non c’è alcuna pena nell’orizzonte di queste autrici, è come se da questi movimenti e da questi studi per e sulla giustizia riproduttiva multispecie emergesse un interrogativo pressante: a fronte di riscaldamento globale ed estinzione di massa, *cosa può una pena?*

In una cornice femminista non punitiva il riconoscimento del danno come crimine può sì avere la funzione di “co-costruire consapevolezza e memoria collettiva nel caso di disastri ambientali” perché “il rapporto circolare tra rappresentazione pubblica dei fatti, definizione giuridica degli stessi ed emergere di memoria e identità collettive diventano fondamentali elementi di coesione nelle comunità” (Altopiedi 2022b: 25), tuttavia resta insufficiente perché, pur ammettendo la necessità dell’ascrizione della responsabilità, la sanzione, penale o

amministrativa, si rivela inadeguata per almeno tre ragioni. La prima la spiega la stessa *Climate Change Criminology*: sono spesso stati-nazione e multinazionali ad attentare alla salute umana e terrestre commettendo un considerevole numero di “crimini ambientali”<sup>30</sup>. Sollund, ad esempio, mentre argomenta a favore del riconoscimento dei reati umani contro gli animali più che umani ammette che “la logica capitalista e consumista è il maggior ostacolo alla protezione dell’ambiente” (Sollund 2017: 256, TdA). La seconda consiste nell’impossibilità di circoscrivere spazio-temporalmente il “danno ambientale”: la punizione delle/dei responsabili non è sempre efficace in termini di obbligo alla riparazione, perché il tempo pare acuire al futuro i danni fatti al passato<sup>31</sup>. La terza ragione consiste nell’inefficacia formativa della punizione, vale a dire: la pena non educa, non genera persone umane dotate di un’etica transspecie, capaci cioè di tenere a cuore non solo la riproduzione umana ma anche la riproduzione di tutti gli altri esistenti sulla terra (Lindahl 2021). Più che invocare il riconoscimento dell’ecocidio come reato internazionale, i femminismi per la giustizia multispecie e transspecie si impegnano per un quotidiano cambiamento etico che sappia farsi via via politico, e si trovano in questo concordi con quelle criminologie verdi che sostengono che

il concetto di ecocidio può rivelarsi utile per focalizzare l’attenzione sui danni associati al cambiamento climatico, tuttavia ci vuole cautela nei confronti degli approcci che tendono a criminalizzare il comportamento piuttosto che affrontarne le “cause profonde”, poiché la criminalizzazione tende ad essere seguita da effetti collaterali e avversi molto gravi. In effetti, la criminalizzazione si è rivelata una soluzione del tutto inadeguata per affrontare problemi sociali con profonde radici storiche, sociali e strutturali (Wonders & Danner 2015: 412, TdA).

Riscaldamento globale e sesta estinzione di massa, dal momento che hanno profonde radici storiche, sociali e strutturali, potrebbero non essere facili da risolvere ricorrendo alla criminalizzazione, ma neppure ad altre vie normative. Come sostiene Menga (2018: 292), infatti, “l’autentica possibilità di impegnarsi in proiezioni immaginative di carattere giuridico ed istituzionale” non sta nella “sola possibilità di essere responsabili *in* futuro” quanto nell’“impegnarsi a trovare forme per essere responsabili *per* il futuro”. Inoltre, il diritto, da solo, potrebbe non riuscire a farsi garante al contempo dell’accesso ai diritti riproduttivi e della tutela della salute terrestre. Variabile storico-culturale tra molte altre, il diritto ha

<sup>30</sup> Secondo Altopiedi (2022a: 179) il filone di studi della *Climate Change Criminology* ha lo scopo esplicito di “costruire da un punto di vista criminologico le azioni (o omissioni) che sono alla base del riscaldamento globale come un tipo specifico di crimine”.

<sup>31</sup> Pensiamo alla storia dei PCB, i policlorobifenili, le molecole impiegate nelle lampade e nei refrigeranti, nei trasformatori e nei condensatori elettrici a partire dal 1930, quando la Monsanto cominciò a produrli commercialmente. I PCB, pur essendo stati dichiarati illegali negli anni Ottanta, sono così resistenti da essere entrati negli ecosistemi stipandosi nel grasso dei cetacei continuando a causarne la morte ancora oggi.

una funzione promozionale quando con le altre variabili vige armonia. Ecco perché i femminismi si pongono a volte a favore di un *law-making approach* e a volte di un *law-breaking approach* (Lane 1998), perché a seconda delle contingenze può essere opportuno divenire parte del processo di elaborazione di una nuova norma oppure contrastare le norme vecchie e nuove che si rivelano ingiuste e devastanti per corpi e territori, come già nel 1998 spiegava Lane nel suo pionieristico *Ecofeminism meets criminology*. Potrebbe darsi che l'elaborazione e l'implementazione di nuove norme giuridiche ci aiuterà nel raggiungimento della giustizia riproduttiva multispecie solo quando le norme culturali e sociali, economiche e politiche cambieranno a loro volta e si lasceranno orientare da etiche non eccezionaliste né suprematiste, cioè foriere di altre politiche e altri modi di vita capaci di rigenerare persone ed ecosistemi. L'etica e la politica, come ci ricorda l'ecologia politica di Smith, riportano nelle nostre mani la possibilità di cambiare perché “sono pratiche quotidiane, agite anche nelle condizioni più sfavorevoli; pratiche che non attendono istituzionalizzazioni né chiedono il permesso di una qualche superiore autorità” (Smith 2011: 183, TdA).

#### 4. CONCLUDERE CON RESPONSABILITÀ

Di quest'impellenza della via etica transspecie, della svolta postantropocentrica invocata per i nostri modi di vita, è intrisa l'opera di autrici quali Haraway e Braidotti, che in conclusione a questa genealogia aggiungono il portato del cyborg femminismo e del postumanesimo intesi come ecofemminismo. Si cade in errore a ritenere, infatti, che il cyborgfemminismo e il postumanesimo non siano ecofemministi<sup>32</sup>, basti pensare all'apripista Zoe Sofia (2022) che già nel 1984 cercava i nessi tra aumento dei livelli di tossicità industriale, tecnologie belliche nucleari, desiderio di riprodursi e di non riprodursi. Per quanto teoriche curiose degli scenari aperti dalle nuove tecnologie della vita e dell'informazione, sia la Haraway cyborg femminista sia la Braidotti postumanista si mostrano sin dalle loro prime opere ben attente a custodire il lascito ecofemminista: sia le soggettività cyborg di Haraway ([1995] 2018) sia le soggettività nomadi di Braidotti (2008), infatti, sono mosse dal desiderio di “sopravvivenza terrestre”, non già di “supremazia umana”; dall'ecofemminismo di filosofe come Lloyd (1994, 1996) traggono il nucleo concettuale monista che permette loro di leggere natura e cultura come un continuum la cui misura non è più l'Uomo, ma l'humus che materialmente costituisce esistenti ed ecosistemi (Lloyd 1994, 1996; Balzano 2021a, 2024). Come le SisterSong, non potrebbero queste teoriche cyborg e postumaniste considerare i diritti riproduttivi adottando uno sguardo meramente interessato all'emancipazione di genere, perché questo significherebbe astrarli

<sup>32</sup> Per approfondire sulla relazione tra cyborgfemminismo, ecofemminismo e postumanesimo si rimanda a Balzano (2021b), Timeto (2021) e Braidotti (2023).



dallo stesso contesto ecosistemico emergenziale in cui si sono sviluppati insieme a molti altri esistenti più che umani. Haraway, riprendendo Zoe Sofia, già in *Testimone\_Modesta* non confina la giustizia riproduttiva nella rivendicazione di autodeterminazione sessuale, ma la declina in relazione alla devastazione degli ecosistemi dicendosi “convinta che il successo di progetti di giustizia e libertà dipenderà dal lenire la sofferenza e ridurre la devastazione delle risorse e dell’habitat” (Haraway 2000: 269-270). Si comprende dunque perché nel suo volume *Chthulucene. Sopravvivere su un paese infetto* (2019b) si dedichi a tessere la trama di modi alternativi di vita già presenti o a venire, invitando a una decrescita delle esigenze dell’umano in favore della rigenerazione delle specie in via di estinzione. Si può dire che l’intera opera di Haraway sia una scorribanda nelle lotte e negli studi per la sopravvivenza della terra, quel pianeta che brulica di forme di vita mutevoli e differenti che pure possono trovare il modo di articolarsi, vale a dire di co-abitare co-costituendosi, di unirsi in relazioni liberatorie e non separarsi in rapporti di dominazione, di aggregarsi in coalizioni orizzontali e non di distribuirsi lungo le linee gerarchiche di classi, generi, specie, processi di razzializzazione. Questa sua proposta per una giustizia multispecie per la sopravvivenza terrestre pare che Haraway la stesse già incubando in *Le promesse dei mostri*, un’opera che si colloca a metà strada tra il 1985 (l’anno della prima versione inglese del *Manifesto cyborg*) e il 1997 (anno di pubblicazione in inglese di *Testimone\_Modesta*)<sup>33</sup>. In *Le promesse dei mostri* Haraway comincia a dipingere il quadro di una giustizia riproduttiva ecofemminista e antirazzista che non rinunci all’impiego delle nuove tecnologie, laddove esse si rivelino liberatorie per corpi e territori. In lei la giustizia riproduttiva assume i “colori del rosso, del verde e dell’ultravioletto”, cioè “di un socialismo ancora possibile, di un ambientalismo femminista-antirazzista e di una scienza a beneficio delle persone” (Haraway 2019a: 39). Dovrebbe dunque esser già chiaro che per Haraway le teorie e i movimenti che si attestano sul solo ambientalismo inteso come “conservazionismo” di una supposta incontaminata natura corrono il rischio di non riuscire in molto altro che nell’istituzione di “riserve” e “parchi”, che a loro volta possono avere come conseguenza l’ulteriore marginalizzazione ed espropriazione di popolazioni già vessate. Per questo insiste nel tener insieme natura e giustizia, da lei definite come “oggetti discorsivi contesi e incarnati nel

<sup>33</sup> La prima versione di *A Cyborg Manifesto* esce per “Socialist Review” (n. 80) nel 1985, poi Haraway lo includerà in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* pubblicato nel 1991 per la Routledge. In italiano è stato tradotto da Liana Borghi per la Feltrinelli e pubblicato nel 1995 (in bibliografia è qui citata la riedizione 2018). *Le promesse dei mostri*, pubblicato con il titolo inglese *The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others*, esce nel 1992 nell’antologia *Cultural Studies* curata per la Routledge da Grossberg, Nelson e Treichler. In italiano è stato tradotto da Angela Balzano per la DeriveApprodi e pubblicato nel 2019. *Testimone\_Modesta*, pubblicato con il titolo inglese *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium. FemaleMan\_Meets\_OncoMouse. Feminism and Technoscience* è uscito per Routledge nel 1997. In italiano è stato tradotto da Liana Borghi per la Feltrinelli e pubblicato nel 2000.

mondo materiale” che “si estingueranno o sopravvivranno insieme” (Haraway 2019a: 86).

Molto vicina a questa Haraway è la Braidotti de *Il postumano. Femminismo*, nel cui capitolo dall’emblematico titolo “Decentrare l’Anthropos: ritorno sull’ecofemminismo”, ci invita ad applicare nei nostri studi “un metodo intersezionale ancorato ecologicamente”. Per lei il rischio nel non adottarlo consiste nel ricadere in “una condizione di apartheid climatica” e così facendo di “perpetuare il razzismo e l’invisibilità delle donne nere e indigene” (Braidotti 2023: 107-108). Secondo Braidotti da queste donne, come dalle Women of African Descedent, abbiamo molto da imparare in materia di giustizia riproduttiva transpecie, perché “le ecofemministe indigene e di colore hanno già dimostrato quanto i regimi patriarcali facciano parte delle modalità colonialiste e capitaliste di appropriazione delle risorse naturali” (Braidotti 2023: 121).

La tensione comune, in conclusione, è oggi quella al decentramento dell’Uomo, non solo in quanto auto-elettosi genere privilegiato, ma anche in quanto auto-elettosi specie privilegiata. Braidotti rinviene una “etica transpecie” in movimento dietro alle pratiche e alle teorie di questi femminismi, un’etica che potrebbe informare anche le scienze giuridiche aiutandole a riconoscere l’esistenza di persone più che umane, se non nei codici, nei propri studi filosofici (Braidotti 2022: 142). Un’etica transpecie sembra sottendere recenti pubblicazioni anche nell’ambito della *green criminology*, come il volume collettivo *Gendering Green Criminology* attesta, la cui definizione di eco-giustizia proposta non pare molto distante da quella di giustizia riproduttiva multispecie che qui si sta delineando:

L’eco-giustizia comprende la giustizia ambientale (relativa alle persone umane e al loro rapporto con ambienti specifici), la giustizia ecologica (relativa alla salute e al benessere degli ecosistemi) e la giustizia di specie (che coinvolge i diritti e la cura della biodiversità, dagli animali non umani alle piante) (Milne *et al.* 2023: 17, TdA).

È comprensibile che le suggestioni che ci arrivano da questi studi, in particolare le esortazioni a considerare persone giuridiche fiumi, montagne, interi ecosistemi, che dai femminismi indigeni a quelli neri arrivano fino al cyborgfemminismo e alla criminologia verde, possano risultare in sé insidiose e in odor di antropomorfizzazione del più che umano, tuttavia è strano che il dubbio sul ventriloquismo del diritto sorga ora in relazione ai diritti del più che umano. Il giusfemminismo, nelle sue varie correnti, ci ha già spiegato che il diritto ha dai suoi albori il volto e la voce dell’Uomo (Smart 1992; Giolo 2015; Casadei 2016), che dal suo particolare posizionamento sessuato e genderizzato ha legiferato per le donne e per tutte le altre persone umane marginalizzate fino, si direbbe almeno in occidente, alla metà del XX secolo. Se è vero dunque che la natura non scrive

leggi<sup>34</sup>, è altrettanto vero che non considerare persone gli esistenti più che umani non ci esime dal continuare a prendere decisioni al loro posto, anzi ci autorizza a continuare a farlo dall'alto, come se null'altro, eccetto l'Uomo, avesse agentività. Lungi dal voler qui trovare una soluzione autoriale a un dibattito collettivo ancora in corso, mi unisco a chi, come Bennett, auspica che il diritto dopo secoli di androcentrismo non si lasci oggi spaventare da quel pizzico di antropomorfismo tattico comune a ecofemminismo ed ecologia politica. Condividendo il posizionamento etico-politico di Bennett, ricordo ricorrendo al suo *Materia vibrante* che “un tocco di antropomorfismo può catalizzare una sensibilità che intende il mondo pieno non di categorie di esseri ontologicamente distinte (soggetti e oggetti) ma di materialità variamente composte” (Bennett 2023: 199).

Con Bennett impariamo che l'antropomorfismo può anche essere un invito a redistribuire le capacità di autodeterminazione, un modo per “contrastare il narcisismo degli umani e delle umane responsabili del mondo” (Bennett 2023: 22). Perché anche se, come ci ricorda Chiaramonte, parole d'ordine quali “responsabilità individuale o collettiva” sono state rese inservibili dai “rapporti sociali e di forza esistenti” (Chiaramonte 2022: 26) sul piano del diritto stesso, in particolare penale, sappiamo che quello giuridico è un piano tagliato da molti altri e che nel penale non si esaurisce, sappiamo che possiamo agire sul multilivello etico-politico. Su questo multilivello la responsabilità continua a contare, Haraway continua a insistervi spiegandoci che la rinuncia alla presa in carico della responsabilità è propria di chi “rifiuta di essere presente nella e alla catastrofe che avanza” (Haraway 2019b: 58). Per lei rinunciare a collegare i fatti reali di sesta estinzione di massa e riscaldamento globale a responsabilità precise vuol dire rinunciare a pensare possibili alternative, vuol dire “ricorrere ai miti autoindulgenti e autoappaganti dell'apocalisse” (Haraway 2019b: 58). Ed ecco il portato liberatorio di un pensiero che si situa nel desiderio di trasformazione di un presente che può non esser destinato a finire con e nei suoi guai. Individuare le responsabilità umane è solo un primo passo, bisogna farne al contempo molti altri, bisogna andare verso la *responso-abilità*, perché non tutte/i condividiamo le stesse condizioni di possibilità di trasformazione. Occorre immaginare e mettere in pratica forme di risposta collettiva ma equamente bilanciata in base alle collocazioni, con Timeto diciamo che la *responso-abilità* “richiede di essere

<sup>34</sup> I femminismi per la sopravvivenza terrestre non sono molto lontani dalla risposta a quest'obiezione che il costituzionalista Ferrajoli offre nel volume *Per una costituzione della terra*: “I veri problemi posti da questa prospettiva non sono di carattere teorico o tecnico, ma solo di carattere politico, legati alla miope indisponibilità dei poteri più forti, le superpotenze militari, le grandi imprese multinazionali e i mercati finanziari” (Ferrajoli 2022: 206-207). Benjamin scrive, sulla stessa scia, che occorre “chiedersi come potremmo riscrivere le nostre costituzioni; come potremmo addirittura ricostituire quella logora immaginazione politica che ha diviso il pianeta in stati-nazione, rivedere l'ideologia economica fallimentare che usa la terra come una gigantesca miniera” (Benjamin 2022b: 10).

consapevoli dei propri posizionamenti” (Timeto 2020: 200). È a questo fine che Haraway conia questo neologismo:

Tutti abbiamo la responsabilità di modellare condizioni migliori per la prosperità multispecie durante momenti storici terribili, e a volte anche durante momenti storici felici. Ma non siamo tutti responso-abili nello stesso modo. Le differenze sono importanti: nelle ecologie, nelle economie, nelle specie e nelle esistenze (Haraway 2019b: 50).

Coltivare la *responso-abilità* “richiede il rischio di essere a favore di alcuni mondi più che di altri” (Haraway 2019b: 208) e noi, che di questo mondo abitiamo la parte più devastante per la salute terrestre, nel correre questo rischio scopriremo forse che è la migliore possibilità che abbiamo, quella a favore di un mondo dove il sistema egemone non sia androcentrico, in cui tutte/i, in particolare “gli umani industrializzati”, adottino l’etica politica del *com/pensare*, da intendere nel duplice senso di *pensare con* corpi e i territori che già stanno vivendo e morendo i giorni della sesta estinzione e del riscaldamento globale, e di *rimediare* a e *curare* i danni loro inflitti.

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# L'ANIMALITÀ COME FORMA DI ESTRANEITÀ NEL CORPO BERNHARD WALDENFELS E HELMUTH PLESSNER A CONFRONTO

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to identify a dimension related to animality in bodily experience. The thesis is that animality is a dimension of the body on the borderline between identity and foreignness. The main question is: can a description of the relationship between body and animality shed light on the way we experience corporeality? To answer this question, I will use Bernhard Waldenfels' concept of the experience of the alien and Helmuth Plessner's biophilosophy. Waldenfels speaks of moments of strangeness in the corporeal self. These are moments in which the subject experiences its own body as identical with itself and at the same time as other than itself. Plessner suggests the idea of an animal form remaining embedded in the human body through his description of the various levels of the organic. The experience of the alien will therefore be related to the animal dimension in the living body to suggest that animality can be considered among the experiences of the alien.

## KEYWORDS

Animality, Plessner, living body, Waldenfels, alien, experience.

## 1. INTRODUZIONE

Nel libro *Mama's last hug* (2019), l'etologo olandese-americano Franz de Waal, in un paragrafo dal titolo *Recognize ourself*, si sofferma sulla parentela che ci lega alle scimmie antropoidi, ossia Bonobo, Scimpanzé, Gorilla e Orango. La connessione tra noi e questi animali non riguarda solo l'ambito della genetica – con più del 98 % di geni in comune – ma risulta evidente anche attraverso piccoli comportamenti, legati soprattutto al linguaggio del corpo, come mimica facciale, reazioni di paura o aggressività etc. Le nuove ricerche di etologia e primatologia

mostrano, inoltre, come la vita sociale ed emotiva di questi animali possa essere complessa e quanti punti di contatto possa avere con la nostra, al punto che: «Their socio-emotional lives resemble ours to such a degree that it is unclear where to draw the line»<sup>1</sup>. Nonostante questa evidente vicinanza tra le specie, De Waal sottolinea come nel nostro approccio a questi animali siano i sentimenti negativi a predominare, come quello del disgusto. Infatti, fa parte del senso comune considerare le scimmie antropoidi *ugly*<sup>2</sup>, ossia brutte, orrende. A questo proposito, De Waal nota che la nostra reazione «is a sign of recognition but also of unease with the uncomfortable closeness»<sup>3</sup>. Il dato di fatto di questa innegabile vicinanza, dunque, porta con sé qualcosa di “scomodo”, non rassicurante: un senso non chiaro ma acuto di disagio. Chiediamoci adesso: da cosa è dovuto questo sentimento di disagio, se non di ripugnanza? È la reazione alla semplice constatazione di una somiglianza fisica scomoda, nel senso che avvicina l’essere umano alle forme animali e ci ricorda le origini della nostra specie? O a entrare in gioco alla vista di una scimmia antropoide è una sorta di risonanza con qualcosa che fa parte di noi, non solo come discendenza filogenetica, ma anche come parte costitutiva di ciò che siamo?

Una simile esperienza può essere descritta attraverso la fenomenologia dell’estraneo del filosofo tedesco Bernhard Waldenfels. Secondo Waldenfels, infatti, il diventare estraneo dell’esperienza (*Fremdwerdender Erfahrung*) è generalmente caratterizzato da un sentimento di spaesamento dovuto al fatto che il confine tra i due poli familiare-estraneo sbiadisce e si confonde. Inoltre, in questa esperienza gioca un ruolo fondamentale proprio il paradosso di una lontananza nella vicinanza e una vicinanza nella lontananza<sup>4</sup>. Scrive Waldenfels: «in ogni caso l’esperienza dell’estraneo pone i confini tra proprio ed estraneo in movimento, e questo tanto più quanto l’estraneo ci riguarda. Il semi-familiare ghigno di uno Scimpanzé provoca un’inquietudine più forte del saltellare di un passero»<sup>5</sup>. Nella familiare mimica facciale di un volto che non è umano riconosciamo qualcosa di simile a noi pur in una distanza siderale, come può esserci tra due esseri viventi che attestano, nonostante tutto, modalità differenti di stare al mondo.

<sup>1</sup> F. DE WAAL, *Mama’s last hug. Animal emotion und what they teach us about ourselves*, Granta, London 2019, 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ivi.*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem.*, 17.

<sup>4</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2006, qui nell’edizione italiana a cura di Ferdinando Menga: B. WALDENFELS, *Fenomenologia dell’estraneo*, Cortina, Milano 2008, 97; 102.

<sup>5</sup> Traduzione italiana mia. «In jedem Fall bringt die Erfahrung des Fremden die Grenzen zwischen Eigenem und Fremdem in Bewegung und dies um so mehr, je näher uns das Fremde rückt. Das halbvertraute Grinsen eines Schimpansen löst eine stärkere Beunruhigung aus als Hüpfen einer Grasmücke», B. WALDENFELS, *Topographie des Fremden*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1997, 44.

Il sentimento di disagio sarebbe da mettere in relazione, dunque, proprio alla somiglianza tra l'uomo e le scimmie antropoidi, dal momento che i confini tra le specie sembrano a volte confondersi. Sempre seguendo l'analisi di Waldenfels, però, questo fenomeno risulta legato a una forma di risonanza corporea, che ci fa esperire l'eco di una familiarità, nonostante e oltre la diversità. La mia ipotesi è che questa risonanza sia legata a una forma di animalità nella corporeità umana, vissuta come dimensione estranea in noi stessi. Ritengo che una simile dimensione possa essere esperita come una forma di estraneità nel nostro corpo, che in quanto appartenente al corpo stesso, eccede la nostra dimensione di soggetto cognitivo ma nello stesso tempo ci costituisce. Alla luce di tutto ciò, questa forma di animalità nel corpo non è da considerare come l'espressione del mero sostrato biologico, che ci lega geneticamente, ad esempio, alle scimmie antropoidi. L'animalità come dimensione dell'estraneità nel corpo è, secondo la mia interpretazione, da considerare come una forma altra di coscienza corporea, accanto e dietro quella linguistica-razionale che caratterizza il modo di stare al mondo dell'essere umano.

Per illustrare questa ipotesi tratterò per prima la particolare tonalità emotiva che si esprime nel sentimento dell'estraneità a se stessi stipulato dalla fenomenologia dell'estraneo di Waldenfels. Poi profilerò l'animalità come possibile forma di estraneità nel corpo tramite l'analisi di Plessner sulle diverse forme di organizzazione corporea che esprimono differenti modalità di stare al mondo. Infine, attraverso l'esempio dei casi di non riconoscimento allo specchio declinati in senso sia umano che interspecifico, fornirò un esempio di esperienza dell'estraneo nel nostro quotidiano legata alla presenza di una coscienza animale nel corpo.

## 2. IL SÉ CORPOREO E IL PERTURBANTE

Il disagio nel guardare una scimmia antropoide è stato ricondotto a un sentimento perturbante legato al riconoscere qualcosa di familiare nell'estraneo. Possiamo ricollegare questa particolare tonalità emotiva al famoso saggio *Das Unheimliche (Il perturbante)* di Sigmund Freud<sup>6</sup>, dove viene distinto il sentimento d'inquietudine provocato dal perturbante da altre emozioni come il disagio, l'angoscia, la paura, il terrore e l'orrore. *Das Unheimliche* per Freud ha una natura ambigua, che riguarda un sentimento al confine tra timore e ribrezzo ed è collegato proprio alla risonanza di qualcosa di familiare in un oggetto o una situazione estranea. Questo risulta evidente anche dalla semantica della parola tedesca stessa, composta infatti da *Heimlich*, che ha il significato di clandestino e di segreto (sinonimo nel tedesco moderno è *Geheim* che significa, appunto,

<sup>6</sup>S. FREUD, *Das Unheimliche*, in O. RANK - H. SACHS (Hg.) *Imago. Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften*, V. 5/6, Wien 1919, 297-324.

segreto) e ha come radice *Heim*, vale a dire casa<sup>7</sup>. L'*Unheimliche* sarebbe da considerare, dunque, come il disvelarsi di qualcosa di inaspettato, sconosciuto e segreto nel cuore stesso di una dimensione familiare. Questo particolare sentimento caratterizza alcune forme di manifestazione del fenomeno dell'estraneo nella fenomenologia di Waldenfels. Secondo Waldenfels, l'elemento scatenante che porta a questo tipo di esperienza è generato da un intreccio originario tra i poli apparentemente opposti di ciò che è familiare e di ciò che non lo è. Infatti, egli ritiene che «l'estraneità [...], non la incontriamo solo negli altri, ma inizia in casa nostra come estraneità di me stesso o come estraneità di noi stessi»<sup>8</sup>. E ancora: «Gli altri entrano non per caso nella mia sfera del proprio (*Eingensphäre*), piuttosto io non appartengo mai del tutto a me stesso»<sup>9</sup>. In questo modo Waldenfels vuole sottolineare l'esistenza di una forma di individualità molto diversa da quella esplicitata dalla categoria di soggetto, generalmente espressione di un'identità forte, di un Io padrone di se stesso e del mondo. Ciò che emerge nella sfera del proprio è una coscienza che si conosce e si vive in un processo di auto-attribuzione identitaria, nel quale è continuamente posta in relazione all'altro da sé: il corpo, gli altri e il mondo. Solo in questo modo un'autentica esperienza dell'estraneo, che implica la risonanza del familiare nell'assolutamente altro e dell'assolutamente altro nel familiare, può essere possibile. Il sé espresso dalla sfera del proprio non domina ciò che lo circonda e neppure è padrone di ciò che lo costituisce. In quanto espressione di un'identità «debole» la cui emergenza è dovuta a un costante processo di relazione con l'alterità, la sfera del proprio è a sua volta attraversata da correnti di estraneità. Momenti dell'estraneo in questo senso sono quelli, ad esempio, della nascita, del nome proprio, della madrelingua, oltre quello della morte<sup>10</sup>. Tutti fenomeni che riguardano la sfera soggettiva, ma che il soggetto non sceglie perché, al contrario, li subisce. Il sé è in questo senso sempre presso sé e contemporaneamente fuori di sé, perché costituito in egual misura dalla relazione con se stesso e l'alterità<sup>11</sup>. Il motivo principale di questa inversione di prospettiva che rende l'io frammentato tra dimensioni di sé che non controlla pienamente è il ruolo attribuito al corpo.

<sup>7</sup> S. FREUD, *Das Unheimliche*, 301-303. Cf. a riguardo C. RESTA, *L'estraneo. Ostilità e ospitalità nel pensiero del Novecento*, il Melangolo, Genova 2008, 51-63.

<sup>8</sup> Traduzione italiana mia. «Fremdheit, die durch die Art ihres Zugangs bestimmt ist und nicht vorweg ein gesichertes Terrain des Eigenen, ein „Eigenheitssphäre“ voraussetzt, begegnet uns nicht nur in Anderen, sie beginnt im eigenen Haus als Fremdheit meiner selbst oder als Fremdheit unserer selbst», B. WALDENFELS, *Topographie des Fremden*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> Traduzione italiana mia. «Die Anderen treten nicht zusätzlich in meine Eigenheitssphäre ein, sondern ich gehöre mir nie ganz selber», B. WALDENFELS, *Das leibliche Selbst*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2000, 44. Cf. F. MENGA, *The Paths of the Alien. On the Philosophy of Bernhard Waldenfels*, in *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics*, XIII, 1, 2011, 7-15.

<sup>10</sup> F. MENGA, *Né prima né l'ultima parola. Il discorso dell'estraneo di Bernhard Waldenfels*, in B. WALDENFELS, *Fenomenologia dell'estraneo*, 157-176, qui 163f.

<sup>11</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2002, 206.

Waldenfels rifiuta l'idea di un "soggetto incarnato", che evoca il movimento di un nucleo egologico preformato gettato in una dimensione materiale, per abbracciare quella di una coscienza già da sempre data in un corpo<sup>12</sup>. Per questo Waldenfels, utilizza il termine *leibliches Selbst*, che indica un sé corporeo costituito attraverso la relazione con gli altri e il mondo. Waldenfels scrive:

«Il dato di fatto che noi siamo affetti da ed esposti a qualcosa di estraneo all'io non dipende né dal nostro sapere né dalla nostra volontà, dunque dalla cosiddetta coscienza, bensì rimanda al nostro corpo. La dinamica ciclica del corpo, infatti, include senz'altro tutto ciò che ha a che fare con me, senza però che esso venga da me prodotto»<sup>13</sup>.

A questo punto si impone un ultimo chiarimento sulla concezione di corpo e corporeità. Qui gioca un ruolo fondamentale la differenza, già sottolineata da Edmund Husserl, di due termini tedeschi quasi intraducibili: *Körper* e *Leib*. *Körper* è il corpo materiale è come tale può essere riferito anche alle cose. Quando viene usato in relazione a un essere vivente, questo termine pone l'accento sulla parte concreta, ossia il sostrato biologico, come tessuti e organi e gli attributi fisici come il peso, l'altezza etc. Con *Leib* è indicato invece il corpo propriamente vissuto, il corpo senziente, con le sue percezioni, sensazioni, emozioni, memorie. Tutti gli esseri viventi sono caratterizzati da questo doppio aspetto, che per Waldenfels mantiene una grande importanza. Seguendo l'esempio di autori cardine nella sua analisi filosofica, quali Plessner e soprattutto Maurice Merleau-Ponty, egli rifiuta, infatti, di considerare solo la sfera senziente del *Leib* volendo integrarla con il piano del corpo materiale<sup>14</sup>. Questo porta a una concezione della corporeità (*Leiblichkeit*) intesa come intreccio tra queste due dimensioni, espresso in tedesco con l'accorpamento dei due termini nell'espressione *Leibkörper*. Il mantenimento della dimensione materiale nel sé corporeo evita, secondo Waldenfels, che il discorso filosofico ricada nell'analisi narcisistica dei vissuti di un soggetto slegato dalla materia. Waldenfels afferma:

«L'essenza complessa di un *Leibkörper* non include solo il corpo vissuto, attraverso il quale percepiamo e manipoliamo le cose e nel quale esprimiamo noi stessi e influiamo l'uno sull'altro, essa include altresì l'apparato fisiologico, compresi quei processi neurologici e genetici attraverso i quali il nostro comportamento viene non solo realizzato, bensì anche, entro una certa misura, formato. Tutto ciò appartiene a noi, ma in forma di una vicinanza scemante e di una lontananza crescente. Io ho tutto il diritto di designare un cervello come il *mio* cervello.

<sup>12</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Fenomenologia dell'estraneo*, 80.

<sup>13</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Fenomenologia dell'estraneo*, 86.

<sup>14</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Fenomenologia dell'estraneo*, 82.



Dobbiamo solo tener presente che ciò che appartiene a me non sta *eo ipso* a mia disposizione, come se fossi il proprietario del mio corpo»<sup>15</sup>

Il binomio *Leibkörper*, dunque, porta all'evidenza una forma primaria di non coincidenza con noi stessi, dal momento che include una dimensione che resta al di fuori della presa cognitiva del soggetto. La coscienza espressa nel *Leib*, dal canto suo, non coincide con l'Io, essendo una forma di corpo cosciente che in quanto tale è sempre posto nella relazione con l'altro da sé<sup>16</sup>. Questo comporta una concezione relazionale della corporeità (*Leblichkeit*) intesa non come sfera chiusa, ma come soglia tra il sé e il mondo. Dove il sé non rappresenta una dimensione separata coinvolta in un secondo momento nella relazione con l'esterno, ma viene costituito dalla relazione stessa<sup>17</sup>.

Per spiegare questa situazione esistenziale Waldenfels fornisce diversi esempi, tra i quali quello della percezione. In questo caso, infatti, il sé non svolge il ruolo della cabina di controllo, ma piuttosto assume quello di ricettore e reattore degli stimoli che lo colpiscono e lo attraversano<sup>18</sup>. Rifacendosi alle analisi di Merleau-Ponty<sup>19</sup>, Waldenfels pone l'accento sulla dimensione passiva della percezione, che si esprime già nel livello immediato dei sensi. Nella vista, ad esempio, non sono solo io a compiere l'atto di vedere, ma è prima di tutto qualcosa che viene alla vista, che si imprime sulla mia retina<sup>20</sup>. Questa dimensione patica del soggetto è espressa dal sé corporeo<sup>21</sup>.

«Corporeità ed estraneità sono strettamente intrecciate l'una con l'altra. L'estraneità si presenta essa stessa corporeamente, ovvero come presenza in carne e ossa [...]. Un essere corporeo, da parte sua, non è mai pienamente presso di sé»<sup>22</sup>.

Possiamo dunque vivere l'esperienza dell'estraneo, con il sentimento perturbante che comporta, perché l'estraneo non arriva da fuori, ma ha origine in

<sup>15</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Fenomenologia dell'estraneo*, 95-96.

<sup>16</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Das leibliche Selbst*, 266.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. M. SUMMA, *Gefühl, Emotion und Erinnerung beim traumatisierten Selbst. Eine Frage der Kohärenz?* in R. ESTERBAUER - P. SCHMIDT (Hg.), *Bodytime. Leib und Zeit bei Burnout und in anderen Grenzerfahrungen*, Tübingen, München 2016, 307-329.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. STERNAGEL, *Bernhard Waldenfels – Responsivität des Leibes*, in E. ALLOA – T. BEDORF – C. GRÜNY – T. KLASS (Hg.), *Leiblichkeit. Geschichte und Aktualität eines Konzepts*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2019, 115-129.

<sup>19</sup> Soprattutto *Fenomenologia della percezione*

<sup>20</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Sinnenschwellen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1999, 126.

<sup>21</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Fenomenologia dell'estraneo*, 81.82. Per il concetto di Leib come "terza via tra soggetto e oggetto" si veda anche: B. WALDENFELS, *Antwortregister*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1994, 464-465.

<sup>22</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Fenomenologia dell'estraneo*, 79.

noi stessi. E ha questa origine in noi, proprio perché siamo sempre già costituiti, attraverso la nostra corporeità, dall'altro da noi: la materia, gli altri e il mondo. Nei paragrafi successivi si approfondirà la descrizione delle forme viventi di Plessner per suggerire come l'animalità possa essere considerata a sua volta una dimensione estranea e allo stesso tempo costitutiva del *leibliches Selbst*.

### 3. LE CATEGORIE DEL VIVENTE E L'UNITÀ PSICOFISICA

Nella sua opera principale dedicata alla biofilosofia *I gradi dell'organico e l'uomo*<sup>23</sup>, Plessner parla di categorie del vivente, che non sono da intendersi in mero senso biologico, poiché non riguardano solo la dimensione materiale di un corpo. Nell'intento di Plessner le categorie rappresentano, viceversa, qualcosa che investe la modalità di esistenza delle forme di vita. Egli sottolinea, infatti, una differenza tra l'organizzazione biologica di un organismo e la sua particolare modalità di stare al mondo. L'idea che sta alla base di questa argomentazione è che gli esseri viventi sono sempre espressione di qualcosa di più rispetto alle mere componenti materiali, di cui sono comunque costituiti. L'esistenza di un corpo vissuto (*Leib*) è caratterizzata da percezioni, sensazioni ed emozioni che non possono essere spiegate solo dal mero dato biologico. Inoltre, queste sensazioni e percezioni implicano una soggettività in grado di esperirle.

La constatazione che gli esseri viventi sono corpi particolari, diversi dalle semplici cose, non implica, viceversa, la dimenticanza della dimensione materiale che costituisce il corpo. A questo proposito Plessner conia il celebre concetto di posizionalità. Questo termine indica una categoria "neutra" ossia capace di racchiudere in sé il doppio aspetto del corpo fisico (*Körper*) e del corpo vissuto (*Leib*). In questo modo la sua analisi evita il rischio di ricadere in una forma di dualismo tra aspetti spirituali e materiali, pur mantenendo la distinzione dei due livelli, che infatti non scompaiono, ma vengono intrecciati in una categoria capace di contenerli entrambi. In quanto categoria neutra che unisce gli aspetti fisici ed esperienziali, la posizionalità rappresenta un'unità psicofisica ed esprime il modo di stare al mondo di ogni essere vivente<sup>24</sup>. Dal momento che gli esseri viventi sono però molteplici, anche la posizionalità non sarà una struttura statica valida per tutti. Ogni organismo vive, infatti, a seconda delle caratteristiche fornite dalla propria specifica posizionalità, che si esprime non solo nell'intreccio tra dimensione materiale e corpo vissuto (*Leibkörper*), ma anche nel rapporto con

<sup>23</sup> H. PLESSNER (1928), *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2019; qui citato principalmente nella traduzione italiana a cura di Vallori Rasini, H. PLESSNER; *I gradi dell'organico e l'uomo*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Sull'unità tra fisico e psichico negli esseri viventi cf. anche H. PLESSNER (1925), *Die Deutung des mimischen Ausdrucks. Ein Beitrag zur Lehre vom Bewußtsein des anderen Ichs*, in H. PLESSNER, *Ausdruck und menschliche Natur*, *Gesammelte Schriften VII*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2006, 67-129, qui 122-125.

l'ambiente circostante. In quest'ottica, Plessner definisce gradi dell'organico proprio i diversi modi di manifestarsi della posizionalità del vivente, che pone un organismo allo stesso tempo in relazione con se stesso e con l'ambiente.

Pur considerando la possibilità di forme intermedie, Plessner inizia la sua analisi con la netta distinzione tra corpi inanimati e corpi viventi, alla quale segue la suddivisione delle forme viventi nei due macro-regni vegetale e animale<sup>25</sup>. Le piante sono caratterizzate da una posizionalità definita "aperta". Questa è espressione di una forma di vita ancora radicalmente dipendente dall'ambiente circostante, in cui i confini tra corpo e ambiente non sono ben definiti.<sup>26</sup> All'animale è viceversa attribuita una forma di vita "chiusa". Il termine chiusa indica secondo Plessner la struttura dell'organizzazione animale, costituita da una corporeità autonoma, che si muove e interagisce con ciò che lo circonda. Plessner commenta:

«Mentre la forma aperta consente che l'organismo, con tutte le sue superfici contigue all'ambiente, sia il portatore delle funzioni, la forma chiusa dovrà manifestarsi come una reclusione, possibilmente rigida, del vivente rispetto al suo ambiente. Questa reclusione ha il significato di un inserimento indiretto nel *medium*»<sup>27</sup>.

Oltre a essere chiusa, la forma di vita dell'animale è centrata. Questo centro va inteso in senso sia biologico che esistenziale: in quanto forma organica caratterizzata da un nucleo di mediazione dei feedback esterni o da un sistema nervoso centrale, ma anche in quanto forma di vita raccolta intorno a un nucleo interno e sensiente. A differenza delle piante che rimangono a un grado per così dire inferiore di individualità, non raggiungendo un livello di autonomia e unità psicofisica, la forma di vita animale si dà pienamente come *Leib*, corpo vissuto. In quanto *Leib*, essa è un corpo cosciente delle sue percezioni e sensazioni e soggetto delle sue azioni. Infatti, «l'animale ha e domina la propria corporalità e con essa il campo che gli è dato»<sup>28</sup> e per questo «non è solo un Sé avente, ma un sé di tipo particolare, un sé riflessivo, un Se stesso»<sup>29</sup>. Plessner afferma:

<sup>25</sup> «La bipolarità del mondo organico non impedisce l'esistenza di forme di passaggio tra gli estremi», H. PLESSNER, *I gradi dell'organico*, 259.

<sup>26</sup> «È aperta quella forma che inserisce l'organismo, in ogni sua esternazione vitale, immediatamente nell'ambiente e lo rende una parte non indipendente del ciclo vitale a lui corrispondente», H. PLESSNER, *I gradi dell'organico*, 244.

<sup>27</sup> *Ivi*, 251. «La forma chiusa è quella mediante cui l'organismo, con tutte le sue manifestazioni vitali, si inserisce nell'ambiente in modo mediato» (*ibidem*).

<sup>28</sup> *Ivi*, 262.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*. Nella complessa articolazione del libro *I gradi dell'organico* Plessner fa una distinzione tra forma di vita animale chiusa ma decentrata e forma di vita animale chiusa e centrata. La prima sarebbe la forma di manifestazione tipica degli animali cosiddetti inferiori, ossia gli invertebrati senza un sistema nervoso centralizzato. La seconda è quella degli animali con un

«L'animale avverte e agisce, il proprio e l'estraneo gli sono dati come chiaramente distinti in zone. Dall'estraneo lo separa la frattura in virtù della quale esso ha e avverte ciò che gli è dato come esterno alla corporalità. Esso esiste nel proprio in quanto domina immediatamente il corpo. Il fatto che possa dominare il corpo, poiché, differenziato da esso e distanziato, l'animale è la propria corporalità, costituisce il carattere posizionale dell'animale; esso è il portatore della propria esistenza e tuttavia la sua esistenza non gli è data, non è per lui osservabile. A chi, dunque, dovrebbe essere data?»<sup>30</sup>.

L'ultima domanda introduce l'analisi della forma di vita umana in relazione a quella animale.

