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Neglected Paths in Italian Philosophy

Edited by

Michael Lewis

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Contents

Articles

Varia

Address for Correspondence

Journal of Italian Philosophy
Department of Philosophy
University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE1 7RU
United Kingdom
E-mail: michael.lewis@newcastle.ac.uk
Website: http://research.ncl.ac.uk/italianphilosophy/

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Neglected Paths in Italian Philosophy

There are a great many reasons for being forgotten, and for forgetting. To some extent we are dealing with the question of the formation of a canon, which differs across both history and geography, to such an extent that those considered essential in one epoch and one country can remain — or can become — utterly unknown in another. The universities are responsible to a large degree for this canonisation, but it is not just up to them. In any case, to open a series of spy holes onto certain of these figures, we present a selection of essays here.

They are perhaps necessarily eclectic, their subjects dispersed, scattered: for when one has been abandoned, as if in a wood, far from the 'right road', and the undergrowth has sprung up all around so as to obscure one's very existence, it is difficult to make connections and chart possible ways between these overgrown patches. We are dealing with something slightly different to that which Heidegger spoke of as a clearing, which one finds at the end (or the beginning) of a tree-feller's path.

One of the joys of Jan Prins's text on Adoardo Gualandi, for instance, is precisely the delicate work of navigating a way through the near impenetrable thickets that have buried this Renaissance Aristotelian in a historical obscurity so absolute that one reader was moved to aver that he had exerted not one single detectable trace of influence on anyone in the subsequent history of philosophy. That someone should be capable of being so absolutely cast into shadow is in itself interesting; but the genuinely scholarly detective-work that is involved in unearthing the clues that will allow one to forge a path towards such a figure has its own arcane satisfactions.

The same may very well be said for Wolfgang Rother's pursuit of the Italian Enlightenment figure, Sebastiano Franci. And yet here, more traces remain, and it becomes clear that one of the reasons why a historical figure can become buried in obscurity is that he is a near perfect exemplar of a certain type: in this case, the very model of an 'enlightener'. These figures are essential to the progression of history and yet it is the very perfection of their embodiment that ultimately leads to their blending in with the many others who contributed to the march of history in a similar fashion. It seems that only those who grow in such a way as to develop an eccentricity or an outstanding difference, or who lead to an epochal change, rather than — as is perhaps the case with Franci — the establishment of an epoch that had already begun, receive prominent places in our historical memory. In this respect, it is a historical injustice that this place has not been received by Franci himself in respect of one of the aspects of his work: his prescient 'Defence of Women', which

Rother brings adeptly to the fore. Historical memory can, after all, be revived, and the constellation that illuminates our own skies may change.

Others such as Dante are nothing like forgotten in the same sense, but are remarkably absent from the curricula of English Philosophy degrees. One can also come too late upon the scene, in the always reckless if not presumptuously avowed desire to drag a supposedly forgotten figure from the shade and into the spotlight: the inevitable delays involved in writing, editing, and publishing can cause one to miss the boat and a figure that was without lustre may in the meantime have lost some of its tarnish: such might well be the case with both Emanuele Severino (almost entirely unknown in English whatever his illustriousness in Italy) and Giocomo Leopardi, if not Giorgio Colli — although to a lesser degree. Colli is another of those whose gradually waxing apparition in English-speaking circles we owe to Agamben (cf. his *Autoritratto nello studio,* 128). The texts of Andrea Righi and Damiano Sacco are both devoted to the first of these three, whose obscurity demonstrates that even the publication of translations is not enough to bring about an immediate sea-change in awareness. More are forthcoming, not least from the pen of Sacco himself, and we can hope that a more serious assessment will be made easier by these translations and the essays we are presenting here. The actions of a good editor — together with an energetic advocate — can by themselves allow those fortunate — and deserving — thinkers to shrug off their eclipse.

The period of Italian Philosophy from the early part of the twentieth century which runs from Benedetto Croce, whose name is only really known, in England, by the title of a book devoted to Hegel (with regard to 'what is living and what is dead...'), which is invoked far more often than it is read, to Giovanni Gentile, whose association with the word 'fascism' has proved excuse enough to set him aside, and Luigi Pareyson, has in its entirety been overshadowed by more recent Italian work in biopolitics. All of these figures, whose very names now sound antiquated to our ears, were translated at the time, and indeed quite widely in the cases of Croce and Gentile, but all of whose works languish out of print or in obscure corners of the publishing world. Paolo Furia provides us with an exemplary deployment of Croce and Pareyson — not forced, but entirely natural in its context — in his pursuit of a concept of 'landscape', a problem which has come to the fore in recent days, particularly in what has been called, by the inextinguishable academic desire for categorisation and naming — for 'reification' in the most interesting and broadest of its senses — the 'New Nature Writing'.

The issue closes with two reflections, which tread more familiar paths within the tradition, and yet they lay stress on certain elements within it which might have been forgotten by it, or by its readers: in the first case, a certain trend within the influential work of Hannah Arendt, and in the second, a certain inheritance from the Cynics.

Alessandra Montalbano presents us with an important reading of Hannah Arendt that sheds new light on an implicit debate that was struck up between Adriana Cavarero and Giorgio Agamben in the period during which the final two

essays of the collection were conceived. Montalbano shows that the fundamentally passive conception of natural or natal life that Agamben and Cavarero inherit in different ways — Agamben stressing the vulnerability of bare life to sovereign power and Cavarero the vulnerability of new-born life to the care of others — risks neglecting the activity of Arendt's conception. If one thing seems to unify any number of strands within the contemporary Left, it is a kind of mistrust of the individual's own ability to rescue themselves from the conditions into which they have been thrown, and thus a tendency to interpret the human being as a 'victim'. Perhaps we can read Arendt for some suggestions as to how one might find a way out of this perhaps unintentionally disempowering attitude.

Roberto Mosciatti demonstrates the way in which certain features of Italian thought, including perhaps some of those to which Montalbano addresses critical questions, may be rendered more intelligible in light of a certain heritage stemming from the ancient Greek 'kynicism' of Diogenes, who whilst confining himself to a barrel remained a citizen of the world.

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Poetic Soteriology
Dante's Heroic Defence of Classical Heroism

Marco Andreacchio

Modernity's confrontation with the question of authority is first and foremost a confrontation with the primordial incarnation of authority — the *father*. When Freud rooted heroism in the daring opposition to and overcoming of paternal authority,[1] he served as a spokesman for the modern revolution, which conceives of all authority as an imposition upon a nature divested of all inherent authority. For modern man *as such*, the only natural right to be spoken of seriously is a euphemism for brute force.[2] Yet, brute force is not enough to overcome 'the will of the father'. What is needed is a supplement: namely, cunning *art*. Art is supposed to be the means adopted by nature to free itself of all authority. Yet, freedom overcomes authority only in the act of converting into it: the son dethrones his father only in the act of occupying the throne anew. Hence the modern drama. Modernity's 'solution' to the conflict between 'filial' nature and 'paternal' authority consists in the *historical realisation* of the *mechanism* supposed to underpin the conflict.

As Hegel reminds us, modernity's 'History' entails the rise of a *new machine* (viz., that of the State) consummating and redeeming a long struggle between slave and master. The new machine is none other than brute nature (to evoke Hobbes) *evolved* through the slave-master 'dynamics'. Thanks to the son-father conflict, nature is transformed or transforms itself into a machine embodying ultimate fatherhood. The final machine is the consummate father, the highest authority. Here, in the 'end' or goal of 'History' — there where *historical consciousness* arises as the supreme mode of thought (*forma mentis*) — the 'natural machine' (nature conceived as subconscious mechanism) is converted into a self-conscious 'mechanical authority' — the machine as *true* authority, as highest *will* (or incarnation thereof).

The rise of modern technology bespeaks not the truth of the modernist reading of authority but the allure of that reading insofar as it fuels popular suspicion regarding all paternal authority. Technology — the product of the early-modern 'scientific' use of art/technique (*technē*) to redefine man's natural ends — has fulfilled early-modern theological-political promises merely by restricting people's vision within the boundaries of modern expectations. Beyond the reach

[1] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*. New York: Knopf, 1939: 10. See further Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* [1909] and Other Writings, edited by Philip Freund. New York: Vintage Books, 1964 [1959]: 84.

[2] On the modern doctrine of natural right, see Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965 [1953].

of modern discourse's charm, nature and authority remain untouched by technological achievements. The son is still the son; the father still the father. Both beg for a messiah, a hero mediating their relationship, lest they, father and son, both fall prey to a 'divine machine' (*deus ex machina*) tyrannically imposed upon both nature and authority to 'resolve' their quarrel once and for all.

The classical *heroic* alternative to modern technology is the *poetry* that Dante Alighieri both represents and defends as the proper education of man as man. It is seeking guidance in appreciating the significance of poetry as the original alternative to all forms of tyranny that we turn to Dante, thereby betraying a simple truth about ourselves and our motives. For we thereupon attest to our being moved not by the curiosity of antiquarians but by a genuine desire for our good, approaching Dante as a teacher, almost a father, leading us beyond the reaches of any and all mechanically-induced fear.

In the fourth Canto of his *Inferno*, Dante paints an idyllic scene populated by noble, mythical characters among whom we find the illustrious philosophers of classical antiquity. These are enshrined *poetically* in a 'castle of nobility' (*nobile castello*):[3] it is thanks to poetry that the great men of the past can thrive beyond fear and hope, or *abstracted* out of ordinary existential strife, into an isle of what, with Matthew Arnold, Dante might agree to call 'sweetness and light'. Accordingly, Dante's 'avatar' — his own self-projection into his dream, his *Comedy* — joins the company of renowned poets to discuss matters that he dares not retell. Poetry is the key to philosophy's own abstractions, or to the elevation of philosophy into the realm of ethereal discussions.

In the opening verses of his *Convivio*, Dante discloses before us a comparable, albeit not identical, theatrical stage, where an assembly of god-like intellects is feasting above the clouds of ordinary human life, while men live as livestock reminiscent of the herds which Cicero had once evoked by way of testifying to Orpheus's poetic power to save men from a bestial condition.[4]

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[3] For an exploration of Dante's Limbo, see my 'Unmasking Limbo: Reading *Inferno* 4 as Key to Dante's *Comedy*,' in *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 40.2 (2013): 199–219.