#### 4. L'INDIVIDUO SENZA PERSONALITÀ E "L'EMIGRANTE DELLA NATURA"<sup>31</sup>

Se l'organizzazione della forma di vita animale è centrica, ossia organizzata attorno a un nucleo cosciente nel corpo, Plessner definisce la posizionalità dell'essere umano, invece, come eccentrica, ossia sdoppiata tra un centro corporeo e un polo virtuale in cui dimora la coscienza riflessiva. Questo vuol dire che la coscienza umana non si dà a partire dal centro corporeo, ma è letteralmente ex-centrica o decentrata. Se l'animale viceversa vive come unità psicofisica monolitica, l'uomo vive come unità psicofisica, ma con una coscienza non direttamente immersa nel corpo ed espressa da esso<sup>32</sup>. Grazie a questa particolarità, la coscienza umana al contrario di quella animale ha lo spazio necessario per ripiegare su se stessa e diventare pienamente riflessiva. Per Plessner:

«L'animale esiste a partire dal suo centro, vive nel suo centro, ma non vive come centro. Esperisce contenuti nel campo circostante, proprio ed estraneo; può anche acquistare il dominio sulla propria corporalità e formare un sistema riflessivo, un Se

sistema nervoso centrale. Solo questi ultimi secondo Plessner possono essere considerati come una forma di sé legato a una coscienza corporea. Gli invertebrati sarebbero invece espressione solo di una forma di coscienza ancora più elementare, legata soprattutto alla sfera senso-motoria e senza coscienza di sé.

<sup>30</sup> Ivi, 263.

<sup>31</sup> „Der Mensch ist der Emigrant der Natur“, H. PLESSNER (1945), *Mensch und Tier in Conditio humana*, Gesammelt Schriften VII, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1983, 52-66; qui 64.

<sup>32</sup> H. PLESSNER (1965); *Zur Frage der Vergleichbarkeit tierische und menschliche Verhalten*, in *Conditio humana*, 284-293, qui 291.

stesso, ma non “si” vive [...]. il corpo complessivo non è ancora diventato pienamente riflessivo»<sup>33</sup>.

L'animale è dunque una forma di vita che vive a partire da un nucleo soggettivo cosciente – un sé –tuttavia ignaro di se stesso. Esperisce il corpo e l'ambiente, ma non si esperisce, non si riconosce in quanto soggetto di percezioni, azioni, emozioni. Manca all'animale, dunque, la relazione con il proprio sé. «Il soggetto è nascosto a se stesso: esso semplicemente ha la sua corporalità ed è assorbito nella centralità spazializzante e temporalizzante del vivere soggettivo senza esperirla, e a partire da essa è un puro Me, non un Io»<sup>34</sup>. Il *puro me* della coscienza animale non ha né il tempo né la distanza, sembra suggerire Plessner, per riflettere su se stesso e di conseguenza riconoscersi e così facendo porsi come un soggetto nel senso dell'Io.<sup>35</sup> Secondo Plessner, solo l'uomo è in grado di riconoscere se stesso come una soggettività, di pensare e dire “Io”. Ma questa possibilità non gli è data grazie al possesso di qualche facoltà considerata superiore o qualche specifica caratteristica spirituale. Essa è piuttosto la conseguenza di una modifica nella forma posizionale stessa, che da centrica diviene eccentrica:

«Posizionalmente si ha una triplice determinazione: il vivente è corpo, nel corpo (come vita interiore o anima) e fuori del corpo, come punto di vista da cui derivano entrambi. Un individuo posizionalmente caratterizzato in questo triplice modo si dice *persona*. È il soggetto del suo vivere, delle sue percezioni e delle sue azioni, delle sue iniziative. Esso sa e vuole. La sua esistenza è veramente posta nel nulla»<sup>36</sup>.

Posizionalità eccentrica significa dunque non abbandonare la modalità di esistenza corporea, ma essere allo stesso tempo oltre. Il nulla in cui si posiziona la coscienza eccentrica rispetto al corpo rappresenta il “salto” dalla soggettività animale a quella pienamente umana. Se l'animale rimane un puro me, dunque, perché assorbito nell'orizzonte corporeo, l'uomo raggiunge la compiuta formazione di un Io grazie a questa mancanza nella sua costituzione e nella sua esistenza: questo nulla in cui dimora l'autoriflessione.

<sup>33</sup> H. PLESSNER; I gradi dell'organico, 312.

<sup>34</sup> Ivi, 296.

<sup>35</sup> «Gli animali vivono in questo rapporto e- nella misura in cui appartiene al medesimo livello- anche l'uomo. Ma solo l'uomo lo sa» H. PLESSNER (1942), *Lachen und Weinen*, in: *Ausdruck und menschliche Natur*, *Gesammelte Schriften VII*, Shurkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1982, qui nella traduzione a cura di Vallori Rasini, H- PLESSNER, *Il riso e il pianto*, Bompiani, Milano 2007, 79.

<sup>36</sup> H. PLESSNER, I gradi dell'organico, 317. Cf. M. WUNSCH, *Personale Lebensform. Zum Personbegriff der Philosophische Anthropologie*, in *Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie* 10, 2016/2, 233-249; V. RASINI, *L'eccentrico. Filosofia della natura e antropologia in Helmuth Plessner*, Mimesis, Milano 2013.

Questo posizionamento nel nulla garantisce inoltre la libertà dell'essere umano rispetto alla vita animale, che viceversa viene principalmente diretta «dal potere anonimo dell'istinto (*der anonymen Macht des Instinkts*)»<sup>37</sup>. L'uomo è legato al qui e ora, è legato al suo corpo, ma non esiste solo in relazione ad esso. Grazie alla non dipendenza dalla sfera prettamente corporea, l'uomo non vive in un ambiente, ma nel mondo: «Al vincolo ambientale dell'animale si contrappone l'apertura del mondo umano»<sup>38</sup>. Questo riferimento a una forma di vita legata più alle dinamiche istintuali che alla libertà individuale porta Plessner a tracciare una netta differenza tra l'animale come individuo e l'uomo come persona<sup>39</sup>. Caratteristica della persona è di vivere in un mondo comune (*Mitwelt*) connotato in senso culturale (*Kulturwelt*)<sup>40</sup>. Al contrario, l'animale è considerato come un "individuo senza personalità" che vive in una relazione immediata con il corpo e l'ambiente, mentre l'essere umano, in quanto persona, abita un mondo culturale sganciato da leggi istintuali e per questo viene considerato da Plessner come un "emigrante della natura".

## 5. IL POLO OPPOSTO

La dimensione esistenziale descritta nel paragrafo precedente viene considerata da Plessner nei termini di una "frattura": tra avere ed essere un corpo, tra la corporeità materiale (*Körperlichkeit*) e vissuta (*Leiblichkeit*). Plessner afferma infatti che: «questa frattura costituisce l'elemento imperscrutabile del rapporto dell'uomo con il proprio corpo»<sup>41</sup>. Soffermiamoci maggiormente sull'aggettivo "imperscrutabile" che spicca in questa citazione. Posto che una frattura c'è – intesa non come momento di contrapposizione dualistica, ma di salto e distanza tra due componenti ad ogni modo in continuità tra loro – che cosa costituisce l'imperscrutabilità nel rapporto tra l'uomo e il proprio corpo? La presenza di una frattura, infatti, non implica necessariamente che l'ombra proiettata da un lato sia così intensa da non lasciar vedere quello opposto. Se siamo sulla riva di un fiume, per così dire, possiamo osservare l'altra. Ma non è questo il caso nell'uomo per Plessner. Nella sua analisi, infatti, è come se l'ombra gettata da uno dei due poli –

<sup>37</sup> H. PLESSNER (1966), *Ungesellige Geselligkeit. Anmerkungen zu einem Kantischen Begriff*, in *Conditio humana*, 294–306, qui 299.

<sup>38</sup> H. PLESSNER (1969), *Homo absconditus*, in *Conditio humana*, 353–366, qui 355.

<sup>39</sup> H. PLESSNER (1966), *Ungesellige Geselligkeit* in *Conditio humana*, 294–306, qui 299. Sull'importanza e la particolarità del concetto di Persona in Plessner Cf. P. H. KRÜGER, *Homo absconditus*. Helmuth Plessners Philosophische Anthropologie im Vergleich, De Gruyter, Berlin 2019, 404–405.

<sup>40</sup> Sulla differenza tra animale come mera individualità e l'uomo come persona si veda anche l'analisi di Edmund Husserl contenuta nel volume XV dell'*Husserliana*, E. HUSSERL, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass, Dritter Teil: 1929–1935*, *Husserliana XV*, Nijhoff, The Hague 1973, 164–181.

<sup>41</sup> H. PLESSNER, *Il riso e il pianto*, 63.

quello eccentrico – fosse così grande e intensa da lasciare l'altro – quello del sé corporeo – il più delle volte nell'oscurità. Uno dei motivi per questa particolare situazione è costituito proprio dalla forma animale a cui l'esistenza umana resta vincolata.

Come già accennato, l'avvento della coscienza eccentrica non può avvenire senza l'ancoraggio al corpo, inteso sia come sostrato materiale sia come sé corporeo. Come coscienza posta nel nulla, per essere al mondo l'Io ha bisogno di un corpo; il quale sussiste nel mondo come corporeità, ossia come *Leib*, corpo vissuto e senziente. Abbiamo visto nel paragrafo precedente come questa forma di corporeità resti vincolata alle caratteristiche della posizionalità animale. Il fatto che il dato dell'eccentricità *non può infrangere la centralità* vuol dire che nel movimento della decentralizzazione, che pone l'io come pienamente cosciente, la forma animale resta incisa in quella umana. Plessner afferma:

«Se la caratteristica di essere fuori di sé rende l'animale uomo, allora è chiaro, dato che con l'eccentricità non diviene possibile alcuna nuova forma di organizzazione, che quest'ultimo deve rimanere animale sul piano corporeo. Le caratteristiche fisiche della natura umana hanno però soltanto un valore empirico. L'essere umano non è connesso con alcuna configurazione determinata e potrebbe perciò anche darsi [...] in una quantità di configurazioni non coincidenti con quelle note. Il carattere dell'uomo è legato soltanto alla forma di organizzazione centralizzata che fornisce la base per la sua eccentricità»<sup>42</sup>.

Se la forma di vita umana non può darsi senza il rapporto con l'organizzazione centralizzata, in ultima analisi, l'uomo non può svincolarsi dalla relazione con l'animale che è in lui. Questo animale in quanto espressione della posizionalità centrata esprime una modalità di esistenza specifica: quella di una corporeità cosciente, che si relaziona al *medium* circostante a partire dal centro senziente nel corpo. È questa particolare forma di esistenza cosciente, ma non ancora pienamente riflessiva che fa dell'animale, come visto, un puro me. Possiamo dire dunque che l'animale nell'uomo è un me dietro o accanto l'io, oppure il me da cui prende le mosse l'io. Me e io si pongono a loro volta in due dimensioni spazio-temporali differenti: quella del qui e ora del corpo, il primo, e quella del non-luogo virtuale e altrove temporale il secondo. L'uomo è l'unità dei due poli, centrico ed eccentrico, o meglio, con Plessner, si può affermare che l'uomo è la realizzazione (*Vollzug*) di questa unità in un movimento che oscilla tra la corporeità e la coscienza riflessiva, tra me e io. Il problema è che l'uomo, in quanto coscienza che esiste nello iato tra centro corporeo e virtuale e che ha consapevolezza di sé non nel corpo, ma nel polo eccentrico, non può tornare pienamente nel corpo nel modo della coscienza animale. Una volta fatto il salto e

<sup>42</sup> H. PLESSNER, I gradi dell'organico, 317.

aver raggiunto un livello di coscienza riflessivo, connotato dalla distanza da se stesso, il soggetto non può guardarsi indietro. Questo porta alla situazione che possiamo definire di non-coincidenza a sé. L'uomo è il suo corpo, ma non coincide con esso così come non coincide con la pura sfera egologica. La sua esistenza si dà come una continua relazione tra poli diversi. L'uomo stesso non è altro che l'attuazione presente e incarnata di questa relazione. Se, da un lato, questa situazione garantisce la ricchezza delle possibilità del mondo umano, intesa come creatività, linguaggio, cultura ecc., dall'altro è motivo di una profonda insicurezza esistenziale. A questo proposito scrive Plessner:

«La testimonianza dell'evidenza interiore non elimina il dubbio sulla veracità del proprio essere, non aiuta a superare la scissione germinale che attraversa l'essere un Sé dell'uomo in quanto eccentrico; così che nessuno sa di se stesso se è ancora colui che piange e ride, pensa e prende decisioni, oppure se quest'ultimo è già scisso da lui, è l'altro in lui, la sua immagine rovesciata e forse il suo polo opposto»<sup>43</sup>.

Cerchiamo di analizzare i diversi termini in gioco nell'ultima frase di questa citazione. Con l'espressione *der Andere in ihm* (l'Altro in lui) può essere considerata l'influenza sociale che costituisce l'uomo in quanto persona. Con *Gegenbild* (immagine speculare, tradotta in italiano con l'espressione "immagine rovesciata") viene generalmente indicata quella riflessa allo specchio, profondamente legata in Plessner alla posizionalità eccentrica da un lato e alla dimensione sociale dall'altro<sup>44</sup>. *Gegenpol* significa letteralmente "polo opposto", così come riportato anche nel testo italiano. Ma come si può intendere il riferimento a questo "polo opposto" (*Gegenpol*)? Se ci atteniamo all'analisi dei *I gradi dell'organico* esposta sino ad ora, possiamo ipotizzare che Plessner si riferisca con il termine *Gegenpol* proprio al centro corporeo animale che continua a dimorare nel corpo umano e resta in relazione preriflessiva con il polo eccentrico. Plessner arriverebbe a postulare dunque l'esistenza di una coscienza corporea, modulata nella forma di vita centrica dell'animalità, che resta come base e controparte della coscienza pienamente riflessiva.

I prossimi paragrafi saranno dedicati a fornire un esempio pratico di come questa esperienza dell'animalità nel sé corporeo possa darsi e di come possa essere descritta da un punto di vista fenomenologico, sempre attraverso l'analisi di Plessner e Waldenfels. L'esempio preso in considerazione sarà quello dei casi di non riconoscimento allo specchio. I momenti in cui noi come esseri umani non ci

<sup>43</sup> Ivi, 332. «L'esistenza corporea è perciò per l'uomo un rapporto, in sé non univoco ma duplice; è un rapporto tra sé e sé (più precisamente tra lui e se stesso). Può pertanto restare indefinito chi si trovi in questa relazione», H. PLESSNER, *Il riso e il pianto*, 67.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. a riguardo H. PLESSNER (1965); *Zur Frage der Vergleichbarkeit tierischen und menschlichen Verhaltens*, in *Conditio humana*, 284-293, qui 290-292.



riconosciamo allo specchio saranno messi a confronto con il non riconoscimento allo specchio delle scimmie, come riportato dagli esperimenti più famosi a riguardo. L'analisi incrociata di questi due fenomeni si propone di fornire un esempio dell'intreccio delle diverse forme di coscienza nella corporeità.

## 6. L'ESPERIENZA DEL NON RICONOSCERSI ALLO SPECCHIO

Waldenfels analizza l'esperienza del non riconoscersi allo specchio attraverso l'aneddoto, che fornisce il filosofo Ernst Mach. In *Analyse der Empfindungen* (1922) Mach racconta come, nel salire su un autobus, abbia scambiato il suo riflesso nel finestrino per un altro uomo<sup>45</sup>. Questo il famoso aneddoto: «Un giorno, dopo un faticoso viaggio notturno in treno, salii assai stanco su un omnibus, proprio mentre dall'altro lato saliva un altro uomo. 'Che maestro di scuola malandato sta entrando!', pensai. Ma ero io stesso, poiché di fronte a me si trovava un grande specchio. L'habitus di classe mi era dunque molto più familiare del mio habitus particolare»<sup>46</sup>.

Waldenfels interpreta questo aneddoto attraverso l'ottica della sua fenomenologia dell'estraneo, per dimostrare la sua tesi dell'estraneità a se stessi, veicolata dalla dimensione corporea. Infatti lui sostiene che “quando mi sorprendo del mio riflesso al finestrino, scopro una certa estraneità in me stesso”.<sup>47</sup> In questa prospettiva, nel momento in cui non mi riconosco allo specchio, mi vedo come un altro, nel senso che riconosco un riverbero dell'alterità che dimora in me stesso. L'egemonia del sé, che secondo Waldenfels si dà come processo di autoattribuzione, crolla e mi riconosco come estraneo a me stesso. Infatti, come visto in precedenza, il concetto di straniero di Waldenfels denota un'esperienza originaria, pre-riflessiva, di qualcosa che non proviene interamente dall'esterno, ma ha origine nella sfera dell'io corporeo<sup>48</sup>. Per Waldenfels, l'esperienza del riconoscersi allo specchio diventa esemplare per spiegare quella dell'estraneo nel proprio corpo. Ciò che mostra l'esperienza del non riconoscersi allo specchio è la non linearità dell'identità. Detto

<sup>45</sup>Lo stesso esempio di Mach viene usato da Freud in una nota del saggio Il perturbante in *Das Unheimliche*, in *Imago. Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften*, V. 5/6, Internationale psychoanalytischer Verlag, Wien 1919, S. 320.

<sup>46</sup>„Ich stieg einmal nach einer anstrengenden nächtlichen Eisenbahnfahrt sehr ermüdet in einen Omnibus, eben als von der anderen Seite auch ein Mann hereinkam. ‚Was steigt doch da für ein herabgekommener Schulmeister ein‘ dachte ich. Ich war es selbst, denn mir gegenüber befand sich ein großer Spiegel. Der Klassenhabitus war mir also viel geläufiger, als mein Specialhabitus“ (in testo trad. mia).

<sup>47</sup>„Der Spiegel hat aber eine andere Funktion als die des schlichten Identifizierens. Wenn ich mich bei meinem Blick ins Schaufenster überrasche, entdecke ich eine gewisse Fremdheit an mir selbst“ Bernhard Waldenfels, *Topographie des Fremden*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1997, S. 33.

<sup>48</sup>Waldenfels 1997, S. 44.

semplicemente: il fatto di non appartenere mai completamente a me stesso: «ma questo io non è semplicemente in relazione con se stesso, si ritira contemporaneamente da se stesso. Il 'ritirarsi da sé / sottrarsi a sé significa che sono anche sempre estraneo a me stesso [...]. Per il momento mi limito a queste allusioni, che indicano una 'non coincidenza nella coincidenza'»<sup>49</sup>. Questa non-coincidenza nella coincidenza a sé stessi è la fonte scatenante del fenomeno del diventare estranea dell'esperienza nel guardarmi allo specchio e non riconoscermi. Per tornare all'esempio di Mach:

«Egli scoprì ovviamente qualcosa di sé nell'immagine speculare. Si è visto come un Altro nello specchio, e questo presuppone fin dall'inizio un certo misconoscimento di sé. Solo così si può sbagliare del tutto e giungere alla conclusione che la persona specchiata è un Altro, e un certo Altro; non si sarebbe certo scambiato per una donna o una lucertola»<sup>50</sup>.

Si noti il riferimento all'importanza della somiglianza, o della vicinanza della forma percepita alla propria corporea, nelle ultime frasi di questa citazione. Mach, infatti, non può scambiarsi per un essere vivente completamente diverso dalla sua costituzione corporea. Come mostrato nei capitoli precedenti, il fenomeno del diventare estranea dell'esperienza di sé si dà soltanto nell'intreccio chiasmatico dei poli opposti di familiarità-estraneità; vicinanza-lontananza. Vorrei sottolineare questo dettaglio perché esprime il senso dell'esperienza dello straniero di Waldenfels. L'estraneo appare sempre in questo movimento di distanza e vicinanza, di somiglianza e differenza, in un modo che sospende ogni pretesa di attribuzione identitaria, ma che resta comunque collegato alla prima prospettiva della coscienza percipiente.

Come può questo fenomeno del non riconoscersi allo specchio essere messo in relazione con l'esperienza dell'animalità del corpo come esperienza dell'estraneo nel corpo? Per spiegarlo, analizzerò nel prossimo paragrafo per prima cosa i risultati dei più famosi esperimenti di riconoscimento e non riconoscimento allo specchio nelle scimmie antropoidi. In conclusione, metterò i risultati di questi esperimenti in relazione all'analisi di Plessner e Waldenfels sull'estraneità come componente della dimensione corporea. Infine, dimostrerò come questa forma di estraneità, anche nel caso del non riconoscersi allo specchio, possa essere messa in relazione a una forma di animalità nel *Leib*, che si dà come espressione di una coscienza corporea che fa parte dello stesso essere vivente ma che la coscienza corporea percepisce come irrimediabilmente estranea.

<sup>49</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels, *Das leiblichen Selbst*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2000, S. 44.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, S. 53

## 7. CASI NON UMANI DI NON RICONOSCIMENTO ALLO SPECCHIO

Per portare avanti la tesi che il fenomeno del non riconoscimento allo specchio faccia capo a una forma di coscienza animale nel corpo, debbo adesso soffermarmi sul fenomeno dello specchio dal punto di vista dell'individualità animale. Per far questo prendo ad esempio gli esperimenti celebri con il nome di *Mirror Tests* volti sulle scimmie antropoidi<sup>51</sup>. Il primo scienziato a trasformare il test dello specchio in un metodo e a ottenere risultati positivi con le scimmie antropoidi è stato lo psicologo americano Gordon Gallup. Il *Mirror Test* consiste nel marcare un punto sulla fronte dell'animale con una vernice inodore. L'individuo viene poi posto di fronte a uno specchio. Questa procedura viene solitamente eseguita quando l'animale è sedato<sup>52</sup>.

Se, dopo essersi svegliato davanti allo specchio, l'individuo si accorge immediatamente della macchia sulla fronte, percezione che di solito è accompagnata dal gesto istintivo di toccare la macchia, il test dello specchio si considera superato. Si presume in questo caso, infatti, che l'individuo abbia riconosciuto se stesso nell'immagine speculare, dal momento che ha toccato la fronte e non la superficie del vetro come conseguenza dello stimolo visivo rappresentato dalla macchia. Se, invece, gli individui non prestano attenzione alle macchie o toccano la superficie dello specchio, il test fallisce. Alla luce di queste ricerche volte a testare la facoltà di riconoscimento di sé in animali non umani, gli studi di Gallup sono giunti a una conclusione interessante: alcuni scimpanzé e oranghi, sia allevati in cattività che cresciuti in natura, hanno risposto correttamente, cioè hanno toccato con sicurezza il punto sulla fronte mentre guardavano con attenzione il loro riflesso. Gallup riporta che questo gesto è stato poi solitamente accompagnato dal gesto di portare le dita alla bocca per assaggiare la sostanza estranea e/o per pulire la macchia<sup>53</sup>. Ai fini del mio discorso, tuttavia, va notato che le scimmie che hanno superato il test dello specchio erano precedentemente abituate all'oggetto. Infatti, Gallup e il suo team sottolineano che tutti gli esemplari sono stati esposti a specchi collocati nelle loro gabbie per dieci-quindici giorni prima dell'esperimento con la macchia sulla fronte. Questo ha dato agli animali l'opportunità di familiarizzare con il manufatto e con il proprio riflesso prima del test. Gallup osserva che nei primi giorni in cui gli animali sono esposti allo specchio, a prevalere è ciò che lui definisce "il comportamento sociale". Il termine comportamento sociale si riferisce a uno spettro di azioni diverse attraverso le quali gli animali entrano normalmente in contatto con un conspecifico. Con il passare dei giorni, questi comportamenti vengono

<sup>51</sup> Vgl. Julian Paul Keneen, *The Face in the Mirror. The Search of the Origins of Consciousness*, HarperCollins, New York 2003.

<sup>52</sup> Gordon Gallup, Susan Suarez, *Self-recognition in Chimpanzees and Orangutans, but not Gorillas*, in *Journal of Human Evolution*, Academic Press, London 1981, S. 175-180; S. 181.

<sup>53</sup> Gordon Gallup, *Chimpanzees: Self-Recognition*, Science, New York 1970, s. 85-86; S. 87.

gradualmente sostituiti da altri. L'animale inizia a concentrare l'attenzione su se stesso. Da questo momento in poi, lo specchio viene utilizzato per una serie di attività come: toelettatura, rimozione dei residui di cibo dai denti, esplorazione dei genitali, ecc. Gallup commenta:

«When initially exposed to mirrors most animals with adequate visual sensitivity respond as if the image represented another animal. After prolonged confrontation with mirrors animals may learn to recognize their own images and cease to respond socially to the reflection, since this is what presumably occurs in man [...]. In all instances of self-directed behaviour, the self is the referent through the reflection, whereas in cases of social behaviour the reflection is the referent»<sup>54</sup>.

Tralasciando le complesse questioni della consapevolezza di sé nella soggettività non umana e l'importanza di imparare a riconoscersi allo specchio<sup>55</sup>, è secondo me rilevante il semplice fatto del non riconoscimento iniziale. Questo mancato riconoscimento iniziale indica un modello di comportamento coerente negli animali che tendono a vedere inizialmente un altro conspecifico nell'immagine riflessa. L'ipotesi è che questo sia anche il caso del mancato riconoscimento allo specchio negli esseri umani. In questi casi, il soggetto cosciente non risponde allo stimolo visivo, mentre a reagire sembra essere più che altro una forma di coscienza corporea, che percepisce l'immagine di fronte a sé ma non si riconosce in essa. Questa forma di coscienza corporea può essere rappresentata seguendo l'analisi di Plessner come il polo opposto della coscienza riflessiva umana. Come già detto, questo polo opposto coincide con la forma di organizzazione animale, centrata sul corpo. Dunque possiamo ipotizzare che questo polo animale nel corpo umano reagisce inizialmente con le caratteristiche della reazione animale allo specchio, cioè come un non riconoscimento di sé. Pertanto, in questi momenti vediamo un'altra persona nello specchio, proprio come gli animali vedono un altro membro della loro specie. Agli occhi di Plessner, sarebbe come se la coscienza eccentrica umana proiettata dal corpo si impigliasse nuovamente nel corpo per qualche istante. Così immersa nel corpo, la coscienza mancherebbe il salto fuori da sé. Per questo motivo, non è possibile, anche se solo per un momento, che l'uomo si riconosca all'esterno, cioè allo specchio. In questo senso, l'essere umano reagisce inizialmente come un puro me corporeo e non come un Io. Per questo motivo, viviamo questi momenti con uno stato d'animo che ci turba profondamente. La sensazione di inquietudine è da

<sup>54</sup> Gallup, 1970, S. 86; Vgl. Gallup, Suarez 1981, S.175.

<sup>55</sup> Vgl. Joan Gray Snodgrass, Robert Thompson (Hrsg.), *The Self across Psychology. Self-Recognition, Self-Awareness and the self-concept*, The New York Academy for Science, New York 1997; Sue Taylor Parker, Robert Mitchell, Maria Boccia (Hrsg.), *Self-awareness in Animals and Humans: Developmental Perspectives*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.

ricollegarsi alla percezione momentanea di una forma altra di coscienza in noi stessi.

In questo senso, gli esseri umani riconoscono in sé una certa estraneità che è legata all'animalità - o al me animale - ed è ancorata come dimensione corporea al confine tra identità individuale e estraneità anonima dell'organico. Questa dimensione corporea è estranea all'io riflessivo cosciente e tuttavia, in quanto parte della corporeità, costitutiva dello stesso io.

## 8. L'ANIMALITÀ COME ESPERIENZA DELL'ESTRANEO

Alla luce degli elementi precedentemente analizzati è possibile mettere in relazione quanto detto circa la forma di vita animale come puro me corporeo in Plessner con il fenomeno dell'estraneo analizzato da Waldenfels. Plessner considera l'animalità del corpo come una figura dell'altro nell'uomo (*der Andere in ihm*) fino a ipotizzare che questa dimensione corporea possa ogni tanto rispondere al posto della coscienza soggettiva umana. Questo è evidente nell'affermazione contenuta nell'opera *I gradi dell'organico* analizzata alla fine del paragrafo precedente, in cui Plessner parla dell'insicurezza dell'uomo di fronte alla sua corporeità, soprattutto nelle situazioni-limite in cui non è sicuro chi sia a rispondere, se il soggetto o "forse" il suo polo opposto. Nel *forse* spicca tutta l'enigmaticità di questa relazione in cui la forma di vita animale resta come un puro me corporeo dal quale prende le mosse l'io, ma al quale il soggetto non può più fare ritorno. Detto in altri termini: una volta fatto il salto dell'eccentricità non possiamo più aderire completamente al corpo, non possiamo viverci come pura corporeità. La nostra relazione con il corpo sarà sempre mediata. In questa mediatezza l'io perde il contatto diretto con il puro me, che resta come una presenza nel corpo non del tutto afferrabile e conoscibile. L'ipotesi è che questa dimensione corporea animale possa essere meglio descritta con il riferimento all'estraneità e non semplicemente all'alterità. In quanto espressione di una forma d'esistenza simile, ma allo stesso tempo radicalmente diversa, l'animalità nel corpo va oltre le connotazioni che generalmente caratterizzano la figura dell'alterità e dell'Altro. La tesi che qui emerge è che nella radicale inconoscibilità di questo polo opposto si esprima piuttosto una delle dimensioni dell'estraneo in noi, per come vengono descritte nella fenomenologia di Waldenfels.

Oltre al sentimento del perturbante che accompagna il manifestarsi dell'esperienza dell'estraneo, come visto nel primo paragrafo, un'altra caratteristica principale descritta da Waldenfels in relazione al fenomeno dell'estraneo è la dimensione patica. Waldenfels descrive, infatti, l'esperienza dell'estraneità utilizzando i termini "pathos" e "risposta"<sup>56</sup>. Ciò che viene

<sup>56</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Fenomenologia dell'estraneo*, 51 f.

sperimentato come straniero ha il carattere di un evento dal momento che non appare come un "oggetto". La prima manifestazione dell'estraneo si dà infatti come *Widerfahrnis*, parola intraducibile che si può rendere in italiano con l'evocazione di un evento che "ci accade", "ci succede" o "ci colpisce". Questo qualcosa che ci investe è l'elemento scatenante del *pathos* legato all'esperienza dell'estraneo. Secondo Waldenfels, noi siamo chiamati a rispondere a questo *pathos*. Per questo motivo, la fenomenologia di Waldenfels propone un'etica responsiva, fondata sul primato della risposta. Questa risposta però non è rivolta a qualcosa o qualcuno di preciso o intelligibile, ma si dà come reazione al sentimento scatenato dall'esperienza dell'estraneo. «Soltanto nel rispondere a ciò da cui siamo colpiti entra in scena ciò che ci colpisce come tale»<sup>57</sup>. L'estraneo dunque, in quanto tale, resta sempre oltre la nostra cognizione e l'esperienza che ne possiamo fare è solo in senso negativo, nell'effetto che sentiamo risuonare in noi nei momenti del *Widerfahrnis* e del *Pathos*. Nella risposta noi non cogliamo l'estraneo in quanto tale, dal momento che la risposta arriva sempre dopo (*zu spät* - troppo tardi), il momento del *Widerfahrnis* e in quanto reazione provocata dall'esperienza dell'estraneo non ha origine in noi ma inizia sempre altrove (*irgendwo*)<sup>58</sup>. Per questo, nell'esperienza dell'estraneo noi non cogliamo mai l'estraneo in quanto tale, ma solo la traccia che ne resta nel momento del *pathos*<sup>59</sup>.

Nella sua visione di una soggettività considerata all'accusativo e al dativo, impegnata a rispondere a ciò che la investe, Waldenfels ci offre dunque lo spunto non solo di considerare il puro me animale nel corpo come un momento dell'estraneità che ci costituisce, ma anche di immaginare una via per una risposta, intesa nel senso di una nuova etica interspecifica<sup>60</sup>. Waldenfels stesso sembra suggerire una simile possibilità, dal momento che «l'estraneità nel cuore di me stesso dischiude nuovi percorsi verso l'estraneità dell'altro»<sup>61</sup>. Come si è cercato di indicare in questo articolo, uno di questi nuovi percorsi potrebbe aiutare a ripensare la relazione con l'assolutamente altro dall'uomo: ossia l'animale accanto all'uomo, a partire proprio dal riconoscimento e dall'esperienza dell'animale nell'uomo.

<sup>57</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 59. Cf. F. MENGA, Né prima né l'ultima parola, 167.

<sup>58</sup> M. FLATSCHER, *Antwort als Verantwortung. Zur Dimension des Ethisch-Politischen in Waldenfels' Phänomenologie der Responsivität*, in *Etica&Politica/Ethics&Politics*, XIII/1, 2011, 99-133, qui 105-106.

<sup>59</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Responsive Ethik zwischen Antwort und Verantwortung*, in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Nr. 58/1 2010, 71-81, qui 77 f. Cf. a riguardo I. YAMAGUCHI, *Die paradoxe Simultaneität inmitten des Widerfahrnisses* in *Etica&Politica/Ethics&Politics*, XIII/1, 2011, 271-290.

<sup>60</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Einführung: Ethik vom Anderen her*, in B. WALDENFELS - I. DÄRMANN (Hg.), *Der Anspruch des Anderen. Perspektiven Phänomenologische Ethik*, Fink, München 1998, 7-14, qui 13.

<sup>61</sup> B. WALDENFELS, *Fenomenologia dell'estraneo*, 97.

# CONTINGENZA, NECESSITÀ E LIBERTÀ NEL PENSIERO DEL GIOVANE LABRIOLA

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyse Labriola's 1873 writing, *Della libertà morale*, focusing on two issues that, although the critical literature has already investigated in a rigorous manner, nevertheless require some clarification. In more detail, the first part of the discussion aims to clarify Labriola's position on *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*, showing how it bases its origin on the fundamental assumption of Spinozism: the negation of the contingency and transcendence of the possible with respect to the real. The second part, on the other hand, aims to clarify the semantic characterisation of the concepts of determinism, mechanical determinism and predeterminism (the latter also associated by Labriola with finalism). In the light of the philosopher's reflections, it is possible to note how the last two terms - predeterminism and finalism respectively - although they may appear incompatible on superficial analysis, in reality they lead to the same theoretical outcome: the denial of freedom and the complexity of states of consciousness in the name of a superior and transcendent order.

## KEYWORDS

Contingency, determinism, predeterminism, moral freedom, clarification.

## 1. LABRIOLA E SPINOZA: LIBERO ARBITRIO, CONTINGENZA E LIBERTÀ CONCRETA

Nello scritto del 1873, Labriola, ricalcando la prospettiva filosofica di Spinoza<sup>1</sup>, nega il concetto di libero arbitrio in quanto facoltà di poter attuare decisioni in modo completamente indifferente rispetto alle idee che si presentano alla

1 Nel 1866, Labriola, in occasione del concorso bandito dalla facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell'Università di Napoli, scrisse il saggio intitolato *Origine e natura delle passioni secondo l'Etica di Spinoza*. Il testo offre una descrizione sistematica dei punti essenziali del capolavoro filosofico di Spinoza e, senza tuttavia offrirne una rielaborazione personale, risulta essenziale per comprendere al meglio la posizione che Labriola assume in merito al libero arbitrio nello scritto del 1873.

coscienza. Esso, a suo avviso, nasce da un pregiudizio metafisico che vede erroneamente contrapposti da un lato un volere incondizionato, associato ad una sostanza spirituale; e, dall'altro, una sequenza di appetiti - successivamente mediati dalle rappresentazioni dell'intelletto o idee - che il libero volere può assecondare o respingere in maniera completamente disinteressata.<sup>2</sup> Tuttavia, sottolinea Labriola, collocare la volontà come sostrato permanente da una parte e l'intelletto e le inclinazioni dall'altra, non ci mette affatto nelle condizioni di poter articolare un giusto concetto di libertà, giacché il *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*, ossia «la facoltà naturale dell'uomo di decidersi fra due o più motivi indifferentemente, senza che nella natura dei motivi, nel loro grado di forza o di intensità, ci sia niente che debba rendere necessaria la decisione»<sup>3</sup>, non è altro che il frutto di un'astrazione della mente, la quale pretende in maniera illegittima di indurre da fenomeni psichici più complessi e determinati concetti astratti e generici (quali, per esempio, la volontà e l'intelletto)<sup>4</sup>.

A questo proposito Labriola sottolinea, infatti, che «chi osserva sé stesso nell'atto della determinazione, prima e dopo di quell'istante in cui la decisione si puntualizza, ha quasi sempre nell'ambito della coscienza la rappresentazione di una possibilità eccedente l'atto determinato al quale si decide».<sup>5</sup> Poniamo, per esempio, che mentre io stia scrivendo un saggio la cui stesura definitiva è richiesta l'indomani stesso, venga distratto da un rumore improvviso. A quel punto, una volta dato l'appetito- o stimolo esterno - la coscienza si rappresenterebbe due possibili risoluzioni: o continuare a scrivere, giacché la scadenza è vicina; o, d'altra parte, interrompere la scrittura per andare a verificare la causa di questo rumore

2 In questo passo è possibile intravedere un significativo punto di convergenza tra Labriola e Spinoza, in particolare per quanto concerne il rapporto tra l'intelletto e la volontà. Spinoza, infatti, sostiene che non esista alcuna facoltà assoluta di volere e di non volere, e che ciascuna volizione non rappresenti altro che un atto di affermare e negare. L'affermazione «la somma degli angoli interni di un triangolo equivale a 180°», infatti, alla luce della presente prospettiva, non può essere affatto concepita senza l'idea del triangolo stesso; e dunque, ne consegue che tra l'idea e la singola volizione determinata sussista un rapporto di tipo analitico. Quest'ultima non è niente oltre l'idea che la implica. Cfr. B. Spinoza, *Etica*, a cura di G. Gentile, Milano, Bompiani, 2020, *PARS II*, PROP. XLIX, p. 217.

3 A. Labriola, *Della libertà morale*, in *Tre saggi sul determinismo*, a cura di I. Volpicelli, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2021, p. 31.

4 Cfr. A. Labriola, *Origine e natura delle passioni secondo l'Etica di Spinoza*, in *Tra Hegel e Spinoza, Scritti 1863-1868*, a cura di A. Savorelli e A. Zanardo, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2015, pp. 77, 210. Per quanto concerne i «concetti generici» o generali, sembra che Labriola abbia estrapolato l'espressione dagli scritti di Fischer, il quale designa con «Gattungsbegriffe» gli universali o concetti che, a differenza delle *notiones communes*, risultano inadeguati, confusi, prodotti dell'immaginazione e non dell'intelletto. A partire da questa riflessione è possibile constatare, dunque, la presa di posizione di Labriola contro lo scolasticismo e con esso tutti quei processi di astrazione che accomunano gran parte del pensiero metafisico occidentale.

5 A. Labriola, *Della libertà morale*, op. cit., p. 32.



disturbante. «Però avvenuta che sia la decisione»<sup>6</sup>, ci tiene a ribadire Labriola, «in qualunque dei due stati io mi trovi in seguito, se mi ricorre alla mente la rappresentazione dello stato opposto, io dico: era anche possibile fare il contrario. Certo era possibile: ma se mi fossi deciso contrariamente, era anche possibile l'opposto; ma che faccio io ora di questa possibilità?»<sup>7</sup>. A partire da questa riflessione si può constatare il carattere problematico del libero arbitrio: esso fa del “poter fare altrimenti”, e dunque di quella «possibilità eccedente l'atto determinato al quale si decide»<sup>8</sup>, una stabile ed astratta potenza dello spirito, che può sussistere indipendentemente dall'effettività del proprio esercizio. Tuttavia, sottolinea Labriola, questa non è altro che un'«astrazione della nostra mente: ma non come elemento reale della decisione stessa, in quanto atto particolare, perché nessuna cosa o atto è sé stesso più la possibilità sua».<sup>9</sup>

Qualora, dunque, io smettessi di scrivere e conseguentemente mi pentissi, l'idea di quella possibilità di fare altrimenti che è solita presentarsi nella mia coscienza come mera astrazione slegata da ogni contenuto empirico<sup>10</sup>, potrebbe

6 *Ibidem.*

7 *Ibidem.*

8 *Ibidem.*

9 *Ivi*, p. 33. Quest'affermazione è emblematica e permette di comprendere al meglio l'influenza del pensiero di Spinoza su Labriola. Dire che qualsiasi cosa o atto non sia «sé stesso più la possibilità sua» equivale a dire che, di fatto, la contingenza non esiste. Un fatto, dunque, in quanto compiuto, è necessario, e non poteva attuarsi in nessun'altra modalità che non sia quella che appare sul piano immanente dell'esperienza. Circa la definizione di contingenza – che per Spinoza è il prodotto di un difetto della conoscenza – si legga B. Spinoza, op. cit., PARS II, PROP. XXXIII, SCHOL. I, p. 75: «Poiché mediante ciò che precede ho mostrato più chiaramente della luce meridiana che nelle cose non esiste assolutamente nulla per cui possano essere dette contingenti, voglio ora spiegare in poche parole che cosa dobbiamo intendere per contingente; ma prima che cosa dobbiamo intendere per necessario e per impossibile. Una cosa è detta necessaria, o in rapporto alla sua essenza, o in rapporto alla sua causa. L'esistenza di una cosa, infatti, segue necessariamente o dalla sua essenza e dalla sua definizione o da una causa efficiente data. Una cosa, poi, è detta impossibile per le medesime ragioni, cioè, o perché la sua essenza o definizione implica una contraddizione, o perché non è data nessuna causa esterna che sia determinata in modo da produrre tale cosa. Ma una cosa è detta contingente per nessun'altra causa se non in relazione a un difetto della nostra conoscenza. Una cosa, infatti, della quale ignoriamo che la sua essenza implica una contraddizione, o della quale sappiamo bene che essa non include nessuna contraddizione, senza potere tuttavia affermare nulla di certo sulla sua esistenza perché ignoriamo l'ordine delle cause, una tale cosa non ci può mai sembrare né necessaria né impossibile, e perciò la chiamiamo contingente o possibile».

10 Cfr. I. Kant, *Critica della ragion pura*, a cura di G. Gentile, Bari, Laterza, 2005, p. 347. Sebbene la letteratura critica non faccia luce su questo tema, per quanto concerne la negazione del libero arbitrio sul piano dell'esperienza, è possibile intravedere un punto di convergenza tra Labriola e il Kant della prima *Kritik*, il quale scrive in modo esplicito, che se per libertà si intende «la facoltà di incominciare da sé uno stato, la cui causalità, dunque, non sta a sua volta sotto un'altra causa, che la determini nel tempo secondo la legge della natura», allora questa non può essere un concetto empirico, bensì un'idea pura trascendentale. È vero, infatti, come diceva Labriola, che nell'atto della decisione io posso smettere di scrivere e simultaneamente pensare che avrei anche potuto non farlo; tuttavia, quel “poter non passare all'atto della decisione” nell'esperienza non appare affatto. Esso resta pur sempre

servirmi ad accrescere l'amore per la scrittura, oppure ad evitare che le sollecitazioni esterne possano condizionare nuovamente la mia scelta in un ipotetico contesto futuro.<sup>11</sup>

Ma nondimeno, in ultima istanza, questa non può affatto sussistere come possibilità effettiva e reale:

Davvero la teoria del libero arbitrio non è che il mito di questa possibilità: un mito filosofico e teologico, come tutti gli altri che sono nati da una scorretta esperienza della vita interiore; dalla fretta di concentrare in concetti generici gli stati reali della vita psichica; e dalla pretesa di attribuire a questi concetti generici una virtù generativa degli atti particolari dai quali sono stati astratti.<sup>12</sup>

Labriola, inoltre, nel sottolineare l'inconsistenza e contraddittorietà di quel processo di astrazione che fonda il *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*, ossia di quell'operazione concettuale che separa astrattamente l'agente (il soggetto della decisione) dall'atto della decisione stessa, ricava un'idea fortemente concreta di libertà, che tiene conto *in toto* della complessità e ricchezza dell'esistenza umana.<sup>13</sup> Infatti, scrive il filosofo, «quel volere che non si traduce in atto, perché in nessuna maniera si potrebbe tradurlo, non merita cotesto nome»<sup>14</sup>; e dunque, esso non può esprimersi adeguatamente nella vuota identità tautologica di  $A=A$ , ma solo nell'immediata coincidenza di ciò che è possibile con ciò che è effettivo.<sup>15</sup> In altri termini, la libertà del volere non si configura come una potenza astratta del fare, ma ha un contenuto determinato, è coscienza di volere «appunto quello che può»<sup>16</sup>, e in questo suo agire consapevole si pone un limite concreto che la contrappone al semplice arbitrio.<sup>17</sup>

un'astrazione della mente, poiché nell'esperienza tutto è determinato e il soggetto umano, in quanto centro delle deliberazioni, costituisce un punto di passaggio entro l'orizzonte di una catena causale di fatti. Egli, più propriamente, è il punto di passaggio di un'azione, ma non per questo ne costituisce il centro originario indeterminato.