[4] While the poetic 'stage' *exposes* Dante's heroism, or his heroic mediation of what is above man and what is below him, the fruit of Dante's mediation is the poetic stage itself. In this respect, Dante's hero may be said to forge *incognito* his own context. How are we to judge, however, of the *ontological status* of the hero and his context? When taken seriously, the hero is a philosopher, and his context — the context he shapes 'from within' — is political/ethical. That is why, for Dante, politics cannot be an obstacle to thought; indeed, as the *inner motor of politics*, thought is at home in politics: philosophy is primordially *political* philosophy. Otherwise phrased, the poetic-political world is the domain of thought, the domain in which and through which thought recognises its essence (what it is in itself), or what it 'was' (what it seems to leave 'behind') outside of its world. In this fundamental sense, politics remains necessarily open to transcendence, which, in relation to politics, is *religious:* not merely a dire expression of political aspirations, but that which the political is necessarily 'tied-back-to' (as primordial, *disclosive* point of reference) — a *permanent order* (as in Aristotle's *taxis physeos*). The *religere* entailed by the term 'religion' shows us that transcendence is no mere pie in the sky, but our original destiny, or proper end, 'defining' our everyday political life and indeed the whole sphere of ethics in terms

Dante's own agency shall consist in mediating the life and language of blessed intellects and that of sheep, thereby introducing a *third* stance — a poetic one, no doubt, but to be more precise, one which sheds light on the limitations of both angels and beasts, who are respectively hovering above and grazing below Dante. In the poet's own *heroic* agency we find an arena of convergence between (1) those abiding by the nature that in the opening lines of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is said to be fully rational, and (2) those lingering in a corrupt or beastly condition.

Aristotle's 'metaphysical' appeal to nature serves as a starting point for Dante's 'other' pursuit whose greatest literary testament is the *Comedy* (*Inferno* 1.91). The Peripatetic emerges, if only with the indirectness of Socratic irony, as a poetic form in which we may recognise what is best in us, without being overtaken by the suspicion that what is best in us depends upon what is lowest in us, or that the loss of 'the good of the intellect' (2.18) is inevitable, as a metaphysical necessity. Whence Dante's appeal to *providence* as integral to a good understanding of the beginning of Aristotle's 'First Philosophy': 'all men naturally desire to know'. 'The reason for which' — Dante notes — 'can be and *is* that everything, driven immanently by the providence of *first* nature, is inclinable to its own perfection; so that, given that science is the final perfection of our soul, in which abides our final happiness, naturally are we all subject to a desire for it (*Convivio* 1.1.1). Clearly the 'nature' in question is the one considered by *Metaphysics*, or 'First Philosophy' — a *physis* in the noblest sense of 'generation' or 'birth'. Truly are we *born* for wisdom, even as the 'birth' in question has been obscured, just as 'the right way' (*diritta via*) of life has been marred in the opening verses of the *Inferno*. Yet, even in our vilest slumber (*Inferno* 2.1–4), our 'first birth' — our original mode of being — is by no

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of a divine — both necessary and meaningful — mandate. To be sure, our *secular* upbringing makes it very difficult for us to assimilate Dante's lesson, especially given the Heideggerian nimbus looming over the prospect of welcoming philosophy as a guide in political affairs. It is encouraging, however, to consider that, by retaining a *Platonic* conception of Being, Dante is immune to the decisionism and voluntarism represented by Heidegger's appeal to 'resoluteness' (*Entschlossenheit*) in the context of a future-oriented reduction of politics to philosophy (whether or not Heidegger's late shift from an ethics of resoluteness to a *Gelassenheit* situated on the horizon of universal or global phenomenological anticipation, if not outright quietism, is to be understood as the German's way of projecting resoluteness into certain unpredictable 'gods' of the future, is a question that remains open; on Heidegger's pertinent 'transition' from the 1930's to the 1950's, see David McIlwain, '"The East within Us": Leo Strauss's Reinterpretation of Heidegger', Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy 26 [2018]: 233–53), Dante's hero does not presuppose (or rise to overcome) the dereliction of Tradition (not to speak of the death of its God): Tradition is the very horizon through which the hero speaks and in speaking responds, or rather lets things themselves respond, to their 'otherworldly' source. As a Platonist, Dante's hero is a 'mender' (Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 1.1) immune to the *modernist* resolution, or rather the drive to wield a Nietzschean 'hammer' — to *overcome* the past (if only through imitation) by way of recovering its beginning and therein achieving self-determination as an essential political act. For a thoughtful exploration of this modern (if not ultimately Heideggerian) alternative to Dante, see pp. 432–40 of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 'Transcendence Ends in Politics' (translated by Peter Caws), *Social Research* 49.2 (Summer 1982): 405–40.

means alien to us. Its 'providence' is at work at the very heart of our wretched condition, 'turning' us *all* back to science or knowledge (*scienza*), and thereby calling all human beings to *philosophy*.

Thanks to our *first* nature, or in virtue of the lingering of that nature's first activity in us, we are all 'called' back to our beginning, as to our genuine perfection, which is simultaneously the knowledge in which our desire is ultimately fulfilled. Yet, 'some' appear to be living *as if* their 'first nature' were their only nature and motor, *and* as if that 'first nature' had manifested itself completely in them.

> It is evident [*manifestamente*] to he who considers things well that few are those remaining who can attain to the spiritual condition [*abito*] desired by all, while innumerable, as it were, are the crippled who live always craving this food. / Oh, blessed are those few who sit at that banquet where upon the bread of angels doth one feast; and miserable are those who share with sheep their common food! (*Convivio* 1.1.6)

While Dante does not deny being capable of rising to the table of the blessed, he does readily profess not to be sitting at their table (1.1.10), even as he himself is not crippled, or *impedito*, as he will appear, however, in *Inferno* 1.62 (after 13 and 30). Indeed, in his *Convivio,* Dante presents himself as having already 'fled the pasture of the vulgar' (*fuggito della pastura del volgo* — 1.1.10) for the sake of educating an already *civilised* reader to interpret the wisdom of divine intellects (13). Dante's own educational banquet presupposes a prior education, which is the one provided by the *Vita Nuova*, the earlier work in which the Florentine moderated all that is 'fervid and passionate' in us, just as the *Convivio* will educate us to cultivate what is 'temperate and virile' in us (16; compare 10).

While apologising for any eventual lack of power (19), Dante professes to *want* to set the table (*apparecchiare* — 11) for those who, though having been taught to refrain from evil, at least one manifest in the guise of vice, are still susceptible to falling prey to it. Dante's banquet is a 'novel' one, that neither angels nor sheep are accustomed to, even as it is by no means unprecedented. Angelic intellects do not understand Dante — they have no taste for his poetic 'victuals' (*vivanda*), the *living food* that in *Inferno* 28 is condemned by the Prophet of Islam; for 'the blessed' (*beati*) have *forgotten* themselves, or the 'miserable life' that Dante has by no means forgotten (*Convivio* 1.1.10). Never would they willingly stoop to the lowlands of vulgar life; never would they want to produce a food for mortal souls, a *discourse* allowing ordinary civilised people to rise above death without fear of ever being overtaken by it. What 'sheep' can count upon is at best a distracted 'mercy' (*misericordia*) from the 'blessed' hovering over them; a mercy manifested in the bread crumbs that Dante suggests may be falling from the ethereal heights of intellectual feasts; so that Dante may with justice be said to be acting with considerably greater mercy than the angels, when he sets out to prepare his 'general banquet' (*generale convivio*). His banquet is not for self-forgetful angelic intellects

as such, but for all men — as the wisdom that Aristotle tells us we somehow all desire — even though Dante's speech is based 'materially' on terms derived from the *abstract* discourse of 'the few' sitting high above us.

The 'material' of Dante's novel speech is 'love and virtue' ordered in 'fourteen molds' or 'fourteen songs' (14) requiring the bread of angels so as not to fall under the veil of obscurity, or to be obscured by shadows (*ibid.*). Dante's terms both shed light upon and are illuminated by their resurfacing in *Inferno* 1, where we face an 'obscure material wilderness' or dark wood (*selva oscura*), a world obscured by the lack of angelic bread, or more precisely by the abandonment of a merciful, *wise* poetry (65, 89) giving shape or life to 'love and virtue' for the sake of all men. The world Dante intervenes in with merciful wisdom is a world in which human discourse has been cast into shadow or into dark uncertainty (...*d'alcuna oscuritade ombra*), by being deprived of firm anchorage.[5] It is this lack of anchorage that Dante remedies by providing *poetic* certainty to human life, lest terms such as love and virtue be mistaken as merely beautiful, as opposed to being recognised as eminently *good* (*Convivio* 1.1.14). Whence Dante's reference to 'wisdom, love and virtue' in *Inferno* 1.104–5; for, there, Dante's prophesised hero feasts upon poetry and the 'love and virtue' that poetry draws out of obscurity, into poetry's own light. From poetry we move to love and from love back to virtue, *terminus ad quem* of the hero's journey.

Dante's hero, or his own heroism requires, however, a preface, even a long introductory Odyssey, a journey of return, not so much to divinity as to the art and life of the protagonist of the *Convivio*. That life and its sustaining virtue has been stained (1.2.1, 15), as has been the lynx of *Inferno* 1, who has been covered with 'stained hair' (*pel macolato* — 33, anticipating 42). The return to virtue would then seem to proceed through the erasing of stains from the face of virtue, reminding us of the 'P's' (standing for faults or *peccata*) that Dante will erase from his own forehead in *Purgatorio*. Does the return to virtue coincide with the exposition of virtue from beneath the shadow of suspicion cast upon virtue by its detractors? The matter is not that simple for the Dante of the *Comedy*, who sets out to co-opt shadows, not to speak of monsters, for his own good cause; and the first noteworthy 'shadow' (*ombra*) Dante recruits as he 'sets the table' for 'war' (*guerra*), is Virgil, the illustrious prophet of Christianity. Shadows are no longer a hindrance to Dante's *ascent* to virtue, since he ascends by descending and thus by entering into the universe of shadows to see in them no mere temptation or stumbling block, but a window or mirror of opportunity to rise at the heart of at once the loftiest and deepest of problems.

What stains 'label' virtue, or more precisely Dante's own virtue? What 'faults' or 'P's' (*peccati*) is the poet to wipe from his forehead? *Convivio* 1.2 provides a decisive answer. The undeserved stains amount to prejudices, insinuations, if not outright calumnies that would have Dante appear both unjust and irrational: Dante

[5] On the juxtaposition of *ombra* and *certo*, as of shadow/veil and certainty, see *Inferno* 1.66.

would be unjust insofar as he attributes literary independence (poetic vestige of authority) to himself, and he would be irrational insofar as he 'exposes' matters that are supposed to be 'too deep' (1–2). Dante is responding to both allegations, showing that reason is independent of authority (in the respect that Dante's freedom is naturally compatible with the highest demands of the highest law) *and* that reason has access to the *arcana* of authority — whereby authority must not be irrational.

It is the 'knife' (*coltello*) of Dante's own judgment that is to *purge* (*purgare*) the faults unfairly attached to him, thereby restoring Dante's dignity, his speech in this world. The task at hand is the civilising one of *mondare*, cleansing of false attributions. Dante defends his right to speak about himself and thus *de facto* to turn himself into an author, by decrying *ad hominem* assaults aimed at denying the poet his capacity to teach others how to be free of all fear. This Dante achieves by casting himself in the condition of his reader, thereby pretending to be moved by fear; thereupon, Dante will rise and raise his reader to the discovery of our true motor, namely virtue, both as a beautiful edifying vision and as an activity to cultivate (17).

In sum, Dante sets out to *justify* his poetic activity in itself *and* to show that it can succeed manifestly insofar as it constitutes the true motor of our common life and experience. What moves us is not, as the vulgar and its authorities would have it, our *passions*, but *virtue*, or more precisely the virtue of enlightened poets such as Dante.

We are now ready to tackle the question of just how far, how *deep*, Dante's speech can soar, 'ordered,' as it is, 'to lift the defect of [his] *canzoni*,' his sweet 'songs' (1.3.2), namely the defect of unwittingly producing more problems than the ones we set out to solve, to begin with (1). What is the problem that poetry sets out to solve? It is that of 'rigidity' (*durezza*, 2) — of inflexibility, of harshness, of hardship. Yet, harsh measures are sometimes deemed necessary to overcome harshness. A law might be harsher than the lawless life it was intended to order, though it ended up obduring it, as we begin to see in the opening verses of *Inferno* 1, where we read: 'In the middle of the path of our life / I found myself anew crossing an obscure wilderness, / for the upright way was marred. / Ah, so hard a thing [*cosa dura*] it is to qualify / this wild wilderness, such impervious fortress / that in thought, renews the fear!' (1–6). When read in the light of the opening verses of *Inferno* 3, the opening verses of *Inferno* 1 warn us against an eternal *law* imposed as 'rigid thing' (*cosa dura*) upon human society. That law is supposed to bridge the hiatus between a *quanto* and a *quale*, a quantity and a quality, and thus the physical and the moral.

What is supremely rigid or harsh is *law*, as in *Inferno* 3.8, where Dante reads of an impersonal, yet feminine 'I' claiming, in capital letters, to 'endure eternally': *IO ETTERNA DURO*, echoing Ulpian's *dura lex*, 'rigid law'. The law that was written to overcome harshness, risks becoming harsher than the harshness it first set out to alleviate. This 'defect' of law is none other than a defect of *speech*, or of

a certain kind of poetry, namely a poetry that has acquired the authoritative status of law. Can we prevent poetry from remaining frozen into 'eternal' legal forms? Dante's tacit answer is negative. Poetry *naturally*, or even *fatefully* crystalises in legal forms that tend to be imposed as eternal certainties upon human life.[6] Dante's own response to the mistaking of poetic forms for what we might call, today, moral absolutes is Dante's own poetry of poetry, or his poetic defence of the original or proper function and nature of human speech. Prior to being fossilised into eternal certainties, poetry lives off virtue, the strength of mind bridging quantity and quality, 'matter' and the good, the proper end of motion. At the heart or 'middle' of our life we stand lost in bewilderment, our path obscured, marred by by-products of fear finding their most formidable representation in laws assumed to constitute a mighty fortress impervious to thought.

Dante's *Comedy* defies that fortress of fear, exposing it as a product of *thought*. The laws we adore out of fear and that thereby stand as manifest projections of our fears, are *in reality* products of thought, of a thought that redeems laws *ex principio*, a thought that is more primordial than fear and that allows us to interpret laws as providential gifts, rather than tyrannical impositions. Such is what the opening of the *Comedy* promises in continuity with the work's early prototype, the *Convivio*. Upon projecting himself into his students' common condition of perplexity, Dante testifies to the role of law as *petrified* moral agent that we can, however, approach as 'infernal' steppingstone for a return to the poetic infancy of law. In short, Dante co-opts fear in the interest of thought. Whence his, 'in thought, renews the fear!' Upon the poet's finding himself anew (*mi ritrovai*, he says) — after the manner of the *troubadours* — fear is 'reframed' (drawn back) in a poetic context, an environment allowing us to make use of fear against fear. Laws are good in themselves, but only as doors to poetry, rather than to fear. It is for the sake of the restoration of law to its originally poetic function that Dante dives into the infernal underworld (the world underpinning the superficial world of vulgar men). In doing so, Dante shows us that eternal forms belong to the mind or thought (the Latin *mens* renders both English terms) and that, as such, they are imposed upon human *bodies* in the guise of immutable laws *only so that thereupon* poetry may intervene to restore the 'forms' to their original setting, *interpreting* them as *forms of intelligibility*, rather than as 'impervious fortresses' against thought.

Now, one of the lessons Dante's 'plan' offers us is that the *reason* 'behind' our ordinary 'embodied' experience is not a law, whether mechanically or otherwise applied to our bodies. Knowledge or *scienza* of bodies is necessarily *poetic* in the respect that it entails the gathering of bodies, not in or under laws, but in or under the guiding *virtue* of poetry: bodies are to be understood in the context of a poetic 'turn' to the Good and thus on a *moral* horizon, even as poetry is constantly engaged in opening that horizon to the unexpected 'strangeness' of its

[6] We often see this in Botticelli's so-called *Primavera*, where a wild girl metamorphoses into a poetic muse who, in turn, yields to a statuesque beauty, even as the circular dance of fates suggests that a return to the wild is underway in the very rise of law to the stature of eternal, divine glory.

abysmal light. Dante's poetry invites us to awaken not to 'natural laws' or hidden 'mechanisms' underpinning the empirical universal, but to an original, primordial awakening, an original thought that, with respect to our *thought-caught-in-fear* stands at the antipodes of our empirical universe. Accordingly, at the heart of Dante's *science* we will find the *providential* agency of thought, as opposed to the rule of machines, divine or otherwise. Countering all imposition of order from without the human, Dante rises, after Aristotle,[7] as staunch defender of *entelechy*, calling us to recognise the inherence of providence in human nature, or the inalienable bond between the human and divine transcendence. Having been marred, 'the human' in question is, to be sure, ignorant of itself and so, needful of education — an education to its original, natural, or *pagan* bond with divinity. Dante's poetry achieves precisely this, namely a restoration of a *pagan* humanity perfectly compatible with the Christian universal proclamation of the dignity of human nature.[8]

Dante faces a formidable objection raised by authorities which conceive Christianity as smothering or overcoming pagan poetry. Dante's response to his enemies builds on his initial pledge, introduced in *Convivio* 1.2, to defend the right of poetry (in the person of the poet) to speak or reason about itself — to defend itself against calumny and promote itself as the most just and rewarding educator. That pledge is followed, in *Convivio* 1.3, by Dante's pledge to free poetry from an *immanent* vice, namely poetry's tendency to betray itself as unpoetic imposition. Authority, even laws, are good *in a poetic context*, falling short of which laws are unjust and authority is false (3-4; compare *Inferno* 1.69–72).

With Socratic humility, Dante offers us his own person as mirror for everyone, calling us to recognise the roots of the injustice poetry is subjected to. Echoing two pagan classics — Virgil's *Aeneid*, 4.174–175 (*fama crescit eundo*, openly referred to in *Convivio* 1.3.10) and Claudian's *De Bello Gildonico*, v. 387 (*minuit praesentia famam*),[9] Dante remarks that 'fame beyond truth grows beyond measure [*si sciampia*],' while 'presence beyond truth shrinks'. Dante's own audience has failed to understand the importance of Dante's own work, his 'wood' or *legno* (*Convivio* 1.3.5), because on the one hand it has expected more than he could offer and on the other hand it has expected less, by failing to recognise what poetry can and does achieve within the boundaries of a *forgotten* humanity. While Dante's Florentine contemporaries may have hoped for a salvation that Dante could not offer, they did not appear to care for the salvation Dante did offer.

Whether good or ill, fame distorts truth, or 'the thing imagined in its true state' (11). Having highlighted the deceptiveness of fame in the minds of well-wishing people, Dante sets out to tackle the darker side of fame, namely its

[7] Aristotle, *De Anima*, 2.1.5.

[8] On Dante's Renaissance inheritance, see my 'Humanisme et mystère dans la philosophie de Pic de la Mirandole,' in *Dogma: revue de philosophie et de sciences humaines*, Vol. 14 (Winter 2021): 8–38.

[9] Vico will revert to these two passages in his *Scienza Nuova* (1744), 'Of the Elements', 1.

susceptibility to being used by mean, envious people marred by 'human impurity' (*l'umana impuritade*, anticipating the 'first envy' that in *Inferno* is evil's root) to diminish the natural dignity of man, that is to bind us inexorably to our body (1.4.2-4).

Since 'the majority of men lives following the senses, rather than reason,' most of us will approach fame *literally*, as justified by what is outward in man, rather than by what is hidden in man, our *interiority*, our *inner dimension* (2). This is a most pressing problem for poets, most notably vis-à-vis their Christian heralding. The circle of 'honoured' — almost 'ornate' — 'famous' (*onrata nominanza*) poets that Dante encounters in Limbo is a circle of poets who have been raised to divine heights by Christianity in the respect that Christianity has extracted Christian universal messages from the works of those pagan poets. Christianity has 'translated' the soul of ancient poetry in *outward* forms, or in terms of categories readily recognisable by the majority of men. The poets have thereby been extolled, yet only on their way to being exposed to stern condemnation, as public enemies, dire threats to the integrity of moral-political order. Thus, for instance, pagan poets, such as Virgil, who have been supposed to bespeak as unconscious vessels truths that only the divine could reveal in full consciousness, are thereupon exposed to the threat of divine excommunication (*Inferno* 1.122–31).

The light that was supposed to redeem the poet can all too easily serve to condemn poets to heresy. Dante himself was, after all, targeted as a heretic early in his career, on both political and theological grounds. In his own verses, all the more so in the unspoken interstices between them, Dante stands his ground, firing back at his denigrators by showing that, being neither god nor beast, man transcends the limits of both beasts and gods. Dante's man is the being who, alone, can save himself, bridging the distance that separates bodily determinations and thought's own indetermination (*Inferno* 2.1–6). Even prior to the *Comedy*, the *Convivio* shows us man as *mediator* between heaven and earth, a *poet* for whom the heavenly is the mirror of the 'forgotten' dignity of the earthly.