11 La libertà di scelta non si esprime nei termini del "poter fare altrimenti". Ciascun atto volitivo è necessario e pieno in se stesso, ed è condizionato dalle cause antecedenti (o, in questo caso, dal vissuto psichico individuale). L'esperienza negativa che può derivare dall'interruzione della scrittura – per esempio, l'inadempienza rispetto alla scadenza prevista – potrebbe certamente servirmi ad agire con maggiore accortezza qualora mi ritrovassi nella stessa situazione in un ipotetico futuro. Tuttavia, quella possibilità di "aver potuto non interrompere la scrittura" resta pur sempre un'astrazione: essa, semmai, potrà essere definita reale unicamente a *partepost*, e dunque dopo essersi effettivamente compiuta nell'esperienza.

12 A. Labriola, *Della libertà morale*, op. cit., pp. 32,33.

13 Cfr. *Ivi*, p. 31.

14 *Ivi*, p. 29.

15 Circa il problematico rapporto tra possibilità ed effettività, cfr. R. Ronchi, *La rana e lo scorpione, Il canone della potenza*, Roma, Castelvechi, 2025, pp. 17,18.

16 A. Labriola, *Della libertà morale*, op. cit., p. 29.

17 Cfr. A. Labriola, *Origine e natura delle passioni secondo l'Etica di Spinoza*, op. cit. A proposito della vera libertà, che si distingue dal libero arbitrio e da quel volere che vuole tutto indiscriminatamente, insiste anche Spaventa. Si legge nella nota 70, in riferimento all'opera

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Alla luce di un'analisi problematica del presente tema, emergono due significativi punti di convergenza tra Labriola e Spinoza: il primo si ritrova certamente nella negazione del *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*<sup>18</sup>; il secondo riguarda più propriamente la negazione della contingenza<sup>19</sup>, concetto fondamentale per comprendere la genesi del concetto di libertà in Labriola. Quel “poter fare altrimenti” che emerge dalla riflessione a proposito dell'atto dello scrivere, infatti, altro non è per il filosofo che il frutto di un processo mentale che separa astrattamente il concetto di causa ed effetto, di possibilità ed attualità, di volontà e intelletto, concependo quest'ultime come unità sostanziali contrapposte.

Per Labriola, infatti, nessuna cosa o atto è «sé stesso più la possibilità sua»<sup>20</sup>, ma si realizza necessariamente nella sua pienezza e immanenza. Dunque, coloro che

spaventiana intitolata *Giordano Bruno, I. Principii della filosofia pratica*: «Sono molti i quali non sanno vedere la libertà che nel libero arbitrio. Io non nego il libero arbitrio, ma affermo che al di sopra di esso vi ha la libertà che è una cosa con la necessità: la necessità ragionevole. Il libero arbitrio è alla libertà, quello che l'intelletto è alla ragione. Il libero arbitrio opera ed ha la coscienza di poter operare il contrario; la libertà opera necessariamente, ma non cessa di essere libera, perché questa necessità è la sua stessa essenza, è la ragione. Nel libero arbitrio lo scopo dell'attività è finito, particolare, determinato, e però estraneo all'essenza dell'attività stessa; nella libertà lo scopo è assoluto, necessario, infinito, è la essenza stessa dell'attività». Alla luce della presente riflessione è possibile individuare un punto di connessione, per quanto concerne il problema della libertà, tra Hegel e Spinoza. Entrambi, negando la contingenza e riconoscendo il primato dell'effettività sulla relazione astratta tra causa ed effetto, propongono un modello di libertà incentrato sull'effettività e attualità dell'atto. La libertà, infatti, non è la coscienza di volere il contrario di ciò che si fa, ma si esprime unicamente nell'attualità di ciò che si fa e si può fare. La sua essenza è la sua stessa attività, e niente può trascendere l'attualità di questa attività. Questo punto è essenziale, e permette di tracciare una nuova linea nello studio della genealogia del pensiero di Labriola. Circa il concetto di effettività in Hegel, cfr. G. W. F. Hegel, *Scienza della logica, tomo secondo*, a cura di C. Cesa, Bari, Laterza, 2021, *SEZ. III, CAP. II*.

18 Cfr. A. Zanardo, *Il primo Labriola e Spinoza*, in *Filosofia e socialismo*, Roma, E. Riuniti, 1974, pp. 50,51. Sebbene dalla trattazione emerga che la negazione del libero arbitrio incondizionato costituisca il fondamento della convergenza tra Labriola e Spinoza, resta tuttavia poco chiarito il rapporto che sussiste tra la genesi del concetto di libertà in Labriola e la negazione della contingenza nel sistema filosofico di Spinoza. Si tratta di una componente essenziale che aiuta a fare maggiore chiarezza sul punto di convergenza teoretica tra i due filosofi: questi, infatti, non solo sono accomunati dal rigetto del libero arbitrio in quanto concetto astratto e contraddittorio, ma presuppongono come denominatore comune della loro riflessione la negazione della trascendenza metafisica e della contingenza (prospettiva, quest'ultima, che introduce una cesura irreversibile nei confronti della filosofia cartesiana e di tutta la tradizione medievale precedente). La stessa tesi, sebbene anche in questa sede non venga approfondito il profondo legame che sussiste tra la contingenza e l'idea di un presupposto soggetto libero, razionale e dotato di *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*, è riproposta anche in G. Labica, G., Texier, *Labriola, d'un siècle à l'autre*, Paris, Meridiens Klincksieck, 1988, pp. 15,16.

19 Sul problema della contingenza e del rapporto tra possibilità e attualità nella storia del pensiero occidentale, cfr. R. Ronchi, *Il canone minore*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2017. In linea con quanto detto a proposito della contingenza, si veda anche la nota 9 del presente articolo.

20 A. Labriola, *Della libertà morale*, op. cit., p. 32.

sostengono il *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae* articolano la loro tesi a partire da un'illusione, una proiezione della coscienza, «che fa della semplice possibilità della decisione opposta, una potenza stabile e costante nella natura umana; o, come si dice, una facoltà originaria dell'anima». <sup>21</sup>

Sebbene questa prospettiva teorica costituisca il punto d'inizio della riflessione labrioliana sulla libertà, risulta tuttavia necessario introdurre alcune precisazioni: Labriola non intende in nessun modo fondare un'ontologia o un sistema filosofico chiuso, ma si limita ad integrare questa riflessione nella propria indagine sulla libertà del soggetto empirico-psicologico <sup>22</sup>. Spinoza, diversamente, colloca la negazione della contingenza all'interno di un più ampio orizzonte metafisico, che non può essere compreso senza un'adeguata analisi del suo sistema immanentistico e antireazionista. Dio, infatti, dice Spinoza, «non opera mediante la libertà della sua volontà» <sup>23</sup>, e

Tutte le cose, infatti, sono seguite necessariamente dalla natura data di Dio, e sono state determinate dalla necessità della natura di Dio ad esistere e operare in una certa maniera. Se, dunque, le cose avessero potuto essere di una natura diversa, o avessero potuto essere determinate ad operare in una maniera diversa, di modo che l'ordine della natura fosse diverso, anche la natura di Dio, dunque, potrebbe essere diversa da quella che attualmente è: e quindi anche quest'altra natura dovrebbe esistere, e, conseguentemente, potrebbero esserci due o più Dei, il che è assurdo. <sup>24</sup>

Pensare Dio come un essere dotato di volontà e, rispettivamente, la sua onnipotenza come un potere gravido di infinite possibilità di attuazione che tuttavia potrebbe anche non attualizzare, vorrebbe dire - per Spinoza - negarne l'onnipotenza stessa. Dio è *causa immanens*; e, dunque, in quanto causa, produce immediatamente un'infinità di effetti che derivano necessariamente dalla sua natura. <sup>25</sup>

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Nonostante, come traspare dalla descrizione, il pensiero di Labriola e Spinoza possano essere in parte accomunati da un megarismo <sup>26</sup> di fondo, occorre tuttavia non farsi trarre in inganno.

<sup>21</sup> *Ivi*, p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> La riflessione filosofica di Spinoza verte più propriamente sul reale, mentre Labriola sviluppa la propria indagine entro il perimetro della dimensione empirica e psicologica. Questa impostazione, come vedremo, è perfettamente compatibile con il suo approccio antispeculativo e concreto.

<sup>23</sup> B. Spinoza, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>24</sup> *Ivi*, p. 75.

<sup>25</sup> Sul rapporto tra contingenza, libertà, necessità e sulla negazione, da parte di Spinoza, della distinzione *trapotentiaabsoluta* e *potentia ordinata*, Cfr. V. Morfino, *Spinoza e la contingenza*, in *“Rivista di storia della filosofia”*, vol. 68, no. 1, Milano, Franco Angeli Srl, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. M. Cacciari, *Metafisica concreta*, Milano, Adelphi, 2023, pp. 157,158.

Labriola cerca infatti di mostrarci che la sua argomentazione a proposito degli atti deliberativi, non abbraccia totalmente il ferreo determinismo di Spinoza<sup>27</sup>, ma intende collocarsi in una posizione intermedia tra quelli che lui definisce, rispettivamente, indeterminismo e determinismo meccanico (in alcuni casi, come vedremo, assimilato al preterdeterminismo)<sup>28</sup>. Il primo fa riferimento al *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*, a quel “poter fare altrimenti” che esprime la possibilità reale di esercitare un volere indifferente e incondizionato. Il secondo riguarda la considerazione del mondo unicamente secondo la legge di causalità e, conseguentemente, risulta compatibile con l’applicazione di un modello analitico di causalità a tutti i processi della realtà (incluso il soggetto umano nella sua irriducibile particolarità e singolarità). Labriola prende le distanze dalla seconda posizione, perché, proprio per via del suo carattere rigorosamente astratto, risulta insufficiente ai fini di un’indagine che voglia spiegare la complessità della natura umana e la libertà del soggetto morale.<sup>29</sup>

Secondo il Cassinate infatti, la libertà non può ridursi - come vorrebbe Spinoza - semplicemente alla coscienza della necessità, e «l’uomo non si può considerare come la somma di uomo e coscienza di uomo»<sup>30</sup>, ma si caratterizza come uomo

27 Cfr. A. Zanardo, op. cit., pp. 53,54. In questa sede viene messa in luce l’evidente presa di distanza di Labriola dal “pieno determinismo” spinoziano.

28Cfr. G. Mastroianni, *I saggi di Antonio Labriola*, in “*Studi storici*”, a.VI, no. 2, Roma, Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, 1965, p. 333. In linea con quanto scritto nel testo a proposito della “posizione intermedia” di Labriola, Mastroianni scrive: «Il concetto della libertà che il Labriola viene elaborando negli anni dal 1862 al 1883, l’esclusione insieme, dell’indeterminismo e del suo opposto astratto, del determinismo meccanico, o esterno, sta in piedi soltanto se si ammette, che lo spirito “è coscienza non come semplice attenzione o ricognizione di quello che gli sta dinanzi, ma come memoria, e giudizio, e riflessione, e formazione dell’io; e soprattutto come valutazione estetica e morale». Si assiste dunque, come ribadisce chiaramente Mastroianni, al tentativo di Labriola di fornire un’alternativa coerente al determinismo meccanico e all’indeterminismo. In questa sede, tuttavia, il significato problematico del determinismo esterno e del preterdeterminismo non viene chiarito.

29 Cfr. A. Zanardo, op. cit., pp. 43,44. Zanardo, in queste due brevi pagine, contribuisce ad allargare significativamente lo spazio della riflessione: la divergenza teorica tra il Labriola dello scritto del 1873 e Spinoza, non solo si ritrova nei due differenti approcci al determinismo, ma si sostanzia anche a partire dal metodo prevalentemente storico e antispesulativo del primo. Questo è certamente vero: Labriola, in questa fase della sua elaborazione teorica, intende prendere le distanze da qualsiasi forma di pensiero sistematico che voglia sussumere la ricchezza del conoscibile entro un unico schema astratto, e colloca quindi sullo stesso piano e la prospettiva del determinismo assoluto accettata dalla scienza moderna - in cui lo stesso Spinoza risulta in qualche modo implicato - e, solo in parte, il sistema monistico di Hegel. Sebbene la distanza da quest’ultimo si percepisca, Labriola, come vedremo, non rigetta integralmente il suo pensiero, ma ne conserva saggiamente le parti essenziali al fine di costruire il suo discorso sulla libertà. Circa l’ambizioso tentativo, portato avanti da Labriola, di superare i due paradigmi epistemologici dominanti dell’epoca - positivismo e monismo totalizzante -, si veda anche il testo di G. P. Orsello, *Antonio Labriola, il pensiero del filosofo e l’impegno del politico nel centenario della morte*, Milano, LED, 2003, cap. I.

30 A. Labriola, *Della libertà morale*, op. cit., p. 46.

proprio perché la coscienza riflessa ne costituisce il *quid*<sup>31</sup>, permettendogli così di emanciparsi parzialmente dall'inamovibile regolarità della necessità naturale.

A partire da questa precisazione, la posizione intermedia di Labriola si fa più chiara e logicamente coerente: egli, infatti, non intende in nessun modo rigettare completamente la prospettiva deterministica e negare la necessità intrinseca ai processi naturali (dandola così vinta a chi sostiene la tesi astratta dell'indeterminismo)<sup>32</sup>; tuttavia, ci tiene a sottolineare con fermezza che esiste una rigorosa distinzione tra lo spazio della coscienza - il determinismo "interno" o psicologico - e il cieco impulso della natura (determinismo esterno).<sup>33</sup> Sebbene quest'ultimo non si possa negare, il primo assicura alla coscienza umana uno spazio di autonomia rispetto all'influenza del mondo esteriore.<sup>34</sup>

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Labriola, nel riconoscere la possibilità della libertà psicologica e morale, non solo prende le distanze dallo spiritualismo e dal positivismo astratto, ma contribuisce a tracciare una linea precisa di quella che dovrebbe essere la missione

31 Qui, però, si impone la necessità di un'ulteriore riflessione: quel *quid* che è stato chiamato in causa, ossia la coscienza in quanto capacità di riflessione, non va intesa come un dato originario astratto, ma si articola a *parte post* in un'esperienza vissuta. Su questo Labriola non transige, e resta deciso nel voler mostrare l'evidente inconsistenza di qualsiasi forma di "metafisica dell'autocoscienza".

32 Cfr. I. Volpicelli, *Herbart e i suoi epigoni*, Torino, Utet, 2003, p. 124. In questo passo viene chiarita ulteriormente la distinzione - per come viene concepita da Labriola - tra determinismo interno ed esterno, senza tuttavia analizzare le molteplici sfumature di significato che derivano dall'utilizzo di questi termini (in modo particolare il secondo, talvolta associato al predeterminismo).

33 Più precisamente, ciò che nella riflessione di Labriola costituisce il fattore determinante della distinzione tra uomo e natura, è rappresentato dallo sforzo appercettivo della coscienza umana. L'utilizzo di questa terminologia - in modo particolare del termine "appercezione" -, così come tutta la riflessione sull'etica e la psicologia, hanno visto la loro genesi a partire da un fruttuoso dialogo tra il Labriola e gli studiosi tedeschi della scuola herbartiana, come ampiamente testimoniato dallo stesso Labriola in A. Labriola, *Carteggio I, 1861-1880*, a cura di S. Miccolis, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2000.

34 Cfr. S. Natoli, *L'edificazione di sé, istruzioni per la vita interiore*, Bari, Laterza, 2020, p. 79. Sul presente tema - in modo particolare sul rapporto tra libertà, necessità e/o libertà interna ed esterna - si è espresso di recente anche Salvatore Natoli, sottolineando come in ogni possibile sistema, che definisce se medesimo nella relazione con il mondo esterno, «i nessi causali permangono, ma non nella forma lineare secondo cui, data una causa, deve conseguire di necessità un certo effetto, ma nel senso che, data una causa - qualunque essa sia -, l'effetto che essa consegue è quello di determinare l'organismo a *trovare dal suo interno* l'assetto funzionale a sé più favorevole. In sostanza non c'è - né può esserci - continuità tra gli *input* ricevuti e gli *output* emessi. Da ciò ne viene che una logica causale di tipo meccanico spiega certi tipi di relazioni ma non certe altre. Su questo la scienza contemporanea - e qui non voglio entrare nel dettaglio - si è diffusa ampiamente: nel mondo anglosassone, per esempio, si è preso a distinguere tra un *hard determinism* e un *soft determinism*, tra un determinismo assoluto e un determinismo morbido». Da ciò si evince, dunque, che il modello analitico di causalità non sia sufficiente per spiegare tutti i fenomeni, tra cui anche il soggetto umano con i suoi stati interiori.

etico-pedagogica dello Stato<sup>35</sup>. La libertà intesa come semplice assenza di impedimenti esterni - libertà negativa - non costituisce infatti l'autentica libertà, poiché non può esserci vera libertà senza «la coscienza della necessità morale della norma»<sup>36</sup> (libertà positiva).

In questa riflessione è contenuta implicitamente, in continuità con il pensiero etico hegeliano mediato attraverso il magistero di Spaventa, la critica ai presupposti teoretici del contrattualismo moderno e del liberalismo classico, che concepiscono la libertà nei termini di mera assenza d'impedimenti e fondano la propria idea di società a partire da un modello antropologico atomistico. Non a caso, Labriola, dirà più tardi (rispettivamente nella conferenza del 1899) di aver scritto fin dal 1873 «contro i principi direttivi dell'ordinamento liberale»<sup>37</sup>, confermando così una linea di continuità teorica<sup>38</sup> tra gli scritti morali del 1873-1878<sup>39</sup> e i saggi su *La concezione materialistica della storia*.<sup>40</sup>

35 Cfr. L. Dal Pane, *Antonio Labriola nella politica e nella cultura italiana*, Torino, Einaudi, 1975, p. 78. La stessa tesi sulla missione etico-pedagogica dello Stato, che riconosce anche nella religione una funzione essenziale nel contribuire a ridestare il pensiero etico, è confermata anche da V. Gerratana, in A. Labriola, *Scritti politici*, a cura di V. Gerratana, Bari, Laterza, 1970, pp. 28,29: «Solo in uno Stato corrispondente a questa missione pedagogica, scienza, morale e religione possono ritrovare la strada di uno sviluppo equilibrato».

36 A. Labriola, *Della libertà morale*, op. cit., p. 21.

37 A. Labriola, *Del socialismo*, in *Tutti gli scritti filosofici e di teoria dell'educazione*, a cura di L. Basile, Milano, Bompiani, 2014, p. 1106.

38 Su questo punto si è discusso molto. La stessa lettera di Labriola ad Engels del 3 aprile 1890, come testimoniato dall'*Epistolario 1890-1895* e ribadito altresì da N. Siciliani de Cumis in *Per una "Autobiografia intellettuale e politica di Antonio Labriola*, in *"Studi Storici"*, A. 26, no. 4, Roma, Fondazione istituto Gramsci, 1984, costituisce una tappa obbligata per comprendere la genealogia del pensiero di Labriola, che si articola in un'intersezione di autori che procede da Spinoza, Hegel e Herbart, per poi giungere fino a Marx. Questa linea è certamente utile per farsi un'idea generale dello sviluppo teoretico del Cassinate, tuttavia non basta: la questione è molto più complessa, intessuta di contraddizioni, cambi di paradigma, ripensamenti...Se ci si limita a questa rigida concettualizzazione, si rischia di non comprendere il vero messaggio del filosofo. Osservazioni simili a quelle esposte in questa nota si ritrovano in S. Miccolis, *Eugenio Garin interprete di Labriola*, in *"Rivista di storia della filosofia"*, vol. 63, no. 1, Milano, Franco Angeli Srl, 2008. In questa sede emerge una posizione critica di Garin, il quale, in opposizione alla linea interpretativa di Togliatti - che condivide in *toto* il contenuto della lettera del 3 aprile -, ritiene che l'evoluzione del percorso di Labriola non si articoli in un processo lineare fatto di compartimenti stagni; e che, tra l'altro, nel suddetto processo, egli non abbia mai preso seriamente in considerazione il pensiero di Hegel. Circa il carattere di organicità e di non compartimentazione astratta del pensiero di Cassinate, non vi è alcun dubbio. Per quanto riguarda l'ultimo punto, come vedremo, c'è ancora una questione aperta che potrebbe allargare lo spazio di riflessione della letteratura critica sul tema.

39 Cfr. A. Labriola, *Tre saggi sul determinismo*, op. cit. In seguito a *Della libertà morale* Labriola scriverà altri due saggi, nei quali cerca di chiarire - senza tuttavia modificare la sua posizione di partenza - le riflessioni elaborate a partire dal primo scritto del 1873.

40 Circa la critica astratta all'individualismo e il socialismo "non cosciente" di Labriola, cfr. A. Labriola, *La concezione materialistica della storia*, introduzione di E. Garin, Bari, Laterza, 1965, p. XII.

«La libertà politica»<sup>41</sup>, dice Labriola nella conclusione dello scritto del 1873,

Dalla quale abbiamo preso le mosse, non ha, dunque, valore senza la morale efficacia del carattere: e quando lo stato non è, o non si adopera ad essere somma e coordinamento di funzioni educative, la libertà riesce alla negazione di sé stessa.<sup>42</sup>

## 2. LABRIOLA, HEGEL E HERBART: PER UN SUPERAMENTO DEL CONCETTO DI DATO

Nonostante la presa di distanza di Labriola dal determinismo meccanico, resta tuttavia da chiarire il problematico rapporto che sussiste tra questo e quello che Labriola, nello scritto del 1873, definisce come predeterminismo. Nella fase iniziale della dissertazione i due termini vengono indubbiamente utilizzati per indicare il modello analitico di causalità;<sup>43</sup> tuttavia, questo non deve trarci in inganno. Il termine predeterminismo, infatti, nel corso dell'elaborazione intellettuale di Labriola assume svariate connotazioni semantiche, e viene introdotto anche per designare il carattere rigorosamente astratto e formale della morale Kantiana<sup>44</sup>:

Se è vero che nella sfera dell'esperienza, o come diceva Kant, del fenomeno, il volere è sempre determinato, e che l'atto della libertà, ossia l'atto del volere che si determina da sé è un atto trascendente la sfera finita del sapere umano; tanto è dire questo, quanto è dire che la moralità di ciascuno, guardata nella sua natura extratemporale, è affatto predeterminata; che il carattere cioè non è quello che

41 A. Labriola, *Della libertà morale*, op. cit., p. 110.

42 *Ibidem*.

43 Cfr. *Ivi*, pp. 44,45 - 48,49. In questo punto Labriola sembra assimilare il predeterminismo unicamente al naturalismo (o determinismo esterno).

44 Cfr. *Ivi* p. 81. In questa sede, la stessa critica è rivolta da Labriola a Schopenhauer. Scrive Labriola: «Si sa che per lo Schopenhauer il volere è dato: anzi è dato tanto, che è il principio stesso, il reale principio della sua metafisica: e che rispetto ad esso il conoscere (la coscienza) sta come derivato rispetto ad originario, come fenomeno rispetto ad essenza. Solo in quanto c'è la coscienza, c'è la possibilità che il volere umano venga determinato dai motivi – i quali sono la causalità stessa in quanto saputa *ab intrinseco* – e che esso non sia semplice *nisus* come la forza nell'ordine fisico. Il volere però come esso è, è dato sempre. Il carattere, nella dottrina dello Schopenhauer, non è quello che pare d'ordinario, ed è infatti; una somma di condizioni parte acquisite, parte originarie, parte mutabili, parte immutabili, ma è invece una condizione di essere extratemporale, staremmo per dire eterna, se nel concetto di eterno non si presumesse l'infinità immaginaria che deriva dalla rappresentazione di un tempo senza termine, il che contraddice al concetto della soggettività del tempo, secondo la dottrina dello Schopenhauer. Ecco come il determinismo, che per sé è fondato, diventa falso quando si traduce in predeterminismo: e specialmente quando il predeterminismo non riposi sopra una semplice affermazione generica, ma si deduca da tutto un complesso di dottrine metafisiche, frettolosamente messe a base di una concezione psicologica imperfetta e superficiale. Posto il carattere come assolutamente dato – questo è il concetto dello Schopenhauer – quello che a noi pare risoluzione, non è che semplice compenetrarsi del motivo dato nella coscienza, col volere in quantopredisposto *ab eterno*. Il carattere si mostrerà sempre e in ogni caso, quello stesso che s'è mostrato una volta; e non c'è mezzo di migliorarlo o di correggerlo».



apparisce nella sfera dell'esperienza, determinabile, ossia educabile, ma dato, assolutamente dato.<sup>45</sup>

Determinismo causale nella sfera dell'esperienza, predeterminismo nella sfera dell'incondizionato, compiono il fondamento teoretico della morale Kantiana.<sup>46</sup>

Ebbene, se analizzata attentamente, questa critica non ha come oggetto solo la morale kantiana, ma tutta quanta la metafisica<sup>47</sup>; e con essa la pretesa illegittima di sussumere la molteplicità dell'esperienza in un sistema monolitico, laddove tutto è, appunto, assolutamente dato e predeterminato<sup>48</sup>. In modo particolare, come possiamo vedere, la riflessione del Cassinate si focalizza sul concetto di dato; e su tutto ciò che nel linguaggio filosofico, in quanto preliminarmente dato, si pone in una dimensione trascendente rispetto al carattere processuale e mutevole dell'esperienza umana. Nel caso della morale kantiana, infatti, la concretezza dell'esperienza e il processo di costituzione del carattere sono annullati nella dimensione noumenica dell'io puro, astratto, e perciò aprioristicamente dato e predeterminato.<sup>49</sup>

45 *Ivi*, p. 55.

46 *Ibidem*.

47 È bene sottolineare che qui, più che alla metafisica *stricto sensu*, si fa riferimento al metodo che la presuppone e che ha contribuito a fare da sfondo a tutto quanto il pensiero filosofico occidentale da Parmenide fino a Kant e Fichte. Più rigorosamente, si fa riferimento al metodo dell'intelletto astratto (criticato soprattutto da Hegel); che, in quanto astratto, non concepisce il reale come un processo dinamico ed unitario, ma come una somma di cose isolate e date a priori.

48 Cfr. I. Kant, *Critica della ragion pratica*, a cura di V. Mathieu, Milano, Bompiani, 2017. Kant, nella seconda critica, postula Dio - oltre alla libertà e all'immortalità dell'anima, che gli sono coesenziali - in qualità di fondamento della stessa libertà sul piano fenomenico. Questo essere razionale, che in «altri termini è Dio», scrive Kant a p. 255, «è causa suprema della natura», «è un essere che causa la natura con intelletto e volontà»; e quindi, poiché è distinto dalla natura e non ne dipende in quanto soggetto finito e determinato, trascende la natura stessa e si svincola dalla legge di causalità. È proprio questa la contraddizione, che investe tutto quanto l'impianto epistemologico kantiano, su cui si sofferma Labriola: se io do per accertato il determinismo causale nella sfera dell'esperienza, per poter fondare una morale devo necessariamente presupporre un soggetto (Dio, o la libertà) preliminarmente dato, astratto, formale, che tuttavia si colloca in una dimensione trascendente rispetto ad essa e che abbia, scrive ancora Kant a p. 255, «una causalità conforme all'intenzione morale». Questo soggetto presupposto, dunque, sfugge al determinismo; e tuttavia - questa riflessione già contribuisce ad allargare lo spazio semantico del seguente termine - è predeterminato, proprio perché si colloca in una posizione supplementare rispetto al carattere finito e processuale dell'esperienza umana. Il predeterminismo, pertanto, non è unicamente assimilabile al determinismo esterno! Sul problematico rapporto tra libertà noumenica e libertà empirica si veda anche M. Mori, *Libertà, necessità, determinismo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2001, p. 37.

49 Cfr. S. Poggi, *Introduzione a Labriola*, Bari, Laterza, 1981, pp. 25, 29, 32. In questa sede Poggi mette certamente in evidenza la contraddizione tra il piano noumenico dell'io puro, trascendentale, e l'io empirico-psicologico (sul quale verte la riflessione di Labriola). Tuttavia non chiarisce il sottile rapporto di connessione tra il predeterminismo e la morale kantiana; e ciò risulta confermato dal fatto che Poggi, nel corso della sua elaborazione, si limiti ad associare il predeterminismo al determinismo meccanico (o esterno), trascurandone così la ricchezza semantica e tutte le implicazioni che ne conseguono.

\* \* \*

Sebbene la letteratura critica non abbia insistito su questo aspetto, è possibile intravedere nella critica labrioliana alla “datità” delle cose una riproposizione, mediata da Spaventa, e dell’apparato concettuale di Hegel<sup>50</sup> e dell’approccio metodologico di Herbart<sup>51</sup>. Entrambi sono accomunati, come testimoniato

50 Labriola abbandona la concezione finalistica e dialettica della storia propugnata dall’ultimo Hegel, quello delle *Lezioni sulla filosofia della storia*, tuttavia non abbandona definitivamente l’apparato concettuale hegeliano in quanto antidoto contro le astrazioni dell’intelletto. La stessa tesi, che conferma ulteriormente una linea di continuità – sotto alcuni aspetti – tra il Labriola degli scritti morali e il Labriola marxista, è sostenuta dal Cassinate in A. Labriola, *La concezione materialistica della storia*, op. cit. p. 222: «Tali maniere son contrassegnate da questi due caratteri: in prima dal fissare, come per sé stanti, e del tutto indipendenti l’uno dall’altro, quei termini del pensiero, i quali in verità son termini solo in quanto rappresentano i punti di correlazione e transizione di un processo; e, in secondo luogo, nel considerare quei termini stessi del pensiero come un presupposto, un’anticipazione, o anzi un tipo od un prototipo della povera e parvente realtà empirica. Nel primo rispetto, p. es., causa ed effetto, mezzo e fine, ragion d’essere e realtà, e così via, si presentano allo spirito soltanto come termini distinti, e quindi diversi, e alcune volte opposti; quasicché si desser cose, che siano di per sé esclusivamente cause ed altre che siano per sé esclusivamente effetti, e così di seguito. Nel secondo caso pare come se il mondo dell’esperienza ci si andasse disintegrando e scindendo innanzi agli occhi in sostanza ed accidenti, in cosa in sé e fenomeno, in possibilità ed ovvia esistenza». Questo genere di ragionamento, indubbiamente mutuato dall’apparato concettuale hegeliano volto a evidenziare il carattere problematico dell’intelletto astratto, è mediato dal confronto di Labriola con Engels, il quale espone gli stessi concetti nel capitolo IV dell’*Antidühring*, *La negazione della negazione* (dall’*Antidühring* di Engels, a pp. 137-146, della 3<sup>a</sup> ed., Stuttgart 1894), in A. Labriola, *Tutti gli scritti filosofici e di teoria dell’educazione* op.cit., pp. 1541, 1553.

A tal proposito, Labriola non dimentica di sottolineare quanto la struttura del linguaggio, articolato nel rapporto dualistico di soggetto-predicato, sia impattante in questo processo di astrazione. Il linguaggio, infatti, così articolato, tende a fare astrazione dalle condizioni particolari e a sussumerle in un unico nome o macrocategoria concettuale, che tuttavia pretende di essere parimenti distinta da esse e in relazione con esse. Lo stesso ragionamento si può applicare al concetto di volere libero: se io astraggo il volere dal suo esercizio effettivo, e quindi dalle particolari condizioni determinate in cui si esercita, ne ricavo un concetto astratto, il VOLERE, che in quanto semplice sostantivo e non più verbo – giacché il volere originariamente esprime l’azione del volere – perde il suo significato concreto. In ultima analisi è interessante notare come Labriola, nella sua presa di distanza dall’intelletto astratto e dalla metafisica, riproponga in qualche modo – seppur velatamente – la stessa critica alla contingenza, e il suddetto particolare traluce dalle ultime parole dell’ultima riga, dove si parla appunto di una SCISSIONE del mondo in «possibilità ed ovvia esistenza». Laddove, infatti, persiste una possibilità – o essenza logica e/ ontologica data, come per esempio il libero arbitrio – che antecede l’esistenza, permangono la contingenza e la trascendenza.

51 Cfr. G. P. Orsello, op. cit. In questo primo punto viene fatta chiarezza, come vedremo, sul carattere problematico del rapporto tra Labriola e la filosofia Herbartiana. A p. 18, Orsello scrive: «Tuttavia, va considerato il fatto del “rilievo contenutistico” che Labriola ricavò da Herbart, e dalla dottrina alla quale restò particolarmente sensibile. Rilievo contenutistico che, inoltre, lo richiamò alla cognizione esatta di ciò che la filosofia “non” doveva essere”; e cioè, “né sommo ed imperiale magistero su l’universo scibile”, né semplice anticipazione del pensiero sull’esperienza naturale, storica e sociale. Fu, quindi, l’acquisizione dell’esatta dimensione dei limiti del pensiero che, con l’herbartismo, si venne a chiarire in Labriola, soprattutto per gli elementi antimetafisici che tale

dall'opera di Spaventa su *Le prime forme fenomenologiche in Hegel e le prime nozioni metafisiche in Herbart*<sup>52</sup>, dalla constatazione della contraddittorietà del dato: elemento sostanziale che rappresenta un significativo punto di convergenza tra la prospettiva del “molteplice concreto” di Herbart e la dialettica di Hegel<sup>53</sup>. La presente osservazione è riconfermata dallo stesso Labriola nella *Prolusione* del 1887, dove, ripercorrendo con finezza la propria autobiografia intellettuale, scrive:

Per quanto io abbia per molti rispetti cambiato nel mio modo di concepire e d'insegnare, da che professo etica e pedagogia in questa Università, tengo però sempre fermo nell'indirizzo herbartiano di considerare la *metafisica, non come veduta del mondo per totalità, ma come critica e correzione dei concetti, che son necessari per pensare l'esperienza*.<sup>54</sup>

Ed è proprio a partire da qui che il *modus operandi* filosofico herbartiano, che si articola in un processo di correzione e rielaborazione razionale di concetti dati,

acquisizione recava con sé». E si noti bene: «elementi antimetafisici che tale acquisizione recava con sé», in riferimento alla presa di distanza dalla prospettiva astratta e intellettualistica della vecchia metafisica della “datità”, ormai superata da Hegel e Herbart.

52 Circa il rapporto tra Labriola, Hegel, Herbart e Spaventa, cfr. I. Volpicelli, op. cit. pp. 49, 50.

53 Cfr. A. Zanardo, op. cit., pp. 52, 53. In questa sede Zanardo ribadisce il punto di connessione tra Herbart e Labriola, e sottolinea come la critica di quest'ultimo al carattere problematico e contraddittorio del *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae* sia mediata – oltre che da Spinoza – dal patrimonio concettuale di Herbart, senza considerare tuttavia l'impatto del pensiero di Hegel. Scrive Zanardo a p. 53: «Si noti anche qui: ciò che avviene è in sostanza l'accedere di Labriola», e qui si riferisce proprio alla dissertazione del 1873, «a una concezione storicistico-dialettica della realtà (la storicità dialettica intesa nel senso di non separazione, di relazione). Questo accedere non ha tuttavia luogo attraverso la rielaborazione del patrimonio concettuale della dialettica hegeliana bensì attraverso la familiarizzazione con la rappresentazione herbartiana della vita psichica come una pluralità connessa, relata dai movimenti di autoconservazione e perturbamento dei suoi elementi».

54 A. Labriola, *I problemi della filosofia della storia (1887)*, a cura di N. Siciliani de Cumis, Napoli, 1976, p. 39. Osservazioni simili a quelle esposte sono presenti, come sottolinea anche L. Basile, nella recensione del maggio 1896 al libro di Max Kauffmann e alla rivista da lui stesso fondata, la «Zeitschrift für Immanente Philosophie», in A. Labriola, *Tutti gli scritti filosofici e di teoria dell'educazione*, op. cit., p. 1127: «L'esperienza deve essere completata dalla revisione filosofica dei dati. La loro filosofia potrebbe perciò chiamarsi *la dottrina dell'esperienza*: - e ciò spiega in qualche modo il titolo di filosofia immanente: - cioè immanente è qui usato in opposizione a trascendente». In questa recensione Labriola infonde tutto se stesso e tutto il significato della sua esperienza intellettuale, che si riassume nel concetto di IMMANENZA. Per immanenza, infatti, non si intende altro che una prospettiva filosofica che predilige la spiegazione e giustificazione del dato immediato al dato immediato stesso (Hegel e Herbart: non esistono cose, dati immediati o postulati del libero volere..Ma è reale unicamente il processo che li costituisce), proponendo una ricerca che, pur muovendosi unicamente nell'orizzonte di comprensione che l'esperienza offre al pensiero, non si imbatte nell'equivoco di ignorare la necessità di una correzione e rielaborazione razionale dei dati immediati. È proprio in questo concetto che va ritrovato il senso dell'elaborazione teorica di Labriola, andando pertanto aldilà di quelle rigide concettualizzazioni che ne restituiscono una visione chiusa e schematica.

si interseca con la filosofia processuale e dialettica di Hegel: nessuna datità delle cose e nessuna *causa sui* sullo sfondo del reale; ma soprattutto, nessuna immediatezza antecedente all'attuazione del processo. Herbart, infatti, pur essendo spesso letto come un pensatore rigorosamente "realista" o "psicologista", nel suo apparato concettuale non accetta il DATO come fondamento assoluto<sup>55</sup>, e questi presupposti di carattere prettamente teoretico si riflettono anche nella sua concezione di libertà. Non vi è dunque nessuna libertà data, nessuna libertà come potenza astratta<sup>56</sup>: il volere è un risultato di tensioni tra rappresentazioni e forze psichiche<sup>57</sup>.

55 Cfr. R. Pettoello, *Idealismo e realismo. La formazione filosofica di J. F. Herbart*, Firenze, La nuova Italia, 1986, pp. 223-250. Pettoello dimostra coerenza nel sottolineare come l'approccio metodologico di Herbart, definito nei termini di "metodo delle relazioni", si accosti in qualche modo anche alla dialettica di Hegel, contribuendo così a sfumare i rigidi confini che tenevano astrattamente separati il realismo e l'idealismo. Tuttavia, dopo aver ribadito questo concetto sembra tornare nuovamente ad una posizione generalista, proponendo l'IO astratto come modello emblematico per rappresentare tutta quanta la tradizione idealistica (Hegel incluso). La stessa generalizzazione, compiuta specularmente, si ritrova anche in B. Croce, *La filosofia di Herbart*, in "La critica. Rivista di letteratura, Storia e Filosofia", Roma, per l'edizione digitale: CSI Biblioteca di filosofia. Università di Roma "La Sapienza" - Fondazione "Biblioteca Benedetto Croce", 2007, p. 146: «In un periodo filosofico, in cui fu vivacissima la visione della universale e continua creazione della realtà, l'Herbart ebbe invece la visione di una realtà immobile, nella quale non era altra produttività che il conservarsi, respingendo i perturbamenti. Tutto il resto era per lui effetto di punti di vista relativi e non essenziali, di vedute accidentali. Gli altri pensatori del tempo acclamavano, come a precursori, ad Eraclito o a Giordano Bruno: l'Herbart salutava reverente, come suoi antichissimi maestri, Parmenide e gli Eleati».

56 Un altro punto di convergenza tra Hegel ed Herbart sui cui la letteratura critica non si sofferma, condiviso *in toto* da Labriola nello scritto del 1873, si ritrova anche nella critica al carattere contraddittorio della libertà astratta, che conduce inevitabilmente alla regressione illimitata del presupposto. Scrive Labriola, in A. Labriola, *Della libertà morale*, op. cit., p. 54: «L'Herbart in fine ha ampiamente criticato il concetto di un volere che determina sé stesso. Qui, egli dice: si fa questa supposizione, che la determinazione di sé, sia uno sfuggire al concetto di causa esterna. Ora chi dice determinazione di sé, dice o precedente inerzia, o precedente attività. Nell'un caso, pure e semplice passaggio dall'inerzia all'attività, nel secondo passaggio da una certa maniera di attività in un'altra. Ora il passaggio dall'inerzia nell'attività si dice movimento, e l'intelletto cerca d'ordinario la spiegazione del movimento nella causa: sicché qui o si deve supporre una causa esterna che agisca sul volere per determinarlo a determinarsi, o si deve supporre nel volere stesso un'altra determinazione di sé, la quale cade sotto lo stesso dilemma, e così all'infinito. Nell'altra ipotesi che la determinazione di sé sia un passare da una maniera d'attività in un'altra, è chiaro che si torna allo stesso dilemma, o della causa esterna, o d'un'altra determinazione di sé, e così all'infinito». La stessa critica, uguale per quanto concerne il contenuto, ma differente per l'esposizione formale, si ritrova anche in G. W. F. Hegel, *Scienza della logica, tomo primo*, a cura di C. Cesa, Bari, Laterza, 2021, pp. 252, 253.

57 Cfr. J. F. Herbart, *Punti principali della metafisica*, a cura di R. Pettoello, Milano, Mimesis, 2012. In linea con con la negazione del dato in quanto fondamento assoluto, Herbart mostra anche l'inevitabile contraddittorietà dell'io concepito come dato assoluto e originario, e quindi come entità fissa e identica a sé. Anche questo concetto, secondo la sua disamina, incappa nella regressione illimitata del presupposto: l'io, se pensato come concetto che si autodetermina conduce necessariamente al regresso - o progresso - illimitato, giacché il porre sé medesimo del soggetto

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La stessa tesi in merito alla “datità” è confermata implicitamente da Labriola anche nella fase iniziale della sua dissertazione, nella quale viene messo in luce una volta per tutte il sottile legame che sussiste tra il determinismo meccanico della scienza moderna e la prospettiva finalistica:

Qui è inutile andare più innanzi: ch  il farlo sarebbe come voler tentare di riassumere tutta la storia del determinismo meccanico, in quanto si ricongiunge alla rappresentazione religiosa o non religiosa di una seria causale assoluta, che abbia o non abbia termine in una volont , superiore all’umana, e pi  o meno cosciente predeterminatrice della volont  umana. Quello che importaper    questo: che bisogna guardarsi dal pregiudizio che sia inevitabile pel pensiero, quando si rivolge a studiare gl’intrinseci motivi dell’attivit  interiore dell’uomo, l’anticipare e confondere in una sola immagine, tutto quello che l’esperienza gli d  come vario e distinto.<sup>58</sup>

Qui il filosofo   estremamente chiaro e estende lo spazio di riflessione: il determinismo meccanico - associabile anche al predeterminismo - oltre a costituire il presupposto teorico ed epistemologico della scienza moderna, si rende perfettamente compatibile anche con una visione religiosa e/o finalistica dell’universo, all’interno della quale le singole volizione umane risultano condizionate da una volont  predeterminatrice<sup>59</sup>. Questo discorso intende semplicemente mostrare come le due differenti prospettive (determinismo meccanico e finalismo), entrambe accomunate dalla pretesa di voler «anticipare e confondere in una sola immagine, tutto quello che l’esperienza gli d  come vario e

implica necessariamente uno sdoppiamento in un soggetto e un oggetto, un io e una corrispettiva rappresentazione dell’io che pensa s  stesso in questo rappresentare; e questo sdoppiamento conduce inevitabilmente ad una contraddizione insolubile. L’io non   un’entit  fissa, un dato ontologico originario, ma   solo un nome astratto...E acquisisce realt  e concretezza solo nella molteplicit  del rappresentato, nonch  nella tensione tra rappresentazioni e forze psichiche. Si assiste pertanto ad una radicale dissoluzione dell’io che non   mai uguale a s  e non   una facolt  identica in tutti gli uomini. La stessa operazione di dissoluzione dell’Io astratto, in continuit  con la critica alla morale Kantiana e all’idealismo soggettivo di Fichte, si ritrova, ancora una volta e in modo decisivo, in G. W. F. Hegel, *Scienza della logica, tomo primo*, op. cit., pp. 254, 255. Il presente punto di convergenza tra Hegel e Herbart, nonch  il suo profondo impatto nello sviluppo del pensiero di Labriola, non   menzionato; e Hegel, forse per via del suo pensiero complesso e del carattere multiforme che lo rendono difficilmente inquadrabile in una categoria di pensiero ben definita, viene ascritto dalla maggior parte della letteratura critica entro l’orizzonte dei “metafisici astratti”. Andare aldil  di queste categorizzazioni permetterebbe di arricchire lo spazio di studio e di riflessione teoretica attorno allo sviluppo del pensiero di Labriola.

<sup>58</sup> A. Labriola, *Della libert  morale*, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>59</sup> Qui il carattere della predeterminazione - o predestinazione - sembra conferire al predeterminismo un significato pi  ancora pi  ampio. In questa fase Labriola non parla di semplice necessit  naturale, ma allude ad una volont  superiore in grado di coordinare le singole volizioni umane.

distinto»<sup>60</sup>, in realtà conducono allo stesso esito: la negazione della libertà in favore di un ordine superiore preliminarmente dato.

Il meccanicismo afferma: se A, allora B: poste le condizioni iniziali all'interno di un sistema, tutti gli effetti sono prevedibili secondo un ordine necessario. Il finalismo dice: A tende a B; oppure, se A, è possibile che B. Tuttavia, dal momento che B costituisce il *telos* di A, questo deve necessariamente preesistere ad A in quanto sua intrinseca potenzialità. Ci sono differenze a questo proposito? Sostanzialmente no, giacché entrambi i modelli presuppongono che esista una totalità compiuta e preliminarmente data di tutti gli eventi del mondo.<sup>61</sup> A produce B, tuttavia B in quanto suo prodotto era già contenuto aprioristicamente in A, ed è irrilevante se il nesso fra i due termini si esprima in termini analitici o teleologici. L'unica differenza che può mettere in crisi la somiglianza tra i suddetti sistemi si ritrova nel *medium* che il modello finalistico, per via della propria struttura, impone: se A, è possibile che B, ma chi rende B *actu*? A quel punto è necessario postulare l'intervento di Dio, di un soggetto libero e sovrano<sup>62</sup> nonché *medium* supremo, che in virtù della propria volontà rende possibile una *méthexis* tra la forma - che sussiste eternamente in lui - e l'essere, l'esistente<sup>63</sup>.

\* \* \*

In ultima analisi risulta opportuno introdurre una riflessione ulteriore: sebbene il predeterminismo e il determinismo meccanico siano due termini semanticamente sovrapponibili, il predeterminismo assume tuttavia una

60 A. Labriola, *Della libertà morale*, op. cit., p. 37.

61 Sul rapporto tra meccanicismo e finalismo, si veda R. Ronchi, *Il canone minore*, op. cit., p. 283. Dopo aver messo in evidenza l'intimo rapporto che sussiste tra la scienza positivista e il sostanzialismo metafisico, Ronchi arriva a constatare come, in realtà, la differenza tra il finalismo e il meccanicismo sia irrilevante, poiché entrambi gli apparati concettuali presuppongono una totalità compiuta e preliminarmente data del sapere. «Secondo tale metodo», scrive Ronchi, «la verità preesisterebbe alla conoscenza e la conoscenza sarebbe solo adeguazione al vero già *dato* (già *dato* a chi? Ma a Dio, che è il nome che la metafisica assegna al supposto soggetto del sapere ultimo!)».

62 La critica al finalismo, alla luce di una prospettiva più propriamente “megarica” improntata sulla pienezza e unità del reale, si ritrova anche in B. Spinoza, *Etica*, op. cit., *PARS I, PROP. XXXIII, SCHOL. II*, p. 83: «Io confesso tuttavia che l'opinione che sottomette tutto a una volontà divina indifferente, e ammette che tutto dipende dal suo beneplacito, s'allontana meno dalla verità che l'opinione di coloro che ammettono che Dio fa tutto in vista del bene. Costoro, infatti, sembra che pongano fuori di Dio qualche cosa che non dipende da Dio, e a cui Dio guarda, come ad un modello, nel suo operare, o a cui egli tende come verso uno scopo determinato. Il che senza dubbio non è altro che sottoporre Dio al fato; cosa, questa, della quale nessuna più assurda si può ammettere intorno a Dio, del quale abbiamo mostrato che è la prima e l'unica causa libera tanto dell'essenza di tutte le cose quanto della loro esistenza. Non c'è dunque ragione che io perda tempo nel confutare quest'assurdità».

63 Cfr. R. Ronchi, *Il Canone minore*, op. cit., p. 228, 229. Il rapporto tra forma e materia in quanto unità distinte riflette la struttura del modello demiurgico, che si esprime nella composizione di materia e forma, e quindi, appunto, nella realizzazione di possibilità preliminarmente date.

connotazione semantica ancora più radicale, ed è utilizzato prevalentemente da Labriola per designare una prospettiva provvidenziale del mondo (o, in altri termini, tutto ciò che rimanda ad una concezione fatalistica che presuppone l'esistenza di un *telos* già dato). In questo stato di cose, di fatto, non vi è spazio per la libertà, poiché ciascun evento del mondo, sia che risponda alla predeterminazione di una volontà divina, sia che risulti perfettamente prevedibile dinnanzi all'onniscienza di un intelletto infinito, risulta aprioristicamente già dato.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup>Cfr. S. Poggi, op. cit., pp. 49, 50, 51. La presa di distanza dal finalismo e dal tentativo, di alcuni filosofi, di racchiudere il processo storico entro i limiti di un disegno provvidenziale e/o di un sistema monistico costituirà poi il nucleo centrale della *Prolusione* del 1887, che a sua volta farà da apertura alla stesura degli scritti sulla concezione materialistica della storia. È interessante notare come, per Labriola, sia il determinismo naturale - e tutto ciò che ci sta attorno, inclusi il meccanicismo e la teoria dell'evoluzione - che la filosofia della storia di Hegel, in realtà condividano la stessa esigenza "monistica" di sussumere il processo storico in uno schema chiuso e prestabilito, nel quale ogni singolo passaggio risulta prevedibile o deterministicamente (leggi naturali); o alla luce di un processo dialettico (Hegel). La stessa tesi è riconfermata anche da G. Mastroianni, in G. Mastroianni, op. cit., p. 333: «Il (primo) Labriola "rifiuta ogni suggestione spiritualistica" ma "respinge del pari la tesi del meccanicismo naturalistico e del positivismo più angusto"».

# COLONIALISM, REVISIONISM, AND ETHICS: WHY EUROPEAN COLONIALISM REMAINS AN INJUSTICE

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## **ABSTRACT**

The issue of how philosophers should evaluate colonialism has acquired a new importance due to two recent conflicting views on European colonialism: ‘anti-colonialism’ and ‘revisionism’. Especially revisionism challenges philosophical evaluation, because it purports to roughly rehabilitate European colonialism on moral grounds and suggests a critique of the prevailing view that European colonialism was an injustice. This article defends the thesis that to philosophically assess European colonialism is to insist primarily on its substantive injustice and thus its illegitimacy, even on a generous reading of the revisionist account. Four arguments are developed. First, accepting the anti-colonialist equation of (European) colonialism with slavery would be a non-starter philosophically: colonialism, as such and specifically European, is no obvious evil but requires further inquiry. Second, philosophers’ argument of colonialism’s procedural injustice, which suggests that a moral inquiry of evidence on European colonialism would be basically unnecessary, is inconclusive due to inherent instability and relevant-substantive emptiness. Third, Charles Beitz’s substantive justice theory of colonialism offers an appropriate philosophical perspective on empirical, European and other, forms of colonialism. Fourth, applying Beitz’s theory to revisionist evidence strongly suggests that European colonialism, even if presented in a most favorable light, remains a serious violation of substantive justice.

## **KEYWORDS**

Anti-colonialism; Beitz; colonialism; justice; revisionism

## **INTRODUCTION**

How wrong is colonialism, the alien rule of foreign peoples? For a long time, the conventional view, at least in the West, was that European colonialism was ultimately beneficial to subjugated peoples, generating their economic and social development, and preparing them for national independence and statehood.



However, this rosy picture is now widely discredited (Beitz 1999: 99); since the late twentieth century, the dominant view has been that European colonialism was deeply unjust to subjugated peoples. As Kok-Chor Tan puts it, '[i]t is generally taken for granted that colonialism was an injustice because...it violated the self-determination rights of nations,...economically exploited the colonized peoples, and...undermined their cultural identity' (2007: 281). Tan admits that European, notably British, colonialism brought benefits to the peoples under its control, such as 'parliamentary democracy and the idea of common law', along with serious economic improvements (2007: 281-282). Yet, he insists, European colonialism's injustice is not lessened by the goods it also generated (Tan 2007: 282).

Recently, the debate on colonialism has highly polarized around two more extreme hostile positions. First, there is the quite popular post-colonialist theory and decolonizing activism combination with its radically 'anti-colonialist' stance. In the wake of thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, this position stresses the slavery-based and enduringly racist, exploitative, and violent nature of European colonialism. Second, in reaction to anti-colonialism, a (what may be called) 'revisionist' attempt to more or less rehabilitate European colonialism has arisen, led by political scientist Bruce Gilley and theologian-ethicist Nigel Biggar. This rather controversially received position aims to put European colonialism in a more positive light by stressing its historical benefits alongside or even over its harms, emphatically arguing against the anti-colonialist equation of colonialism with the evil of slavery (Gilley 2018, 2022, 2023; Biggar 2023a, 2023b; cf. Fynn-Paul 2023). Both these positions are self-consciously political, with the anti-colonialists demanding reparations paid by the West to descendants of colonized peoples and the revisionists defending measures to protect, if not promote, the liberal West against anti-colonialist efforts to undermine it. Still, especially the revisionist stance entails a challenge to philosophical evaluation, because it purports to assess European colonialism on moral grounds and suggests a critique of the accepted view that European colonialism was an injustice. Gilley's main thesis is that European colonialism was generally good for being evidently beneficial to colonized peoples and being handled by them as legitimate. Biggar's main thesis is that British, and arguably European, colonialism was generally morally intricate, if not approximately just. Both authors stress European, or British, colonialism's pivotal role in abolishing slavery worldwide.

How should philosophers morally evaluate colonialism? In particular, how should they respond to the revisionist challenge, bearing in mind that revisionism but also anti-colonialism (or any other historical account) cannot be *assumed* empirically correct? In this article, I defend the thesis that to philosophically assess European colonialism is to insist primarily on its substantive injustice and thus its illegitimacy, even on a generous reading of the revisionist account. To this end, four arguments are developed. First, accepting the anti-colonialist equation of (European) colonialism with slavery would be a non-starter philosophically:

colonialism, as such and specifically European, is no obvious evil but requires further inquiry. Second, philosophers' argument of colonialism's procedural injustice, which suggests that a moral inquiry of evidence on European colonialism would be basically unnecessary, is inconclusive due to inherent instability and relevant-substantive emptiness. Third, Charles Beitz's (neglected) substantive justice theory of colonialism offers an appropriate philosophical perspective on empirical, European and other, forms of colonialism. Fourth, applying Beitz's theory to revisionist evidence strongly suggests that European colonialism, even if presented in a most favorable light, remains a serious violation of substantive justice.

Before starting my analysis, I should perhaps explain why, in my view, the revisionist account should not be silenced but, like the anti-colonialist perspective, scrutinized. Some (but not all) anti-colonialists condemn any examination of revisionist work, having actively pursued the view that it must embody inferior scholarship and white-racist thinking that should never have been published and may not be 'normalized' by being discussed; instead, we should accept, not upset, the experiences of descendants of people long subjected to a deeply racist, exploitative, and violent European practice.<sup>1</sup> Yet I submit that, when examining (European) colonialism philosophically, we should not sacrifice the core academic standard of open-mindedness, especially when we acknowledge that: such 'generous' treatments of colonialism are to be treated extra-critically; the works of Gilley and Biggar, whatever the truth of their claims, are both well-researched, that is, based on significant historical evidence and critical engagement with – anti-colonialist as well as more conventional-historical – literature; and various academics have expressed support for revisionists' work or at least defended their right to participate in scholarly debates.<sup>2</sup> To defend this stance, my first argument will entail that (European) colonialism, for all its potential flaws, cannot simply be equated with slavery, the Holocaust, Nazism, or racism; only then I will examine how a philosophical analysis should engage – again, critically – with revisionist moral history writing on colonialism.

<sup>1</sup> Due to the impact of this extreme movement, Gilley and Biggar have had to endure hostility, censorship, and publication hindrances (see, e.g., Gilley 2017, 2023: pt.1; Biggar 2023a: xiii-xiv, 1-3, 298 n.1, 298-299 n.1-5).

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the statements of praise by (renowned) scholars added to their books, positive reviews of Gilley's and Biggar's works have also become available (see, e.g., Basdeo 2023; Griffith 2024; Russell 2022, and Dimsdale 2023; Gregg 2023; Tonks 2023 respectively). In addition, both Gilley (e.g., 2022) and Biggar (e.g., 2023b in reply to Lester 2023) have responded in detail to their critics. For a strong critique of academics' (bullying) attempts to silence (rather than debate) 'unwelcome' ideas, uncluding those of Gilley on colonialism, see Howard-Hassmann and McLaughlin (2022).

## NO OBVIOUS EVIL: COLONIALISM IS NOT LIKE SLAVERY

My first argument is that adopting the anti-colonialist equation of (European) colonialism with slavery would be a non-starter philosophically: colonialism, as such and specifically European, is no evident evil but calls for further examination. Whereas revisionist writing derives from a disentanglement of (European) colonialism from slavery (Biggar 2023a: 45-66), anti-colonialists suggest that evaluating colonialism is straightforward: the whole European racist project of ‘colonialism and slavery’ is one undeniable large evil. Without adopting a radical anti-colonialist discourse, some philosophers suggest the same obvious wrongness of colonialism and slavery (Moore 2016: 449; Renzo 2019: 348). Yet I argue that a slavery-colonialism equation offers no good starting-point, that is, immediate end-point, for philosophical evaluation – even if cases of European colonialism do turn out to be evil. Thus, as philosophically (European) colonialism should not be instantly put in such a very bad light, a slavery-colonialism equation offers no good reason for leaving revisionist work aside. I offer four points in defense of this position.

First, the conventional critique of European colonialism finds it an ‘injustice’, or a ‘wrong’, due to its alleged benefits not having primary value, but does not treat it as simply an evil, like slavery (Tan 2007, cited earlier) – and with good reason. Even if European colonialism *was* evil, it does not follow that it was the element of colonialism that made it evil. Indeed, ‘colonialism’ is not by definition exploitative, racist, or violent. Historically, modern-European colonialism seems the ‘model example’ (Tan 2007: 303 n.3), but colonialism has been ancient and non-Western, too, and might still occur in the future somewhere. Intuitively, while slavery entails the morally reprehensible ownership of concrete human beings, colonialism is less concrete than slavery, and so its evilness is less evident. Philosophically, critics such as David Miller and Robert Goodin accept that colonialism may be good, albeit problematically so. Miller imagines ‘a community’ governed by ‘a colonial power which protects its subjects’ basic interests and applies the rule of law impartially’ (1996: 417), even though that community should still be granted self-determination; Goodin envisions a ‘colonial power [that] truly discharges its duties to protect and promote the interests of the colony, rather than exploiting it’ (1988: 685 n.60), which he considers historically implausible yet logically possible. Thus, it seems hard indeed to see European colonialism as unambiguously evil as slavery.

Second, note how influential philosopher John Rawls confirms a clear distinction between (European) colonialism and slavery in his international theory. Slavery, Rawls argues, is a severe violation of the human right to liberty as one urgent right (1999: 65, 78-79, cf. 38 n.45, 138, 174); since slavery, like genocide, the Holocaust, mass murder, and poverty, is one of ‘the great evils of human history’ (1999: 126, cf. 6-7, 19-22), the Society of ‘liberal’ and ‘decent’ Peoples

cannot tolerate it at all. As regards colonialism, a practice that he does not really mention, Rawls seems hesitant to condemn it. The closest to (European) colonialism Rawls becomes in a passage on European imperialism:

[E]stablished constitutional democracies have in the past engaged in empire building. A number of European nations [such as England and France] did so...[A]n explanation...would involve examining the class structure of these nations over time, and how that structure affected the desire of England and France for colonies..., as well as the role of the armed forces in supporting this desire...[T]he shortcomings of these societies as constitutional democracies [that support the disappearance of armed conflict] are evident (Rawls 1999: 53-54).

Now, firstly, rather than directly criticizing (European) colonialism, Rawls approaches European colonial imperialism mainly from an ‘explanation’ perspective and stresses the need for in-depth ‘examining’. Next, while Rawls does suggest that European societies’ colonial imperialist activities were ‘evident shortcomings’, he refrains here from calling these ‘evils’, or violations of ‘human rights’ committed by early England and France as ‘outlaw states’. Then, when elsewhere he writes more critically about imperialism, which included colonialism in the European case, Rawls still does not clearly condemn that as a human rights violation or an evil. Thus, Rawls states that ‘if a state’s concern with power is predominant; and if its interests include...enlarging its empire..., gaining...imperial...prestige and glory...– then the difference between states and peoples is enormous’ (1999: 28, cf. 41-42, 76); and he adds that ‘a liberal society cannot justly require its citizens to fight in order to...win power and empire. (When [it does], it...becomes an outlaw state.)’ (1999: 91). But this means that, for Rawls, the real issue of evil is violence-employing *aggression*, for it is such ‘armed conflict’ that will turn an empire, colonial or otherwise, into an ‘outlaw state’. Suggesting, then, that colonialism is morally somewhere between justice and slavery, Rawls (1999) does not philosophically exclude that non-aggressive forms of colonialism may be ‘decent’, provided they also uphold a ‘decent consultation hierarchy’ and protect human rights.<sup>3</sup>

Third, Charles Mills’s ‘decolonizing’ attempt to disprove Rawls on (European) colonialism is unconvincing – and it is important to see why. Mills (2015: 13-23) argues that the silence of Rawls’s theory about colonialism betrays its ‘coloniality’, as it ‘forecloses any discussion of the colonial and racial past and present’ and ‘fundamentally mis-orient...our normative priorities’ (2015: 14). As he elaborates:

How could a model world of largely self-sufficient societies, conceived of as cooperative ventures for mutual advantage and choosing whether to interact with

<sup>3</sup> Whether Rawls (1999) could ever regard colonialism as just is doubtful because of the value he attaches to collective self-determination. In the ‘Beitzian substantive justice’ section, I will criticize the (what I consider) communitarian overemphasis on self-determination within the context of the colonialism debate.

one another or not, possibly serve to map an actual world consisting of Western powers trans-oceanically establishing and dominating exploited colonial territories that are part of their global empires?...To assume that a slave society or a European colonial outpost or a white settler state is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage is...to...[assume] away the most fundamental and glaring fact about such societies, viz. that they are systems of oppression (Mills 2015: 15).

Yet, as a critique of Rawls's implication that colonialism is not simply evil, Mills's analysis fails. Firstly, as Rawls's ideal-theoretical global society of liberal and decent peoples is surely not meant to 'map' a world of dominating-exploitative imperialist Western states, Mills attributes an evilness to Rawls's model that it arguably does not have; and, against Mills, we should insist that Rawls never makes such cooperative assumptions about a 'slave society', 'European colonial outpost', or 'white settler state', and that his theory directly opposes non-ideal Western (or any other) 'systems of oppression' for not representing truly liberal or decent, thus tolerable, peoples. Next, Mills's critique is question-begging in the sense that Rawls's theory being 'colonial' would not make it automatically as bad as Mills asserts, as that will depend on our very assessment of (European) colonialism, which is precisely what is in dispute here and yet to be established. Then, Mills's critique is sweepingly circular: he assumes, rather than demonstrates, that, like slavery and genocide, (European) colonialism is evil, when Rawls condemns slavery and genocide but sensibly suggests more caution towards colonialism.

Now Mills goes on to accuse Rawls of theoretically concealing colonialism:

Denying the past and present relations of colonialism and neocolonialism,...Rawls offers us a vision of autarkical polities whose respective levels of development are the result not of a...system of extraction and exploitation, not of *empire*, but of different national cultures and traditions. The societies of the West get to be 'cooperative ventures,' covered by the norms of justice; the societies of the Rest fall into the outer darkness, normatively registering only as 'burdened societies' and 'outlaw states.' Thus..., he launders colonialism and imperialism, whitewashing them (Mills 2015: 18-19).

However, while overlooking Rawls's category of 'decent peoples', Mills is unfair to Rawls and assumes debatable facts about (neo)colonialism as self-evident. Indeed, Mills's critique does not affect the Rawlsian principles of justice and realistic utopian vision as a response to the great historical evils that Rawls emphatically recognizes. And while I do agree with Mills (2015: 20) that Rawls (1999: 89-120) overlooks colonialism at the level of non-ideal theory by not considering European colonialism as one potential cause of present-day global poverty, this does not change that, with Mills, we are back to square one: before 'decolonizing' anything, one should assure beyond reasonable doubt that (European) colonialism *is* a great evil of history, and this Mill does not do. Overall, Mills is highly vulnerable to the revisionist critique that he, like other anti-

colonialists, assumes the basic illegitimacy of colonialism by fiat, as part of the definition, so as to preclude potentially critical empirical research (Gilley 2022: 115, 118).

Fourth, Robin Dunford's attempt to 'decolonize' Western thought as shaped by the 'evil' of (European) colonialism suggests a wider anti-colonialist tendency to rely dogmatically on disputable empirical-theoretical assumptions. Thus, Dunford attacks 'the enduring legacies of colonialism' (2017: 381) on the following basis: 'Decolonial theory joins World Systems Theory in suggesting that colonialism was constitutive of capitalist modernity', instead of European self-reliance or some 'unique' feature such as reason, democratic politics, market economy, free enterprise, or technological development (2017: 384). 'Without [the colonial] plunder, the accumulation of resources so central to the birth and reproduction of capitalism would not have been possible' (Dunford 2017: 384). Yet, for establishing the total wrongness of colonialism, Dunford's Marxism begs the question: he does not show, beyond reasonable doubt, why we should follow World Systems Theory, rather than some other economic theory, and blame capitalism for colonial exploitation. But those who oppose the thesis that the West owes its present welfare gap with the rest of the world mainly to its colonial past are not *evidently* wrong (which is not to say that they will be right). Dunford's position, then, cannot convincingly refute non-Marxist revisionism with its distinction between colonialism and slavery.

Since, then, the colonialism-slavery-evil equation fails as an immediate dismissal of (European) colonialism, we may well go on to assess revisionist moral history writing critically-ethically, based on a review of the philosophical debate on colonialism.

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL INCONCLUSIVENESS OF THE PROCEDURALIST CRITIQUE

Second, I argue that philosophers' argument of colonialism's procedural injustice, which suggests that a moral examination of evidence on European colonialism, revisionist or otherwise, would be basically superfluous, is indecisive due to inherent instability and relevant-substantive emptiness. Unlike anti-colonialism, the argument to be criticized now does not assume colonialism to be characteristically European; yet it implies that European colonialism, like all forms of colonialism, is wrong for reasons of procedural (in)justice. I will argue that this strict-deontological view problematically neglects the empirical-historical outcomes of colonialism and the (in)justice thereof.

In a leading account, Lea Ypi aims to show what is wrong with colonialism *per se* (2013: 161). What makes colonialism matter morally, she begins, is that it entails 'the subjugation of one people to another' and thus 'involves collective

political agents' (Ypi 2013: 162). Ypi 'assumes that we know what makes the collective a political collective', and that 'indigenous societies' and 'tribal groups' are eligible (2013: 162). Colonialism's wrong, then, is its violation of 'an associative ideal that fails to respect equality and reciprocity in the creation of its norms' (Ypi 2013: 186, cf. 178). As she explains further:

[A] gain in the...dimension [of substantive principles might] offset the wrong involved in the [dimension of norm creation]. But the question of what is wrong with colonialism can be distinguished from questions regarding the acceptability of the costs of, say, ending domestic oppression..., or benign paternalistic regimes. Conversely, even if...some or all of these practices are necessary in order to advance some substantive principles, the resulting [colonial] relation is... no less wrong (Ypi 2013: 186).

Thus, in Ypi's view, procedural injustice is what makes colonialism wrong as such: 'colonized people are forced to join a political association where the rules are established and maintained without their [consent]', so that 'they are being wronged' (Ypi 2013: 187, cf. 180); and good or just consequences cannot nullify this wrongness. Ypi's proceduralism, then, ultimately dismisses the very revisionist assumption that empirical historical research could support a rehabilitation of European colonialism.

Yet Laura Valentini quite plausibly suggests that Ypi's proceduralist account cannot be sustained, arguing that it fails on either view of a 'political collective': 'aggregate' or 'corporate' (2015: 316).: 'On the [aggregate] interpretation', Valentini points out, 'colonialism is distinctively procedurally wrong insofar as it involves the subjection of the wills of *individual members* of colonized groups to colonizers' control' (2015: 316). However, Valentini objects, if the wrong of colonialism is thus due to 'the lack of individual voluntary consent' (2015: 318), European countries' colonialism would be wrong in the same procedural way as how those same countries, like 'all existing well-ordered democratic states' (2015: 321), are governed today, namely without the unanimous voluntary consent of their citizens - which is untenable (cf. 2015: 321-322).<sup>4</sup>

'On [the corporate] interpretation', the collective has 'a will of its own', so that the wrong of colonialism is due to the colonizers' having failed to acquire the collective's 'voluntary consent' (Valentini 2015: 323). However, Valentini asks, what, if any, collectives could have so much moral value that 'a failure to track their wills amounts to wrongdoing?' (2015: 323). Ypi's belief (cited above) that 'we know what makes [a] collective a political collective' and that local communities

<sup>4</sup> Valentini's point tacitly resembles a claim by Beitz: 'few, if any, governments...actually [have] been consented to by all of their citizens. Nevertheless,...nonvoluntary political institutions [seem] legitimate provided they conform to appropriate principles of justice...If government in general need not be based on consent, then colonial rule cannot be opposed simply because it is not based on consent' (1999: 96, cf. 79-80).

qualify, ‘is inconsistent with individual human beings’ status as equal and ultimate units of moral concern’, Valentini (2015: 323-324) objects. As she explains:

From a normative individualist perspective, the moral standing of a collective is explained by, and therefore conditional on, the collective’s serving the legitimate interests of individuals [which are] are consistent with reasonable [principles] of [distributive and rights-and-duties establishing] justice (Valentini 2015: 324).

Therefore, Valentini claims, a corporate reading of colonialism’s wrong must fail. The lack of a state’s voluntary consent cannot be morally decisive against being colonized, for that state could be deeply unjust (despotic, exploitative) itself; what matters are the legitimate interests of its subjects. But this grants that, if the subjects favor colonialism due to it likely improving their living conditions, normative individualism would acknowledge ‘the takeover’ as procedurally justified (Valentini 2015: 324).

Importantly, Valentini adds, to modify Ypi’s view by suggesting that ‘a collective political agent has moral standing only as long as it upholds [Ypi’s ideal of] *equality and reciprocity* among its members’ (2015: 325) is to accept that a political agent that meets Ypi’s ideal may rightfully incorporate a collective entity that violates this ideal – which means that ‘it allows for circumstances under which colonialism is *not* distinctively procedurally wrong’ (2015: 326). So construed, Ypi’s a discriminatory account that *does* leave basically benign colonialism open.<sup>5</sup> Since, then, it is hard to see how colonialism is inherently procedurally wrong, Valentini’s critique suggests that the evaluation of colonialism requires a *substantive* standard of justice grounded in normative individualism. This would imply the evaluative need of empirical research in order to be able to establish the actual (in)justice of a particular manifestation of colonialism.

But perhaps Ypi’s position can somehow be rescued from Valentini’s critique and a proceduralist approach be maintained, as two other philosophers suggest. First, Han van Wietmarschen argues against Valentini for a third, ‘plural’ reading of Ypi’s account: one that suggests that the ‘joint subjugation by the [colonizers] of the plurality of [colonized] people [could] be morally significant independently of the legitimate interests of individual [colonized] persons’ (2018: 173, 174). Against Valentini’s ‘tyrannical state’ objection, van Wietmarschen insists that his own plural view does not interpret the wrong of colonialism as the takeover of such a state, but suggests that this wrong consists ‘in the plurality of [colonized] persons being jointly subjugated’ (2018: 174). Thus, the colonized individually have a freedom right against both the joint colonial subjugation of their people’s plurality and tyrannical government (van Wietmarschen 2018: 174). Van Wietmarschen admits that he has ‘not provided a complete pluralist theory of the wrong of colonialism’, one that ‘[specifies instantiating] conditions’ and ‘[settles] which

<sup>5</sup> As the next section will explain, this possibility, too, was already part of Beitz’s theory, published in 1979.



pluralities matter' (2018: 175). Yet the proceduralist case may thus survive, he submits.

Now if van Wietmarschen's argument succeeds, colonialism is procedurally wrong after all. However, as van Wietmarschen does not explain why 'pluralism' should be accepted as such, his attempt to rescue the proceduralist argument remains unstable. Thus, his theory lacks independent standing, and it seems only invoked to solve the issue of colonialism by trying to somehow bridge the gap between Valentini's 'aggregate' and 'corporative' readings of Ypi's 'political collective'. Indeed, by not convincingly explaining why a 'joint subjugation of the plurality of a colonized people' matters morally at least as much as 'the legitimate interests of individual colonized persons', van Wietmarschen leaves his pluralist view substantively undeveloped. Not going beyond a mere 'optimism that pluralities may jointly consent or fail to consent to rule, and that pluralities may be, or fail to be, provided with equal and reciprocal terms of political association' (2018: 176), van Wietmarschen rather confirms Valentini's skepticism.

Second, Vittorio Bufacchi proposes a revision of Ypi's proceduralist argument in order to save it from Valentini's critique. As he explains:

What Ypi perhaps should have said...is that at the heart of the distinctively procedural wrongness of colonialism is the *arbitrariness* of colonial laws...The extreme and brutal violence that defines experiences of colonialism is per se contingent,...but the arbitrariness in which violence was orchestrated under colonialism is distinctive (Bufacchi 2017: 209).

More broadly, attempting to refute the 'received view' on colonialism, namely 'that any violence that occurred was a contingent factor, not an inherent factor' (2017: 198), Bufacchi argues that 'violence' is integral to the injustice of colonialism, and that colonial violence is typically arbitrary – an argument he illustrates with a case study on the colonial development of sugar plantations in the Caribbean.

However, Bufacchi's argument suffers from serious weaknesses. Firstly, by suggesting that colonialism means 'the [arbitrary] decision to invade a certain territory at a certain moment in time, resulting in more arbitrariness (as unconstrained social power)' (2017: 207), Bufacchi defines it in a more negative way – as a kind of 'invasion' – than is warranted, making it unduly easy to regard arbitrary violence as a non-contingent, characteristic feature. Next, that colonialism cannot be but arbitrarily violent is more assumed than (philosophically) argued throughout, as Bufacchi merely criticizes the Ypi-centered conventional view for overlooking this allegedly essential characteristic, and mostly relies on empirical analysis and examples to make his case. Then, even if we grant that his Caribbean case study successfully demonstrates an integrality of violence, it does so about 'slavery' rather than 'colonialism' – this case study being most explicitly one about sugar plantation slavery. Bufacchi tries to anticipate this criticism by ending that

‘slavery has always been an integral part of the colonial project’ and ‘in colonial contexts the smaller indigenous population suffered the same fate as slaves’ (2017: 205); but these empirical statements are not beyond dispute and, moreover, do not demonstrate the inherently violently character of (European) colonialism, apart from slavery, with which, as we have seen, (European) colonialism should not be equated. Finally, even if colonialism were inherently arbitrarily violent, it remains unclear if this is an injustice to any meaningful extent, as Bufacchi makes no attempt to refute Valentini’s ‘aggregate’ and ‘corporative’ readings of Ypi’s ‘political collective’. In short, Bufacchi’s attempt to modify and thus save Ypi’s proceduralist argument seems unsuccessful.

Now even if either one of these two attempts to rescue proceduralism could be sustained, I would argue that, as also Valentini suggests, for the purpose of evaluating colonialism a proceduralist account cannot go far enough. What if a procedurally unjust colonialism specifically generates substantively just outcomes: should we then really conclude that the colonialism involved is ‘no less wrong’, as Ypi suggests? Indeed, in order to establish colonialism’s actual moral status, one still has to examine its effects and establish their moral quality, thereby moving beyond a purely deontological approach that is overly restrictive in politics and governance (cf. Amstutz 2018: 73-83). Thus, even a valid proceduralist critique cannot decisively show colonialism’s unjustifiability: ‘procedurally wrong’ does not yet mean ‘wrong’. Tan, who stresses colonialism’s wrongness and rejects the ‘consequentialist framework of sorts’ of those who maintain that colonialism was more beneficial than harmful to colonized peoples (2007: 282), would still agree: he accepts the need to (also) study what colonialism actually *does*.

In short, the proceduralist account is philosophically inconclusive due to inherent instability and lack of full moral coverage. Even if we generously grant the moral force of the proceduralist argument of the injustice of colonialism, an ethical attitude of proceduralism would be too empty to be good enough as an instantly negative response to the revisionists; it has nothing morally meaningful to say about assessing evidence about consequences, the very importance of which the revisionists rightly emphasize. What we need, then, is a theory of substantive justice that allows incorporating empirical analysis in our judgement and does not (implicitly) duck away from the revisionist challenge.

## **IN DEFENSE OF THE EVALUATIVE RELEVANCE OF BEITZIAN SUBSTANTIVE JUSTICE**

My third argument is that Charles Beitz’s (neglected) substantive justice theory of colonialism offers an appropriate philosophical perspective on empirical,

European and other, forms of colonialism.<sup>6</sup> Beitz would accept that, in order to morally assess colonialism comprehensively, stressing its procedural injustice is insufficient at best. I begin by reconstructing Beitz's theory. Next, I defend it, notably its independent moral status, against several communitarian objections in which the right to self-determination is emphasized. With Beitz, then, the door is fully open to considering historical evidence, revisionist or otherwise, from a philosophical perspective focusing on (in)justice.

Beitz's position, which abandons 'actual or tacit consent' for 'hypothetical contract' as the basis for legitimacy (Beitz 1999: 80), is that, like 'intervention', 'colonialism [and] imperialism...are not morally objectionable because they offend a right of autonomy, but rather because they are unjust' (Beitz 1999: 69). Beitz, then, would argue against the earlier-cited, Tan-summarized dominant view that colonialism violating collective self-determination is not a key issue morally. As he explains:

[I]n terms of hypothetical consent[,]...the argument for self-determination is that colonial rule violates principles of justice that would be agreed to by rational citizens of the colony...But the principle of representative self-government is probably not the only principle that would be agreed to – another would be some sort of principle of just distribution – and perhaps it would not be agreed to at all. [Conceivably,] representative institutions would be limited in their scope because of the demands of rapid and equitable economic development (Beitz 1999: 98).

Particularly relevant for an assessment of revisionism is Beitz's subsequent discussion of the nowadays discredited but long-held (philosophical) view that European colonialism was 'justified by its beneficial effects on subject peoples' (Beitz 1999: 99). To evaluate such a view, Beitz claims, two questions matter:

First, are the benefits a subject group might derive from alien rule such that they would be rationally agreed to by members of the subject group if they were in a position to choose for themselves? Second, would they agree to alien rule as the best way to secure these benefits...? (Beitz 1999: 100).

Now 'the second question...is the heart of the case against colonialism' (Beitz 1999: 101). Beitz accepts that the usual critique of the unacceptability of the cost of alien rule appears sound, but he leaves the empirics unresolved. He stresses a moral criterion by which to evaluate evidence about costs and benefits of colonialism: institutional conformity to 'appropriate principles of justice' (Beitz

<sup>6</sup> Beitz's political theory of global justice has been discussed intensively over the past four and a half decades, but his specific treatment of the (in)justice of colonialism and postcolonial autonomy has received rather little attention. Except Miller and Weltman (see later), none of the authors writing (philosophically) on colonialism cited in this article refer to Beitz's discussion of colonialism.

1999: e.g., 97, cf. 101).<sup>7</sup> Beitz then explains how actual justice is more basic than self-determination:

What is certain is that members of colonized groups have the right to just institutions; whether they have a right of self-determination depends on the extent to which the granting of independence would, in their particular circumstances, help to minimize injustice (Beitz 1999: 102). This view avoids the arbitrariness of flat assertions of a fundamental, absolute right of independence...yet...[entails] that the validity of any particular claim of a right of self-determination can only be assessed with the aid of complex empirical considerations together with a theory of social justice appropriate to the group involved (Beitz 1999: 104).

Thus, Beitz suggests that, since self-rule is not morally self-evident, forms of colonialism may be acceptable if they uphold legitimate institutions based on principles of justice rationally agreed on in a hypothetical contract; yet, as empirical inquiry will usually show colonialism to violate this substantive criterion, legitimate colonialism is unlikely.

Daniel Weltman, who, like Valentini, questions the view of colonialism being wrong procedurally, explicitly recalls '[Beitz's neglected] cosmopolitan theory of justice', which 'contains its own under-appreciated explanation of the wrongness of colonialism' (2023: 295). As he correctly observes, Beitz's theory does not entirely rule out the rather surprising possibility of 'just colonialism' (Weltman 2023: 295-296). Weltman's 'suggestion' is a Beitz-like 'cosmopolitan instrumentalism' as the yardstick of justice (2023: 296, 288), but he does not make an effort to really defend it. Yet I submit that such a standard makes even more sense than Weltman himself seems to think: it confirms my critique of the views of colonialism as 'like slavery' or 'procedurally wrong', opens the door for empirics-based consequential assessment, and makes it possible to reflect on revisionist moral history writing in a duly critical manner.

Yet, before settling on Beitz's individualist cosmopolitanism with its instrumental treatment of colonialism, we should consider three direct, communitarian objections. First, Miller explicitly disagrees with Beitz's view that both 'outside interference' and 'self-determination' should be instrumentally judged on the basis of 'justice' (Miller 2005: 382). Arguing against Beitz, Miller defends self-determination as primary:

The boundary issue must be resolved first: once we know who is to be included in the political community, we also know who the contracting parties are...[Problematically,] Beitz wants to *settle* questions such as decolonization and secession by appealing to an independent standard of justice (Miller (2005: 384).

<sup>7</sup> With this expression, Beitz accepts 'that different principles of justice may apply to different types of societies in view of variations, e.g., in levels of socioeconomic development' (1999: 81 n.33).

Yet Beitz has aptly replied that Miller, too, does not really take self-determination for granted, but – quite plausibly – suggests ‘*democratic* self-determination..., or perhaps some other form of institutionalized responsiveness to the popular will’ and ‘basic human rights’ as criteria (Beitz 2005: 414; see Miller 2005: 384, 386-387). Therefore, Miller’s autonomy-based critique entails no basic objection to Beitz’s theoretical reliance on an ‘independent standard of justice’ (which may vary according to societies’ situations<sup>8</sup>).

Second, Margaret Moore implicitly questions Beitz’s individualist starting-point:

Liberals...are comfortable with language rooted in human rights, individual liberty and equality before the law, but do not have a clear account of why people should care about group affinity, or how group membership should be related to political rule. [Yet]...the injustice of colonialism cannot be cashed out in individualist terms only: some of its wrongs are collective in character – to do with the colonized people’s collective aspirations to be self-governing (in a sense that does not necessarily presuppose a commitment to democracy) within their own territory (Moore 2016: 459).

However, like van Wietmarschen’s argument discussed earlier, Moore’s one is question-begging. Why should we accept collectivism, especially when Moore merely applies it to the present issue, without offering an independent defense? Moreover, why should we not, like Miller does, require self-determination to be democratic, or at least somehow population-responsive, and to protect human rights? Moore will reply that ‘the colonized people want...a government that they *identify with*, meaning that the governed and the government...share the same group identity’ (2016: 454). Yet a Beitzian cosmopolitan could come back and ask: what if ‘alien’ colonial rule brings more justice than the government ‘the colonized’ can ‘identify with’ does? Also, do the people simply want the government Moore believes they want (there being counterexamples)? Even if they do, should we not ask what the people *should* want, for what if what they want violates an appropriate criterion of justice, or human rights? What if a foreign government appears more just than a domestic one, offering a more population-responsive rule and wiping out poverty while allowing people to uphold (much of) their cultural identity? In short, Moore’s communitarianism is too rigidly collectivist to be plausible.

Third, also implicitly against Beitz, Massimo Renzo maintains colonialism’s distinctive wrong by arguing how colonialism violates political self-determination:

[T]he distinctive wrong of colonialism is that it undermines the capacity of the colonized to exercise their self-determining agency as a political community in a particular way: the colonized are prevented from engaging in the sort of group agency required for them to be able to shape the future of their community in light of choices autonomously made (Renzo 2019: 372-373, cf. 359, 362, 364, 368).

<sup>8</sup> See the previous note.

However, Renzo's communitarianism, like Moore's, is merely applied and unqualified. Moreover, the self-determination-seeking 'political community' may not always exist (or have existed) at the beginning of (European) colonization. Insofar as such communities did exist, the value of justice may well be more important than self-government; and then we would have to establish if self-government protects justice better than alien rule.

Thus, the communitarian critique does not override the primary importance of individualist justice but has secondary value at best. It suggests strongly why we should oppose colonialism as well as intervention in moral communities that are governed justly; however, in other cases, the communitarian argument will either not apply due to the absence of a moral-political community or have to give way to substantive principles of justice. And where communitarian arguments cannot make the difference, 'benevolent colonialism', like 'benevolent intervention', cannot be excluded (cf. Beitz 1999: 198).