Are we to understand Dante as a Freemason *avant la lettre*, a proto-modernist for whom religious verities are but *symbols* of truths of the heart? Would Dante be reading Christianity along the lines of Nietzsche, as 'Platonism for the plebs'? In order to best tackle such questions, we would need to first ask what is meant by 'Platonism'. Are we speaking, here, of an esoteric *doctrine*, or of a mode of *interpretation* of any and all doctrines? Dante's *Convivio* orients us towards the latter sense of Platonism: Christianity would not be Platonism, but the Hebrew Bible for the plebs — the Bible *interpreted* Platonically for all plebs, as *paradigm* for all necessary mirrors of truths hidden at the heart of *human nature*. What is key, here, is that Dante does not envision truth as hidden in a-social, or a-moral nature; the truth he seeks, if only on our behalf, is seated in our *moral-political* nature, a nature we would need to rediscover. Dante's work is then not trying to reground man in an artificial 'new society' of enlightened intellectuals, but to awaken us to divinity — as original awakening — at the heart of ordinary political

life. The seat of awakening is sought not in a future society that would mark the glory of an enlightened will, but in poetry that opens our *present* society to its divine depths. [10] In this respect, Dante achieves at once both more and less than modernity calls for. For while 'failing' to foster a new, universally 'enlightened' society, or the Age thereof, Dante succeeds in reviving poetry, (1) as primary creative/active constituent of any society *and* (2) as heroic 'turn' to the divine — a turn in the person of heroic speakers, to 'the life of the mind' as *end in itself*, a life of poetic 'turning', of turning as permanent *stance:* the circular at the heart of the upright. While our common path is 'straight' (*diritta*), Dante's poetry exposes the 'straight' to the circular, preemptively countering any progressive impulse to reduce the circular to the straight, the divine to a human poorly understood. The task of understanding the human is more urgent than that of understanding the divine (or of reading the divine in the light of the human), even and especially where the Hebrew Bible points to something somehow buried in or forgotten by pagans (who by and large ignore their origins), namely the moral fibre of ordinary bodily experience.

Understanding the human is, for Dante, a matter of understanding the human in terms of divinity, or in light of divinity, of the unknown. If Dante would agree with Aristotle's common sensical suggestion that we know the uncertain in the light of the certain (fleeing the latter in the name of the former is foolish), he would also and most importantly recognise with his classical predecessors that the uncertain hides originally in the certain *and* that the certain is best understood as a mirror of the uncertain or the undetermined, divine or otherwise. Thus it is that Dante's quest for humanity turns out to be a quest for divinity, or that which allows the human to transcend the beastly; thus does the circular emerge as key to the upright, the *diritto*, but also the *moral* right, *justice*, primarily understood as virtue. Yet, again, Dante warns against the misleading and misguided approach to the circular (divine indetermination) as *imposition* upon the upright, the rectilinear. The divine is not, originally, a law or will limiting man's liberty, even as the divine *appears* thus to those who live as if moved by fear of evil, rather than by desire for the good. For those fearless ones — enlightened poets, or Platonic philosophers — who are guided by genuine desire in their daily life, the divine is primarily 'the love that moves the sun and the *other* [fixed] stars' (*Paradiso* 33.145); not only the sun of poetry's 'sweet season' — the one that promises to reach up to the good — but also the stars moved by 'divine love' alone (*Inferno* 1.38–43). Dante's hero is

[10] The absence of any universal 'triumph of the will' in Dante is tied to the poet's recognition of a fundamental incompatibility between his own will and the will of non-poets, or of those who live in and for 'surfaces'. Hence Dante's readiness to 'blame' his lack of knowledge and power, rather than his will, for his omitting to tell us things he has seen or heard. Compare *Inferno* 1.10, 30, 4.145 and *Convivio* 1.2.6. Dante's will, the determination of his own desire, or what he wants, is never discussed openly. We must wait for the final verses of *Paradiso* to learn that, thanks to poetic desire's conversion into divine love, Dante's will is both overcome and raised into God's own.

relentless in his quest to raise poetry to theological heights, not only lest the divine be divined as a despotic will alien to the human, but most importantly because poetry, as testified to by Dante, is originally open to that mysterious 'something' — that *mezzo* or middle term — distinguishing man from the beast: not fear, but a desire irreducible to any fear or any object thereof.[11]

It is desire that draws the divine to the centre of our attention, in the *Comedy*. Accordingly, the ascent to the good is possibly only on condition of (re)descending to recover desire, a task that, as the *Convivio* already shows, will allow poetry to regain its credibility. What is at stake is the 'x' upon which our ordinary life experience hinges. If that 'something' is alien to our humanity, then we are condemned to fear; if, on the other hand, our everyday life experience hinges upon desire *and* the good, then we have nothing to fear, or rather we will be able to rise above all fear on the horizon of a transcendent end. Nevertheless, Dante takes a further step to recognise that desire distinguishes itself from mere animal thirst by being articulated in terms of *speech* — the *living word* that Dante's infernal descent aims at reviving (*Purgatorio* 1.6–7). Whence Dante's Christianity.

When Christianity regrounds (or invites a regrounding of) ordinary experience in the Absolute through the personification of logos/reason/speech, it invites the common realisation that speech is alive at the heart of human experience, as a bond between bodily determination and thought. Dante responds wholeheartedly to Christianity's call by inviting us to recognise that in the absence of poetry, man is no longer himself, or deserving of a name (*Inferno*, 3.52–60). Christianity itself is no longer itself or worthy of its name to the extent that it betrays poetry. On the other hand, Christianity is fully commendable insofar as it allows for Dante's *Comedy*, a poem that, to speak colloquially, is about — and *is* — the way to recover poetry.

To read the *Comedy* as *the education of poets* in the Christian tradition is to read Dante as converter of *unpoetic* self-professed Christians to poetry in the Platonic tradition. Far from rendering dispensable the virtue of poets (*virtus poetica*) of classical antiquity, Dante's Christianity vouches for and blesses it, offering it its *nihil obstat* in the face of all barbaric objections to poetry as *way of life*. To be clear, poetry here offers no Romantic escape in the face of the meaninglessness of a life devoid of divine providence. Dante would not accept the modern mechanistic cosmology accepted, if only reluctantly, by Romanticism. Dante would abhor the Romantic retreat into sentiment before the onslaught of 'the machine'. Dante's answer to any and all *dei ex machina* is as bold and uncompromising as is the warrior taking his firm stance as 'I alone and one' (*e io sol uno*) in *Inferno* 2.3. There where modernity will capitalise *against* Christianity on Christianity's *promise* of a synthesis of the human and the divine, by cultivating sentiment as fuel for *the machine of Progress*, Dante recovers, in the name of *poetry*, Christianity's promise to restore a 'pre-Christian' covenant between Man and God. That poetic covenant

[11] See pp. 131–32 of Hilail Gildin, 'Déjà Jew All Over Again: Dannhauser on Leo Strauss and Atheism,' in *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy*, 25.1 (Fall 1997): 125–33.

is not written in the language of sentiment, but of virtue, of man's emergence into divine intelligibility. That emergence is at once willful and *by grace* in the respect that poetry has found a way — *its* way, the *loving* way that it incarnates — to harmonise human and divine will. By the end of his *Comedy*, Dante has shown us a Christianity whose proper function is to confirm the perfect compatibility of the poet's (philosophical) desire and God's own will.

Thanks to Dante's Christianity, many will come to accept that there is no special providence (indeed, no humanity) without the poetic hero's drawing upon general providence; so, praise would be due to God *and* to Dante's 'living word', a word in which general providence manifests itself to us in the act of shaping our moral–political universe. Yet, many of Dante's contemporaries have ceased viewing the City as a mirror of divinity, or the human as *personal* image of a divine *mystery* beyond all personality. What has been lost, or more precisely 'abandoned,' is trust in the capacity of speech to 'imitate' reality. It is for the sake of recovering that trust, that *rational* confidence, that Dante sets out to expose the *poetic* nature of objections to poetry. Such is the prospect intimated by verses 8–9 of *Inferno* 1, where the poet promises: 'so as to treat of the good that I found therein [i.e. in the wild wilderness], / I'll speak of *other* things which I spotted therein'. The 'other' things are *scorte*, 'spotted' on the 'other journey' (*altra viaggio*) that in *Inferno* 1.91 entails the exploration of the hidden/infernal underworld or underpinnings of political life, guided by Virgilian poetry.

Dante makes it clear that he is following Virgil by way of transcending fear (88–90, after 15 and 19), most notably with respect to his capacity to ascend towards the good of poetry, the good that Dante's 'avatar' is to find. Classical poetry blessed by Christianity can guide us to its own virtue via a journey into the underworld or the *substance* of our ordinary lives. But this is possible only insofar as the foundations of politics are poetic, so that the poet is the true teacher of political things. It is thanks to poetry, after all, that Dante projects himself into his 'avatar' in the very first verses of the *Comedy*, where we read of his finding himself anew: *mi ritrovai*, he states, thereby tipping his poetic hat to his *troubadour* teachers.

Now, it is of course in the vehicle or means — *mezzo* — of poetry that Dante finds himself anew, or that he is, so to speak, 'reborn'. His 'second birth' (countering the 'second death' of *Inferno* 1.117) is, to be sure, set in an awful context, yet this context is to be understood as somehow already redeemed by the very fact that its nature or foundation is defined by poetry; whence the 'but' (*ma*) of verse 8 of *Inferno* 1. Yes, the world in which Dante lands *himself* is horrible; *yet*, in the name of poetry's goodness, he will speak of 'other things,' namely of those *same* horrible things, albeit in a *poetic* context, or in the context of an original *redemption*. The horrible things are 'other', then, in the same sense that Dante speaks of 'the other stars', which stand 'fixed' above poetic agency. As poetry's sun rises, it reaches up to the rigidity of 'fixed' things, as of eternal laws, exposing their own poetic nature or provenance.

It makes sense, now, to render the opening *mezzo* of the *Comedy* its *active* valence. Dante's *mezzo* is no mere temporal signpost, but a functional agent, a hinge, or rather a pivot. It is 'in the *pivot* of the path of our life' that Dante finds himself anew, for the sake of exposing the poetic context of all those horrible things that we ordinarily fear — so that we may finally rise above all fear in full recognition of the *providential* nature of our daily obstacles. These are *challenges* that kindle and nourish our *desire*, our tending from a 'now' (the νῦν that Aristotle attests to as 'middle' or μεσότης)[12] lost in obscurity to the eternal 'now' of thought itself.

Dante's *Convivio* confirms that the poet's ascent is alien to the pursuits of 'sheep', these representing the vast majority of men (indeed 'almost all' — *quasi tutti*), lost as babies (*pargoli*) in mere *appearances*, while hating both virtuous poets and their reasonings (1.4.4–5). So, as Plato had anticipated, the genuine poet speaks before a wall of misanthropes and misologues who resent in Dante his capacity to rise in speech and strength of mind above mortality (7). Dante would sin in their eyes already for having exposed the immortal meaning or 'message' of words, instead of resting his will on literal, superficial readings.

The world Dante stands before is a world dominated by mediocrity envious of both good and evil, always on an amoral quest for power (8). It is in rejecting a quasi-universal 'lust for domination' (St. Augustine's *libido dominandi*) that Dante sets himself apart from the vast majority of men, these being always ready to project upon 'the good man' (*l'uomo buono*) the stains (*macule*) of his surroundings (9–11).[13] More importantly, however, Dante attests to his rising *above* other men to lend his person the air of 'authority' (*autoridate*) without which vulgar judges could all too easily vilify Dante's poetry, thereby distracting potential earnest readers from the rewarding challenge of taking it seriously (12–13). How far above mortals Dante rises is not an easy matter to settle, primarily because the distance between human desire and divine heavens is no more measurable than is the distance between our mortal bodies and our poetic projections.[14]

[12] Aristotle, *Physics*, Book 8.1, 251b11–12: τὸ δὲ νῦν ἐστι μεσότης τις, καὶ ἀρχὴν καὶ τελευτὴν ἔχον ἅμα. On the *active* sense of Aristotle's (and Plato's) 'middle' (μεσότης), see Roberto Grasso, 'ΜΕΣΟΤΗΣ in Plato and Aristotle' in *Dissertatio: Revista de Filosofia*, Vol. 48 (2018): 71–95.