Finally, my Beitz-based individualist cosmopolitanism has the typical argumentative benefit of giving the revisionists an ethical opening, although a demanding one: perhaps their accounts could clear the relatively low hurdle of substantive justice, which, however, they must if European colonialism stands any chance of rehabilitation.

## **AGAINST REVISIONISM: THE SUBSTANTIVE INJUSTICE OF EUROPEAN COLONIALISM**

Fourth, I argue that applying Beitz's theory to revisionist evidence strongly suggests that European colonialism, albeit presented in a most favorable light, remains a serious violation of substantive justice. Thus, the roughly colonialism-friendly evidence revisionism provides does not eliminate what seems morally problematic about European colonialism at any rate: its failure to generate an appropriate form of substantive justice.

Gilley (2018, 2022) defends the radical view that European colonialism was 'objectively beneficial' and 'subjectively legitimate'. Now '[t]he objective cost/benefit approach', firstly, 'identifies a certain need of human flourishing – development, security, governance, rights, etc. – and asks whether colonialism improved or worsened the objective provision of that need' (Gilley 2018: 169). According to Gilley, anti-colonialist research generally fails to meet key demands of this approach, such as 'properly [enumerating] the things that matter and then [assigning] them weights', and 'measuring the counterfactual: what would likely have happened in a given place absent colonial rule [considering global social, economic, and technological trends and the likely course of indigenous development]?' (2018: 169). To single out colonialism's effects, one should: (i) compare colonized countries with non-colonized ones, which will often turn out

relatively favorable for the former ones; (ii) study colonized countries', 'pre-colonial histories', which will disclose 'comparatively weak institutions, divided societies, and subsistence economies' (Gilley 2018: 169-170). In addition, anti-colonialists have struggled with the epistemic requirement of 'falsification', notably when discussing 'what was undoubtedly a benefit of colonialism: the abolition of slave-trading', which 'puts the greatest strain on their "colonialism is bad" perspective' (Gilley 2018: 171). Research that does meet the above academic standards tends to find that:

[A]t least some, if not many or most, episodes of Western colonialism were a net benefit...[through] significant social, economic, and political gains...: expanded education; improved public health; the abolition of slavery; widened employment opportunities; improved administration; the creation of basic infrastructure; female rights; enfranchisement of untouchable or historically excluded communities; fair taxation; access to capital; the generation of historical and cultural knowledge; and national identity formation (Gilley 2018: 171-172).

In response to critics, Gilley has admitted that '[e]arly and late colonialism were different phenomenon [sic], which as a result had different effects', notably regarding slavery and anti-slavery (2022: 112); consequently, his 'focus [is] on post-1824 colonialism' instead of 'the former (and allegedly worst) period' (Gilley 2022: 113). Yet he has maintained that: (i) colonialism fostered countries' economic growth, political democratization, living and health conditions, education levels, human rights protection, and legal system development; (ii) postcolonial embrace of colonial inheritance made countries prosper more as independent states (Gilley 2023; cf. Fynn-Paul 2023).

Next, '[t]he subjective legitimacy approach' examines if the colonized 'treated [colonialism], through their beliefs and actions, as rightful' (Gilley 2018: 173). Against anti-colonialists who see colonialism as solely illegitimate, Gilley defends its legitimacy:

Millions of people moved closer to areas of more intensive colonial rule, sent their children to colonial schools and hospitals, went beyond the call of duty in positions in colonial governments, reported crimes to colonial police, migrated from non-colonized to colonized areas, fought for colonial armies, and participated in colonial political processes – all relatively voluntary acts. Indeed, the rapid spread and persistence of Western colonialism with very little force relative to the populations and geographies concerned is *prima facie* evidence of its acceptance by subject populations (Gilley 2018: 172).

In response to critics, Gilley (2022: 118) has acknowledged that empirically measuring subjective legitimacy under colonial rule is hard. Yet he has reiterated that 'given the ease of its spread and the minimal degree of coercion...relative to time, population, and geography, the standing assumption must remain that

colonial rule was highly legitimate, a fact reinforced by the tumult that followed colonial rule' (Gilley 2022: 118, cf. 117).

Inspired by what he calls Gilley's 'intellectual integrity and moral courage' (2023a: xiii, cf. 1), Biggar targets anti-colonialism in academia and society. Yet Biggar's argument is more moderate: the 'whole truth' about the British Empire, the largest case of European colonialism, is 'morally complicated and ambiguous', 'though much that obtained in the British case also obtained in the other European ones' (2023a: 7, 5). Firstly, his research detects a number of 'evils' of British colonialism, such as:

brutal slavery; the epidemic spread of devastating disease; economic and social disruption; the unjust displacement of natives by settlers; failures of colonial government to prevent settler abuse and famine; elements of racial alienation and racist contempt; policies of needlessly wholesale cultural suppression; miscarriages of justice; instances of unjustifiable military aggression and the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force; and the failure to admit native talent to the higher echelons of colonial government on terms of equality (Biggar 2023a: 276).

Next, Biggar's research identifies various 'goods' created by the British Empire, starting with its '[renunciation of] the slave trade and slavery...in the name of basic human equality and [the lead of] endeavours to suppress them worldwide for a hundred and fifty years' (Biggar 2023a: 284). The British colonial empire, among other things, also:

moderated the disruptive impact of Western modernity upon very unmodern societies; promoted a worldwide free market that gave native producers and entrepreneurs new economic opportunities; created regional peace by imposing an overarching imperial authority on multiple, warring peoples; perforce involved representatives of native peoples in the lower levels of government; sought to relieve the plight of the rural poor and protect them against rapacious landlords; provided a civil service and judiciary that was generally and extraordinarily incorrupt; developed public infrastructure...; made foreign investment attractive by reducing the risks through establishing political stability and the rule of law; disseminated modern agricultural methods and medicine...; evolved into a loose, consensual, multiracial international organization, the (British) Commonwealth of Nations (Biggar 2023a: 284).

Then, emphatically 'sceptical of [utilitarian] cost-benefit calculations', Biggar argues that the evils and goods are so unlike that they must be considered 'incommensurable', that is, they 'cannot be sensibly reduced to a common currency and then weighed against each other' (Biggar 2023a: 423 n.46, 285). Nevertheless, the British Empire – given the arguable goodness or innocence of its central 'values, principles, and goals' – was 'not systematically unjust', that is, not as deeply racist, exploitative, and violent as contemporary anti-colonialist critics insist; rather, it was 'systematically just, whether more or less' (Biggar 2023a: 285-288, quotations 285). Finally, similar to Gilley, Biggar stresses the 'subjective legitimacy'



of British colonial rule, which was expressed through local peoples' '[recognition of] the good that colonial government did' (2023a: 288).

If we now apply our Beitzian substantive justice standard to Gilley's and Biggar's accounts generously, by taking the empirical quality of their analyses for granted, how should we then assess (their accounts of) European (or British) colonialism? Basically, I will argue that both authors, in their fixation on refuting the anti-colonialists, set the moral bar too low and thus fail to see the substantive injustice of European (or British) colonialism.<sup>9</sup> First, we should note that both authors fail to theorize (substantive) justice, and particularly fail to articulate 'some sort of principle of just distribution' (Beitz, quoted earlier). Gilley's objective-consequentialist and subjective-legitimacy reasoning misses the essence of substantive justice; arguably, colonialism could meet both these standards but still be unjust. His 'subjective legitimacy' criterion may cover actual 'consent' (or tacit acceptance), but it does not encompass 'legitimacy' as based on hypothetical consent and the resulting principles of justice to be satisfied. Biggar (2023a: 8-13) offers a quite extensive presentation of his non-consequentialist ethical perspective, but he, too, does not stress any requirement of (substantive) justice; thus, he does not go much beyond stressing a (rather obvious) standard of basic human equality, the role of just war theory (which, at the level of *jus ad bellum* at any rate, may be hard to maintain if indeed European colonialism itself was an injustice), and especially the importance of judging past actors with moral restraint from the viewpoint of the present (which, however, is more relevant to moral understanding than to moral justification). Therefore, we should approach Biggar's eventual incommensurability of pros and cons framework with due caution, as that should not function as an escape from apt critical assessment.<sup>10</sup>

Second, from the perspective of justice, Gilley's and Biggar's accounts make a concession that is much more serious than both authors seem to realize: especially but not only because of the practices of (racist) slave trade and slavery, the first phase of colonialism, European and British, was the worst one. But if so, European (and British) colonialism did not start as an attempt to generate substantive justice for all involved, the colonized in particular, which it should have done if possible at all. Thus, European (and British) colonialism did not embody a direct effort or intention to bring appropriately justice-based legitimate rule to the subjugated peoples, when arguably their rights and interests should have been safeguarded first of all, from the very start. Gilley's and Biggar's very strategies to more or less rehabilitate European colonialism, then, may well be one of dubiously 'arguing back', that is, of pardoning the early injustice by pointing to later benefit (cf. Malik 2023). Notably Gilley's (distracting) counterfactual and

<sup>9</sup> The argument to follow occasionally draws and builds on Kamminga (2024: 197-200).

<sup>10</sup> I will return to Biggar's incommensurability framework below.

postcolonial argumentation suggests a questionable way to conceal or legitimize the primary injustice of European colonialism.

Fourth, strikingly, the ‘benefits’ of European colonialism listed by both Gilley and Biggar are not rapid benefits and seem mostly (much) later ones, and even include reparation of earlier harms, whereas the evils listed by Biggar are mostly (already) early ones. Indeed, this evident problem from the perspective of substantive justice is obscured by Biggar’s incommensurability of pros and cons ethical framework. Thus, highlighting the incommensurability of the goods and evils identified may be abstractly correct, but, from the primary perspective of the colonized, it is concretely misleading: when judging the (in)justice of British and European colonialism, the evils should properly be given more weight than the goods. Biggar’s ‘the truth is nuanced’-argument against the anti-colonialists, then, effectively covers up British (and European) colonialism’s injustices.

Fifth, while the evils of European colonialism were mostly borne by the colonized peoples, the goods of European colonialism were not even distributed in a remotely just way among colonizers and colonized. Biggar himself admits, as we saw, that British colonial powers failed ‘to admit native talent to the higher echelons of colonial government on terms of equality’. But one particularly remarkable result of European and British colonialism was that the benefits of the abolition of slavery were distributed in a grossly unjust way. Thus, while many millions were paid to ‘slave-owners’ to compensate them ‘for their loss of property’, all that enslaved people received was their ‘emancipation’; that, in the British context, Biggar hints at this arrangement as ‘a distasteful but necessary political compromise’ is conceivable, but his suggestion that it was also ‘morally justified, even obligatory’ (2023a: 57, 63) is effectively to conceal the injustice of the arrangement itself and the underlying colonial condition (cf. Malik 2023).

Sixth, even if we accept the authors’ ‘subjective legitimacy’ as a criterion of justice, we should note that the claim that subject peoples perceived European (and British) colonialism as legitimate is unconvincing. Gilley and Biggar do not really show that the colonized found the alien rule they became subjected to ‘legitimate’; indeed, perhaps the colonized dealt with colonial rule opportunistically (by making the best of the situation) or fearfully (in fear of reprisals or of even worse alternative rulings), even if so in a ‘relatively voluntary’ (Gilley) way. However, note that to demonstrate subjective legitimacy under colonialism would be virtually impossible anyway, as the empirical measurement difficulties Gilley points to have a philosophical basis of their own: the earlier-discussed procedural critique of colonialism. If, for the sake of argument, this philosophical critique (compatible as it is with a Beitzian-substantive one) does hold, European colonialism would have to be regarded as unjust instantly.

Thus, their attempts at moral assessment notwithstanding, Gilley’s and Biggar’s revisionist accounts fail to see the injustice committed, ‘the heart of the case against colonialism’ (Beitz), as the morally too high cost of European colonialism.

Indeed, even if Gilley and Biggar rightfully hold against anti-colonialists that European colonialism is no pure evil and different from (European) slavery, or genocide, their own accounts imply the early as well as continuing injustice of the European colonial practice. As such, the ‘whole truth’ about European (or British) colonialism is much less ‘morally complicated and ambiguous’ than Biggar, still the most colonialism-critical of the two, likes to think. Strikingly, both tend to *excuse* European colonialism’s whole injustice. The (immediate) cause of this may well be a neglect of the relevant philosophical ethical literature. Arguably, even if their historical analyses hold, European colonialism also does not qualify, in Rawlsian terminology, as merely ‘decent’ for not having secured human rights from its very beginning. If so, European colonialism is an intolerableness.

## CONCLUSION

In deviation from anti-colonialist resolute condemnation and philosophical-proceduralist eschewal, I have defended Beitz’s open ethical method for evaluating colonialism, which sees colonialism as usually unjust yet facilitates judgmental revision in actual cases. Subsequently, I have argued that the revisionist case to more or less rehabilitate European colonialism cannot be ethically sustained: it fails to offer plausible reasons for abandoning the dominant view that European colonialism was a serious injustice, even if not inevitably so. My argument, however, does entail a modification of Tan’s summary account, as it implies that European colonialism’s violation of a right to self-determination *per se* is no part of the injustice.

Thus, to philosophically assess European colonialism as an empirical-historical phenomenon, is to insist on its substantive injustice and accordingly its illegitimacy, irrespective of the benefits brought to subjugated peoples and the wrongs committed by post-colonial regimes. It is my contention that such a philosophical ethical treatment of (European) colonialism and revisionist attempts to more or less rehabilitate it is more directly and effectively critical than current anti-colonialism. In any case, given the (relative) colonialism-friendliness of revisionist moral history writing, my critique may serve as a secure minimum: while the empirical dispute between anti-colonialists and revisionists cannot be settled philosophically, the more anti-colonialism (or some other revisionism-critical account) could be shown historically correct, the even more serious the injustice of European colonialism will turn out to be.

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# OCCHIO AL PANOPTICON BENTHAM E LO SGUARDO COME STRUMENTO DI CONTROLLO SOCIALE

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## ABSTRACT

The article investigates the central socio-political function played by the gaze in *Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon*. The relevant role of the sense of sight in the Inspection House already emerges clearly in the light of the cultural temperament and historical context in which it was designed, as both are imbued with a renewed taste for theatricality, not only in aesthetic terms but also with distinctly political reflections. However, the contextualisation of the panoptic project within *Jeremy Bentham's Political Theory and Theory of Punishment* - both indebted to his ethical-anthropological perspective - will allow for a clearer understanding of the social and political significance of the gaze as its essential profile: as operating in the Panopticon, in fact, the sense of sight would have guaranteed not only a (reflexive) monitoring *of society* but also a control over the rulers (represented by the inspector) *by society*. Through his articulate reflection, Bentham corroborates a link between visibility and surveillance that is destined to persist in the present time.

## KEYWORDS

Bentham; Panopticon; gaze; Bentham's Political Theory; Bentham's Theory of punishment

## 1. IL PANOPTICON DI CRISTALLO E LA FORZA DELLO SGUARDO

In una delle più celebri *Favole al telefono*, Gianni Rodari racconta di un bambino di nome Giacomo<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Cfr. Rodari, 2010, 116-118.

Giacomo era noto tra gli abitanti della sua città come “Giacomo di cristallo”, non tanto in virtù della sua fragilità, quanto piuttosto in ragione della sua totale trasparenza, paragonabile a quella del vetro, dell’aria e dell’acqua. Attraverso il suo corpo cristallino era possibile carpirne con la vista gli organi vitali, i pensieri, le bugie e i segreti. La sua involontaria schiettezza presto lo rese invisibile al cruento tiranno della città, il quale non poteva tollerare che i sinceri pensieri di spontaneo sdegno nei suoi confronti si diffondessero tra i sudditi senza che il bambino, oramai adulto, nemmeno aprisse bocca. Giacomo fu dunque catturato e rinchiuso nella più buia delle prigioni. E qui accadde il miracolo: la trasparenza di Giacomo si trasmise dapprima alle celle, poi alle mura del carcere, e infine all’intera cinta muraria esterna. La prigione era diventata come di cristallo, e splendeva di luce propria tra le ombre notturne. Sicché tutti i sudditi della città, di giorno e di notte, vicini o lontani, dentro o fuori dal carcere, avrebbero potuto, passandoci accanto, posare il proprio sguardo su Giacomo e continuare a scrutarne i pensieri.

Forse era così che Jeremy Bentham immaginava il proprio Panopticon, il progetto di un «edificio trasparente»<sup>2</sup> che egli pensava anzitutto quale prototipo di prigione.

L’«alveare trasparente»<sup>3</sup> che il filosofo inglese elaborò a partire dai disegni del fratello minore si sarebbe dovuto presentare come una struttura architettonica circolare<sup>4</sup>: lungo il perimetro esterno sarebbero state posizionate le celle destinate ad accogliere i detenuti<sup>5</sup>, da soli o a gruppi<sup>6</sup>; al centro, entro le mura di un’alta torre, si sarebbe collocato l’ispettore<sup>7</sup>, coadiuvato nelle sue mansioni dalla propria famiglia e da una pluralità di sottoguardiani; infine, all’interno della cinta muraria avrebbero dovuto essere ricavati dei passaggi, che avrebbero permesso ai sudditi liberi di entrare ed uscire dalla *Inspection house* a loro piacimento<sup>8</sup>. La «gabbia trasparente e circolare»<sup>9</sup> sarebbe stata illuminata di giorno tramite la luce solare accolta da larghe inferriate e ampi lucernari, e di notte attraverso molteplici lampade<sup>10</sup>, e il suo funzionamento sarebbe dipeso da un gioco ottico reso possibile dall’architettura stessa: i prigionieri, infatti, proprio come Giacomo di cristallo, avrebbero potuto essere visti da chiunque e in qualsiasi momento, tuttavia non avrebbero mai potuto vedere i propri osservatori<sup>11</sup>.

La natura, per così dire, cristallina propria del Panopticon ed essenziale al suo corretto funzionamento impone la necessità di effettuare un’analisi del ruolo

<sup>2</sup> Foucault, 2019, 226.

<sup>3</sup> Zanuso, 1989, 256.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1983c, 37 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, IV, 40).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Steadman, 2007, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1983c, 37 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, IV, 40).

<sup>8</sup> Si veda in seguito.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, 2019, 227.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1983c, 39 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, IV, 41).

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, 46-47 (*ivi*, 44).



effettivamente rivestito all'interno della *Inspection house* dal senso umano che si colloca alla base della trasparenza, ovvero sia la vista.

Da un lato, è necessario ricordare che Bentham “scoprì” il Panopticon e decise di proseguirne l'elaborazione teorica e pratica in un periodo storico contraddistinto, al contempo, da epocali novità e allarmanti problematiche sociali, delle quali, peraltro, egli si stava già occupando con notevole interesse<sup>12</sup>. L'*Inspection house* concepita dal filosofo londinese avrebbe dovuto fungere da prototipo non soltanto per le prigioni, ma anche per altri edifici pubblici e privati<sup>13</sup>, i quali avrebbero dovuto essere ripensati in termini panottici al fine di assicurare un controllo sociale capace di donare finalmente ordine e sicurezza a una collettività confusa e disorientata a causa degli eventi storici dei quali era in balia<sup>14</sup>.

Dall'altro lato, il Panopticon si innesta entro la più ampia concezione politica di Bentham, il quale, con il passare degli anni, si dimostrò sempre più avverso a quelle forme di corruzione che, a suo dire, venivano attuate dai politici inglesi a danno del bene pubblico. Agli occhi del filosofo inglese, la *Inspection house* rappresentava un modello ideale (e forse utopico) di comunità: in essa non vi sarebbe stato spazio per il perseguimento dei c.d. *sinister interests*, in quanto funzionari e governanti (rappresentati *in primis* dall'ispettore) sarebbero stati assoggettati al perenne controllo dei sudditi, e il popolo dal quale essi sarebbero dipesi avrebbe dovuto considerarsi detentore del potere sovrano.

Tali forme di controllo *della* società e *da parte della* società paiono attuarsi, nel contesto panottico, attraverso quella che, citando il titolo di un interessante saggio di Umberto Curi, può definirsi “la forza dello sguardo”.

Per tale ragione, dapprima la rilevanza della vista relativamente al Panopticon verrà esaminata alla luce di un profilo essenziale dello stesso, perlopiù emergente dallo studio della sua evoluzione storica, ovvero sia la teatralità.

In seguito, dopo aver effettuato una sintesi del pensiero politico di Bentham, si avrà cura di notare come la gerarchia sociale che egli immagina nei principali scritti politici trovi un proprio delineamento anche nelle opere dedicate alla *Inspection house*, ove il primato del popolo si manifesta nelle dinamiche dello

<sup>12</sup>Emblema di tali problematiche è la condizione delle prigioni nella seconda metà del 1700. Come riporta il filantropo inglese John Howard, le carceri europee ed americane si presentavano all'epoca come luogo di corruzione e perdizione. In esse, delinquenti di varia natura, di diversa età e di differente sesso venivano stipati in gran numero entro ambienti angusti e malsani: al loro interno, violenza ed estorsione, depravazione morale e promiscuità sessuale, malattie ed omicidi erano dinamiche estremamente frequenti. Sul punto cfr. Howard, 1777. Sull'aumento demografico intervenuto nel corso del XVIII secolo e sulle problematiche igieniche, economiche, ospedaliere e carcerarie pericolosamente occorse nel corso dell'epoca dei Lumi cfr. Curi, 2004, 214-224.

<sup>13</sup>Bentham stesso si premura di indicare con puntualità tutte le variazioni architettoniche che il Panopticon avrebbe dovuto subire per meglio adattarsi a fungere ora da fabbrica ora da manicomio, ora da scuola ora da ospedale: cfr. Bentham, 1983c, 81 ss. (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, IV, 58 ss.). Sulla multifunzionalità del Panopticon cfr. La Monica, 2014, 11; Contadini, 2016, 89; Pavarini e Melossi, 2018, 108; Kutz, 2019, 2. Bentham pervenne al punto di dedicare un'opera intera alla progettazione di una scuola retta dal principio panottico: cfr. Bentham, 1993. Sul punto cfr. Komatsu, 2019, 6-7.

<sup>14</sup>Cfr. Gombert, 2014, 12; Cottell e Muller, 2020, 262; Marchesin, 2024b, 102-103.

sguardo e, al contempo, è reso possibile dalle stesse. Successivamente, a seguito dell'analisi della teoria penalistica del filosofo londinese, si vedrà come quest'ultimo ritenesse la vista il senso umano migliore non solo per il controllo dell'altro, ma anche per la disciplina di sé.

Da ultimo, si evidenzierà come lo stretto legame tra monitoraggio e sguardo instaurato da Bentham all'interno e per mezzo del Panopticon rappresenti un elemento ancor oggi (anche solo implicitamente) consolidato nelle analisi dei principali esponenti nell'ambito dei *surveillance studies*, anche da parte di coloro che, in tempi recenti, hanno inteso dimostrare la totale o parziale divergenza della sorveglianza attuale rispetto al modello panottico.

## 2. PANOPTICON, CHE SPETTACOLO!

All'interno del Panopticon di Jeremy Bentham, il senso della vista riveste un ruolo di primaria importanza. Esso, infatti, non è soltanto indispensabile – come si vedrà più approfonditamente in seguito – per il corretto funzionamento della *Inspection house* così come concepita dal filosofo inglese. Lo sguardo rappresenta un elemento essenziale della teatralità, la quale a propria volta costituisce un'entità caratteristica del Panopticon, nonché del suo sviluppo teorico e pratico.

Relativamente ai progetti, concreti o rimasti su carta, che funsero da ispirazione per Samuel Bentham, prima, e per suo fratello Jeremy, poi, nella predisposizione della *Inspection house*, gli studiosi hanno azzardato, nel tempo, un ingente numero di ipotesi più o meno audaci. Michel Foucault indicò inizialmente due edifici, entrambi parigini, quali possibili modelli di riferimento, ovvero la Ménagerie di Versailles<sup>15</sup> e la Scuola militare di Parigi<sup>16</sup>. Più di recente, invece, Roger Morrissè pervenuto al punto di sostenere che Samuel potrebbe aver progettato il Panopticon nel tentativo di trasporvi, perfezionato, un principio architettonico applicato in un'opera navale che egli aveva già intrapreso nel territorio russo<sup>17</sup>.

Tuttavia, non mancano autorevoli prospettive che ricollegano la *Inspection house* benthamiana a uno schema teatrale.

Da un lato, Robin Evans nota non trascurabili somiglianze architettoniche tra il Panopticon e il Teatro (o Anfiteatro) della Memoria<sup>18</sup>, un modello, anch'esso mai realizzato, descritto nel XVI secolo da Giulio Camillo Delminio in *L'idea di Theatro*. Dall'altro lato, Philip Smith ritiene che la *Inspection house* del filosofo londinese e di suo fratello vanti un rilevante debito nei confronti della *Rotunda* del Renelagh Pleasure Gardens<sup>19</sup>, luogo verosimilmente conosciuto da entrambi

<sup>15</sup>Cfr. Foucault, 2019, 221-222.

<sup>16</sup>Cfr. Barou e Perrot, 1983, 8-9.

<sup>17</sup>Cfr. Morrissè, 2015, 178.

<sup>18</sup>Cfr. Evans, 1982, 209.

<sup>19</sup>Cfr. Smith, 2008, 107.

data la sua generale notorietà tra l'aristocrazia inglese e vista la sua collocazione nel quartiere londinese di Chelsea, sulle sponde del Tamigi: un edificio circolare avente un perimetro di diametro pari a 120/150 piedi ove insistevano una cinquantina di palchetti privati che affacciavano su un palcoscenico centrale, sin da subito utilizzato per tenere concerti musicali di grande rilevanza sociale.

In generale non è affatto improbabile che i fratelli Bentham abbiano progettato il Panopticon a partire da un modello teatrale, tenuto conto, peraltro, dell'allora temperie culturale, contraddistinta sia dalla nascita di nuove forme di espressione artistica quali il panorama<sup>20</sup>, sia dal coevo e progressivo passaggio a un teatro ove lo spettatore veniva sempre più relegato in una posizione di oscurità e silenzio in contrasto con la condizione dell'attore, destinato a declamare il proprio copione entro un palcoscenico costantemente illuminato<sup>21</sup>.

A livello storico, la teatralità insita nella *Inspection house* emerge vividamente dalle analisi di Simon Werrett.

All'interno del contesto socio-politico russo in cui Samuel elaborò i primi progetti panottici che tanto piacquero al fratello, «the atricality constituted a fundamental component of the [...] nobility's life»<sup>22</sup>: la Russia desiderava dare al mondo un'immagine di sé quale Paradiso terrestre, nel quale «Catherine [II] was portrayed as a 'planter' or 'gardener' in court ceremony, allying the Empress with the image of God as the creator of Eden»<sup>23</sup>.

Inoltre, proprio negli anni in cui Samuel iniziò a lavorare alle dipendenze di Grigorij Aleksandrovič Potëmkin (ovverosia, a partire dal 1780 circa), il potente principe russo «suggested to Catherine [II] a tour of the southern provinces and the Crimea, to survey the work he had been overseeing there»: tale visita, infatti, avrebbe costretto la sovrana ad allontanarsi dalla Capitale nella quale era da poco rientrata, e ciò allo scopo di «cut off the influence of his[of Potëmkin] antagonists,

<sup>20</sup>David Kutz nota che «a less frequently discussed comparison of these two late eighteenth century inventions [Panopticon e panorama] is to consider them as theatrical forums – or spectacles»: Kutz, 2019, 4. Sulle analogie che legano Panopticon e panorama, nonché sulle possibili modalità con cui le due invenzioni di fine Settecento si influenzarono a vicenda cfr. Oettermann, 1997, 41; Welzbacher, 2018, 87; Kutz, 2019, 3-4; Fiddler, 2022, 7.

<sup>21</sup>Come osserva Peter J. Hutchings, è proprio nel corso della seconda metà del XVIII secolo che si consuma un passaggio fondamentale dal modello del cinquecentesco teatro *The Rose* a quello del teatro anatomico. Nei teatri di tale periodo storico, infatti, gli attori conservarono il proprio ruolo di protagonisti all'interno del palcoscenico, mentre agli spettatori – prima autorizzati a partecipare chiassosamente alla rappresentazione messa in scena, e illuminati da lampade o dalla luce del sole – venne chiesto di rimanere in silenzio durante lo spettacolo, nonché di sedere in platee e gallerie buie: cfr. Hutchings, 2001, 32.

<sup>22</sup>Werrett, 2008, 57. Simon Werrett specifica che nella Russia di fine Settecento la nobiltà era solita mescolare teatro e realtà. Inoltre, a seguito delle politiche precedentemente perseguite da Pietro il Grande, i nobili russi erano usi atteggiarsi artificialmente alla maniera occidentale per accrescere la propria reputazione agli occhi del sovrano: ciò portò a un maggior consumo di libri di autori occidentali, nonché alla trasformazione delle tradizionali tenute russe in palcoscenici per spettacoli stravaganti.

<sup>23</sup>Werrett, 2000, 178.

and at the same time dazzle the Empress with “the grandest spectacle of her reign”»<sup>24</sup>. Sicché, «from the beginning, Bentham’s activities at Krichev were connected with Catherine’s imperial tour» e «[his] responsibilities reflected the desires of Potemkin to theatricize the southern regions as a new Russian paradise»<sup>25</sup>.

Pertanto, come ribadisce Michael Fiddler, il Panopticon di Samuel avrebbe dovuto essere parte integrante dell’Eden che Potëmkin desiderava ricreare nei territori di propria competenza al fine di impressionare positivamente Caterina II<sup>26</sup>. Riproducendo lo schema tradizionale della tenuta russa<sup>27</sup>, la *Inspection house* avrebbe permesso all’imperatrice e ai suoi ospiti di posizionarsi nella torre centrale e, da lì, di godere dello spettacolo offerto dal lavoro della numerosa e ordinata manovalanza collocata lungo il perimetro<sup>28</sup>.

Infine, una volta innestato nella riflessione filosofica di Jeremy, il Panopticon di Samuel acquisì ulteriori elementi strutturali destinati ad accentuarne la teatralità. E non si trattò solamente di profili architettonici, pur rilevanti, come la *chapel gallery*, uno spazio polivalente sovrastante la loggia dell’ispettore da cui avrebbero potuto celebrarsi i riti divini e dove gli amministratori avrebbero potuto constatare il funzionamento della *Inspection house*<sup>29</sup>.

Il Panopticon di Samuel, permettendo a pochi (l’imperatrice e i suoi ospiti) di vedere molti (i servitori), pare effettivamente realizzare, almeno in parte, la lettura di N.H. Julius, secondo il quale esso segnerebbe il passaggio storico dalla società dello spettacolo a quella della sorveglianza<sup>30</sup>. Viceversa, nell’*Inspection house* di Jeremy i (molti) cittadini avrebbero potuto farvi ingresso e, una volta entrati, avrebbero potuto vedere i (pochi) detenuti e guardiani in esso presenti, sicché pare corretta l’osservazione di Philip Smith, per il quale «for the great utilitarian the panopticon was not simply an observatory for the cold eye of one over the many, but rather a theater and spectacle where the multitude could look upon a few for both entertainment and edification»<sup>31</sup>.

Ciò consente di comprendere per quale ragione «Jeremy Bentham continued to identify this theatricality as a key aspect of the Panopticon’s functioning. In his published account of the Panopticon, Bentham described his institution as “a Masquerade”, a theatre “serious, affecting and instructive”»<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>24</sup>Werrett, 2000, 180. Tra gennaio e luglio 1787, Caterina II effettuò il *tour* in Crimea unitamente a Potëmkin, l’imperatore Giuseppe II d’Austria e una delegazione di ambasciatori stranieri.

<sup>25</sup>Werrett, 2000, 181.

<sup>26</sup>Cfr. Fiddler, 2022, 8. Cfr. anche Werrett, 2015, 4.

<sup>27</sup>Cfr. Werrett, 1999, 13, e Werrett, 2008, 60.

<sup>28</sup>Cfr. Werrett, 2000, 183-184.

<sup>29</sup>Cfr. Kutz, 2019, 4.

<sup>30</sup>Cfr. Julius, 1831, 384-386.

<sup>31</sup>Smith, 2008, 106.

<sup>32</sup>Werrett, 2000, 184.

### 3. BENTHAM E LA DEMOCRAZIA RAPPRESENTATIVA

Come già affermava Norberto Bobbio, «Bentham è a modo suo uno scrittore democratico»<sup>33</sup>.

Se, infatti, il filosofo inglese dimostrò ciò che Paola Rudan definisce «una 'tensione democratica'»<sup>34</sup> sin dal *Fragment on Government* del 1776, è altrettanto vero che tale anelito andò rafforzandosi nel corso della sua lunga vita.

Bentham era un intellettuale acuto, particolarmente attento a vicende e problematiche del suo tempo<sup>35</sup>. Da un lato, ciò lo condusse ad approfondire la conoscenza dell'evolversi della Rivoluzione americana, della quale apprezzò *in primis* proprio gli sviluppi in senso democratico<sup>36</sup>. Dall'altro lato, stante anche la temperie culturale dell'epoca, egli entrò presto in contatto con altri pensatori inglesi<sup>37</sup> che, condividendo i suoi assunti, formarono un «partito di agitazione democratica organizzato secondo i modi propri del XIX secolo»<sup>38</sup>. Da ultimo, proprio il tracollo del dispendioso tentativo di realizzare un Panopticon in Inghilterra convinse il filosofo londinese della necessità di promuovere una decisa svolta democratica anche nella madrepatria, posto che egli individuò le ragioni di tale fallimento proprio nella corruzione che attanagliava l'allora classe dirigente<sup>39</sup>.

Benché alcune delle pagine più buie della Rivoluzione francese lo avessero fatto ritornare, talvolta, verso posizioni più tradizionaliste e conservatrici<sup>40</sup>, Bentham non smise mai del tutto di foraggiare con i propri scritti la causa

<sup>33</sup> Bobbio, 1991, 102.

<sup>34</sup> Rudan, 2016, 1. Tale espressione viene usata da Paola Rudan per indicare il «riconoscimento [da parte di Bentham] dell'azione continua di un 'principio popolare' della società politica che deve essere governato per garantirne la continuità nel tempo»: Rudan, 2016, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Ne è una dimostrazione il *Frigidarium* che Bentham ideò per la conservazione di cibi e bevande in un periodo storico contraddistinto da conflitti bellici, carestie e aumenti demografici: cfr. Cohen, 1997.

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. Rudan, 2010, 118.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. Reichlin, 2013, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Formigari, 1982, 7. Cfr. anche Loche, 1991, 208-209, e Llewellyn, 2021, 1 e 4-5.

<sup>39</sup> Alcuni studiosi evidenziano che proprio la mancata realizzazione del Panopticon da parte delle autorità inglesi indusse Bentham a ritenere estremamente e pericolosamente corrotto l'ambiente politico dell'Inghilterra e, quindi, ad abbracciare posizioni maggiormente democratiche: cfr. Cavanna, 1982, 604, e Guidi, 2009, 21. Sul punto cfr. anche Tyler, 2017, 7, e Causer, 2022, 371. Sull'importanza rivestita dalla consapevolezza della corruzione e dei *sinisterinterests* dei governanti per l'evoluzione del pensiero politico benthamiano cfr. Crimmins, 1994, *passim*; Schofield, 2006, 109-136; Vitali, 2023, 267.

<sup>40</sup> Come describe Mark J. Kaswan, Bentham «flirted with democratic ideas in the late 1780s, only to be scared away by events following the revolution in France [...]» e «the occasion of his return to those ideas came with the "discovery" in 1804 of what he referred to as "sinister interest," or the idea that rulers, in pursuing their own self-interest, might act in opposition to the interests of the citizens over whom they rule»: Kaswan, 2010, 3. Cfr., sul punto, anche Kaino, 2008, 21-22, e Rudan, 2016, 1.

democratica; anzi, egli continuò a perorarla attraverso lunghe e molteplici trattazioni, fino al *Constitutional Code*.

Come ricorda Annamaria Loche, le ragioni che indussero il filosofo inglese alla teorizzazione di una democrazia rappresentativa non sono soltanto di natura personale. Esse risultano essere strettamente correlate anche alla matrice utilitaristica che ne informa il pensiero<sup>41</sup>.

Come noto, il principio cardine ispiratore della filosofia morale e politica di Bentham è quello d'utilità, secondo il quale «la natura ha posto il genere umano sotto il dominio di due supremi padroni: il *dolore* e il *piacere*»<sup>42</sup>.

Dal punto di vista dell'individuo, generalmente si ritiene che tale assioma fondi il teorema antropologico-morale del c.d. egoismo motivazionale, in virtù del quale l'essere umano si configurerebbe come entità individualistica ed auto-centrata, in quanto sempre propensa a soddisfare il *propriopleasure* e a evitare il *pain* che potrebbe occorrere a *proprio* danno<sup>43</sup>.

Per vero, non manca nel pensiero benthamiano il riconoscimento di affezioni sociali che, agendo sul *felicific calculus* individuale, possono indurre a preoccuparsi e prendersi cura anche dell'interesse altrui, e non esclusivamente del proprio in senso stretto.

Come noto, il principio di utilità postula che un'azione sia meritevole di approvazione o disapprovazione a seconda della sua tendenza a, rispettivamente, aumentare o diminuire la felicità della parte il cui interesse è in causa<sup>44</sup>. Pertanto, nell'ambito dell'etica privata, qualora l'agito dispieghi le proprie conseguenze solamente nei confronti di colui che agisce, da costui si dovrà pretendere la virtù della *prudenza*, ovverosia la qualità di saper accrescere o, quantomeno, non diminuire la propria felicità<sup>45</sup>. Tuttavia, poiché l'individuo vive ed opera perlopiù in un contesto sociale, è ben possibile che una porzione affatto irrilevante delle sue condotte sia destinata a coinvolgere e, pertanto, interessare non soltanto il soggetto agente ma anche altre persone, destinatarie a vario titolo e con diversi gradi di intensità dei suoi effetti. In tali casi, l'arte di autogoverno, in adesione al summenzionato principio di utilità, imporrà di esercitare le virtù della *probità* e della *beneficienza*, ovverosia, le capacità di – rispettivamente – non far decrescere o, addirittura, far aumentare la felicità altrui<sup>46</sup>.

Eppure, la ragione profonda che induce l'essere umano a curarsi degli interessi altrui e a operare anche al fine di conservare o implementare la felicità degli altri non è data da una naturale tendenza filantropica o altruista. Secondo il Maestro dell'utilitarismo, infatti, il comportamento tenuto dall'individuo non influisce

<sup>41</sup> Cfr. Loche, 1991, 206.

<sup>42</sup> Bentham, 1998, 65 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 1).

<sup>43</sup> Cfr. Zamagni, 2009, 97-101.

<sup>44</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1998, 65 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 1).

<sup>45</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, 341-342 (*ivi*, 143).

<sup>46</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, 342 (*ivi*, 143).

soltanto sulla felicità di costui: esso inciderà anche sulla felicità altrui, producendo i suoi effetti piacevoli o dolorosi anche nei confronti degli altri, dalle cui azioni e reazioni dipenderà, almeno in parte, anche la felicità del soggetto agente<sup>47</sup>.

Poiché, dunque, «dalle relazioni sociali scaturiscono alcune sanzioni, vale a dire piaceri e dolori, che devono essere computate nel calcolo individuale»<sup>48</sup>, al soggetto utilitarista converrà generalmente manifestare agiti probi o addirittura beneficienti oltre che prudenti, poiché, concorrendo gli stessi alla preservazione o all'implementazione della felicità delle altre persone, essi gioveranno alla felicità del soggetto agente e, soprattutto, ad essi verosimilmente seguiranno condotte altrui che, a loro volta, non la diminuiranno o addirittura la aumenteranno<sup>49</sup>. Come sostiene Paola Calónico, «nella prospettiva utilitaristica, bisogna essere *probi* [e *beneficenti*] per accrescere il *proprio* benessere»<sup>50</sup>.

Dalla prospettiva della collettività, invece, il filosofo londinese applicò il principio d'utilità alla vita politica e associata ricavandone il *greatest happiness principle*, assunto in virtù del quale è possibile individuare lo scopo primario di qualsivoglia *good government*, ovvero sia il perseguimento della *greatest happiness of the greatest number*<sup>51</sup>.

Tuttavia, i due precipitati teorici derivanti dal principio d'utilità non paiono, nemmeno agli occhi di Bentham medesimo, passibili di una convivenza spontaneamente pacifica. Come egli spiega, l'instaurazione del *good government* rappresenta un obiettivo grandemente ostacolato proprio dalla tendenza egoistica degli esseri umani, e dei governanti in particolar modo: essi, infatti, alla stregua di qualsiasi altra persona e indipendentemente dalla loro caratura etico-morale, sono naturalmente indotti a perseguire i propri interessi personali (c.d. *sinister*

<sup>47</sup> Cfr. Calónico, 2024, 19.

<sup>48</sup> *Ivi*, 33.

<sup>49</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1983b, 150. Tale regola etica viene indicata da Bentham sia per far fronte all'incapacità degli individui di calcolare correttamente le conseguenze dei propri atti, sia per incentivare a non soffermarsi soltanto sui piaceri e dolori immediati ma anche su quelli futuri.

<sup>50</sup> Calónico, 2024, 34. Cfr. Bentham, 1983b, 184. Più in generale, nell'*Introduzione ai principi della morale e della legislazione* Bentham annovera tra i piaceri anche quelli che definisce «della benevolenza» (oppure «del benvolere», «della simpatia», «delle affezioni benevole»), ovvero quelli percepiti dall'individuo nel vedere altri esseri sensibili (non solo esseri umani ma anche animali) godere a loro volta di piaceri (cfr. Bentham, 1998, 99; ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 17). L'Inglese ammette apertamente che tale tipologia di piaceri ben possa costituire un movente (il c.d. benvolere) capace di determinare l'azione dell'essere senziente (cfr. *ivi*, 169; *ivi*, 52), in misura in parte dipendente anche dalla sensibilità di ciascuno (cfr. *ivi*, 113; *ivi*, 24-25). Tuttavia, secondo Bentham, la condotta generata dal movente del benvolere non può dirsi affatto priva di riflessi egoistici, ovvero sia preordinati all'aumento del piacere o alla diminuzione del dolore dell'agente stesso. Come viene esplicitato nella trattazione delle relazioni di simpatia, ad esempio, un individuo si preoccupa del benessere delle persone a cui è legato da un rapporto di tal genere principalmente per il fatto che «l'idea della loro felicità gli procura piacere, mentre quella della loro infelicità gli procura dolore» (*ivi*, 115; *ivi*, 26).

<sup>51</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1983a, 136-137. Cfr. Tyler, 2017, 5 e 8.

*interests*), disinteressandosi, se del caso, della felicità comune, e anche a costo di sacrificare gli interessi collettivi<sup>52</sup>.

Ed è proprio entro tale orizzonte antropologico e politico che si collocano i ragionamenti benthamiani attorno alla rilevanza della *publicity*.

Nella riflessione benthamiana, non mancano ipotesi nelle quali si riconosce la necessità di mantenere o perseguire un certo grado di *secrecy*<sup>53</sup>, come nel caso dell'esercizio del diritto di voto da parte del suddito<sup>54</sup>. Tuttavia, nel rapporto politico che astringe governanti e governati, il Maestro dell'utilitarismo non sembra paventare dubbi sulla necessità che a prevalere sia il valore della *publicity*, al fine di scongiurare il realizzarsi e il reiterarsi di pratiche abusive da parte dei primi a pregiudizio dei secondi.