[13] Compare *Inferno* 1.33. *Convivio* awakens in the careful reader of *Inferno* the thought that at least some of its inhabitants might be innocent men tainted by their surroundings.

[14] Compare *Inferno* 2.91–93 and *Paradiso* 33.40–41.

Adoardo Gualandi (?–1597)
A Forgotten Renaissance Philosopher

Jan Prins

Adoardo Gualandi [1] represents a practical philosophical culture adequately described in a recent study of Montaigne's *Essays* as a culture 'that centres on the persona of the priest–philosopher who both teaches and embodies a re–invented, more methodical and applied form of moral philosophy, who interacts in civic life with the secular noble elite, and with scholars and bibliographers, offering physic for the soul'.[2] In the seventeenth century he was bracketed with Descartes as one of the 'novatores', at least as far as his method was concerned. He was known for his clear explanation of moral philosophy in general and that of Aristotle in particular. That reputation was based on just one book, *De civili facultate...*, published after his death. It shows Gualandi as an eclectic Aristotelian who attracted attention not so much as an original thinker as for the way he organised the material in his explanation of ethics and politics. His fame as a teacher lasted until the beginning of the eigtheenth century. Since then, his name and work have fallen into oblivion.

1. Life and Work

Adoardo Gualandi was descended from an old and renowned patrician family from Pisa.[3] At the University of Bologna he graduated *summa cum laude* in civil and canon law.[4] This is all we know about his origin and youth.[5] After having

[1] His first name is also written as Edoardo, Odoardo, Adoardus, Odoardus, Aduardus, Adouardus, Eduardus and Oduardus. As for his last name he is also referred to as Gualando, Gualandius and Gualandinus.

[2] See Warren Boutcher, *The School of Montaigne in Early Modern Europe. Volume Two: The Reader–Writer.* Oxford University Press, 2017.

[3] In the Middle Ages, the Gualandi family supported the Ghibellines and it was one of the families that the Archbishop Ruggieri degli Ubaldini set up against Ugolino della Gherardesca. The Gualandi family is also cited by Dante Alighieri in the Inferno (XXXIII, 33). See also Ranieri Grassi, *Descrizione storica e artistica di Pisa. Parte storica.* Pisa, 1836.

[4] See J.B. Braschio, *Memoriae Caesenates sacrae et profanae.* Romae, 1728, pp. 375–378; and Augusto Fontana, *Amphitheatrum legale.* Parma, 1688: p. 455.

[5] There would be a written sketch of Gualandi in the collection of manuscripts of the Biblioteca Palatina di Firenze: *Abbozzi di memorie, storiche, osservazioni, etc. sopra 50 uomini illustri Pisani.* Cartaceo in fol. del Sec. XVIII. See *Codici Manoscritti Italiani dell' J. e. R. Biblioteca Palatina di Firenze* illustrati di Giuseppe Molini. Fascicolo primo. Firenze, 1833. Further among the manuscripts of Gioacchino Sassi preserved in the Malatestian Library, the communal library of Cesena, there would be a pencil-sketch of him (see *Le vite dei Cesenati.* Volume II. A cura di Pier Giovanni Fabbri. Editrice Stilgraf. Cesena, 2008, p. 129). According

served as private secretary to the Cardinal and Archbishop of Naples, Alfonso Carafa (1540–1565) he was, from 1557 until 1588, Bishop of Cesena in northern Italy.[6]

In that capacity Gualandi was a valuable member of the community in Cesena and left many traces in the history of the town. In 1564 and 1566 he organised a diocesan synod on health care, and he also founded an orphanage in 1576.[7] In 1569 he was one of the first to respond to the call by the Council of Trent (1545–1563) to ensure better seminaries and to establish a seminar in each and every diocese.[8] Two years later he facilitated the establishment of a university in Cesena.[9] In 1572 the cathedral of Cesena, the San Giovani Battista, was substantially rebuilt and renovated at his behest.[10] Another synod in 1582 resulted in Gualandi's first publication, *Constitutiones, et decreta condita ab illustri...Adoardo Gualando...* (Caesenae, 1584). In 1588, Gualandi retired and was succeeded as Bishop of Cesena by his nephew Camillo Gualandi. During his retirement Gualandi wrote his only known philosophical treatise, *De civili facultate Libri XVI.*[11] The book remained incomplete. On the instigation of his

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to Braschio, 'Et ipsius Odoardi effigies, expressa naturalitèr arte pictoris, continetur in Icone Altaris Capituli Canonicorum Cathedralis, a parte dextera' (Braschio, op. cit.).

[6] See Romeo de Maio, 'La mancata biografia di Paulo IV di Francesco Robortello', p. 341, note 17 in *Archivum Historiae Pontificae* 3. Romae, 1965.

[7] See *Opere drammatiche del conte Gio. Francesco Fattiboni cesenate*. Tomo primo. Cesena, 1777, pp. 51–52.

[8] See Braschio, op. cit. Gualandi for that matter did not himself attend the last session of that council. Pope Pius IV had forbidden him to take part in it because of his friendship with the cardinal and Archbishop of Naples, Alfonso Carafa. Two members of the Carafa family had recently been killed by order of that same pope. Through his contact with the Archbishop of Naples, Gualandi was also on friendly terms with Giovanni Pietro Carafa, Alfonso's great-uncle. As Pope Paul IV, Giovanni Carafa ruled the Roman Catholic Church and the Vatican, from May 23rd 1555 until his death on 18th August 1559. This highly placed friend of Gualandi was known as the father of the Roman Inquisition. During his papacy he set up the Index of Forbidden Books. He was succeeded by Pope Pius IV. See further Paolo Sarpi, *Istoria del concilio di Trentino*. Londra, 1619, p. 518.

[9] The university offered courses in civil law and institutions, logic, and natural philosophy; with the progressive liberation from episcopal control, it became one of the few universities in the region regulated by the municipality (at least until 1725). See www.homolaicus.com/arte/cesena/storia/cronologia.pdf and Pier Giovanni Fabbri, op. cit. (2008), p. 28.

[10] Gualandi promoted a complex series of remodelling and redecoration works: the crypt (located in the centre of the main aisle) was closed, and the chapels and presbytery were subsequently redesigned and decorated with Ionic pillars in golden wood.

[11] Adoardi Gualandi, *De civili facultate libri XVI... In quibus doctissimè, ac luculenter universa de moribus Philosophia explicatur*. Romae, apud Aloysium Zannettum, 1598.

nephew and successor as Bishop of Cesena, the work was published posthumously in 1598, a year after his death in Rome on 17th March 1597.[12]

2. Poets, rhetoricians and philosophers

At his inauguration as Bishop in Cesena, the *Accademia de' Riformati,* a literary society established around 1557 by the historian and poet Giuliano Fantaguzzi, organised a festive reception.[13] Gualandi was so taken with this initiative that he proposed to hold the meetings of the society henceforth in the episcopal palace. For over thirty years he was patron of this *Accademia* where, as with other academies, the focus on literature was combined with a strong interest in philosophy.[14] Possibly it was also through this society that Gualandi met the eclectic philosopher, man of letters, and astronomer Jacopo Mazzoni (1548–1598), a prominent member of the Academy.[15] It is likely that they became good friends. Gualandi introduced Mazzoni to cardinal Filippo Boncompagno and once gave him a commentary on Pindar.[16] During the first decade of his episcopacy, Gualandi was also well acquainted with the humanist and preceptor of, among others, Jacopo Zabarella, Francesco Robortello (1516–1567) who

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[12] In some sources Gualandi is said to have written also a *Tractatus de philosophia*. I could find no such tract (see for example, *Discorso Accademico Sull' Istoria Letteraria Pisana*. Ranieri Prosperi, Pisa, 1787, p. 119).

[13] See Francesco S. Quadrio, *Della storia e della ragione d'ogni poesia*. Volume primo. Bologna, 1739, p. 63. According to some this is about the *Accademia degli Offuscati* (see *Series episcoporum Caesenatium a Ferdinando Ughellio contexta a Nicolao aliquantulum aucta & emendata nunc a Francisco Antonio Zaccaria...ad nostrum tempus perducta.* Caesenae, 1779, p. 70). I think the academy in question is confused here with a similar institution, established, also in Cesena, by Scipione Chiaramonte but then only in 1631 (see Cesare Masini, *Genealogia della famiglia Masini*. Venezia, 1748).

[14] See *Giornale de' letterati*, Volumes 79–80. Tom. 79. Pisa, 1790, p. 191. See also *La Vita di Jacopo Mazzoni patrizio cesenate scritta dall'abate Pierantonio Serassi*. Roma, 1740: pp. 12, 160. On the combination of literature and philosophy, especially at the Florentine Academy, see David A. Lines, 'Rethinking Renaissance Aristotelianism: Bernardo Segni's Ethica, the Florentine Academy, and the Vernacular in Sixteenth-Century Italy', *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013): p. 856.

[15] Mazzoni is one of the most important exponents of the tradition of the *comparationes*. In *De triplici hominum vita, active nempe, contemplativa et religiosa, methodi tres* (1576) he collects five thousand conclusions that would show that Plato, Aristotle and other philosophers were compatible. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola formulated no more than nine hundred conclusions. Mazzoni promised to settle the disagreements between Plato and Aristotle as well as those between the Greeks, the Arabs, and the Latins. In *In universam Platonis et Aristotelis philosophiam praeludia, sive de comparatione Platonis et Aristotelis liber primus*, published in 1597, however, he reconsidered the idea that their views are not incompatible (see Edward P. Mahoney, 'Aristotle and some late medieval and Renaissance philosophers' in R. Pozzo (ed.) *The Impact of Aristotelianism on Modern Philosophy.* Catholic University of America Press, 2004, p. 21).