Nella concezione socio-politica benthamiana, l'abuso altro non è che «una qualche pratica da cui risulta, per molti, una quantità di sofferenza più che pari alla messe di piaceri raccolta da pochi»<sup>55</sup>. Se, in sé, qualsiasi soggetto o raggruppamento di individui potrebbe potenzialmente tenere una condotta abusiva nei termini anzidetti<sup>56</sup>, tale probabilità appare assai più elevata in relazione a coloro che detengono funzioni e poteri di governo<sup>57</sup>. Da un lato, infatti, essi sono pur sempre esseri umani dominati da *pain* e *pleasure* e, pertanto, sono contraddistinti nelle loro azioni dal medesimo egoismo motivazionale che caratterizza qualsiasi altra persona. Dall'altro lato, tuttavia, a differenza dei governati, i governanti, in quanto tali, hanno maggiore accesso a strumenti esterni di felicità (denaro, privilegi, potere di evitare punizioni, etc.), i quali non possono

<sup>52</sup>Cfr. Bentham, 1981, 41 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, II, 413), e Bentham, 2007b, 233 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, II, 282-283). Benché inizialmente riponesse una certa fiducia nei confronti dei governanti, con il tempo Bentham cominciò a ritenere che questi ultimi fossero mossi perlopiù dal perseguimento dei propri interessi personali, anziché di quelli della comunità, che spesso venivano sacrificati: cfr. Bartlett, 2022, 16, e Ferraro, 2011, 269.

<sup>53</sup>Bentham individua i principali ambiti nei quali la *secrecy* può essere chiamata a prevalere sulla *publicity* nella gestione delle forze armate interne ed estere, nelle relazioni internazionali, in materia di salute, ed in qualsiasi altro contesto in cui le informazioni eventualmente rese pubbliche si esporrebbero al pericolo di essere utilizzate per «hostile purposes»: Bentham, 1983a, 164. Philip Schofield, peraltro, ricorda opportunamente che, dalla prospettiva di Bentham, la realizzazione del valore della *publicity* comportava non solo ingenti benefici, ma anche alcuni svantaggi, rappresentati *in primis* dalla spesa economica necessaria per darvi attuazione; sicché, da un punto di vista strettamente utilitaristico, la *publicity* costituiva un principio meritevole di essere perseguito e applicato finché ciò non avesse comportato costi superiori agli auspicati vantaggi: cfr. Schofield, 2019, 49.

<sup>54</sup>Al riguardo, Bentham osserva: «hence, supposing votes public, a constitution, democratical in appearance, may be aristocratical in effect: and the happiness provided for—not that of the *many*, but, at the expense of the many, that of the *few*»: Bentham, 1983a, 163-164.

<sup>55</sup>«[...] some practice, the result of which is, on the part of the many, a mass of suffering more than equivalent to the harvest of enjoyment reaped from it by the few»: Bentham, 1981, 58 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, II, 431).

<sup>56</sup>Cfr. Tyler, 2017, 23.

<sup>57</sup>Cfr. Bentham, 1981, 92 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, II, 475-476).



che intensificare la predetta propensione universale, nonché agevolarne la concreta manifestazione<sup>58</sup>. Poiché generalmente gli interessi individuali di coloro che governano si pongono in contrapposizione (o, quantomeno, in una relazione di non perfetta coincidenza) con l'interesse generale di coloro che sono governati<sup>59</sup>, è assai probabile che l'esercizio dei poteri di governo da parte di chi li detiene possa tramutarsi in un vero e proprio abuso e, pertanto, in un ostacolo al conseguimento dell'obiettivo costituito dalla *greatest happiness of the greatest number*. Senza prevedere alcun tipo di vincolo o controllo nei confronti di chi detiene funzioni di governo, dunque, ciò a cui si perviene è l'antitesi del *good government*, ovvero sia un *misrule*<sup>60</sup>.

Per scongiurare l'avvento del malgoverno si rende, pertanto, necessario minimizzare la tensione naturale dei (pochi) governanti a sacrificare la felicità dei (molti) governati al fine di perseguire quella propria personale. La limitazione della disponibilità di strumenti esterni di felicità avrebbe certamente smorzato tale propensione, rendendola più difficile e meno immediata da attuare<sup>61</sup>. Tuttavia, essa non sarebbe bastata. La via principale che Bentham individuò per scongiurare il pericolo di abusi e, conseguentemente, permettere la realizzazione del *greatest happiness principle* è rappresentata dal tentativo di far convergere tra loro interessi individuali dei governanti e interessi collettivi della società<sup>62</sup>. In questo modo, non sarebbe stato affatto necessario pretendere che funzionari e rappresentanti rinunciassero al perseguimento della propria felicità a vantaggio di quella collettiva – pretesa del tutto infondata dalla prospettiva utilitaristica, dato l'egoismo motivazionale che la informa -: essi avrebbero finito per realizzare l'interesse pubblico proprio nel tentativo di soddisfare i propri interessi privati, in quanto ad esso coincidenti.

Al fine di realizzare tale convergenza, il Maestro dell'utilitarismo individuò nella sanzione morale (o popolare)<sup>63</sup> una forza capace di influenzare efficacemente il comportamento dei governanti, in quanto incidente su un oggetto

<sup>58</sup>Cfr. Bentham, 1983a, 120. Peraltro, secondo Bentham, tale condizione appare in grado di innescare non tanto (o non solo) un'agguerrita competizione per le risorse disponibili, quanto piuttosto una cooperazione tra i governanti, i quali, consapevoli che un fine comune può essere perseguito più facilmente attraverso sforzi altrettanto comuni anziché isolati, tenderanno a formare tra loro vere e proprie leghe di interessi: cfr. *ibidem*.

<sup>59</sup> Cfr. Ben-Dor, 2007, 216, e Rudan, 2019, 268.

<sup>60</sup> Per Annamaria Loche e Paola Rudan, Bentham pervenne a una più convinta teorizzazione del regime politico democratico soltanto una volta divenuto consapevole dei c.d. interessi obliqui (o sinistri) dei governanti: cfr. Loche, 1991, 200, e Rudan, 2013b, 14.

<sup>61</sup>Cfr. Rudan, 2019, 271.

<sup>62</sup>Cfr. Bentham, 1983b, *passim*. Cfr. Rudan, 2013a, 203.

<sup>63</sup>Cfr. Bentham, 1983a, *passim*. La sanzione antipatetica è, per Bentham, un castigo che, correlato all'opinione pubblica, è destinato a incidere notevolmente sulla reputazione della persona: cfr. Bentham, 2007c, 110-111 (ed. Crompton, 1978, 16) e Bentham, 1983b, 117-118. Cfr. anche Loche, 1991, 221; Loche, 2000, 347; Ferraro, 2011, 257; Rudan, 2013a, 186-187; Ferraro, 2023, 123.

universale di desiderio, ovvero sia la buona reputazione<sup>64</sup>. Tale sanzione avrebbe dovuto essere demandata all'insieme dei governati, i quali, avrebbero potuto e dovuto vigilare sull'operato di funzionari e rappresentanti, per valutare la legalità e la convenienza di ogni loro azione<sup>65</sup>. Qualora il popolo avesse ritenuto illegittimi o inappropriati gli atti di un governante, avrebbe potuto procedere al suo sanzionamento, consistente anzitutto nella sua mancata rielezione, dato il suffragio universale, eguale, segreto e annuale immaginato dal filosofo londinese al fine di far dipendere il potere dei governanti da quello dei governati<sup>66</sup>.

Proprio a tale scopo si rende essenziale il valore della *publicity*. Se la realizzazione del *greatest happiness principle* dipende dalla convergenza in capo ai governanti di interessi privati ed interessi pubblici, e se un simile obiettivo può essere raggiunto *in primis* attraverso il controllo da parte dei governati e l'eventuale sanzione morale che ne sarebbe potuta derivare, allora è necessario che l'operato di coloro che governano possa sempre essere conosciuto da coloro che sono governati, e pertanto possa dirsi *public*<sup>67</sup>.

È entro tale contesto teorico che il filosofo inglese abbraccia la democrazia rappresentativa: essa, come emerge anche dall'analisi di Philip Schofield, costituisce agli occhi di Bentham il regime politico preferibile non in quanto *fine* in sé, ma come *mezzo* più efficace per generare i presupposti necessari a portare a realizzazione il *greatest happiness principle*<sup>68</sup>, pur senza contravvenire alla natura egoistica dell'uomo, ma anzi facendo leva proprio su di essa per un migliore compimento di tale principio.

Una democrazia rappresentativa, fondata sul principio della sovranità popolare<sup>69</sup>, avrebbe rappresentato, secondo Bentham, l'assetto politico più idoneo a favorire la genesi di una robusta *public opinion*: essa, al contempo, avrebbe favorito la conoscenza da parte del popolo delle dinamiche di governo, e avrebbe anche agevolato il dibattito pubblico funzionale all'irrogazione di

<sup>64</sup> Per Bentham, ogni individuo anela a godere di buona fama presso il gruppo sociale di cui è parte; egli crede fortemente che l'efficacia della sanzione morale (o popolare) risieda proprio nella sua capacità di incidere negativamente sulla buona reputazione del soggetto: cfr. Bentham, 1989, 13-28. Cfr. anche Rudan, 2019, 271, e Schofield, 2019, 45-46.

<sup>65</sup> Bentham, inoltre, ritiene necessario che i poteri del Costituito possano e debbano monitorarsi e limitarsi reciprocamente, mediante appositi meccanismi istituzionali: cfr. Bentham, 1983a, *passim*. Cfr. anche Loche, 1991, *passim*, e Rudan, 2016, 8.

<sup>66</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1983a, *passim*.

<sup>67</sup> Tra le varie misure che Bentham prevede per favorire la pubblicità dell'operato dei governanti (cfr. Schofield, 2019, 42), vi è anche la proposta di realizzare una *minister's audience chamber* che ricalcasse, sebbene parzialmente rimaneggiati, i principi architettonici panottici. Entro un'ampia stanza poligonale, il *minister* avrebbe svolto il proprio *business* seduto al centro dell'aula, circondato da *boxes* ove i *suitors* avrebbero atteso di interfacciarsi con lui: cfr. Bentham, 1983a, 438-451.

<sup>68</sup> Cfr. Schofield, 2019, 53. Cfr. Bentham, 1983a, 25. Sul punto cfr. Loche, 1991, *passim*; Kaino, 2008, 3; Ben-Dor, 2007, 216-217; Kaswan, 2010, *passim*; Rudan, 2013a, 90 e 208.

<sup>69</sup> Cfr. Pellegrino, 2013, 246; Tyler, 2017, 10-11; Vitali, 2023, 274.

un'eventuale sanzione popolare, rendendo possibile la convergenza di interessi essenziale al conseguimento della *greatest happiness of the greatest number*<sup>70</sup>.

Il rilievo politico attribuito in chiave utilitaristica alla *public opinion* condusse il Maestro dell'utilitarismo a progettare una sua strutturazione sempre più solida e articolata, pervenendo infine ad una sua istituzionalizzazione sottoforma di corte<sup>71</sup>: il *Public Opinion Tribunal*. Lo scopo fondamentale di tale "potere giudiziario" avrebbe dovuto essere quello di fornire ai governati una serie di strumenti (rappresentati, *in primis*, dalla sanzione morale) attraverso i quali stabilire una concreta dipendenza del potere costituito dal potere costituente<sup>72</sup>. Tale rapporto di subordinazione, unitamente ai mezzi che l'avrebbero reso possibile, avrebbe finito per influenzare l'azione dei governanti, facendola utilitaristicamente convergere verso gli interessi pubblici e, pertanto, verso la realizzazione del *greatest happiness principle*.

Nella democrazia rappresentativa immaginata da Bentham, funzionari e rappresentanti sarebbero stati fortemente incentivati al rispetto della legge e al rigoroso adempimento dei rispettivi oneri, essendo certi che, in caso contrario, le loro mancanze sarebbero state notate dai sudditi e, conseguentemente, punite con la perdita della carica ed, eventualmente, anche attraverso una punizione civile o penale. I governanti, chiaramente interessati al mantenimento del proprio ruolo sociale e alla conservazione dei benefici ad esso connessi, avrebbero finito per perseguire gli interessi collettivi, ma non in quanto esseri umani (innaturalmente) più altruisti e propensi a sacrificare le proprie egoistiche priorità, bensì perché al fine di perseguire i loro interessi personali (*in primis*, la salvaguardia di cariche e vantaggi) avrebbero dovuto operare per la realizzazione della felicità della comunità. In altri termini, *publicity*, *public opinion* e *Public Opinion Tribunal* avrebbero agito in maniera tale che, per i governanti, interessi privati e doveri pubblici avrebbero finito per coincidere<sup>73</sup>.

#### 4. SUL PANOPTICON, OVVERO SU UNA PIRAMIDE DEMOCRATICA DI OCCHI

In letteratura, il rapporto di derivazione che unisce il Panopticon e la teoria politica di Jeremy Bentham rappresenta tutt'oggi un nodo non pienamente risolto.

<sup>70</sup> Per Bentham, la distinzione tra regimi non dispotici e sistemi autoritari di fonda proprio su tale libertà: cfr. Bentham, 1981, 53 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, II, 425) e Bentham, 2007b, 249-250 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, II, 288). Sull'importanza dell'opinione pubblica e del dibattito pubblico in Bentham cfr. Cutler, 1999, 322-323, e Ben-Dor, 2007, 218-219.

<sup>71</sup> Sul processo di progressiva istituzionalizzazione della *public opinion* cfr. Rudan, 2017, 343.

<sup>72</sup> Sul procedimento che avrebbe potuto portare all'irrogazione della sanzione morale (o popolare) cfr. Bentham, 1983a, 133-135.

<sup>73</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1983a, *passim*. Cfr. anche Formigari, 1982, 20-21; Cutler, 1999, 324; Ben-Dor, 2007, 216; Kaswan, 2010, 4; Rudan, 2013b, 14.

Come noto, Michel Foucault riteneva che la *Inspection house* immaginata dal filosofo inglese fosse destinata ad essere «il programma a livello di un meccanismo elementare e facilmente trasferibile, il funzionamento di base di una società tutta attraversata e penetrata da meccanismi disciplinari»<sup>74</sup>. Di contro, vi sono studiosi che, alla stregua di Gianfranco Pellegrino, oggi sostengono che «non è il Panopticon a fungere da modello di società: piuttosto, è la visione benthamiana della società, come società democratica basata sulla trasparenza, a venire applicata, con i necessari aggiustamenti, nel carcere panoptico»<sup>75</sup>.

Indipendentemente dal fatto che si propenda per l'una o per l'altra visione, entrambe le prospettive summenzionate rilevano, indirettamente, l'esistenza di un innegabile nesso logico tra il Panopticon e il modello di comunità agognato da Bentham; una connessione stretta a tal punto che i due schemi teorici hanno tutta l'aria non solo di coesistere pacificamente all'interno del pensiero benthamiano, ma anche di influenzarsi vicendevolmente, concorrendo insieme alla formazione e alla evoluzione di quest'ultimo.

E in effetti, *Inspection house* e società politica benthamiana sembrano all'evidenza condividere un profilo essenziale, il medesimo profilo che, secondo il filosofo londinese, sarebbe stato decisivo nel contesto democratico al fine di conferire uno spirito politicamente utilitaristico alla collettività.

Come anticipato, tra i principali strumenti individuati da Bentham per assicurare una *junction of interests*<sup>76</sup>, a sua volta in grado di allontanare lo spettro del *misrule* e di indurre i governanti a operare verso il raggiungimento della *greatest happiness of the greatest number*<sup>77</sup>, vi è il *Public Opinion Tribunal*.

A livello costitutivo, esso avrebbe dovuto essere una vera e propria autorità costituzionale onnicomprensiva: tutti i sudditi<sup>78</sup>, infatti, avrebbero dovuto parteciparvi attivamente<sup>79</sup>, operando in differenti aree<sup>80</sup> e facendosi coordinare da figure istituzionali<sup>81</sup>. Sul piano operativo, il *Public Opinion Tribunal* avrebbe

<sup>74</sup> Foucault, 2019, 228.

<sup>75</sup> Pellegrino, 2013, 241.

<sup>76</sup> Cfr. Ferraro, 2011, 259.

<sup>77</sup> Paola Rudan afferma che, «al di là dei minuziosi dettagli formali, l'obiettivo di Bentham è quello di stabilire l'effettiva ed efficace dipendenza dei governanti dai governati, del "potere pubblico efficiente" da quello "originativo". Per realizzare questo fine, i governati devono possedere gli strumenti per orientare l'azione dei governanti nella direzione indicata dal principio della maggior felicità per il maggior numero»: Rudan, 2017, 344.

<sup>78</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 2007a, 279 e 312-313 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, VIII, 561 e 565). Cfr. anche Cutler, 1999, 328; Kaswan, 2010, 12; Rudan, 2017, 363.

<sup>79</sup> Cfr. Loche, 1991, 218-220; Loche, 2000, 347; Rudan, 2013a, 185-186; Rudan, 2017, 344.

<sup>80</sup> Bentham prevede *in primis* una bipartizione del *Public Opinion Tribunal*: cfr. Bentham, 2007a, 322 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, VIII, 569). La formazione complessiva del *Public Opinion Tribunal* è indicata in *ivi*, 314-315 (*ivi*, 566). Sul punto cfr. Rudan, 2013a, 188-189, e Rudan, 2013b, 13-14.

<sup>81</sup> Cfr. Rudan, 2017, 344.

rivestito molteplici mansioni<sup>82</sup>; tuttavia esso avrebbe dovuto perlopiù agire come un'autentica Corte titolare del potere giudiziario<sup>83</sup>: sfruttando i mezzi di pubblicità a sua disposizione<sup>84</sup>, avrebbe vegliato costantemente sull'agire dei governanti – quantomeno nell'esercizio delle loro funzioni<sup>85</sup> –, e in caso di condotta errata o illecita avrebbe potuto irrogare la sanzione morale (o popolare) in quanto destinata ad incidere sulla reputazione dei loro destinatari.

Analogo meccanismo avrebbe dovuto operare, secondo il filosofo inglese, all'interno del Panopticon. Sin dal primo scritto dedicatovi, infatti, esso si presenta come edificio non chiuso, bensì aperto «alla folla dei curiosi, al grande *comitato pubblico* del tribunale del mondo»<sup>86</sup>.

Come osserva Hiroaki Itai, la presenza del *Public Opinion Tribunal* nell'*Inspection house* risulta essere di primaria importanza per Bentham<sup>87</sup>. Assoggettando l'ispettore e il suo operato alla vigilanza del popolo e al potere punitivo di quest'ultimo, il filosofo londinese intendeva inibire la possibilità di abusi verso i reclusi<sup>88</sup> e fare in modo che il Panopticon fosse un «carcere democratico»<sup>89</sup>, anziché esporlo al rischio di «degenerare in tirannia»<sup>90</sup>.

In altri termini, nella *Inspection house* avrebbe dovuto essere il popolo a detenere il potere maggiore, potere che esso avrebbe dimostrato di possedere e avrebbe potuto esercitare attraverso il senso della vista. E ciò non deve meravigliare. Se, infatti, è possibile affermare foucaultianamente che la conoscenza rappresenta uno strumento per esercitare il potere (il quale, a sua volta, ne amplifica le dimensioni)<sup>91</sup>, allora non stupirà il fatto che sia proprio lo

<sup>82</sup> Sulle funzioni del *Public Opinion Tribunal* cfr. Bentham, 2007a, 315-316 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, VIII, 566). Come riassunto da Annamaria Loche, le principali funzioni del *Public Opinion Tribunal* avrebbero dovuto essere: *Statistic/Evidence-furnishing function*, *Censorial function*, *Executive function* e *Melioration-suggestive function*: cfr. Loche, 1991, 220. Cfr. anche Cutler, 1999, 328-329; Kaino, 2008, 19; Tyler, 2017, 10-11.

<sup>83</sup> Cfr. Cutler, 1999, 329, e Rudan, 2017, 360.

<sup>84</sup> Per Bentham, la *pubblicità* rappresenta l'unico antidoto efficace contro quella malattia che è il *misrule*: cfr. Bentham, 2007a, 275 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, VIII, 559). Cfr. Rudan, 2017, 344-345.

<sup>85</sup> Cfr. Loche, 1991, 219, e Loche, 2000, 346.

<sup>86</sup> Bentham, 1983c, 51 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, IV, 46). Hiroaki Itai ritiene che il «grande *comitato pubblico* del tribunale del mondo» descritto da Bentham in *Panopticon: or the Inspection-House* anticipi il *Public Opinion Tribunal* meglio teorizzato in *Constitutional Code*: cfr. Itai, 2019, 4. Tim Causer considera plausibile che l'apertura del Panopticon ai sudditi liberi possa essere stato ispirato anche dal funzionamento delle *hulks*: cfr. Causer, 2022, 366-367.

<sup>87</sup> Cfr. Itai, 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Cfr. Zanuso, 1989, 246-247; La Monica, 2014, 15; Escamilla Castillo, 2022, 90-91.

<sup>89</sup> Pellegrino, 2013, 241.

<sup>90</sup> Foucault, 2019, 226.

<sup>91</sup> Foucault ben sintetizza tale concetto con l'equazione «sblocco epistemologico, partendo da un affinamento delle relazioni di potere; moltiplicazione degli effetti del potere grazie alla formazione e al cumulo di nuove conoscenze»: Foucault, 2019, 244. Nel Panopticon, in virtù degli artifici architettonici progettati dai Bentham, chi è visto (e, a sua volta, non vede) è «oggetto di una

sguardo, ovverosia il senso umano che più d'altri assicura conoscenza, a essere stato individuato da Bentham quale viatico per riconoscere al popolo la sovranità all'interno del Panopticon, in conformità con la sua visione utilitaristicamente democratica.

In una bozza per il frontespizio della prima opera dedicata alla sua *Inspection house (Panopticon: or the Inspection-House)*, il filosofo inglese raffigurò tre cerchi concentrici, sovrastati da un triangolo sui cui lati riportò i tre valori che avrebbero dovuto informare l'intero progetto panottico: *Justice, Mercy, Vigilance*. Nel disegno definitivo, Bentham aggiunse un occhio all'interno della struttura piramidale, e la inserì all'interno della serie di circonferenze. In letteratura è, correttamente, consolidata la prospettiva secondo la quale tale simbologia deve ritenersi correlata alla tradizione cattolica ben nota all'Inglese<sup>92</sup>, stante la citazione dei Salmi riportata di seguito<sup>93</sup> e la riconducibilità della figura dell'occhio a quella tradizionalmente inesorabile e priva di palpebre di Dio<sup>94</sup>.

Tuttavia, un'altra interpretazione è possibile alla luce del pensiero benthamiano.

All'interno del Panopticon, le persone (eventualmente) presenti possono essere disposte, per semplicità, entro tre categorie. Dapprima vi sono i detenuti, i quali non possono mai vedere nessuno ma possono sempre essere visti da tutti; successivamente è presente l'ispettore (con i suoi familiari e i sottoguardiani), che può sì guardare i prigionieri senza essere a sua volta osservato dagli stessi, ma può anche essere scrutato dai sudditi senza poter liberamente ricambiare il loro sguardo; infine vi sono i consociati, i quali possono sempre vedere tutti senza mai essere visti da nessuno. In altri termini, se sudditi e detenuti versano in condizioni tra loro diametralmente opposte, l'*inspector* si colloca nel mezzo, condividendo peculiarità ora della posizione dei primi ora di quella dei secondi.

Come evidenziato da Umberto Curi, la vista genera conoscenza, e la conoscenza è strettamente correlata alla detenzione e all'esercizio del potere<sup>95</sup>. Ciò significa che chi più vede più conosce, e chi più conosce ha più potere (e viceversa: chi meno vede meno conosce, e chi meno conosce ha meno potere). Dal lato passivo, invece, tale ragionamento implica che meno si è visti meno si è

informazione, mai soggetto di una comunicazione» (*ivi*, 218), sicché finisce inevitabilmente per accrescere la conoscenza e, dunque, il potere di chi lo vede.

<sup>92</sup> Sull'interpretazione del frontespizio dell'opera *Panopticon: or the Inspection-House* cfr. Steadman, 2007, 7, e Fiddler, 2022, 9-10.

<sup>93</sup> I passi riportati da Bentham dal Salmo 139 recitano: «Thou art about my path, and about my bed; and spiest on all my ways»; «If I say, Peradventure the darkness shall cover me; then shall my night be turned to day. Even there also shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me»; «Yea, the darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and light to thee are both alike»; «Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me; and lead me in the way everlasting».

<sup>94</sup> Sulla tradizionale figura dell'occhio di Dio cfr. Stolleis, 2007, 37 ss.

<sup>95</sup> Umberto Curi parla addirittura di «assioma dell'identità fra vedere e potere»: Curi, 2004, 226.

conosciuti, e meno si è conosciuti meno si è assoggettati al potere altrui (e viceversa: più si è visti più si è conosciuti, e più si è conosciuti più si è assoggettati al potere altrui)<sup>96</sup>.

Nell'*Inspection house*, chi più vede meno è visto (cioè i consociati), e chi meno vede più è visto (ovverosia i prigionieri); dunque, quanto più si ha potere sugli altri tanto meno si è assoggettati al potere altrui, e quanto minore è il potere che si ha sugli altri tanto maggiore è il potere altrui a cui si è assoggettati. Per espresso:

i sudditi, vedendo l'ispettore e i detenuti, hanno sempre potere su di loro e, non essendo visti da nessuno, non sono mai assoggettati ad alcun potere alieno;

l'*inspector*, vedendo i prigionieri e non essendo visto da loro, ha potere nei loro confronti ma non è assoggettato al loro potere; viceversa, essendo visto dai consociati e non potendo vederli liberamente, è assoggettato al loro potere ma non ne ha alcuno su di loro;

i detenuti, non vedendo l'ispettore e i sudditi, non hanno mai alcun potere su di loro e, essendo visti da tutti, sono sempre assoggettati al potere altrui.

Per riprendere le parole di Umberto Curi, «l'asimmetria nelle relazioni di potere viene fatta dipendere da un'asimmetria nelle condizioni di visibilità dei diversi soggetti»<sup>97</sup>, le quali - è possibile aggiungere - all'interno della macchina panottica favoriscono *in primis* proprio i sudditi.

Ritornando all'immagine che troneggia nel frontespizio di *Panopticon: or the Inspection-House*, dunque, è possibile dare di essa un'interpretazione diversa da quella tradizionale, più suggestiva ma soprattutto di maggior utilità per comprendere le dinamiche interne alla *Inspection house*. Se, infatti, il cerchio è simbolo di un'architettura, quella panottica, volta a favorire la visibilità, il triangolo insistente al suo interno è emblema di una gerarchia democratica, la quale viene a formarsi in esso in virtù di un determinato ordine graduato di sguardi, che trova rappresentazione visiva proprio nell'occhio imperante nel cuore del disegno.

## 5. BENTHAM E LA FUNZIONE DETERRENTE DELLA PENA

La teoria penalistica di Jeremy Bentham appare fortemente influenzata dalla matrice utilitaristica che ne informa il pensiero morale e giuridico, nonché dal già richiamato principio di utilità, che vi si pone a fondamento.

La natura utilitaristica della *theory of punishment* benthamiana emerge con chiarezza dal tentativo del filosofo inglese di fornire una definizione di reato. Per Bentham, infatti, vi è una stretta correlazione tra la nozione di *offence* e il

<sup>96</sup> «Estendere e rafforzare il potere tende a coincidere con la dilatazione e il consolidamento delle funzioni di sorveglianza. Correlativamente, quanto più si è esposti allo sguardo altrui, tanto più si è ridotti a una condizione di sostanziale sottomissione, soprattutto se alla propria visibilità corrisponde l'invisibilità di colui che è nelle condizioni di osservare»: *ibidem*.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*.

concetto di *detrimental act*, da intendersi come atto foriero di un danno determinato da un aumento di *pain* ovvero da una diminuzione di *pleasure*.

Secondo il filosofo londinese, non ogni azione in sé pregiudizievole deve ritenersi un illecito penale, in quanto essa «può essere qualificata come dannosa, e quindi punibile, solo se lede il bene giuridico fondamentale»<sup>98</sup> della sicurezza sociale, presupposto per la felicità della comunità. Tuttavia, non può configurarsi un'ipotesi di reato laddove il comportamento considerato non sia, agli effetti o in potenza, fonte di nocumento per terzi<sup>99</sup>. Il danno provocato dalla condotta umana eventualmente passibile di essere qualificata come *offence*, peraltro, non deve essere valutato con esclusivo riguardo alla persona offesa dalla stessa, bensì avendo conto anche degli effetti pregiudizievoli direttamente e indirettamente patiti dall'intera società di cui essa è componente<sup>100</sup>. Per usare le parole di Francesca Zanuso, «quando Bentham parla di azione penalmente rilevante intende un atto materiale che produca un evento lesivo per gli interessi della comunità», «un'azione (o omissione) contraria al *felicific calculus* e quindi in grado di diminuire la quantità della felicità presente nella collettività»<sup>101</sup>.

Il filosofo inglese ritiene che, dinanzi all'illecito penale e al nocumento da esso scaturente, la società sia chiamata a rispondere, onde evitare l'acuirsi del danno provocato e l'espandersi degli effetti pregiudizievoli prodotti, i quali subirebbero una intollerabile implementazione in caso di impunità del reo<sup>102</sup>. E la reazione collettiva non può che incarnarsi, per Bentham, nella pena prevista dalla legge<sup>103</sup>.

<sup>98</sup> Zanuso, 1989, 183.

<sup>99</sup> Jeremy Bentham afferma che, «per il principio di utilità, dovrebbero esser dichiarati reati solo quegli atti che il bene del pubblico richiede siano tali» e che «il bene del pubblico non può richiedere che venga dichiarato reato un atto che non tenda, in un modo o nell'altro, ad andare a detrimento del pubblico»: Bentham, 1998, 254 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 97). Cfr. anche Bentham, 1832a, 125-126.

<sup>100</sup> Jeremy Bentham osserva che «se un dato insieme di un qualunque numero di individui va considerato come costitutivo di un immaginario *corpo* composto, un pubblico o uno stato politico, allora ciascun atto nocivo per uno o più dei suoi *membri* risulterà, quanto ai suoi effetti, nocivo per lo *stato*»: Bentham, 1998, 254 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 97). Più nello specifico, Bentham identifica tre tipologie di danno generato dal reato: un pregiudizio di primo livello derivante dalla sottrazione di una quota di utilità legittimamente goduta, patito dalla persona offesa e dalle persone ad essa unite da legami di simpatia; un'offesa di secondo grado rappresentata dall'allarme sociale generato dalla diffusione della notizia dell'illecito penale; un nocumento di terzo livello costituito dalla possibilità che la conoscenza dell'*offence* commesso disincentivi i sudditi dallo svolgimento delle attività necessarie al corretto funzionamento della società. Sul punto cfr. Bentham, 1832a, 179. In generale, Francesca Zanuso nota che a Bentham «il reato [...] appare svantaggioso poiché mina alle basi la fiducia che la società ripone nelle istituzioni e nella loro capacità di proteggere i consociati»: Zanuso, 1989, 165. Cfr. Draper, 2002, 10-11, e Marchesin, 2024b, 105.

<sup>101</sup> Zanuso, 1989, 183. Cfr. Draper, 2002, 10, e McHugh, 2008, 12.

<sup>102</sup> Francesca Zanuso ben riassume il pensiero benthamiano, affermando che «l'esempio del reo impunito può [...] invogliare altri al delitto ma anche portarli a sospettare della correttezza dell'identificazione della norma con "la massima felicità del maggior numero" e, in questo senso,



In maniera apparentemente paradossale, la punizione è concepita dal filosofo londinese a sua volta come un *evil*, un nocumento inflitto all'accertato reo, un intervento accrescitivo del *pain* o diminutivo del *pleasure* irrogato a colui che sia stato legalmente riconosciuto come responsabile del reato commesso<sup>104</sup>. In tale contesto pare aprirsi una contraddizione logica nel pensiero benthamiano: se, infatti, l'obiettivo dichiarato di ogni *good government* è rappresentato dalla *greatest happiness of the greatest number*, per quale ragione si rende necessario per il legislatore assommare al dolore prodotto dall'*offence* verso la persona offesa e la società anche il *pain* generato dalla pena nei confronti del reo?

La distonia appena evidenziata, tuttavia, non è che apparente.

Nella teoria penalistica di Bentham, infatti, la punizione non manifesta una valenza kantianamente retributiva<sup>105</sup>. Pur rivestendo anche una funzione compensativa del danno economico patito dalla persona offesa<sup>106</sup>, la pena benthamiana, per dirla con Eva Cantarella, «è “prospettiva”, non “retrospettiva”»<sup>107</sup>, guarda a un futuro da assicurare, non a un passato da ripristinare. Essa, cioè, si giustificerebbe in quanto *evil* proprio nella misura in cui riuscirebbe a scongiurare un pregiudizio (quello eventualmente cagionato dall'impunità del reo) ancor maggiore rispetto al nocumento procurato dalla punizione stessa<sup>108</sup>. Essa concorrerebbe alla felicità comune neutralizzando la possibilità di un ulteriori e/o peggiori *detrimental acts* in futuro.

Sebbene, dunque, il filosofo inglese auspichi un mondo ipotetico e utopico ove non vi sia bisogno alcuno di ricorrere alla pena<sup>109</sup> – la quale, pur sempre, è parte

produrre una destabilizzazione sociale, più sottile, meno evidente ma non per questo meno pericolosa»: Zanuso, 1989, 166. Cfr. anche Marchesin, 2024b, 106.

<sup>103</sup> In letteratura non tutti gli studiosi concordano sul fatto che Bentham non ammettesse la possibilità di punire anche un soggetto riconosciuto innocente qualora ciò avesse cospicuamente concorso all'implementazione della felicità collettiva: cfr., quali opinioni tra loro contrastanti, McHugh, 2008, 3, e Calvert, 2006, 226-227. Viceversa non si rilevano particolari dubbi circa il fatto che, per Bentham, il reato deve sempre essere seguito dalla pena quale sua conseguenza giuridica, salvo che questa debba ritenersi nel caso di specie infondata, inefficace, inutile o eccessivamente dispendiosa: cfr. Zanuso, 1989, 205, e Hanafy, 2021, 8. Quanto a quest'ultimo profilo, Bentham medesimo afferma che «nella misura in cui un atto tende a disturbare [la felicità della società], nella misura in cui la sua tendenza è pericolosa, quell'atto creerà una richiesta di pena»: Bentham, 1998, 132 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 35).

<sup>104</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1998, 222 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 83). Cfr. Zanuso, 1989, 165, 174, 209; Draper, 2002, 8; McHugh, 2008, 1-2 e 8; Gombert, 2014, 2; Allen e Roberts, 2022, 140.

<sup>105</sup> Cfr. Kant, 2005, 249.

<sup>106</sup> Cfr., ad esempio, Bentham, 2022, 135-137.

<sup>107</sup> Cantarella, 2005, 17. Cfr. Marchesin, 2024b, 107-108.

<sup>108</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1998, 222 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 83); Bentham, 2007a, 277 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, VIII, 560); Bentham, 1832b, 3. Si concorda con Francesca Zanuso, per la quale, nel pensiero benthamiano, «la pena si giustifica proprio per la sua *funzione curativa*, per la sua capacità di opporsi ai mali generati dal reato»: Zanuso, 1989, 163. Cfr. anche McHugh, 2008, 12-13; Draper, 2009, 5-6; Ferraro, 2023, 127-128.

<sup>109</sup> Cfr. McHugh, 2008, *passim*.

del saldo negativo nel calcolo della felicità collettiva, ancorché funzionale alla medesima, essa viene giudicata un essenziale strumento attraverso il quale il legislatore ha la possibilità di dissuadere i sudditi dalla criminalità e, pertanto, di prevenire la commissione di illeciti penali analoghi a quello punito<sup>110</sup>.

Benché sia chiamata a integrare anche altri requisiti tutt'altro che secondari<sup>111</sup>, per Bentham, pertanto, la punizione deve rivestire, anzitutto, una funzione deterrente<sup>112</sup>.

La prevenzione generale perseguita dalla pena si dispiega già prima della commissione del reato, per effetto della pura e semplice *pubblicità* della norma giuridica che la prevede<sup>113</sup>. Secondo il filosofo londinese, minacciando coloro che sono tentati di compiere un *offence* di infliggere loro, in caso di effettiva commissione, un *pain* proporzionalmente superiore al *pleasure* derivante dalla consumazione dell'illecito penale, la punizione intimata dal legislatore dovrebbe incidere sul *felicific calculus* dei potenziali delinquenti, distogliendoli dal loro proposito criminale<sup>114</sup>.

Ma è soprattutto a seguito della commissione del reato che la pena è destinata a dispiegare i propri effetti dissuasivi, *in primis* per mezzo della propria *esemplarità*. Pur dovendo rispettare l'essenziale vincolo della economicità, per Bentham la punizione del re o dovrebbe essere resa conoscibile e visibile all'intero consorzio sociale, e dovrebbe essere architettata in maniera tale da rafforzare nei suoi

<sup>110</sup>Cfr. Bentham, 1998, 219 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 76). Cfr. Perrot, 1983, 117; Zanuso, 1989, 160-161 e 221; Draper, 2002, 7; Pellegrino, 2007, 51 e 60; Massarenti, 2010, 135; Contadini, 2016, 59; Hanafy, 2021, 10.

<sup>111</sup> Nella prima lettera indirizzata a Lord Pelham, ad esempio, Bentham enuclea cinque finalità/peculiarità della pena, oggetto di successiva trattazione, ovverosia esemplarità, riforma, inabilitazione, compensazione/soddisfazione ed economicità: cfr. Bentham, 2022, 74.

<sup>112</sup>Cfr. Bentham, 1832b, 4, e Bentham, 1998, 126, 222, 231-232 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 31, 83, 86). Cfr. anche Draper, 2009, 5. Come si vedrà in seguito, Bentham era generalmente contrario sia alle punizioni corporali che alla pena di morte. Tuttavia, egli immaginò elaborate (e un poco astruse) forme di simulazione della pena capitale (cfr. Massarenti, 2010, 135) e di sostituzione del fuoco con un liquido indelebile nelle tecniche di marchiatura (cfr. Perrot, 1983, 118), proprio nella convinzione che tali macchinazioni potessero avere un'efficacia deterrente.

<sup>113</sup> Paola Rudan riassume bene il pensiero benthamiano affermando che «solo in quanto la legge e la minaccia di punizione che l'accompagna sono note il comando del sovrano può diventare un motivo d'azione per l'individuo utilitarista»: Rudan, 2013a, 80. Sulla pubblicità della legge in Bentham cfr. Formigari, 1982, 21-22, e Kaino, 2008, 5-6.

<sup>114</sup> Bentham riteneva che il dolore derivante dalla pena prevista dal legislatore dovesse essere appena superiore al piacere generato dal reato. Sul punto cfr. McHugh, 2008, 8 e 16; Draper, 2009, 7; Hanafy, 2021, 14. Sulla proporzionalità della pena in Bentham e sulla sua, conseguente, efficacia cfr. Bentham, 1998, 226, 232, 237, 242 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 85, 86, 90, 91). Cfr. anche McHugh, 2008, 1; Draper, 2009, 6-9; Tyler, 2017, 10. Sulla minaccia della sanzione come via per disincentivare i consociati dal tenere la condotta alla quale essa è associata cfr. Calónico, 2023, 103-104.

membri l'associazione tra *offence* commesso e *punishment* subita<sup>115</sup>, già di per sé tracciata dalla certezza della pena e dalla rapidità della sua irrogazione<sup>116</sup>. Ancora una volta, dunque, il *felicific calculus* del suddito verrebbe influenzato, sì da indurlo al rispetto della normativa vigente<sup>117</sup>.

Infine, la forza deterrente della pena (irrogata) dovrebbe esercitarsi nei confronti del reo, ovvero sia di colui che ha già dimostrato di poter costituire un serio pericolo per la sicurezza e la felicità della comunità. Secondo il filosofo inglese, infatti, colui che è stato riconosciuto colpevole altri non è che un soggetto che ha errato nella propria decisione, ritenendo - scorrettamente - il piacere derivante dalla commissione dell'illecito penale superiore al dolore prodotto dalla punizione prevista dal legislatore, e quindi effettivamente per sé utile<sup>118</sup>. La pena, pertanto, è chiamata alla *riforma* del reo, ma in senso strettamente utilitaristico: dovrà, cioè, educarlo a un corretto *felicific calculus*, insegnandogli che l'osservanza dell'ordinamento giuridico è più utile della sua violazione<sup>119</sup>.

## 6. PANOPTICON GUARDA-E-IMPARA

A seguito di una pluridecennale riflessione protrattasi fino agli ultimi anni della sua vita, Jeremy Bentham pervenne alla conclusione che la pena che più d'altre avrebbe potuto aderire agli ideali utilitaristici fosse rappresentata dalla reclusione del reo all'interno di una *prison*.

Sebbene negli scritti giovanili avallasse la possibilità di irrogare, a seconda dei reati perseguiti, anche punizioni corporali "tradizionali" (fustigazione, marchiatura a fuoco, mutilazione, *etc.*) oppure concepite *ad hoc* (si pensi al telaio di ferro per arrecare ustioni agli accertati piromani)<sup>120</sup>, il filosofo inglese abbandonò ben presto l'idea di servirsene, in quanto patentemente anti-economiche<sup>121</sup>; esse altro non facevano che restituire alla collettività un soggetto esteticamente ripugnante, afflitto nel fisico e nella reputazione, spesso non più in grado di svolgere alcuna mansione a favore della società stessa, la quale, pertanto, avrebbe dovuto

<sup>115</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1998, 245 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 92). Come ricorda Michelle Perrot, ad esempio, Bentham era favorevole alla marchiatura dei delinquenti (evanescente o perpetua, a seconda dei casi) con un liquido nero; il simbolo da tatuare o colorare avrebbe dovuto essere posto sulla parte del corpo correlata al reato commesso, e avrebbe dovuto raffigurare un'entità connessa a quest'ultimo: cfr. Perrot, 1983, 118.

<sup>116</sup> Su certezza e rapidità della pena in Bentham cfr. Contadini, 2016, 59.

<sup>117</sup> Non a caso Bentham ritiene che la pena *apparente* - cioè quella visibile agli occhi dei consociati - sia più rilevante di quella *reale* - ovvero sia la pena effettivamente irrogata al reo - in termini di esemplarità: cfr. Bentham, 1998, 245 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 92).

<sup>118</sup> Cfr. Zanuso, 1898, 168.

<sup>119</sup> Cfr. Allen e Roberts, 2022, 138.

<sup>120</sup> Cfr. L. Radzinowicz, 1948-86, vol. I, 384 n e 388 n; Semple, 1993, 36-38; Draper, 2002, 14.

<sup>121</sup> Bentham muoveva l'accusa di anti-economicità anche alla pena della deportazione in terra australiana: cfr. Bentham, 2022, 151-152.

mantenerlo a proprie spese<sup>122</sup>. Quanto alla pena di morte, anch'essa non convertibile in profitto<sup>123</sup>, Bentham ritenne sin da subito che la sua natura non remissibile né compensabile poco si confacesse all'inevitabilità dell'errore giudiziario<sup>124</sup>.