[16] See *La vita di Jacopo Mazzoni*, p. 29 and J. Mazzoni, *Ragioni delle cose dette...* Cesena, 1587, p. 50.

taught, among other subjects, ethics from an Aristotelian point of view.[17] Gualandi praised the famous Cesenat physician Nicolò Masinius (1533–1602) who was also a philosopher and conveyed information about the art in Cesena to Vasari, another member of the *Accademia de' Riformati*.[18] The communal library of Cesena, the Bibliotheca Malatestiana, is in possession of a manuscript by Masinius, dated 1584 and entitled *Animadversiones ad regimen puerorum spectantes*. It is preceded by two prefaces, one of which is addressed to *Adoardo Gualandi*.[19] Masinius' nephew, the painter and architect, Francesco Masini, also dedicated a treatise to Gualandi.[20] The latter was indeed greatly interested in literature. He was praised for his poetics.[21] The Florentine poet and historian, Benedetto Varchi (1503–1565), addressed a sonnet to Gualandi.[22]

3. The dissemination and reception of *De civili facultate*

Given the growing number of translations and commentaries on Aristotle's Ethics and Politics in the sixteenth century, as well as the steady stream of synopses of moral philosophy in general, it should not surprise us that *De civili facultate* soon came to the awareness of the general public. In 1604 a second edition followed.[23] The book could be found in libraries all over Europe.[24] The

[17] See Romeo De Maio, *Riforme e miti nella Chiesa del Cinquecento*. Guida editori. Napoli, 1992 (1e ed. 1973), pp. 124 and 337.

[18] Gualandi qualified him as a *medico praestantissimo* (see the lemma in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. Vol. 71 (2008) on Nicolò Masini. See also *Le vite dei Cesenati*. Volume V. Nel 150 dell' Unita d'Italia. A cura di Pier Giovanni Fabbri. Editrice Stilgraf. Cesena, 2011. Appendice, p. 551). For several years Niccolò Masini taught natural philosophy at the university of Cesena (see Pier Giovanni Fabbri, op. cit. (2008), p. 28).

[19] See Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Iter Italicum:* [A finding list of uncatalogued or incompletely catalogued humanistic Mss of the Renaissance in Italian and other libraries. Vol. I. Italy. Agrigento to Novara. Brill, 1977; Vol. V, *Alia* itinera III and Italy III. Brill, 1990, p. 527.

[20] Franciscus Masinius Architectus, & Pictor laude dignus Raphaelis Urbinatis Discipulus, in cujus vita descripta à Vasario hic Civis nostcr commendatur. *Difcorso di Francifco Maffini Sopra un modo nuovo facile, e reale di trasportare su la Piazza di S. Pietro la Guglia che in Roma detta di Cesare*. A Monfig. Adoardo Gualandi Per il Raverio 1686 (*Thesaurus antiquitatum et historiarum Italiae*. Joannis Georgii Graevii. Leiden, 1723, p. 68).

[21] S. Verdoni, *Della difesa della Comedia di Dante*. Parte prima. Cesena, 1588, p. 31.

[22] See *De' Sonnetti di M. Benedetto Varchi*. Parte prima. Firenze, 1555, p. 153. As a member of the Accademia degli Infiammati in Padua, Varchi, incidentally, also lectured on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. See D.A. Lines, 'Aristotle's Ethics in the Renaissance' in Jon Miller (ed.), *The Reception of Aristotle's Ethics*. Cambridge University Press, 2012: 171–193. In 1593 there was also published a pastoral poem in honour of Gualandi and his nephew Camillo (Antonii Hadriani. *Gualandus Ecloga. De laudibus*. Padua, 1593.)

[23] The catalogue of the library of Lipeni (Lipen), (1630–1692), rector in Stettin and Lübeck, suggests that there was another edition in 1600 (see note 24).

[24] This can be concluded from descriptions of libraries, especially in auction catalogues. See, for the library of the cleric and architect Domenico Paganelli (1545–1624), Maria Celeste Cola, *Palazzo Valentini a Roma*. Roma, 2012; Georgio Draudio. *Bibliotheca classica sive catalogus officinalis*. Frankfurt, 1611; Georgii Mathiae Königii, *Bibliotheca Vetus Et Nova*... Altdorf,

German Lutheran minister Paulus Bolduan included the book in his *Bibliotheca philosophic*a.[25] Gabriel Naudé (1600–1653), librarian of Mazarin, recommends it in his political bibliography for its style and method.[26] Hermann Conringh and Hugo de Groot repeat that recommendation.[27] Daniel Morhof (1639–1691), literary historian and polymath, brackets him together with Descartes and Campanella as a methodological innovator.[28] The German theologian Johann Franz Buddeus praises him for his original method too.[29] At the end of the seventeenth century, Thomas Pope Blount marks him out as one of the famous writers of his day.[30] In the seventeenth century in particular Gualandi was praised

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1678; M. Martini Lipenii, *Bibliotheca realis philosophica*... Tomus primus. Frankfurt, Vogel, 1682; *Biblioteca Heinsiana sive Catalogus librorum*... Johannes de Vivie. Leiden, 1683; Bibliotheca Carpzoviana. Lipsiae, 1700; Biblioteca Carlsoniana...collecta per Petrum Husson. Den Haag, 1711; *Bibliotheca Marckiana...auctio in taberna libraria Abrahami de Hondt*. Den Haag, 1712; *Bibliotheca Menarsiana ou Catalogue de la bibliotheque de Jean Jacques Charron*...Den Haag, 1720; Biblioteca Hulsiana sive catalogus librorum...Tomus 1...Den Haag, 1730; *Bibliotheca Emtinckiana sive catalogus librorum....publica distractio*...Pars Secunda...S. Schouten. Amsterdam, 1753; Ferwerda, Abraham, [*Catalogus universalis cum pretiis of de Boek–Negotie*. Leeuwarden, 1771; [*Catalogue des livres de la bibliotheque choisie de feu monsieur F.A.E. Bruynincx*...Anvers, 1791; [*Catalogues de livres du collège des ci-devant Jésuites de Louvain*, 1779.

[25] *Bibliotheca philosophica sive Elenchus scriptorum philosophicorum*...Pauli Bolduani. Jenae, 1616. Advised by people like Melanchthon and Petrus Ramus, Bolduan would have confined himself to the best works of their kind (see Michael Jasenas, *A History of the Bibliography of Philosophy*. Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, 1973, p. 33). Carus characterises this work as the first 'philosophische Bücherverzeignis' (see Friedrich August Carus, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*. Leipzig, 1809).

[26] Naudé writes that among the moderns, that is his contemporaries, there are many that have written on ethics. Instead of mentioning all of them he prefers to point only to the best, relying on his readers to have enough foreknowledge of the old philosophers to be able to make on the basis of that knowledge a wise choice from the contemporary literature: '...Optimum tamen erit melioribus se quamprimum addicere, ut Adouardo Gualando, et Francisco atque Alexandro Piccolomineis qui artem integram nobiliori quadam methodo, & maiori vi ac copia spirituum tradidere...' (Gabrielis Naudaei, *Bibliographia politica.* Venetiis, 1633, p. 15; see also Boutcher, op. cit.)

[27] See Hermann Conringh, *Opera*. Tomus III. Politica. Brunswijk, 1730, p. 69) (1st edition 1635, 2nd edition 1637); *H. Grotii et aliorum dissertationes de studiis instituendis*. Amsterdam, 1645.

[28] There is talk of '...novatores ethici quoad methodum ...' (D.G. Morhofii. Polyhistor. 4e ed. Tomus 2–3. *Polyhistor philosophicus et practicus.* Lubecae, 1747 (1st edition 1688), p. 557). As for Gualandi, with that qualification Morhof was alluding to the, in his view, curious combination of moral and civil philosophy. He wondered whether Gualandi had the same thing in mind as Francis Bacon with his doctrine of *Iurisprudentiae universalis* in *De augmentis*, Lib. 8.

[29] Io. Francisci Buddei, *Isagoge historico–theologica ad theologiam universam*. Lipsiae, 1730, p. 271.

[30] Thomas Pope Blount. *Censura celebriorum authorum*. London, 1690, p. 657. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the book was for sale in London (see *Catalogus*

for his linguistic usage. He is referred to not only as a teacher of moral philosophy but also, and especially in the eighteenth century, in his capacity as a jurisconsult and philosopher of law.[31] His book is often mentioned for its original arrangement of the material in its presentation and explanation of moral philosophy.[32] The 'protestant scholastic' Rudolphus Geoclenius (1547–1628) adopts several notions from *De civili facultate* in his famous *Lexicon philosophicum.*[33] Others refer approvingly to various of Gualandi's views in the fields of psychology,[34] ethics[35] and political philosophy.[36]

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librorum...quos...selegit Robertus Martine...Londini, 1635). There was a copy of the first edition of *De civili facultate* in the Bodleian library in Oxford (see Thomas Hyde, *Catalogus impressorum librorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae in Academia Oxoniensi*, 1674).

[31] See for example Iuliani Viviani, *Praxis iuris patronatus acquirendi conservandique*. Venetiis, 1670, p. 64, 77; Augusto Fontana, *Amphitheatrum legale*. Parma, 1688; Martini Hassen, *Synopsis Scientiae de prudentia morali universa*. Wittenberg, 1721, p. 166; M. Johann Andreae Fabricii, *Abriss einer allgemeinen Historie der Gelehrsamkeit*. Dritter Band. Leipzig, 1754.

[32] Gualandi's work was widely available in German–speaking areas. There was also a copy of *De civili facultate* in the library of the German students in Padua (see *Bibliotheca Medico-Philosophico-Philologica Inclytae Nationis Germanae artistarum quae Patavij degit*... Franciscus Stokhamer et Andres Bridler (Bibliothecarij), Padua, 1677). Maybe that explains why the few critical reactions to his work are from German protestant scholastics.

[33] Rodolph Geoclenius, *Lexicon philosophicum quo tanquam clave philosophiae fores aperiuntur*. Francofurti, 1613. Goclenius refers to notions from Gualandi's *De civili facultate* in the entries on the terms *acceptio, affici, amor, ars, increpatio, ius, obligatio, definitio* and *laus*.

[34] Reference to Gualandi's ideas about the will in Petro Andrea Canonherio, *Dissertationes politicae ac discursus varii in C. Cornelii Taciti annalium libros*, Francofurti, 1610, p. 68; reference to Gualandi's discussion of the five powers of the soul in Book 3, Chapter 10 (see Miguel Gomez de Luna y Arellano, *Iuri, ratio & rationis imperium*. Madrid, 1629, pp. 74 and 79); reference to Gualandi's book in connection with the relation between the rational and irrational powers (see p. 113). And in connection with a wise use of the senses (see p. 116, Miguel Gomez de Luna y Arellano, *Opera tripartita. Tomus primus*. Antwerpen, 1651. In certain notes concerning the passions and faculties of the soul, attributed to the English mathematician and philosopher, Walter Warner (ca. 1557–1643) the writer refers to Gualandi's view of the natural sense of appetite (see Jan Prins, *Walter Warner (ca. 1557–1643) and his notes on animal organisms*. Utrecht, 1992, p. 188, note 2).

[35] See in connection with the relationship of prudence to the other virtues and the problem of evil as such, Bartholomeus Keckermann, *Disputationes practicae nempe ethicae, oeconomicae, politicae*. Hanover, 1608: Disp. 22, p. 42, and Disp. 27, p. 191. See also *Bartholomaei Keckermanni Operum omnium quae extant*. Tomus secundus in quo speciatim, methodice & uberrime, de Ethica, Oeconomica, Politica disciplina: necnon de Arte Rhetorica agitur.. Genevae, 1614, Disp. 22, p. 633; Lib. 9, cap. 5, p. 644; Lib. 3, cap. 4, Disp. 27, p. 710. As for Gualandi's specification of the 'recta ratio' as a *ratio*, instructed by the *facultas civilis*, i.e. the art of politics, see M. Tullii Ciceronis, *De officiis Libri tres. Et in illos Samuelis Rachellii ... Commentarius* ... Frankfurt, 1668: par. 36 of the Prolegomena in M. Tullii Ciceronis de Officiis Libros Tres quibus natura HONESTI, aliaque ad Jus Naturae spectantia explicantur.

[36] See in connection with a specification of the notion of 'nobility', Conringii, *Opera omnia. Tomus III. Varia scripta. Politica*. Brunswijk, 1730: §. X. and §. XI.

There are also critical commentaries, albeit not many. For example, from the theologian and philosopher Bartholomaeus Keckermann (c. 1572–c. 1608) concerning Gualandi's ideas about magnanimity, and from the physician, philosopher, and theologian Giovanni Battista Persona (1575–1620) who questions Gualandi's statements on the subject of moral virtue, as well as his definition of prudence.[37] Gualandi's qualification of the Pope as holy is met with criticism in Holland.[38] Yet, these critical comments are in the minority by quite some way.

4. Moral philosophy in the Renaissance

Most of the writings on moral philosophy, published in Gualandi's time, that is, in the second half of the sixteenth century, consisted of translations, summaries and commentaries on the moral and political philosophy of Aristotle. None of these formats apply to *De civili facultate*. This does not mean that Aristotle's writings are absent from Gualandi's book. On the contrary, Aristotelianism is central to it. Yet, this would not justify the conclusion that Gualandi was an Aristotelian. Nor, for that matter, and despite Platonic elements, was he a Platonist, as he is unjustly said to be by certain reference works.[39] His opting for Aristotle was primarily didactically inspired. In fact, Gualandi was a pronounced eclectic who drew from many sources. His book teems with references to scientists and philosophers, among which may be found Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics, Epicureans, Cynics, atomists and sophists, along with theologians, writers and poets like Homer, Hesiod, Terence, Virgil, and Ovid, but also rhetoricians like Demosthenes and Quintilian, lawgivers such as Ulpianus, historians like Plutarch and Xenophon, as

[37] See Bartholomeus Keckermann, *Disputationes practicae...*1608, Disp. xxiv, pp. 106, 107 en 108, Disp. xxvii, p. 191; *Bartholomaei Keckermanni Operum omnium quae extant*. Tomus secundus...1614, Disp. 24, p. 674. See also Io. Bapt. Persona, *Noctes solitariae sive de iis quae scientifice scripta sunt ab Homero in Odyssea*. Venetie, 1613: Colloquium 29, pp. 191–200.

[38] See Johannes Mauritius (c. 1660–c. 1721). 't Heylig jaar 1700. Amsterdam, 1700, pp. 92–99; J.V. Herwerden, *Armageddon – Proefnemend onderzoek*. Amsterdam, 1756, p. XLIII.

[39] See *Biografia universale antica e moderna*. Supplimento, ossia ..., Volume 9, Venezia, 1841, p. 649. See also *Dizionario biografico universale* ...Volume Terzo. Firenze, 1844–45, p. 106. And further, *Discorso accademici sull' istoria letteraria Pisana*. Per Ranieri Prosperi. Pisa, 1787, p. 119. Also according to the *Nouvelle Biographie Générale* by M.M. Firmin Didot Frères, Gualandi would have had a reputation as a 'partisan déclaré des doctrines platoniciennes' (Tome 22. Paris, 1858, p. 302). This misunderstanding probably goes back to Girolamo Tiraboschi, *Storia della letteratura italiana: Dall' anno MD fino all' anno MDC*, Tomo VII, Parte seconda, Modena, MDCCXCI, p. 451. Tiraboschi had a broad definition of 'platonist' which included being a former member of the vanished Platonic Academy or one whose friends or teachers were members, propagators of Plato's philosophy or people resisting empty doctrines, whether or not they were presented as Aristotelianism. Tiraboschi took his list of 'platonists' from a letter of Bonifazio Vannozzi (1540–1621), secretary to papal legate Cardinal Caetani, in which, apart from Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Tiepoli, Contarini, and both Patrizi's, Adoardo Gualandi is also mentioned. However, these names do not so much refer to 'platonists' as to people that were critical of Aristotle (see *Delle lettere miscellanee del sig. Bonifazio Vannozzi*. Venetia, 1606, p. 105).

well as the physicians, Galen and Hippocrates. Thus he uses sources from Greek and Roman antiquity as well as patristic (Augustine) and scholastic writings (Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Eustratius). However, he does not mention any contemporaries. Gualandi shared this eclecticism, along with his extensive use of arguments from authority, with most of his contemporaries. The same is true for the themes he broaches such as, for example, the question of the highest good, the relationship between happiness on earth and heavenly happiness, that is, between *felicitas* and *beatitudo*, the relationship between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*, the Aristotelian virtues, justice in particular, the relationship between the moral and the intellectual virtues or the relationship between virtue and pleasure. Last but not least, typical for the Renaissance literature on moral philosophy is the completion of ethical instruction with political philosophy, and especially the discussion of the relationship between ethics and politics.[40] In this connection the title of Gualandi's magnum opus, *De civili facultate*, is significant. It tells us something about his ideas regarding the nature of ethics and politics in general as well as about their relationship. These ideas are closely allied to those of the philosopher, humanist and translator Johannes Argyropoulos (1415–1487), as well as those of the historian and translator Bernardo Segni (1504–1558). In the Latin and Italian translations of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics,* the term *politikos*[41] is interpreted in different ways, corresponding to the various views on the relationship between ethics and politics. A translation such as *'politica'* stresses the communitarian aspect of Aristotle's views. In that context the primary object of ethics is not the body of the individual person but the *corpo civile della società*, i.e. the body politic or nation as a whole. Bruni's choice of *'civilis'* shows that he conceded a certain ambiguity: the term refers both to the social character of man as well as to the social structure in which man lives. Finally, someone like Argyropoulos translates the word with *'facultas civilis'* and thus resolves the ambiguity. To him, civility as an ability belonging to the individual man comes first. 'Civil faculty' is also the expression used by Segni in his Italian translation. According to Matteo Rolandi, the use of that expression signifies that in Segni's view the architectonic element of ethics is not to be looked for primarily in society, but in the acting of the individual, in human being as such, either as political action for the common good, or the pursuit of power. The highest goal of man, happiness, is the object of the architectonic element of ethics, that is, of political science, or, in other words, of the law-giving science that stipulates the norms for proper regulation in all fields. The conclusion that in this case ethics would be subordinate to politics is unacceptable to Segni. To him, it is ethics alone that constitutes the structuring discipline and guiding principle of all other

[40] On ethics in the Renaissance, see D.A. Lines, 'Humanistic and scholastic ethics' in James Hankins (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*. Cambridge, 2007: 304–318; Jill Kraye, '11 Morall philosophy in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. General Editor: C.B. Schmitt. Cambridge, 1988: 301–386.

[41] See *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1102a, 10–15 (I, 13).

moral disciplines.[42] Gualandi also uses the expression *civilis facultas,* which bears the same meaning as *moralis facultas* for him. Thus, he rightly states that his treatise on political philosophy is at the same time an exposition of moral philosophy in general. *Philosophia civilis* is nothing but *philosophia moralis.*[43] The *civilis facultas*, i.e. politics or the art of citizenship is, according to Gualandi, following Aristotle, the highest *ars* and consequently also *architectonic*, that is, the structuring element.[44]

5. Ethical politics

Though remarkable, Gualandi's notion of ethical politics, including the relevant terminology, would not justify his qualification as an innovator. In fact he shared this notion with his contemporary, the famous natural philosopher Francesco Piccolomini (1523–1607), deemed byNaudé the best writer on moral philosophy at that time, along with Gualandi himself. [45] Piccolomini systematised and extended Aristotle's work on ethics and politics. [46] We see the same with Gualandi. Maybe he was inspired by Piccolomini's approach in *Universa philosophia de moribus* (1583). In any case, apart from the notion of ethical politics, there are some striking similarities. Both combine neo-scholastic, humanist and Thomistic views, in their discussion and comparison of different traditions, organised, moreover, by subject. Both dwell extensively on the necessity and importance of education in the development of prudence and

[42] See M. Rolandi, '"Facultas civilis". Etica e politica nel commento di Bernardo Segni all 'Etica Nicomachea' in *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica*. Vol. 88, No. 4. (ottobre-dicembre 1996): 553–594. See also David A. Lines, 'Rethinking Renaissance Aristotelianism: Bernardo Segni's Ethica, the Florentine Academy, and the Vernacular in Sixteenth-Century Italy' in *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013): 824–865 and David A. Lines, 'Ethics, politics and history in Bernardo Segni (1504–1558). Machiavellianism and anti-Medicean sentiment' in Christoph Strosetzki (Hg.), *Ethik und Politik des Aristoteles in der frühen Neuzeit.* Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2016: 45–68.

[43] See the title page: *DE CIVILI FACULTATE LIBRI SEXDECIM NUNC PRIMVM EDITI, In quibus doctissimè, ac luculenter vniuerfa de moribus Philofophia explicatur.* Andrew Aidy, in his *Clavis philosophiae moralis* (Heidelberg, 1614) equates *philosophia moralis* with*scientia moralis*, also called *architectonica*. In his paraphrase of *Aristotelis politicorum Libri VIII* (Leiden, 1681), Daniel Heinsius uses the expression *scientia civilis*.

[44] 'Civilis facultas est ars Architectonica' (op. cit., 1 in princ. Index); 'Civilem facultatem omnium artium præftantiffimam effe, manifeftum eft; tum quia cæteræ omnes ei inferuiunt & fubminiftrant; tum vero quia eius finis omnium rerum agendarum eft terminus, & humana perfectio & beatitudo' (op. cit., Lib 1, cap. 1, p. 5); 'Ciuv?ilis facultas ars omnium maxima' (op. cit., Lib. 10, cap. 9, p. 201). Cf. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* I, 2–3.

[45] See Jill Kraye, 'Eclectic Aristotelianism in the moral philosophy of Francesco Piccolomini' in Gregorio Piaia (ed.), *La presenza dell'Aristotelismo Padovano nella filosofia della prima modernità*. Editrice Antenore, 2002, 57–82. On Naudé, see also note 26.