Viceversa, l'imprigionamento avrebbe permesso a ciascun detenuto di esercitare un'attività lavorativa produttiva di utilità funzionali al futuro sostentamento del prigioniero stesso, alla remunerazione delle guardie e alla compensazione del danno patito dalla persona offesa<sup>125</sup>. Inoltre, esso, sempre passibile di remissione in caso di acclarato sbaglio da parte della magistratura, avrebbe garantito al legislatore la facoltà di calcolare con maggiore precisione la proporzionalità della punizione rispetto all'*offence* accertato<sup>126</sup>.

Ma, come ricordano Anthony J. Draper e Brian Calvert, ciò che faceva della reclusione una pena di gran lunga più utile delle sue alternative risiedeva, secondo il filosofo londinese, nella sua maggior capacità di fungere da deterrente pur attraverso un minor dispendio economico<sup>127</sup>; funzione, questa, che essa avrebbe adempiuto facendo leva sul senso umano ritenuto più confacente allo scopo di prevenzione: la vista.

Dapprima, infatti, Bentham immaginò una prigione dal sapore piranesiano, tenebrosa e arricchita da un simbolismo volto a suscitare orrore<sup>128</sup>. La speranza

<sup>122</sup> Cfr. Perrot, 1983, 118; Contadini, 2016, 59; Porret, 2021, 15-16.

<sup>123</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1998, 248 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 94). Cfr. anche Draper, 2002, e 16; Porret, 2021, 154.

<sup>124</sup> Cfr. Bentham, 1998, 250 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 95). Cfr. anche Zanuso, 1989, 224; Draper, 2002, 16; Calvert, 2006, 214-215, 217, 224-225; Porret, 2021, 154.

<sup>125</sup> Bentham attribuisce un valore non solo educativo ma anche produttivo al lavoro, soprattutto se unito alla pena dell'imprigionamento: cfr. Zanuso, 1989, 239-240; Bedau, 2004, 11; Steadman, 2007, 6; Finestra, 2012, 64; Cottell e Mueller, 2020, 252; Causer, 2022, 368-369; Allen e Roberts, 2022, 141-142; Fiddler, 2022, 7. Bentham, in giovane età, riteneva addirittura che per determinate classi sociali il lavoro avesse una capacità deterrente maggiore di quella della pena di morte: cfr. Calvert, 2006, 219. Per comprendere l'importanza che Bentham attribuisce allo svolgimento di un mestiere in carcere cfr. Bentham, 1983c, 58 ss. (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, IV, 49 ss.).

<sup>126</sup> In questi termini Elio Tavilla nota che «il carcere è la tipologia di penalità più rispondente al paradigma utilitarista»: Tavilla, 2022, 114.

<sup>127</sup> Cfr. Calvert, 2006, 220 e 223-224, e Draper, 2002, 15. Relativamente alla pena di morte, Bentham pervenne a ritenere che essa, benché massimamente esemplare, non fosse realmente in grado di produrre un'efficacia deterrente: cfr., nello specifico, Bentham, 1832b, 63-70, e, più in generale, Bentham, 1838-1843a, 390 ss. Sul punto cfr. Zanuso, 1989, 224-225; Draper, 2002, 16; Calvert, 2006, 214; Massarenti, 2010, 135; Porret, 2021, 154.

<sup>128</sup> Questo è quanto Bentham descrive in merito a possibili modelli di carcere: «on the outside of the two last kinds of prisons may be represented various figures, emblematical of the supposed dispositions of the persons confined in them. A monkey, a fox, and a tiger, representing mischief, cunning, and rapacity, the sources of all crimes, would certainly form more appropriate decorations for a prison [...]. In the interior, let two skeletons be placed, one on each side of an iron door: the occasional aspect of such objects is calculated to suggest the imagination of the most salutary terrors. A prison would thus represent the abode of death, and no youth that had once visited a place so

del filosofo inglese era, evidentemente, che un carcere così concepito sarebbe stato in grado di attirare su di sé lo sguardo di chiunque vi fosse passato nei paraggi. La vista raccapricciante di una simile prigione, associata all'idea che essa fosse conseguenza inevitabile della commissione di un illecito penale, avrebbe dovuto indurre i sudditi a formulare un *felicific calculus* da cui risultasse la maggior utilità del rispetto della normativa vigente anziché della sua violazione.

Tuttavia, è con la scoperta e la successiva teorizzazione del Panopticon che Bentham farà dell'imprigionamento e del carcere degli strumenti realmente capaci di rivestire una funzione di prevenzione del crimine attraverso un uso scientifico della visibilità. E ciò risulta evidente se si ha cura di riprendere la tripartizione di sguardi interni alla *Inspection house* precedentemente descritta.

Si prendano le mosse dal vertice della «piramide di occhi»<sup>129</sup> realizzata dal Panopticon. In esso la vista del suddito che vi avrebbe potuto fare liberamente ingresso non si imbatte più, come nella precedente teorizzazione, in una tetra e oscura scenografia, colma di lugubri simboli di dolore e sofferenza. L'architettura luminosa e leggera dell'*Inspection house*, al contrario, è pensata appositamente per facilitare lo sguardo del consociato e per guidarlo direttamente verso i detenuti. Come sottolinea opportunamente Francesca Zanuso, questi ultimi, già di per sé visibili nella condizione privativa della loro libertà personale, sarebbero stati chiamati, inoltre, a indossare delle maschere rappresentative dei reati commessi, onde consentire una più diretta associazione da parte del pubblico tra *offence* (causa) e *punishment* (effetto)<sup>130</sup>.

In altri termini, all'interno del Panopticon i prigionieri sarebbero stati un *esempio* per i membri del popolo. La vista dei detenuti da parte dei sudditi avrebbe dovuto svolgere una funzione disciplinare nei confronti di questi ultimi. Usciti dalla *Inspection house* dopo aver posato il proprio sguardo sui prigionieri e sulle loro maschere, i consociati avrebbero dovuto essere dissuasi dalla criminalità e indotti al rispetto dell'ordinamento giuridico.

Scendendo direttamente all'ultimo gradino della gerarchia d'occhi, vi si trova, come anzidetto, il prigioniero. Benché solitamente si usi sostenere che, nel Panopticon, il detenuto versa in una condizione, al contempo, di totale trasparenza e completa cecità, deve essere notato che tale affermazione non può dirsi del tutto esaustiva. Come già notava Michel Foucault, all'interno della *Inspection house* il potere (dell'ispettore) è sì inverificabile; nondimeno, esso è comunque visibile e desidera rendersi tale come monito della propria presenza

decorated, could fail of receiving a most salutary and indelible impression»: Bentham, 1838-1843a, 431.

<sup>129</sup> Escobar, 2023, 28.

<sup>130</sup> Cfr. Zanuso, 1989, 170 e 246-247. Cfr. anche Werrett, 1999, 12-13, e Kutz, 2019, 4. Bentham medesimo indugia, in generale, sulla necessità di irrogare una pena che sia facilmente riconducibile al reato punito: Bentham, 1998, 244-245 (ed. Bowring, 1838-1843, I, 92).

perenne e insondabile<sup>131</sup>. Dalla propria cella, infatti, la vista del prigioniero – idealmente – avrebbe potuto imbattersi esclusivamente nella Loggia dell'ispettore, oltretutto nel luogo dal quale egli sapeva di poter essere osservato in qualunque momento, senza che di ciò potesse avere contezza alcuna<sup>132</sup>.

Nel Panopticon, pertanto, lo sguardo dei detenuti è parte integrante della loro stessa *riforma*. Affinché essi imparino a compiere un corretto *felicific calculus*, dunque a prediligere la legalità alla criminalità, non sarebbe sufficiente imporre loro una condizione di totale visibilità e trasparenza. È altresì necessario che i prigionieri vedano la torre centrale dalla quale possono essere scrutati. Soltanto la combinazione delle due condizioni permetterebbe alla *Inspection house* di disciplinare i detenuti, rendendoli integerrimi sorveglianti di se stessi e, nel lungo termine, impeccabili sudditi utilitaristici.

Da ultimo, nel cuore della piramide di occhi, si sarebbe collocato l'*inspector*, la cui posizione non poteva che essere di articolata medietà. Infatti, come risulta anche dall'osservazione di Catherine Pease-Watkin, nel Panopticon la vista dell'ispettore, come quella di un qualsiasi suddito, si imbatte – ed anzi, è tenuta ad imbattersi – nei prigionieri e nelle maschere rappresentative dei relativi *offences*. D'altro canto, il suo sguardo deve ritenersi in parte analogo a quello del detenuto, in quanto destinato ad incrociare inevitabilmente anche le strutture architettoniche dalle quali egli sapeva di poter essere osservato in qualunque tempo dal popolo<sup>133</sup>.

L'*inspector* risulterebbe, pertanto, essere sottoposto a una duplice forza disciplinante, resa possibile, in ogni caso, dal senso ottico. Se, infatti, la vista dei dispositivi strutturali della *Inspection house* gli avrebbe costantemente ricordato che ogni sua trasgressione avrebbe potuto essere notata, il fatto di (dover) rivolgere lo sguardo verso i detenuti avrebbe funto da monito nei suoi confronti circa le possibili conseguenze derivanti da una sua violazione.

In definitiva, è possibile affermare che nel Panopticon – perlopiù nella sua veste di prigioniero – la vista ricopre anche una relevantissima funzione disciplinante. L'*Inspection house* si mostra come una struttura architettonica progettata affinché chiunque, osservando, possa trovare delle ottime ragioni (utilitaristiche) per aderire alla legalità e ripudiare la criminalità. La vista si dimostra il senso più adatto per perseguire lo scopo di prevenzione sociale attribuito da Bentham alla pena, poiché capace di (ri)educare i rei e di ammonire quanti ancora non sono

<sup>131</sup> Cfr. Foucault, 2019, 219.

<sup>132</sup> A più riprese Roberto Escobar tiene a evidenziare l'importanza che riveste nel Panopticon il fatto che il prigioniero debba avere costantemente davanti agli occhi la Loggia dell'ispettore dalla quale poteva essere continuamente osservato: cfr. Escobar, 2023, *passim*.

<sup>133</sup> Catherine Pease-Watkin afferma che «the inspection principle working in two ways at once - the warder keeps the inmates under constant inspection, and the public are free to inspect the warder at any time - emphasises the Benthamite hallmarks of openness and accountability»: Pease-Watkin, 2003, 1.

stati vinti dalle lusinghe del *pleasure* derivante dalla commissione dell'illecito penale.

## 7. UNO SGUARDO AL PASSATO E UNA VISTA SUL PRESENTE

In un celeberrimo passo de *Le Petit Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry affermava: «on ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux». A tale massima poetica di indubbia delicatezza, Jeremy Bentham avrebbe verosimilmente risposto, avendo in mente il proprio Panopticon, che ciò che è essenziale è la vista in sé, nonché l'uso che concretamente se ne fa.

Come nota opportunamente Marcella La Monica, il progetto della *Inspection house* benthamiana «è incentrato sulla visibilità»<sup>134</sup> - nella sua duplice accezione di vedere ed essere visti - in quanto, si aggiunge, essa rappresenta agli occhi del filosofo inglese il mezzo migliore per assicurare un autentico controllo sociale

Ponendo il Panopticon in relazione alla più ampia teoria politica di Bentham, si è potuto apprezzare come in esso la vista non sia soltanto una comoda (e, comunque, preziosa) metafora per esplicitare la gerarchia democratica che avrebbe dovuto informarne il funzionamento. Nella *Inspection house*, lo sguardo rappresenta proprio lo strumento designato dal filosofo londinese per realizzare e garantire il potere sovrano del popolo, anche e soprattutto sull'ispettore e sui suoi sottoguardiani. In tali termini, si è pervenuti alla valorizzazione della forza sia *positiva* che *negativa* della vista: se, infatti, vedere significa esercitare attivamente un potere su chi è visto, essere veduto è sinonimo di passivo assoggettamento al potere di chi vede. Il controllo sociale che qui si realizza è, dunque, quello *da parte della società*, la quale, non vista, assoggetta con il proprio sguardo non solo chi l'ha offesa o potrebbe farlo, ma soprattutto coloro che sono tenuti ad agire per suo conto e nel suo interesse.

Esaminando il Panopticon nella sua veste di prigione modello e, dunque, entro gli spazi della *theory of punishment* di Bentham, invece, la vista si è dimostrata essere, nella riflessione di quest'ultimo, il senso umano più efficace per favorire l'auto-disciplina dell'individuo. In tale contesto, lo sguardo è da intendersi come forza che agisce non su altri o da parte di terzi, ma su se stessi, assumendo, dunque, una carica *riflessiva*: il vedere la pena irrogata in caso di trasgressione o, più semplicemente, il luogo dal quale tale violazione potrebbe essere notata e conseguentemente punita sarebbe sufficiente, per il filosofo inglese, a indurre il soggetto ad auto-controllarsi, a diventare primo e più integerrimo sorvegliante di se stesso, a disciplinare la propria condotta orientandola alla legalità anziché alla delinquenza. In tal caso, il controllo che ne emerge può dirsi sociale proprio perché *della società*, ovverosia avente ad oggetto la collettività medesima; con la

<sup>134</sup>La Monica, 2014, 11.

peculiarità che, collocati entro un'architettura appositamente studiata per questo, sono proprio i membri della comunità a controllare se stessi.

Nel Panopticon, pertanto, controllo e vista sono legati tra loro da una interrelazione apparentemente indissolubile, tant'è vero che quest'ultima compare già nel neologismo utilizzato da Bentham per designare il progetto architettonico ispirato dal fratello minore<sup>135</sup>.

Il rapporto tra lo sguardo e la sorveglianza individuale e sociale trova un proprio miliare consolidamento nelle teorie panottiche del filosofo londinese, sicché ancora nel tempo presente studiosi e intellettuali operanti nell'ambito dei *surveillance studies* non ve se ne discostano del tutto. E non si tratta esclusivamente di quanti ritengono il monitoraggio odierno ampiamente aderente al modello di vigilanza incarnato dalla *Inspection house*<sup>136</sup>, o di quanti ancora si servono del paradigma panottico al fine di mettere in guardia da un futuro (sempre più prossimo) che potrebbe schiudere derive dispotiche dal sapore orwelliano<sup>137</sup>.

Numerosi sono coloro che, soprattutto a partire dagli ultimi decenni del secolo scorso, hanno ritenuto necessario evidenziare le peculiarità ed eccentricità delle pratiche post-moderne di controllo rispetto alle tipicità della sorveglianza panottica. Ciò non di meno, essi non hanno rinunciato, anche soltanto implicitamente, a riaffermare la centralità della vista nelle forme contemporanee di monitoraggio, come dimostrato già solo dai neologismi conati dagli stessi per designarle. Dal *Synopticon* di Thomas Mathiesen<sup>138</sup> e Zygmund Bauman<sup>139</sup> al *Catopticon* di Jean-Gabriel Ganascia<sup>140</sup>, dall'*Oligopticon* di Bruno Latour ed Emile Hermant<sup>141</sup> al *Banopticon* di Didier Bigo<sup>142</sup>, dal *Panspectron* di Manuel DeLanda<sup>143</sup> al *Panopticoncommodity* di David Lyon<sup>144</sup>, la gran parte dei modelli teorici volti a descrivere la vigilanza attuale, se da un lato intendono discostarsi dal paradigma panottico, dall'altro finiscono per riaffermare la centralità dello sguardo (*opsis*, in greco *ὄψις*) che ne informa il funzionamento.

<sup>135</sup> Come noto, il termine Panopticon è stato onomaturgicamente creato da Bentham attraverso la fusione di due termini greci, ovverosia *pan* (*παν*) per indicare la totalità e *opsis* (*ὄψις*) per riferirsi al senso della vista: cfr. Finestra, 2012, 65; Kutz, 2019, 1; Escamilla Castillo, 2022, 75.

<sup>136</sup> Tra i primi, proprio Michel Foucault affermò l'esistenza di una effettiva continuità tra la sorveglianza panottica e il monitoraggio odierno: cfr. Foucault, 2010, 94, e Foucault, 2021, 95. Tale opinione è stata più di recente sostenuta anche nell'ambito dei *surveillance studies*: cfr. Fonio, 2006, 273; Sekulovski, 2016, 7; Manokha, 2018, 231.

<sup>137</sup> Sul rapporto tra il Panopticon di Jeremy Bentham e *1984* di George Orwell cfr. Fortunati, 1987.

<sup>138</sup> Cfr. Mathiesen, 1997.

<sup>139</sup> Cfr. Bauman, 2012.

<sup>140</sup> Cfr. Ganascia, 2010.

<sup>141</sup> Cfr. Latour e Hermant, 2006.

<sup>142</sup> Cfr. Bigo, 2006.

<sup>143</sup> Cfr. DeLanda, 1991, 205-206.

<sup>144</sup> Cfr. Lyon, 2006, 8-9.



E il legame tra controllo e vista pare destinato a proseguire ancora a lungo se si tiene conto del progressivo affiancarsi, accanto alla tradizionale *surveillance*, di una vera e propria *dataveillance*: una sorveglianza avente ad oggetto i dati, ovverosia la trasformazione degli *invisibili* gusti e pensieri delle persone in articolate stringhe alfanumeriche *visibili* e utilizzabili, ancorché con il fondamentale ausilio di algoritmi e dispositivi tecnologici<sup>145</sup>.

Sebbene, dunque, le odierne forme di monitoraggio possano essere ben diverse per finalità e modalità rispetto al Panopticon<sup>146</sup>, esse, in maniera non dissimile da quanto fatto dallo stesso Bentham, non cessano di fare affidamento sul senso della vista e sulla sua capacità di assicurare un certo controllo sociale, spesso associato all'idea di ordine e sicurezza. Se notevoli sono i progressi tecnologici intervenuti in materia di vigilanza, è necessario ammettere chela forza dello sguardo e il suo ruolo centrale nelle dinamiche di controllo balzano agli occhi per la loro attualità.

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<sup>145</sup> Il termine *dataveillance* è stato coniato da Roger Clarke in Clarke, 1998. Per un'analisi complessiva dell'attuale stato dell'arte in materia di sorveglianza, ove si mescolano forme di *surveillance* e dinamiche di *dataveillance*, nonché delle principali problematiche ad essa connesse cfr. Zuboff, 2019; Lyon, 2020; Han, 2023.

<sup>146</sup> Per una riflessione sui profili di rottura e continuità tra monitoraggio contemporaneo e sorveglianza panottica cfr. Marchesin, 2024a.

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# APRIRE IL SISTEMA WILLIAM JAMES, JEAN WAHL E L'EMPIRIZZAZIONE DI HEGEL

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the « empirization » of Hegel's philosophy through the lens of William James and Jean Wahl, two key figures in 20th-century philosophical empiricism. While both thinkers were overtly critical of Hegel's systematic approach, their interpretations integrate elements of his thought into alternative structures. James's radical empiricism and Wahl's second-order empiricism prioritize lived experience over conceptual abstractions, offering a critique of Hegel's dialectics while reimagining his insights on the unity of thought and reality. However, their reinterpretations do not merely dissolve Hegel into experience; rather, they reconstruct his philosophy within a strong, albeit non-systematic, metaphysical framework. By opening Hegel's system to the flux of lived reality, they propose a model where individuality and universality coexist without hierarchical subordination, paving the way for ethical and philosophical pluralism. The paper situates these reinterpretations within broader debates on metaphysics, pragmatism, and the limits of systematic thought.

## KEYWORDS

Hegel – James – Wahl – Empiricism – Metaphysics

## 1. QUALCHE PREMESSA

Tentare di ricondurre Hegel entro i ranghi di un apparentemente generico empirismo, anche servendosi degli strumenti concettuali offerti da autori che hanno in effetti tentato l'impresa non senza esiti significativi, rischia di rivelarsi azzardato per più di una ragione. A scoraggiare il tentativo è prima di tutto la lettera dello stesso Hegel, il quale, pur concedendo all'empirismo classico il merito di aver introdotto il «gran principio» secondo cui «ciò che è vero deve essere nella realtà ed esservi per la percezione»,<sup>1</sup> si risolve anche a far presente che esso «in luogo di cercare il vero nel pensiero stesso, lo va ad attingere

<sup>1</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, tr. it. di B. Croce, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1967, §38 (*Zusatz*), p. 48.



dall'*esperienza*»,<sup>2</sup> senza accorgersi di stare così praticando metafisica «in modo del tutto privo di critica e di consapevolezza».<sup>3</sup> Consci della centralità dell'esperito ma del tutto incapaci di pensare dialetticamente e di scorgere la co-appartenenza tra il sapere e l'oggettività che costituisce l'universale, gli empiristi – Hume in testa – sono per Hegel fautori di un pensiero limitato e unilaterale.

Se alla difficoltà rappresentata dalla esplicita avversione di Hegel per gli empiristi si aggiunge il proposito di leggere la sua opera attraverso l'interpretazione fornitane da William James e Jean Wahl, che del dibattito empirista del secolo scorso sono stati fra gli esponenti di spicco, il quadro non sembra migliorare. La critica di James alla dialettica, inserita nel più ampio contesto del dibattito sullo hegelismo attivo nelle università inglesi e americane a cavallo tra Otto e Novecento, è rimasta sostanzialmente confinata al periodo in questione, e ha trovato qualche eco forse soltanto nella più celebre lettura della produzione hegeliana fornita proprio da Jean Wahl, formatosi sui testi jamesiani. Pur meritando in larga misura un discorso diverso rispetto a quella di James, anche l'interpretazione di Wahl, entrato a far parte del *pantheon* del pensiero francese del secolo scorso anche e soprattutto grazie a un libro su Hegel, è collocata ormai da qualche decennio ai margini del dibattito sul filosofo dell'idealismo assoluto, e come quella di James è stata consegnata a uno stato di inattualità quasi irreversibile.<sup>4</sup> Interessati perlopiù agli aspetti dello hegelismo traducibili nei termini di una filosofia dell'esperienza – e apertamente ostili nei confronti della veste sistematica attribuita al proprio pensiero dallo Hegel maturo –, James e Wahl risultano assai poco utili alla causa, se l'obiettivo è quello di contribuire all'attuale stato dell'arte degli studi sullo stesso Hegel.

Agli ostacoli già menzionati si aggiunge infine l'esplicita avversione dichiarata da James e Wahl verso numerosi e decisivi aspetti della proposta hegeliana. James vede in Hegel quasi soltanto un bersaglio polemico – servendosi del quale egli si confronta in senso critico anche con gli hegeliani di Harvard e i neoidealisti inglesi –, tanto da arrivare a definire il sistema hegeliano, non senza una certa superficialità, «una trappola per topi, in cui se oltrepassi la porta potresti essere

<sup>2</sup> *Ivi*, §37, pp. 47-48.

<sup>3</sup> *Ivi*, §38 (*Zusatz*), p. 49. In termini sostanzialmente analoghi Hegel si esprime nelle *Vorlesungen* sulla storia della filosofia, in cui viene tra l'altro esplicitato il legame intrinseco tra l'esperienza intesa come mero insieme di fatti indipendenti e l'esito scettico dell'empirismo di Hume. Cfr. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, tr. it. di E. Codignola e G. Sanna, 3 voll., La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1964, III, pp. 221 e sgg. Per una trattazione in ampiezza del confronto critico di Hegel con l'empirismo cfr. J. Kozatsas, *Hegels Kritik am Empirismus*, Wilhelm Fink, Paderborn 2016 (riguardo ai passi qui riportati in particolare le pp. 60-66).

<sup>4</sup> Per un resoconto delle sorti della cosiddetta *French Theory*, di cui Wahl è fra i capostipiti, e una ricostruzione del dibattito recente su Hegel cfr. S. Achella, *L'ontologia vivente di Hegel*, in «Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica», CIX, 2, 2017, pp. 443 e sgg.

perso per sempre».<sup>5</sup> Wahl, benché mosso per lunghi tratti della sua esperienza filosofica da un atteggiamento decisamente più ricettivo nei confronti di alcune istanze hegeliane, si mostra a sua volta e in più occasioni scettico verso la logica e il sistema, sostenendo tra l'altro, con Kierkegaard e contro Hegel, che un «solo pensiero parziale, ma vivo ed esistente, vale più di tutto il Sistema».<sup>6</sup> Proprio il sistema, da intendersi quale prodotto conclusivo di una ragione in grado di mantenere insieme entro il proprio sapere la totalità del reale, costituisce una barriera almeno a prima vista insuperabile per qualsiasi operazione di accostamento dell'impianto hegeliano ai due autori in questione, che precisamente a partire dalla critica ai sistemi hanno dato avvio alla propria produzione filosofica.

Esposte le difficoltà, vien presto fatto di chiedersi perché l'interesse per l'empirizzazione di Hegel e perché attraverso le filosofie di James e Wahl. I motivi a supporto del tentativo, esattamente come gli ostacoli che lo scoraggiano, sono in realtà diversi, e attengono tanto alla dimensione teoretica quanto a quella storiografica. La prima delle spiegazioni concerne il fatto che, nonostante le ripetute e argomentate prese di distanza (specialmente da parte di James), nello sviluppo del pensiero dei due interpreti si produce una lettura dell'impianto hegeliano che, cercando di sbarazzarsi dell'elaborazione sistematica senza però chiudere i conti con altri plessi problematici dello hegelismo, finisce in una certa misura per integrare alcune istanze tematiche di quest'ultimo in un diverso ecosistema filosofico – producendo anche solo per questo una elaborazione teorica degna di venire interrogata. La seconda spiegazione, di taglio più storiografico, ha a che vedere invece con la necessità di una messa in luce della relazione che lega lo Hegel di James a quello di Wahl: per quanto infatti si sia finora efficacemente mostrato, in sede di studi critici, l'apparentamento del recupero wahliano di Hegel con quello messo in atto negli stessi anni da alcuni interpreti francesi e tedeschi, è ragionevole pensare che tra le fonti privilegiate del primo Wahl, desideroso di liberare Hegel dalla sua stessa logica speculativa, fosse proprio James, al cui empirismo egli aveva dedicato una parte consistente della tesi dottorale. Da ultimo, l'intervento jamesiano e wahliano su Hegel, che si concretizza in un'operazione di apertura del sistema, produce anche un suo versante 'applicativo', nella misura in cui uno hegelismo empirizzato e ibridato

<sup>5</sup> W. James, *On Some Hegelisms*, in «Mind», XXVI, 7, 1882, p. 193. Sul rapporto filosoficamente conflittuale tra James e gli idealisti del suo tempo cfr. V. Vevere, *To Dive Back in the Flux of Life: James's Critique of Intellectualism*, in A.-T. Tymieniecka (a cura di), *Phenomenology of Life. From the Animal Soul to the Human Mind: Analecta Husserliana*, XCIV, 2007, pp. 419-433; R. Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, pp. 327-341.

<sup>6</sup> J. Wahl, *Hegel et Kierkegaard* (1933), tr. it. di R. Salvadori, in Id. (a cura di), *Interpretazioni hegeliane*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1980, p. 124.

con motivi del pensiero americano e francese del secolo scorso finisce con il suggerire modelli etici non privi di un qualche interesse.

In virtù tanto dei problemi quanto delle ragioni che confortano l'opzione ermeneutica a cui saranno consegnate le prossime pagine, si cercherà qui di restituire le linee fondamentali del lavoro di James e Wahl sull'opera hegeliana, che si svolge sostanzialmente su due livelli: 1) la riconduzione del sistema a una esperienza concreta di cui Hegel sarebbe stato partecipe; 2) la liberazione della filosofia hegeliana, come esito del recupero di tale esperienza concreta, dalla sua espressione sistematica, con il contestuale innesto in una metafisica empirista che ne conserva alcuni aspetti centrali. Si renderà allora evidente che a muovere i due autori nella lettura della lettera hegeliana è da una parte il desiderio di tornare dal prodotto finale della speculazione di Hegel (il sistema) alla premessa di quello stesso prodotto (l'esperienza); e dall'altra parte il tentativo di pensare l'esperienza in questione come momento capace di renderci più vicini alla realtà.

## 2. EMPIRISMO RADICALE ED EMPIRISMO DI SECONDO GRADO

Prima di cominciare a vedere da vicino il lavoro svolto da James e Wahl sull'opera di Hegel, conviene forse provare a fornire qualche cenno sulle elaborazioni dell'empirismo da essi prodotte – e, per quanto possibile, sulla loro definizione del termine stesso “empirismo” –, in modo da intravedere con anticipo i problemi filosofici che giustificano la loro curvatura dei testi hegeliani.

L'elaborazione jamesiana dell'empirismo è nota con il nome di empirismo radicale, e costituisce l'esito maturo e il vero e proprio precipitato della sua riflessione. Partito come fisiologo, poi passato alla psicologia e approdato agli studi filosofici soltanto nella fase conclusiva della sua riflessione (quasi alla ricerca di un fondamento sempre più generale del sapere), James perviene alla messa a tema dell'empirismo radicale mediante una generalizzazione della sua più rilevante scoperta in ambito psicologico. Dopo aver introdotto, nel capitolo IX dei *Principles of Psychology* (1890), la tesi dello *Stream of thought*, secondo cui la coscienza, non apparendo a se stessa «come tagliata a pezzi», deve venire intesa metaforicamente come un «“fiume” o “una corrente”»<sup>7</sup> in grado di rendere conto della vita soggettiva, egli, rivoltosi negli anni successivi con sempre maggior

<sup>7</sup> W. James, *Principles of Psychology* (1890), tr. it. di G.C. Ferrari e A. Tamburini, Società Editrice Libreria, Milano 1909, p. 190. La tesi secondo cui la teoria metafisica di James costituirebbe la generalizzazione di quanto precedentemente sostenuto sulla vita della coscienza si trova già in C. Sini, *Il pragmatismo americano*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1971, pp. 354-355: «In fondo l'empirismo radicale di James non è che lo sviluppo, in sede filosofica, delle idee già contenute nel capitolo sulla “corrente della coscienza” in sede di analisi e descrizione psicologica». La stessa tesi è stata argomentata, assai più di recente, in M. Bella, *James's Radicalization of Empiricism*, in S. Marchetti (a cura di), *The Jamesian Mind*, Routledge, London-New York 2022, pp. 319-329.

decisione alle questioni metafisiche, finisce con l'estendere all'intera realtà quanto in precedenza predicato della dimensione coscienziale.

Così come, secondo il dettato dei *Principles*, la vita della coscienza costituisce una corrente continua e priva di interruzioni brusche, in cui le esperienze contingenti non avvengono isolatamente e si mostrano invece come addentellate a quelle che la precedono e a quelle che le seguono,<sup>8</sup> l'intera struttura del reale, negli scritti di metafisica del James maturo, si attesta come un unico flusso di esperienza pura, in cui ogni esperienza singola è connessa a certe altre e in cui dunque non si danno distanze fra entità o momenti del mondo. Contro la «polverizzazione generale di tutta l'Esperienza»,<sup>9</sup> l'empirismo radicale considera la realtà come un tutto autosufficiente, nell'ambito del quale le relazioni sono reali quanto i termini che congiungono, e in cui pertanto ogni unificazione delle cose da parte di un soggetto conoscente è resa superflua:

«La mia tesi è che se cominciamo con l'ipotesi che ci sia una sola sostanza o materia primigenia del mondo, una sostanza di cui ogni cosa è composta, e se chiamiamo questa sostanza "esperienza pura", allora il conoscere si può facilmente spiegare come un particolare tipo di relazione reciproca in cui possono entrare porzioni di esperienza pura».<sup>10</sup>

Ciò che rende radicale la versione jamesiana dell'empirismo è proprio la sua concezione delle relazioni (assai differente rispetto a quella dell'empirismo classico), di cui la messa a margine della coscienza rappresenta un corollario. Se infatti le esperienze attraverso cui il reale si compone e fluisce sono già da sempre in relazione tra loro senza bisogno dell'intervento unificatore di un ente trans-empirico (il soggetto coscienziale),<sup>11</sup> allora la coscienza costituisce al massimo una specificazione secondaria e temporanea di una esperienza che in se stessa è neutra e non suddivisa in soggetti e oggetti: «Non esiste – scrive James – una materia del pensiero diversa da una materia della cosa, ma la stessa identica porzione di "esperienza pura" [...] può valere alternativamente come un "fatto di coscienza" o

<sup>8</sup> «Non c'è, infatti, una moltitudine di idee coesistenti; una tale nozione è una chimera. Tutte le cose che sono pensate in relazione, sono pensate sin dal principio come un'unità, in un'unica pulsazione di subbiettività, in un solo stato psichico, sentimento, o stato mentale» (W. James, *Principles*, cit., p. 214).

<sup>9</sup> W. James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912), tr. it. di L. Taddio e A. Colombo, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2023, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> *Ivi*, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. anche W. James, *The Meaning of Truth. A Sequel to "Pragmatism"* (1909), in Id., *Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1975, p. 173: «[...] le relazioni tra cose, congiuntive come disgiuntive, sono materia di esperienza diretta tanto quanto le cose stesse [...] dunque le parti di esperienza sono mantenute insieme una accanto all'altra da relazioni che sono esse stesse parti di esperienza».

come una realtà fisica, a seconda se è presa in un contesto o in un altro».<sup>12</sup> Non si danno in prima battuta materia e spirito, che costituiscono tutt'al più categorie strumentali; quella tra fisico e mentale non è una separazione che originariamente si trovi nell'esperienza, e perciò tanto il primo quanto il secondo possono vedere i propri confini variare a seconda dei contesti, delle funzioni e delle classificazioni a cui sono sottoposti.

Sulla sua caratterizzazione generale dell'esperienza James innesta poi la distinzione dinamica fra i percetti e i concetti, ossia fra ciò che viene immediatamente colto da un ente percipiente che si rivolge al flusso della realtà e la rielaborazione razionale di quel contenuto percettivo. Come Bergson, egli vede nei concetti una astrazione (un *trarre fuori-da*) e un isolamento di materiale originariamente percettivo.<sup>13</sup> Ciò significa non soltanto che l'apparato concettuale, essendo ricavato dall'esperienza, non può essere impiegato per fondarla, ma anche che esso, in quanto derivato astratto e discontinuo di un'originaria corrente concreta e continua, non è in grado di restituire fedelmente i caratteri di quest'ultima: il concetto «si riferisce sempre a un qualche dato o a una parte di un dato che conosciamo prima di tutto sul piano percettivo»,<sup>14</sup> e dunque la conoscenza concettuale «è e sempre sarà inadeguata alla ricchezza della realtà che cerchiamo di conoscere».<sup>15</sup> In quanto strumenti statici riferentisi a un reale dinamico, i concetti costituiscono al massimo un surrogato di ciò da cui traggono le informazioni a partire dalle quali si strutturano – e in quanto tali non rappresentano nell'ottica jamesiana nulla più che «schematizzazioni abominevoli».<sup>16</sup>

Ne consegue un ulteriore aspetto fondamentale: sebbene i concetti costituiscano soltanto una «elaborazione *post-mortem*»<sup>17</sup> di ciò che si dà percettivamente nell'esperienza, essi si mostrano nondimeno adatti a una «comprensione retrospettiva»,<sup>18</sup> utile dal punto di vista pratico, del contenuto della percezione, rivelandosi così *pragmaticamente veri*. È questo il punto in cui l'empirismo radicale fonda e riarticola il pragmatismo jamesiano – in realtà

<sup>12</sup> W. James, *Essays*, cit., p. 109. Sulla teoria jamesiana della coscienza si veda G. Bird, *Consciousness in Kant and William James*, in G. Gava e R. Stern (a cura di), *Pragmatism, Kant, and Transcendental Philosophy*, Routledge, London-New York 2016, pp. 177-195.

<sup>13</sup> Sulla posizione di Bergson si veda ad esempio H. Bergson, *Matière et mémoire* (1896), tr. it. di A. Pessina, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2009, p. 179: «E andiamo così dal tutto alle parti, attraverso un lavoro di scomposizione [...] che consiste nello spezzettare, per la maggior comodità della vita pratica, la continuità del reale».

<sup>14</sup> W. James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911), tr. it. di P. Gori, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2021, p. 90.

<sup>15</sup> *Ivi*, p. 89. Riguardo alla differenza fra percetti e concetti in James cfr. M. Bella, *On the Difference between Percepts and Concepts in William James's Philosophy of Experience*, in «Pragmatism Today», IX, 2, 2018, pp. 10-22.

<sup>16</sup> W. James, *Some Problems*, cit., p. 100.

<sup>17</sup> *Ivi*, p. 101.

<sup>18</sup> *Ivi*, p. 102.

presente nella riflessione di James da ben prima che questi si rivolgesse stabilmente alle questioni metafisiche –, giacché il dispositivo concettuale, mostratosi inadatto sotto il profilo strettamente teoretico, ritorna servibile in virtù della sua capacità di procurare vantaggi pratici. La «trasposizione concettuale del sensibile»,<sup>19</sup> colpevole di polverizzare e di arrestare una realtà di per sé infinitamente mobile, va comunque mantenuta e impiegata a un altro livello della vita umana in quanto capace di soddisfare la massima pragmatica secondo cui laddove un'ipotesi «funziona in modo soddisfacente, nel senso più ampio del termine, è vera».<sup>20</sup> La verità in senso teoretico, irraggiungibile *via concetti*, è affiancata dalla verità in senso pragmatico, a cui individui e comunità lavorano quotidianamente attraverso il confronto diretto con il reale. L'empirismo radicale (la teoria della realtà come flusso dell'esperienza pura) è a fondamento del pragmatismo (la teoria secondo cui, vista l'impossibilità di cogliere teoreticamente il flusso mediante il concetto stabile, non resterà che accontentarsi della capacità mostrata da quest'ultimo di agire in modo praticamente efficiente).<sup>21</sup>

“Empirismo” significa dunque per James una teoria della realtà come plesso unitario e autosufficiente di esperienza da cui gli individui traggono il contenuto percettivo che, una volta ritradotto in patrimonio concettuale, guiderà i loro progetti pratici entro il mondo. A confortare o meno la sopravvivenza di tali progetti pratici sono le risposte, positive o negative, che a essi fornisce l'esperienza; e dato che quest'ultima può far conseguire effetti pratici positivi ad apparati concettuali affatto diversi e tra loro in contrasto – rendendoli così di fatto pragmaticamente veri –, il binomio empirismo-pragmatismo costituisce in James la giustificazione ontologica del *pluralismo* (tanto ontologico quanto etico).<sup>22</sup> La «visione pluralistica» come terminale dell'azione di empirismo e pragmatismo, la quale a sua volta conduce James alla conclusione secondo cui «non vi può mai essere una forma onnicomprensiva» in grado di cogliere da sola «la sostanza della

<sup>19</sup> *Ivi*, p. 154.

<sup>20</sup> W. James, *Pragmatism* (1907), tr. it. di S. Franzese, Il Saggiatore, Milano 1994, p. 169.

<sup>21</sup> Benché dunque l'elaborazione da parte di James del pragmatismo sia precedente dal punto di vista cronologico rispetto a quella dell'empirismo radicale, è quantomeno verosimile che egli, una volta abbracciati in pianta stabile gli interessi metafisici, abbia riformulato e riadattato la massima pragmatica in virtù dell'impianto teorico dell'empirismo radicale, che costituisce a tutti gli effetti una teoria a cui è demandato il compito di rendere conto dell'intera realtà. Sul punto cfr. J.E. Hackett, *Why James can be an Existential Pluralist. A Response to Talisse and Aikin*, in «Contemporary Pragmatism», XIV, 4, 2017, p. 514.

<sup>22</sup> Rimarrebbe da chiedersi perché e in virtù di cosa il concetto, in quanto schematizzazione statica di un che di mobile (e quindi soggetto a mutamento continuo), risulti comunque praticamente funzionante. Se gli strumentari concettuali arrivano sempre in ritardo rispetto al flusso a cui si riferiscono, come si spiega la loro efficacia? A quest'altezza della giustificazione jamesiana del pragmatismo (e quindi del pluralismo) sarebbe stato forse necessario giustificare l'efficacia pratica alla luce di una qualche *forma* ugualmente condivisa dal pensiero e dalla realtà – qualcosa di simile alla forma logica nel *Tractatus* di Wittgenstein –, ma al riguardo James è avaro di spiegazioni.

realtà»,<sup>23</sup> rappresenta, come vedremo, uno degli argomenti *posteriori* che nell'opera jamesiana vengono rivolti contro Hegel e la sua logica.

Quanto a Wahl, si può cominciare notando che la sua versione dell'empirismo, proposta al pubblico europeo dagli anni Venti del secolo scorso, si fa carico tra le altre cose di riproporre e in parte risolvere alcuni dei quesiti fondamentali del pensiero inglese e americano dei decenni precedenti – variamente rielaborati mediante il dialogo con la filosofia di area francese. È proprio partendo da questioni che egli rinviene prima di tutto nel pensiero di James – segnatamente il problema del rapporto tra monismo e pluralismo –, che Wahl, già dalla tesi dottorale, comincia a esplicitare i termini di quello che sarà uno dei punti centrali del suo stesso empirismo: «Bisogna insistere sul fatto – scrive – che l'amore del dettaglio è sempre accompagnato in James da un rispetto della totalità concreta. [...] Il sentimento della totalità concreta è la negazione dell'idea di un tutto astratto».<sup>24</sup> E ancora: «Senza dubbio James non accetterà mai un monismo completo. Egli aderisce all'idea di un *pluralismo monistico*. [...] Così una sorta di dialettica immanente spinge James, sembra, dal pluralismo verso un monismo all'interno del quale egli cerca di integrare il pluralismo».<sup>25</sup>

Wahl vede quindi nella nozione di *much-at-once* (“molteplicità unitaria” o “unità del molteplice”) l'espedito teoretico servendosi del quale James avrebbe cercato di mantenere insieme in maniera dinamica, sotto il tetto dell'empirismo radicale, il monismo costituito dall'unico flusso dell'esperienza pura e il pluralismo rappresentato dall'esplosione dei punti di vista e dei progetti pratici rivolti all'esperienza medesima.<sup>26</sup> Ed è da una domanda che retoricamente pone a James ma che per via implicita rivolge a se stesso, che egli svilupperà di lì in avanti alcune delle linee essenziali della metafisica empirista: «Come deve allentarsi o piuttosto approfondirsi il monismo per lasciare spazio al pluralismo?».<sup>27</sup>

Il pluralismo e l'attenzione per i particolari dell'esperienza non escludono, e anzi implicano, la presenza di una totalità a cui la pluralità fa riferimento; il legame tra l'uno e i molti non è tuttavia immediatamente evidente, e necessita pertanto di una esplicitazione filosofica che mostri il conciliarsi dei termini. A tale opera di

<sup>23</sup> W. James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), tr. it. di M.C. Santoro, Marietti, Torino 1973, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> J. Wahl, *Les philosophies pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amerique* (1920), Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, Paris 2005, pp. 150-151.

<sup>25</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 227-228, corsivo nostro. Per una restituzione dei caratteri generali della tesi dottorale di Wahl (oltre che dei termini del confronto wahliano con James in essa contenuto) si rinvia a M. Girel, *Jean Wahl d'Angleterre et d'Amérique: contribution à l'étude du contexte et de la signification des Philosophies pluralistes (1920)*, in «Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale», LXXXI, 1, 2014, pp. 103-123.

<sup>26</sup> Sul *much-at-once* cfr. W. James, *Some Problems*, cit., p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> J. Wahl, *Les philosophies pluralistes*, cit., p. 228. La domanda è traducibile anche nei seguenti termini: come far convivere il fatto che la realtà è una per tutti con la possibilità di punti di vista potenzialmente infiniti su di essa?

conciliazione è dedicata larga parte del pensiero originale di Wahl, dispiegatosi attraverso una interpretazione continua, oltre che delle filosofie anglo-americane, di alcuni luoghi fondamentali della storia della riflessione occidentale – dalle tesi del *Parmenide* platonico fino all'*in-der-Welt-sein* di Heidegger.<sup>28</sup> Il compito di pensare l'unità metafisica del reale mantenendo intatta l'autonomia dei progetti individuali è da Wahl demandato alla sua particolare declinazione dell'empirismo, quello che in *Vers le concret* (opera per diversi aspetti in continuità con la tesi di dottorato) viene detto «empirismo di secondo grado».<sup>29</sup> Non dissimilmente da James, egli ritiene che l'empirismo classico (quello che arriva fino a Mill e Spencer), pur avendo messo in rilievo il ruolo fondativo del contenuto esperienziale nei confronti delle strutture conoscitive della coscienza, non abbia poi condotto la propria posizione teorica fino alle sue naturali conseguenze; in particolare, esso avrebbe ingenuamente assunto l'esperienza come un dato privo di elementi problematici, mancando di rendere conto in maniera adeguata del nostro rapporto con il reale e prestando così il fianco alle accuse di ingenuità e di insufficienza teorica rivoltegli dai razionalisti.

Muovendo dalle carenze dell'empirismo tradizionalmente inteso, la proposta filosofica dell'empirismo di secondo grado, quello che «sarebbe passato attraverso il razionalismo, e l'avrebbe superato»,<sup>30</sup> tenta di pensare il rapporto tra gli individui e la realtà (pluralismo e monismo) nei termini di una unità concreta: «in generale – sostiene Wahl – non c'è una barriera tra noi e le cose»,<sup>31</sup> e, nonostante ciò che ci viene incontro nell'esperienza non vada assunto senza problematizzarlo, l'esito a cui la riflessione filosofica dovrà pervenire sarà un rinnovato contatto – diretto e privo di filtri come quello pensato dagli empiristi classici – con il tessuto esperienziale, un contatto che, in quanto passato attraverso la mediazione del pensiero, ha tuttavia perduto l'ingenuità iniziale e fondato la sua relazione con la realtà, rendendosi in tal modo *concreto* – nel contesto di una sorta di articolata giustificazione del senso comune, che finisce per riportarci, consapevolizzati, al punto di partenza.

L'idea wahliana di una unità concreta, di un contatto diretto ma non ingenuo tra individuo e realtà, apparecchia le condizioni per il conseguimento della ricercata conciliazione tra l'uno e i molti, tra il monismo dell'unico tessuto esperienziale e la molteplicità dei progetti esistenziali che si stagliano da quel

<sup>28</sup> Proprio in conseguenza del fatto che il suo pensiero tende spesso a sparire dietro a quello degli autori che commenta, Wahl è stato fin qui considerato più un interprete e un federatore di culture filosofiche diverse che non un creatore e un filosofo originale. Sul punto si veda ad esempio G. Bianco, *Après Bergson. Portrait de groupe avec philosophe*, PUF, Paris 2015, p. 31. Per una ricognizione generale della vita e delle opere di Wahl cfr. invece R. Piaggio, *Tra esistenza e pensiero. Saggio su Jean Wahl*, Il Melangolo, Genova 2007.

<sup>29</sup> J. Wahl, *Vers le concret* (1932), tr. it. di G. Piatti, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2020, p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ivi*, p. 43.



tessuto per poi puntare su di esso. Se intende davvero aderire all'idea di un pluralismo monistico, l'empirismo radicale deve secondo Wahl mostrarsi in grado di pensare e mantenere in coordinazione tanto una realtà senza biforcazioni quanto una molteplicità di tentativi diversi, autonomi e fra loro indipendenti di entrare in contatto con essa:

«Per un empirismo radicale, non c'è un reale che si distaccerebbe in mezzo a una pluralità di possibili, e che sarebbe esso stesso costituito da una pluralità di reali. *C'è una sola realtà, senza biforcazione.* [...] C'è, dicevamo, una sola realtà, senza biforcazione e tuttavia la mente non può conoscere la realtà *se non opponendola in una certa misura a se stessa, dividendola, raddoppiandola in un mondo di possibili.* [...] Queste divisioni e questi schemi, che la mente pone per poi negare il loro valore, costituiscono le tappe necessarie in questo percorso della negazione con la quale questa tenta di definire il reale nei suoi rapporti con essa».<sup>32</sup>

Tra gli individui e la realtà su cui essi poggiano i piedi vige per Wahl una sostanziale identità di struttura, di modo che, proprio in virtù di tale assenza di barriere e biforcazioni ontologiche, non vi è alcun bisogno di un soggetto trascendentale che fondi e spieghi la relazione soggetto-oggetto – tanto che, egli scriverà, «alla fine saremo portati a chiederci se questa distinzione tra l'“in noi” e il “fuori di noi” abbia un senso».<sup>33</sup> E nondimeno l'unità fra gli individui e il reale non è, come nell'empirismo classico, un che di già sempre dato, giacché esiste inizialmente una «tensione tra l'esistenza e la realtà»,<sup>34</sup> una provvisoria distanza fra gli individui e la loro presa di coscienza di essere in uno con il reale, che impone alla vita umana di guadagnare attraverso la riflessione un rapporto di contatto diretto con le cose che costituisce la vera cifra della concretezza wahlamente intesa. «Il concreto non sarà mai il dato per la filosofia. Sarà il ricercato»,<sup>35</sup> e proprio nell'idea di una coincidenza e di una continuità con il reale non immediate ma *guadagnate* risiede il decisivo passo in avanti dell'empirismo di secondo grado proposto da Wahl rispetto all'empirismo radicale jamesiano da cui esso prende almeno in parte le mosse.

Ciò che ad ogni modo più conta in questa sede è che, a partire dai concetti fondamentali delle due metafisiche empiriste di cui si è cercato di riassumere i tratti, è possibile ricavare una concezione complessiva dell'empirismo alla luce della quale comprendere e valutare la torsione a cui gli autori in esame tentano di sottoporre il testo hegeliano e le prospettive ermeneutiche che tale torsione mette

<sup>32</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 223-224, c.n. Sulla nozione di “concreto” all'interno dell'empirismo di Wahl si rinvia a D. Panagia, *Sentimental Empiricism. Politics, Philosophy, and Criticism in Postwar France*, Fordham University Press, New York 2024, pp. 101 e sgg.

<sup>33</sup> J. Wahl, *Traité de Métaphysique*, Payot, Paris 1953, p. 708.

<sup>34</sup> *Ivi*, p. 666.

<sup>35</sup> J. Wahl, *Vers le concret*, cit., p. 53.

al servizio degli interpreti. L'*excursus* sull'impianto generale delle due filosofie, almeno secondo l'ipotesi di lavoro che si verrà esplicitando in seguito, dovrà pertanto rivelarsi funzionale al rintracciamento 1) del senso e degli obiettivi che muovono le operazioni di James e Wahl sull'opera di Hegel e 2) dei lineamenti essenziali di una metafisica e di una filosofia pratica in cui alcune nozioni dello hegelismo, una volta estratte dal sistema, si rivelino operative secondo una diversa forma.

### 3. JAMES E L'ESPERIENZA CONCRETA DI HEGEL

Pur con significative pause, il confronto con Hegel e le sue riprese più o meno originali nel contesto anglo-americano si estende lungo tutta la durata dell'esperienza di pensiero di James. Cominciata in maniera esplicita nel 1882 con l'articolo *On Some Hegelisms*, la polemica con lo hegelismo si protrae fino al 1909, l'anno dell'ultima opera jamesiana pubblicata prima della morte dell'autore, mantenendo una certa coerenza di fondo ma andando anche incontro a notevoli slittamenti di senso. Non si tratta certamente, anche in virtù della conoscenza tutto sommato limitata da parte di James del testo hegeliano e delle sue sottigliezze, di una delle interpretazioni maggiormente puntuali e articolate del filosofo dell'idealismo; ma vedremo che comunque sia essa non è priva di spunti di originalità e di intuizioni che, nello stesso James non pienamente sviluppate, sapranno trovare più compiuta trattazione in Wahl.

Nel riprendere il filo di tale interpretazione, è qui il caso di partire da dove ci si era interrotti, vale a dire dal giudizio jamesiano, polemico e *tranchant*, secondo cui il sistema di Hegel somiglierebbe a una trappola per topi: finché non se ne è varcata la soglia, lo si considera per quel che è – una ben strana costruzione teorica –; ma una volta entrati e presi per buoni il vocabolario e l'intelaiatura concettuale, è ormai troppo tardi per liberarsene e tornare alla consueta ricerca filosofica.<sup>36</sup> E a chi si aspettasse, al di là delle metafore brillanti e delle condanne sbrigative, una spiegazione punto su punto delle proprie posizioni sul sistema, James risponde, benché solo tra le righe, con un'altra metafora e altro sarcasmo: «Non è necessario bere l'oceano, per sapere che è salato; né una critica vaglia un intero sistema dopo aver provato che le sue premesse sono marce».<sup>37</sup> Ma quali sono le premesse che James trova così fallaci da svalutare la credibilità dell'intero impianto hegeliano?

<sup>36</sup> L'entità in larga misura soltanto superficiale della critica jamesiana a Hegel, anche in conseguenza del fatto che James stesso non si è mai sforzato di nascondersela, non è sfuggita agli interpreti: «Come altri lettori superficiali di Hegel, James pensa alla dialettica come a una sorta di macchina di tesi-antitesi-sintesi che macina aprioristicamente il mondo e i suoi abitanti» (D.J. Cook, *James's "Ether Mysticism" and Hegel*, in «Journal of the History of Philosophy», XV, 3, 1977, p. 314).

<sup>37</sup> W. James, *On Some Hegelisms*, cit., p. 194.

La prima e più evidente delle premesse ritenute inaccettabili riguarda la nota considerazione di Hegel, ormai ampiamente stereotipa, sull'unicità della vera filosofia: «[...] che la filosofia sia e possa essere soltanto una, riposa sul fatto che la ragione è soltanto una».<sup>38</sup> Una sola, nell'ottica di Hegel, è la ragione che informa di sé tanto la coscienza quanto l'oggettività del reale; ed essendo una la ragione, non potrà che essere una anche la filosofia autentica, quella che si fa carico di portare alla luce le istanze di tale ragione universale. Come già emerso, in James è centrale fin dal principio il problema di mantenere in equilibrio monismo e pluralismo – unicità del tessuto dell'esperienza e molteplicità delle esperienze individuali –, e l'idea di un'unica vera filosofia in grado di restituire la struttura della realtà non può quindi che lasciarlo scontento: «E per immettere persino quel grado di razionalità nell'universo, [seguendo Hegel] abbiamo dovuto massacrare una grande parte dei suoi contenuti».<sup>39</sup> Il prezzo dell'adesione allo hegelismo è per James il sacrificio della pluralità degli sguardi, delle opinioni e dei progetti sul reale, ridotto da Hegel a una sola filosofia capace di restituirne tutti i tratti essenziali – e in tal senso il tono esasperatamente sarcastico della critica jamesiana indica forse la percezione di un pericolo che egli rinviene nell'adozione di quell'attitudine filosofica.

C'è però anche dell'altro, che ha più direttamente a che vedere con la dialettica e quindi con la struttura generale della logica hegeliana. Hegel definisce la dialettica «il superiore movimento razionale, dove tali [elementi della realtà], che sembrano assolutamente separati, passano l'un nell'altro per se stessi».<sup>40</sup> Il movimento dialettico, che segna il tentativo hegeliano di andare oltre la logica dell'identità, mostra il reale come l'esito del trapassare dei suoi elementi gli uni negli altri: gli enti reali non sono fissi e sempre uguali a se stessi, ma confluiscono in altro da sé e giungono infine, precisamente come esito di tale movimento, a una superiore coerenza logica in cui tutti i momenti fondamentali della realtà si trovano sintetizzati. Il reale è per Hegel logico *in quanto* processuale. Mostrandosi insoddisfatto anche di tale restituzione – e senza dismettere i panni del polemista a tratti anche grossolano – James descrive come «assai pittoresca» la nozione «di un essere che inciampa perennemente oltre i suoi stessi piedi e che deve cambiare proprio per esistere».<sup>41</sup> Pur avendo abbandonato la fiducia verso la logica tradizionale, egli non ritiene che quella hegeliana possa rappresentarne

<sup>38</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Über das Wesen der philosophischen Kritik* (1802), tr. it. di S. Baritussio, in «Verifiche», XII, 1983, p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> W. James, *On Some Hegelisms*, cit., p. 189. Nella critica di James all'idealismo all'obiezione di natura strettamente metafisica si accompagna sempre quella etica: ricondurre per via teoretica l'universo a una sola ragione significa mettere implicitamente al bando tutte le altre. Al riguardo cfr. T.L.S. Sprigge, *James, Empiricism, and Absolute Idealism*, in J.R. Shook e J. Margolis (a cura di), *A Companion to Pragmatism*, Blackwell, Oxford 2006, pp. 166 e sgg.

<sup>40</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik* (1831), tr. it. di A. Moni rivista da C. Cesa, 2 voll., Laterza, Roma-Bari 1981, I, pp. 97-98.

<sup>41</sup> W. James, *On Some Hegelisms*, cit., p. 197.

un'alternativa credibile, e si affretta a metterne in risalto i tratti di arbitrarietà e di astrattezza capziosa.<sup>42</sup>

Siamo nuovamente di fronte, almeno in larga misura, a una semplificazione della proposta speculativa hegeliana – che tra l'altro James mostra di conoscere tuttalpiù per sommi capi –; e tuttavia, seppur nel contesto della generale imprecisione dell'analisi, vengono consegnate alle righe di *On Some Hegelisms* alcune importanti linee argomentative. Nello specifico, James ritiene che l'autocontraddittorietà come motore *a priori* della dialettica (e quindi della realtà intera) possa venire eventualmente dimostrata solo grazie all'osservazione dei suoi effetti *a posteriori*. Nonostante pretenda di fondare una nuova logica formale, nella lettura jamesiana Hegel elabora un principio fondamentale, quello della *self-contradiction*, che in fin dei conti «deve appellarsi ai suoi pretesi prodotti per provare la propria esistenza».<sup>43</sup> Ogni generalizzazione sul reale, anche quelle che si ritengono onnicomprensive, deve in effetti esordire da una osservazione empirica sulle parti contingenti del mondo, e anche l'idealismo assoluto hegeliano, in questo senso, non può secondo James fare eccezione. Se anche l'incedere dialettico costituisse l'effettivo motore processuale della realtà e della storia, Hegel potrebbe essersene avveduto soltanto osservando i fatti, e non certo speculando sui fondamenti a priori della logica; ciò dimostra secondo James l'intrascendibilità del contingente, da cui l'edificazione di pensiero hegeliano deve aver tratto ispirazione. È questo il primo passo del *tentativo jamesiano di empirizzazione di Hegel*.<sup>44</sup>

Una volta elaborati, nella fase conclusiva della sua produzione, i concetti fondamentali dell'empirismo radicale, James ha modo di proseguire la propria opera di riconduzione della lettera hegeliana nei gangli dell'empirismo. È in tal senso che, prendendo sul serio l'ipotesi della natura a posteriori della dialettica e sfruttando appieno lo strumentario concettuale garantitogli dalla sua metafisica empirista, egli cerca di spingersi ancora oltre: se in effetti l'esperienza è il flusso originario da cui ogni concettualizzazione deve trarre il proprio contenuto, se la nostra attività intellettuale consiste sempre in una «sostituzione dell'ordine percettivo in cui si dà originariamente la nostra esperienza con un ordine concettuale»,<sup>45</sup> allora non sarà soltanto la dialettica hegeliana a scaturire dall'esperienza, ma il suo intero sistema. Stando a quanto suggerito dal nuovo

<sup>42</sup> *Ivi*, p. 202.

<sup>43</sup> *Ivi*, p. 195.

<sup>44</sup> Non è mancato chi ha visto nella critica jamesiana a Hegel mediante l'empirismo una effettiva desedimentazione della cogenza della logica hegeliana nel suo complesso (si veda D. Morse, *William James's Neglected Critique of Hegel*, in «Idealistic Studies», XXXV, 2-3, 2005, pp. 199-213). Benché tale posizione non manchi di buone argomentazioni a supporto, sembra più ragionevole sostenere che la critica jamesiana, pur non riuscendo a toccare davvero nel vivo l'impianto di Hegel, possa comunque vantare il merito di aver suggerito la via empirista alla desedimentazione di alcuni assunti hegeliani.

<sup>45</sup> W. James, *Some Problems*, cit., pp. 73-74.

empirismo jamesiano, Hegel deve aver concettualizzato dei percetti, cioè deve aver tratto tutti gli elementi del suo sistema dall'osservazione diretta del flusso dell'esperienza; ciò significa che, nonostante abbia accordato rilevanza al «metodo concettuale» e non ai «fatti sensibili»,<sup>46</sup> il contenuto primigenio della sua speculazione non può che essere stato il flusso percettivo:

«Tenendosi stretto, come aveva fatto lui, alla visione di un mondo realmente vivente, e rifiutando di contentarsi di una visione di esso intellettualistica e frammentaria, è un peccato che abbia adottato la maggior parte delle parole che l'intellettualismo aveva già svuotato di contenuto. Ma egli si accostò al vecchio disprezzo dei razionalisti per l'immediatezza del mondo sensibile con tutti i suoi squallidi particolari, e mai tollerò la nozione che la forma della filosofia potesse essere solo empirica. Il suo sistema doveva essere un prodotto dell'eterna ragione, così la parola "logica" con le sue indicazioni di necessità incontrovertibile, era l'unica parola che egli poteva considerare naturale. [...] *Ma il vero contenuto erano sempre le sue percezioni empiriche, che eccedevano e superavano le sue categorie logiche, tremendamente insufficienti in ogni uso concreto*».<sup>47</sup>

La dialettica, la logica e l'intero sistema costituiscono quindi per James il momento conclusivo e l'arresto di una *esperienza concreta vissuta da Hegel*, la messa a tema concettuale di una impressione percettiva sulla realtà che costituisce l'origine autentica della sua filosofia. È quindi questo il passo successivo del processo di empirizzazione della proposta hegeliana: non soltanto la dialettica può trarre i propri assunti esclusivamente attraverso una verifica a posteriori; è invero tutto il sistema, attenendosi agli assunti del *radical empiricism*, ad attestarsi quale irrigidimento e impoverimento di un materiale empirico originario e intrascendibile.<sup>48</sup> Per quanto egli abbia fondato la verità dell'empirico mediante il suo innesto nell'universale, nella lettura jamesiana Hegel non ha fatto che

<sup>46</sup> W. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, cit., p. 60.

<sup>47</sup> *Ivi*, p. 61, c.n. La questione è colta con puntualità estrema da Giuseppe Riconda, che commentando il passo in questione scrive: «La tesi paradossale di J. è che si commette una grande ingiustizia verso Hegel, quando lo si prende prima di tutto come un logico. [...] egli è in realtà un uomo che osserva ingenuamente la realtà, che si pianta nel flusso empirico delle cose e di qui prende l'impressione di quel che capita; J. non si stanca insomma di rilevare il carattere "impressionistico" del suo filosofare» (G. Riconda, *Religione e metafisica nel pensiero di William James*, in W. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, tr. it. cit., p. 245).

<sup>48</sup> Lo stesso vale secondo James per il rapporto tra l'autentica esperienza religiosa e la sua istituzionalizzazione ad opera delle religioni ufficiali: la religione autentica è quella che scaturisce dalla concreta esperienza individuale, mentre le religioni istituzionali rappresentano al massimo la versione inaridita dell'esperienza da cui la fede si origina. Cfr. ad esempio W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature* (1902), tr. it. di P. Paoletti, Morcelliana, Brescia 1998, pp. 293 e sgg.

nascondere la funzione in certo modo trascendentale dell'esperienza pura che sta a fondamento della sua costruzione teorica.<sup>49</sup>

L'intervento di James sull'opera hegeliana ha portata duplice, giacché esso consiste per un verso, come si è detto, nella riconduzione del sistema a una esperienza concreta e individuale; e per un altro verso nella trasformazione dall'interno dell'istanza metafisica hegeliana proprio in virtù di tale riconduzione all'empirico dell'elaborazione speculativa. Su questo secondo aspetto sarà necessario soffermarsi più distesamente verso la fine, poiché esso consente di vedere in che senso sia possibile una ripresa empirizzante e a-sistematica dello hegelismo favorita proprio dagli spunti forniti da James.

#### 4. WAHL E L'ESPERIENZA METAFISICA DI HEGEL

Sotto diversi e rilevanti aspetti, l'interpretazione wahliana di Hegel rappresenta una ripresa produttiva di quella tentata da James.<sup>50</sup> Certamente quest'ultimo, dei cui testi Wahl può vantare fin dalla prima fase della sua ricerca una conoscenza in ampiezza, non costituisce l'unica fonte del giovane interprete francese di Hegel – desideroso di reimmettere e revitalizzare nel proprio Paese il dibattito sulla filosofia hegeliana dopo qualche decennio di silenzio –, e un quadro particolareggiato delle dinamiche culturali e delle operazioni editoriali che concorrono al ritorno dello hegelismo nella Francia della prima metà dello scorso secolo è ormai da tempo noto e a disposizione degli studiosi: il reintegro di una certa parte della speculazione del pensatore dell'idealismo passa in larga misura dalle fatiche di Rosenkranz, Nohl e Dilthey in Germania e di Rosca in Francia, e di tali fatiche il lavoro di Wahl è senza dubbio largamente debitore.<sup>51</sup>

E tuttavia, fin dal testo con cui, nel 1929, Wahl comincia la sua riabilitazione della prima filosofia hegeliana a spese del pensiero dello Hegel maturo (*Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*), si percepiscono le assonanze con l'operazione messa in campo da James qualche anno prima.

<sup>49</sup> Sulla funzione trascendentale dell'esperienza pura in James cfr. D.A. Crosby, *The Philosophy of William James. Radical Empiricism and Radical Materialism*, Rowman & Littlefield, New York 2013 (in particolare pp. 1-13).

<sup>50</sup> Opportunamente, Bernstein rileva che «la caricatura terribile che James fece di Hegel contribuì a spegnere ogni serio interesse per quest'ultimo», aggiungendo che ancora oggi «molti filosofi angloamericani approverebbero quel ritratto» (R.J. Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* [2010], tr. it. di R. Kirchmayr, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2015, p. 115). Come ci sarà modo di apprezzare, ci sono nondimeno buone ragioni di ritenere che Wahl non si sia fatto influenzare dagli aspetti più caricaturali della lettura jamesiana.

<sup>51</sup> Per una ricostruzione storiograficamente puntuale delle sorti dello hegelismo in Francia a cavallo tra il XIX e il XX Secolo e dell'incidenza dell'interpretazione wahliana di Hegel per il ritorno di quest'ultimo sul suolo francese cfr. R. Morani, *Con Hegel, oltre Hegel. Jean Hyppolite e il rischio del pensiero*, Orthotes, Napoli-Salerno 2021, pp. 25 e sgg.

L'*incipit* dell'opera, mediante il quale Wahl dichiara implicitamente le intenzioni delle pagine a seguire, ricalca nei toni e nei contenuti il tentativo jamesiano:

«La filosofia di Hegel non può essere ridotta ad alcune formule logiche. O piuttosto tali formule dissimulano qualcosa che non è d'origine puramente logica. *La dialettica, prima di essere un metodo, è un'esperienza* attraverso cui Hegel passa da un'idea all'altra. La negatività è il movimento stesso attraverso cui uno spirito procede continuamente al di là di ciò che è». <sup>52</sup>

La dialettica, la logica e il sistema, sostiene Wahl facendo eco al James di *A Pluralistic Universe*, non sono che la sedimentazione di un'esperienza originaria provata da Hegel a contatto con il flusso del reale. <sup>53</sup> La negatività che segna dall'interno il movimento dialettico, ben prima che della logica, è il motore della passione, <sup>54</sup> e senza uno sguardo di prima mano sullo scorrere dei percetti, senza una visione impressionistica sul reale, anche il più rigido e devitalizzato impianto speculativo si sarebbe per Hegel reso impossibile. Come Wahl stesso avrà a scrivere riferendosi proprio allo Hegel filtrato dalla lettura jamesiana – che egli dimostra dunque di conoscere perfettamente –, l'«Assoluto hegeliano» non costituisce «se non *un'interpretazione di un'esperienza, che essa sola è reale*». <sup>55</sup>

La restituzione wahliana dell'esperienza filosofica di Hegel vanta in ogni caso una radicalità e un'ampiezza di prospettiva decisamente maggiori rispetto a quanto rinvenibile in James. Proprio nel tentativo di restituire i tratti dell'esperienza hegeliana originaria, nel testo del '29 Wahl fa ricorso agli scritti giovanili del filosofo, cercando di mettere in mostra in essi l'operatività di una nozione, quella di coscienza infelice, che farà capolino soltanto al termine del momento dell'autocoscienza della *Fenomenologia dello spirito*. Considerato una sorta di «concetto elastico» <sup>56</sup> in grado di spiegare, oltre che la genesi, anche gli esiti maturi della speculazione di Hegel, il *malheur de la conscience* è impiegato da Wahl per rendere conto della negatività fondamentale che muove la dialettica e ne scandisce il percorso. Il negativo dialettico, in particolare, viene identificato nel *Malheur* con

<sup>52</sup> J. Wahl, *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (1929), tr. it. di F. Occhetto, Castelvechi, Roma 2023, p. 21, c.n.

<sup>53</sup> È dunque vero che, come Wahl stesso ammette, Rosenkranz, Nohl e Dilthey rappresentano fonti imprescindibili per la sua ripresa di Hegel; ma è vero anche che, rispetto alle categorie interpretative di questi ultimi, nella lettura wahliana è attivo un dispositivo tipicamente empirista e tipicamente jamesiano – che fa scaturire per via diretta tutto lo hegelismo da una esperienza –, così come è piuttosto chiaro che «gli interpreti sopra citati attribuiscono a Hegel certe idee e un certo linguaggio – non esperienze», come invece fa James (D.J. Cook, *James's "Ether Mysticism"*, cit, p. 318).

<sup>54</sup> J. Wahl, *Le malheur*, cit., p. 134.

<sup>55</sup> J. Wahl, *Vers le concret*, cit., p. 122, c.n.

<sup>56</sup> J. Wahl, *Le malheur*, cit., p. 153.

una infelicità fondamentale che fa capo all'individuo, il quale si sa scisso dal mondo entro cui cerca di realizzarsi e prova quindi l'impulso a togliere la separatezza per sentirsi finalmente a casa nella realtà: «La dialettica stessa, presa nel suo insieme [...], che altro è se non il racconto delle afflizioni della coscienza, mai appagata, poiché mai completa?». <sup>57</sup> Ben prima che dell'articolazione del concetto nell'oggettività, il procedere dialettico hegeliano rende conto per Wahl della parabola della vita umana, il cui cammino è segnato dal tentativo di risolvere il problema dello spaesamento e della separazione dal mondo che ne spiegano la costitutiva infelicità: «Solo quando avrà preso coscienza del suo svolgimento, di questo lungo vagabondaggio [...], essa conseguirà la felicità», <sup>58</sup> passando così in ultima istanza dal *malheur* al *bonheur*. <sup>59</sup> La dimensione della vita si rivela pertanto fondativa rispetto a quella del concetto, che nella speculazione hegeliana più tarda ne eredita le funzioni mantenendone il movimento essenziale. <sup>60</sup>

A farsi carico di dettagliare i termini della fondatività dell'esperienza concreta sulla dimensione speculativa è, nella produzione dell'ultimo Wahl, la nozione di *esperienza metafisica*, con la quale egli sembra tirare le somme del percorso teorico aperto da James all'inizio del secolo. Concetto apparentemente paradossale a detta stessa del suo autore, <sup>61</sup> l'esperienza metafisica esprime in Wahl l'idea di un dominio di verità che si apre all'esperienza nel suo rapportarsi diretto e privo di filtri alla realtà, permettendole di percepirsi in unità concreta con essa in virtù di «un richiamo alle cose nei confronti di colui che è dinanzi alle cose». <sup>62</sup> Pervenuto alla convinzione secondo la quale «ogni grande filosofia si fonda [...] su delle esperienze» <sup>63</sup> in cui i lineamenti essenziali delle future costruzioni teoretiche sono in qualche modo anticipati, l'empirismo wahliano si chiede tra le altre cose «che cosa sia l'esperienza filosofica di Hegel». <sup>64</sup> La risposta al quesito, con cui Wahl connette le soluzioni filosofiche di Hegel ai problemi culturali, religiosi e politici – *empirici* – che segnano il primo Ottocento tedesco, porta di fatto a

<sup>57</sup> *Ivi*, p. 45.

<sup>58</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>59</sup> Sul passaggio dall'infelicità alla felicità della coscienza nella lettura di Wahl cfr. A. Di Miele, *Jean Wahl tra Hegel e Kierkegaard*, in «Rivista di Filosofia», CIX, 1, 2018, pp. 101-120.

<sup>60</sup> Per quanto indubbiamente distante dalle intenzioni del testo di Hegel, la restituzione wahliana coglie comunque il punto nodale che, nella *Fenomenologia*, segna il momento dell'autocoscienza: in essa, infatti, «per noi è già presente il concetto dello spirito», e proprio tale consapevolezza è alla base della sua infelicità e dell'impulso a superarla in vista di una riconciliazione con il reale. Cfr. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807), tr. it. di E. De Negri, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1960, p. 152. Sull'infedeltà di Hegel al dettato hegeliano si veda B. Bourgeois, *Jean Wahl als Leser von Hegel*, in J.U. Schneider (a cura di), *Der französische Hegel*, Akademie, Berlin 2007, pp. 77-89.

<sup>61</sup> Cfr. J. Wahl, *L'expérience métaphysique* (1965), tr. it. di M. Pietropaoli, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2016, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> *Ivi*, p. 95.

<sup>63</sup> *Ivi*, p. 70.

<sup>64</sup> *Ivi*, p. 75, c.n.



termine l'opera di empirizzazione del sistema soltanto suggerita da *A Pluralistic Universe*:

«Hegel però non si è accontentato né delle diverse esperienze di Fichte, in cui vedeva l'espressione del falso infinito, né delle esperienze di Schelling, le quali conducono soltanto all'indeterminato. [...] Hegel riprende quindi l'insieme di queste meditazioni, e noi, di nuovo, ci poniamo la questione dell'esperienza metafisica che domina il suo pensiero. In realtà ci sono diverse esperienze, a un primo sguardo molto dissimili le une dalle altre: un'esperienza religiosa, poiché Hegel come Schelling è stato innanzitutto un teologo; un'esperienza politica a partire dal declino della Germania e dalla nostalgia dell'antica Grecia; e un'esperienza propriamente filosofica di riflessione sul sistema di Kant e contro questo sistema».<sup>65</sup>

La constatazione, forse a prima vista banale, dice in realtà ben più del semplice fatto che il pensiero di un autore è inseparabile dalla sua biografia. Prendendo le mosse dall'idea di un «oltrepassamento continuo, che ci rimanda però senza sosta in seno all'esperienza stessa», Wahl fa risalire la grande elaborazione speculativa hegeliana – e con essa ogni metafisica possibile – all'unità concreta dell'individuo con il reale, all'identità di struttura tra soggetto e oggetto che sta al centro della proposta ermeneutica dell'empirismo di secondo grado.

Empirizzare Hegel significa perciò in primo luogo condurlo momentaneamente fuori dal sistema per riportarlo, parlando con James, al flusso dei percetti da cui la sua edificazione concettuale è scaturita, mostrandone contestualmente il legame inseparabile con le questioni etiche e politiche del tempo in cui è vissuto; ma significa anche far valere l'empirico come dimensione trascendentale – un trascendentale, va da sé, de-soggettivato – da cui ogni successiva teoria può sorgere, come terreno insuperabile che rende possibili le filosofie determinate e storicamente manifestatesi.<sup>66</sup> L'empirismo così concepito, sia esso “radicale” o “di secondo grado”, si attesta così a tutti gli effetti come una *metafisica anti-sistemica*, di cui in ogni caso non sarà superfluo provare a mettere in luce in breve le ulteriori implicazioni teoriche e i possibili risvolti etici.

<sup>65</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 31-32. Al riguardo si veda M. Borghesi, *Dialettica e malinconia in Hegel*, in M. Moschini (a cura di), *Il giovane Hegel. La dialettica e le sue prospettive*, Orthotes, Napoli-Salerno 2017, p. 23: «Riconquistare il rapporto con la dimensione oggettiva, storico-politica, uscire da sé in rapporto all'“alterità”, è la condizione per non ammalarsi, avvatarsi in un'interiorità vuota [...]. La *dialettica*, che sta al centro dell'Idealismo, è il metodo che corrisponde a tale esigenza».

<sup>66</sup> Non a caso, riferendosi al tessuto ancora indifferenziato dell'esperienza che rende possibili le successive differenziazioni, Wahl parla in *Vers le concret* di un «fondo non-relazionale e tuttavia unificante» alludendo a una sorta di autosufficienza trascendentale di cui la realtà sarebbe dotata (J. Wahl, *Vers le concret*, cit., p. 39).

## 5. METAFISICA SENZA SISTEMA

«Si vede quello che non può soddisfare nel sistema di Hegel. Egli infatti pensa d'essere arrivato a un momento in cui può fare la sintesi di tutto. Noi sappiamo però che il mondo e la filosofia sono continuati dopo Hegel, e talvolta contro di lui». <sup>67</sup> In poche righe Wahl riassume il senso della sua insoddisfazione – sostanzialmente identica a quella di James – nei confronti della veste sistematica della filosofia speculativa hegeliana: benché partito da una genuina esperienza metafisica, Hegel ha finito con l'irrigidire la propria originaria impressione sul reale in una costruzione monolitica e impersonale, attribuendole infine il ruolo di parola conclusiva sulla storia del pensiero. Di qui allora anche lo scopo dell'opera di empirizzazione dello hegelismo, condotta, in tempi diversi ma secondo modalità analoghe, tanto da James quanto da Wahl: se Hegel, per il tramite del sistema, ha ritenuto di poter chiudere i conti con la filosofia, aprire il sistema vorrà dire svincolare immediatamente il pensiero dal rischio delle sue sclerotizzazioni e consegnarlo a nuove possibilità scaturenti dal diretto contatto con l'esperienza.

C'è però di più, giacché aprire il sistema significa del pari liberare una parte di ciò che il suo artefice vi aveva posto – così come una parte delle speranze che vi aveva riposto – per collocarla in una diversa atmosfera teorica. Lo Hegel letto dagli empiristi è quello che, pur avendo illusoriamente pensato di poter proferire l'ultima parola in filosofia, era originariamente mosso dal desiderio genuino e apprezzabile di pensare l'esperienza al contempo come un movimento che fluisce e come un tutto pacificato in cui gli individui possano sentirsi a casa. <sup>68</sup> In una rara concessione a Hegel, James ammette che quanto di intrinsecamente buono si può trovare in quest'ultimo risiede nel suo tentativo di colmare lo iato che separa gli esseri umani dal mondo, eliminando così il velo di estraneità (*Strangeness*) che il reale riserva in prima battuta all'individuo che cerca di stabilirsi in esso:

«Per qual motivo agli uomini è stata data la ragione, diceva uno scrittore del diciottesimo secolo, se non per metterli in grado di trovare i motivi per cui essi vogliono pensare e agire? Penso che la storia della filosofia confermi largamente

<sup>67</sup> J. Wahl, *L'expérience métaphysique*, cit., p. 32.

<sup>68</sup> Merita menzione, a questo proposito, il fatto che Croce, commentando la metafisica empiristica di Bergson – per moltissimi aspetti affine a quella di James, a cominciare dalla concezione della realtà come un flusso e dalla subordinazione dei concetti allo scorrere dei percetti – rilevi, al di là delle differenze manifeste, una profonda affinità tra gli intenti del maestro francese e quelli di Hegel: «Così uno degli scrittori, che si collegano a questo movimento [quello della filosofia dell'intuizione immediata], il Bergson, propugna come metafisica dell'assoluto una conoscenza intuitiva “qui s'installe dans le mouvement et adopte la vie même de choses”. E non era codesta per l'appunto l'esigenza di Hegel, il suo punto di partenza: – trovare una forma mentale, che sia mobile come il movimento; che partecipi della vita delle cose; che tasti “il polso alla realtà”, e riproduca mentalmente il ritmo dello svolgimento, senza spezzarlo, irrigidirlo e falsificarlo?» (B. Croce, *Saggio sullo Hegel. Seguito da altri scritti di storia della filosofia*, Laterza, Bari 1913, p. 146).

questa tesi. “Il fine della conoscenza – dice Hegel – è di spogliare il mondo oggettivo della sua estraneità e di farci sentire più a casa nostra in esso”. Uomini diversi trovano che le loro menti sono a casa propria nelle più diverse parti del mondo».<sup>69</sup>

Ecco allora la posta in gioco fondamentale del processo di empirizzazione compiuto da James come da Wahl. Pensare uno Hegel non sistematico significa pensare una metafisica (da intendersi quale “teoria della realtà”) che tenti, pensando il reale come un movimento che tende verso la conciliazione, di rimuovere la spaesatezza degli individui *senza per questo mostrare la necessità di una sola via* per arrivare alla pacificazione con il mondo: è vero che il fine della conoscenza è spogliare il mondo dell’estraneità con cui esso a tutta prima sembrerebbe respingerci – tra l’altro in accordo con l’indicazione wahliana secondo cui il concreto contatto con la realtà non è il dato ma il ricercato –; ed è però vero anche che a «uomini diversi» (o a diversi gruppi umani) è lasciata la libertà di scegliersi una via personale e adatta al proprio temperamento di trovare dimora nella realtà.<sup>70</sup>

La metafisica senza sistema che scaturisce dal confronto con lo hegelismo conduce infine alle sue conseguenze il discorso jamesiano e wahliano sulla nozione di *much-at-once*, sul pluralismo monistico come sintesi dinamica dell’unicità dell’esperienza e della pluralità di possibili sguardi e di progetti esistenziali su di essa. Hegel ha rettamente mostrato che gli individui e il reale in cui essi si muovono sono fatti della stessa stoffa, che, come ha a scrivere lo stesso Wahl, «all’inizio e alla fine [...] c’è una unità del soggetto e dell’oggetto»<sup>71</sup> (lato monistico); ma ha mancato di mettere in luce il fatto altrettanto rilevante – e che tuttavia cova sempre al di sotto della sua filosofia sistematica<sup>72</sup> – che alla riunificazione con il mondo si può giungere non soltanto mediante un preteso sapere assoluto veicolato dalla ragione universale, bensì piuttosto attraverso strade

<sup>69</sup> W. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, cit., pp. 15-16 (tr. modificata), c.n. Per un commento dettagliato del passo jamesiano in questione cfr. R. Stern e N.W. Williams, *James and Hegel. Looking for a Home*, in A.M. Klein (a cura di), *The Oxford Handbook of William James*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, pp. 430-449.

<sup>70</sup> Detto altrimenti: forzare Hegel al punto da privarlo della risposta sistematica vuol dire teorizzare l’unità concreta del reale senza servirsi della soluzione a cui egli stesso aveva fatto ricorso per ovviare al problema. Sul legame tra la riunificazione del reale e il sistema in Hegel cfr. G. Cantillo, *Oltre i cancelli del sistema. Logica e ontologia della vita in Hegel*, in G. Cantillo, G. Di Tommaso e V. Vitiello (a cura di), *Logica ed esperienza. Studi in onore di Leo Lugarini*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2008, pp. 265-296.

<sup>71</sup> J. Wahl, *Traité de métaphysique*, cit., p. 708.

<sup>72</sup> Scrive infatti Wahl nel *Malheur*, lasciando chiaramente intendere che nello stesso Hegel entrambi i corni concettuali del pluralismo monistico rimangono sempre attivi: «[...] il monismo di Hegel è una dottrina o piuttosto un modo di vivere cui si perviene soltanto a condizione di partire da un pluralismo profondo» (J. Wahl, *Le malheur*, cit., p. 106).

molteplici, che invero sono potenzialmente tanto numerose quanti sono gli individui che abitano il mondo stesso (lato pluralistico).

Oltre il sistema si aprono dunque gli effetti teoretici e pratici dello Hegel empirizzato – giocoforza non senza una marcata forzatura della sua speculazione – e di una filosofia che prova a pensare l'esperienza come un tutto autosufficiente in cui individui e realtà siano uniti senza perciò annullarsi reciprocamente. E a mettere in salvo il punto di caduta pratico dell'apertura empiristica del sistema – il pluralismo etico, la molteplicità di possibili visioni della realtà – dal rischio più o meno evidente di relativismo – giacché, se ogni via di accesso al mondo è di per sé ammissibile, se ne potrebbe ricavare che una teoria vale l'altra – interviene il *dispositivo pragmatico* elaborato da James e ripreso da Wahl. Se infatti, seguendo la massima pragmatica jamesiana, si accetta che ogni idea o prassi «è resa vera dagli eventi»,<sup>73</sup> si vede bene che ciò che dimostra la validità di una teoria o di una pratica sul mondo è il fatto che la realtà risponda positivamente ai suoi stimoli, cioè appunto che essa si dimostri pragmaticamente vera. Ancora più nello specifico, a salvare dalla relativizzazione il pluralismo etico – e a fondare la legittimità della stessa massima pragmatica – è il suo scaturire da uno stato di cose metafisico, il pluralismo monistico, che alla molteplicità di sguardi possibili sul reale affianca la necessità insuperabile di riferirsi sempre allo «strato di roccia»<sup>74</sup> rappresentato dall'unica realtà su cui quei tentativi lavorano e dalle cui risposte – positive o negative – dipende la sopravvivenza di ogni filosofia e progetto esistenziale.

Esplosione dei punti di vista ammessi per colmare lo iato che separa i soggetti dall'oggettività del mondo, ma riferimento necessario a una realtà che è unica e intrascendibile – e che ha sempre l'ultima parola sulla verità o falsità delle operazioni che si svolgono entro di essa –: ecco quindi gli esiti dell'empirizzazione di Hegel. Il corpo a corpo di James e Wahl con il pensiero di quest'ultimo, non sempre filologicamente attento ma assai produttivo sotto il profilo teoretico, ha condotto infine a una proposta filosofica entro cui empirismo (radicale o di secondo grado), pragmatismo e pluralismo dialogano e accolgono fra loro alcuni spunti di uno Hegel che, certo assai diverso da se stesso, riesce comunque a vedere operante in un impianto filosofico alternativo il suo desiderio di una pacificazione tra pensiero e mondo. Il desiderio in questione lo avvicina singolarmente ai due autori attraverso cui si è qui cercato di rileggerlo, i quali, pur al netto delle differenze e di alcune manifeste ostilità, hanno fatto di Hegel uno strumento imprescindibile per il loro tentativo di pensare un contatto diretto e concreto con la realtà.

<sup>73</sup> W. James, *Pragmatism*, cit., p. 113.

<sup>74</sup> L'espressione, piuttosto nota, è presa in prestito da L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (1953), tr. it. di M. Trinchero, Einaudi, Torino 2009, §217, p. 113.

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