[46] See David A. Lines, 'Latin and Vernacular in Francesco Piccolomini's Moral Philosophy' in *«Aristotele fatto volgare» Tradizione aristotelica e cultura volgare nel Rinascimento* a cura di David A. Lines ed Eugenio Refini. Edizioni ETS. Pisa, 2014: 169–199; A.E. Baldini, 'La politica "etica" di Francesco Piccolomini' in *Il pensiero politico*. Anno XIII, n. 2, 1980.

moral virtues. Finally the work of both is regularly used by protestant scholastic commentators. Yet, in spite of these similarities there are also important differences between *De civili facultate* and *Universa philosophia de moribus.* Unlike Francesco Piccolomini, Gualandi did not address academics or governors of princes in particular, but the general educated public. Hence his book was simpler, more concise and more practical than that of Piccolomini. Physical, metaphysical or methodological issues are ignored. Gualandi attends more closely to psychology and pedagogy. As to the theoretical digressions, *De civili facultate* can be considered as a more lightweight version of *Universa philosophia de moribus* light. It offers reasoned yet easy to understand instruction in the practical application of the principles of citizenship. For Gualandi, it was not contemplative wisdom, *sapientia*, that was central, but *prudentia*, practical wisdom.

6. Innovation in method

The expression *'novatores'* was used in various senses in the seventeenth century. Primarily it was used to refer, usually disapprovingly, to natural philosophers who, like Bernardino Telesio (1509–1588), Francesco Patrizi (1529–1597), Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), Campanella (1568–1639), or Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and Descartes (1596–1650), to mention only a few, dared to deviate substantially from the views of Aristotle or to combine these with essentially different ideas.[47] This can not be said of Gualandi who, like Piccolomini, did not seem to care about originality with respect to the core of his theoretical views. However, the expression *'novatores'* was also used to refer to philosophers, especially peripatetics, who, mainly for didactic reasons, arranged their material differently than was usual among the followers of Aristotle. This kind of innovation does apply to Gualandi. It fits in well with the eclecticism of his time, which was motivated by a pragmatic view of theory. How do we make theory useful in everyday life? That is what it is about, and therefore no longer primarily about the question of whether the theory in question is true. That no longer needs to be investigated. Thus, the truth of Aristotle's *Ethica Nicomachea* is undisputed. Also according to Gualandi, at least in outline. In a letter to the reader by Giuseppe Iseo,[48] it is even said that Gualandi highly appreciated Aristotle as the only classical philosopher to present us, in his *Ethics*, with a complete philosophy of life.[49] He did not want to imitate Aristotle but to complete him, and in so doing,

[47] See Daniel Garber, 'Novatores' in *Cambridge History of Philosophy of the Scientific Revolution*. Edited by D.M. Miller and D. Jalobeanu. Cambridge University Press, 2022: 35–57.

[48] In 1581, Isei, canon of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, completed a *Discorso sopra il poema di Torquato Tasso* and, later on, *Commenti alle opere di Lucio Celio Lattanzio Firmiano* (see Damiano Muoni, *L'antico stato di Romano di Lombardia*. Milano, 1871). Gualandi might have met Iseo through the 'Riformati'.

[49] Op. cit., the introductory letter from the editor, Giuseppe Iseo, and Lib 1, cap. 1, p, 3

to equal or even surpass his great precursor.[50] What Aristotle says about our education as social beings, about the development of our ability to live together, our talent for citizenship (*ad civilem formandum artificem*) only requires filling out . In Gualandi's view this replenishment was dearly needed at the end of the sixteenth century. There were conflicts all over Europe. Rulers forgot their duties. Guided by anger and avidity, Kings led their subjects, for no particular reason, into ruin. In fact these rulers are sick, insane. Their minds have to be cured. According to Gualandi, philosophy can, and has to, bring relief here. In *De civili facultate,* he describes the way in which the goal of politics, a peaceful and prosperous society, can be realised. To be more precise, Gualandi finds the *Ethics* wanting in instruction regarding right, decency, virtue, dignity, honour, faith and trust. Without these there can be no well functioning society. Gualandi addresses matters of public interest here, which are therefore indispensable to all. He aims to teach his readers how to attune the powers of the soul in such a way as to result in a unity aiming at tranquility of the soul (*animi tranquilitas*), and a constitution '*ad bene beateque vivendum'*.[51] Now, as an *ars* the *civilis facultas* is not supposed to supply, like *scientia*, knowledge of truth, purely theoretical knowledge, but is meant to procure applied knowledge in the form of a plan of action that will allow us to realise the goal of politics.[52] In that regard, Aristotle's work is too abstract. Gualandi therefore sees it as his task to give concrete form to Aristotle's schematic overview. He wants to add the detail required for practical application and thus concretise Aristotle's abstractions.[53] All in all this had to

[50] 'At verò, cùm Philofophus ille fumma rerum tantummodo faftigia delibarit, Auctor nofter ADOVARDVS GVALANDVS EPISCOPVS non tàm illius imitationem, quàm emulationem inftituens, hos ingenti labore libros varia doctrina, fummi ingenij pleniffimos condidit, quibus ea preclariffimis vel inuentis, vel iudicijs difputauit: vt inde non modò infignem quandam ad Veterum volumina factam fuiffe acceffionem; fed nihil admodum iam in arte morum vniuerfa praterea requiri poffe videatur'. (See letter from the editor.)

[51] Op. cit., Lib. 3, cap. 10, p. 63.

[52] 'Quámobrem , tradita à nonnullis artis definitio rationi confona videtur, nempe ad finem aliquem humanæ vitæ vtilem tendentium præceptorum congeries. Quamuis pro refpectuum diuerfitate, diuerfas admittat definitiones , quæ quidem, vt sint exactae, non minùs refpicere oportet poteftatem, quæ cognofcit, quàm quæ operatur'; cùm fit cognofcitiuæ partis virtus, quatenus effectricem ad finem aliquem dirigit, quo à fcientia differt, quæ in veri cognitione terminatur, Idcirco Ariftoteles vtrumque complexus, artem effe dicit habitum rerum faciendarum cum vera ratione' (op. cit., Lib. 16, cap. 1, p. 333; see also op. cit., Lib. 8. cap. 1, p. 146; Lib. 10, cap. 5, p. 193).

[53] 'HACTENVS non folùm , quæ ad errores in agendo fpectant, expofuimus,verùm etiam, quæ ad præcepta in genere attinet, eadem , quæ Ariftoteles,profecutifumus. Ille enim dicit agendum effe,vt oportet, & vbi, quando, & quantum, [aliaq .huiufmodi;] nos verò fpectandum finem dicimus, artificem, fubiectú, officium, locumq. Ac tempus, & omnino quæcumq. ad motum abfoluendum funt neceffaria. Quæ cum ijs, quæ ab eo dicuntur, fere conueniũt, præterquàm quòd ille nihil deniq. præcipere videtur, quod non cæteris quoq. artibus cómune fit, & logica potius prȩcepta tradidiffe cenferi poteft, quàm propria ciuilis artifici' (Lib. 5, cap. 2, 88).

result in a set of step-by-step instructions regarding how we are to act. Such instruction was all the more necessary, in Gualandi's view, since the moral virtues are not, as Aristotle falsely claimed, products of the intellect and of the intellectual desire, that is, the will, but dwell in the sensitive desire. They are not naturally given but must be developed through a long process of habit formation. Precisely with a view to this, there was, according to Gualandi, a need for a practical implementation of the *Ethica Nicomachea* so that it could be used as a handbook for everyday life. A guide, as practical as the handbooks written by the Stoics, albeit not in the form of a loosely arranged collection of aphorisms but as a methodically organised, detailed, all-encompassing overview.[54]

7. The structure of *De civili facultate*

To accord with Gualandi's view of political philosophy, *De civili facultate* consists of two parts: the first concerns man as an individual, the second, man as a member of a community.[55] In Book I, Gualandi discusses the question of the highest good. The next four sections, Books II to V, cover man as such, which in fact means an exposition of moral psychology. In Book V, one of the most interesting, Gualandi gives an overview of the errors to which we can fall prey both in our actions in general and in a way that is classified according to our faculties, that is, will, desire and temperament. In addition, he discusses how these errors can be prevented or what can be done about them. All these errors are just as many points of attention for the educator. Man as a social being constitutes the theme of the next eleven parts, i.e., Books VI to XVI. Books VI and VII address society in general, its nature, necessity, its origin and its foundation. This constitutes, according to Gualandi, an important addition to the *Ethica Nicomachea*.[56] The theme of books VIII and IX is the philosophy of law. Gualandi, like Francis Bacon, explored the possibility of justice as a universal foundation of law, and in that connection the relationship between justice and virtue.[57] Remarkable since around 1600, this was not a question for most of their

[54] Gualandi discusses the Stoic's views not just to make Aristotle's seem more illustrious by comparison, but heunequivocally mentions their strengths, such as the fact that they pay more attention to particulars and to specific cases than the Peripatetics. And the fact that Zeno, for example, teaches us a lot about political and moral philosophy. See op. cit., 88, 2. At the same time, he criticises them for not stating rules. Op. cit., 79. Cf. Kraye (2002).

[55] Many writers divided ethics into three parts: ethics, economy and politics. Propagators of a bi-partition of moral philosophy were Vermigli, Zwinger, Simone Simoni, Giphanius, Piccart, Waele, and Accoramboni (see *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 318, note 53).

[56] 'Siquidem nullus in ijs de societatibus fermo habetur, quo fit, vt neque de iure, & honeftate, neque de virtute, & dignitate, neque de honore, & fide, alijsque innumeris, quæ focietates ipfas comitantur, ex fuis principijs quicquam demonftrent' (op. cit., Liber primus, praefatio, p. 3).

[57] See *The Works of Francis Bacon*. Volume the seventh containing *De augmentis scientiarum.* Vol. II. London, 1815: XXVII *The doctrine of Universal justice, or the fountains of equity*, 255–290.

contemporaries. In Books X to XIV, Gualandi discusses the notions of virtue, honour and fame, that is, the qualifications which a ruler or magistrate can and has to acquire by acting virtuously, in order to perpetuate a peaceful and prosperous society. The last two parts of *De civili facultate* are dedicated to dignity, as the complement of virtue. Building a community requires, writes Gualandi, probably following the Stoic, Seneca, the will to give and the will to receive.[58] One who gives is virtuous while one who knows how to receive has dignity. Thus virtue and dignity are the complementary pillars of society.

8. A guide to happiness

Gualandi primarily had the educator in mind with this book. Moral virtues are habitual acts aiming at the good. Aristotle rightly asserted that one does not acquire those habits, as Socrates seemed to think, merely through knowledge of the virtues. However, nor do you cultivate them, as Aristotle thinks, only through laws.[59] After all, man does good, helps his fellow man, not because the law prescribes it, but driven by humanity and attracted by the beauty of virtue (*honestas*).[60] The principles of the civil art exist naturally and are therefore easy to know.[61] Education consists of introducing the pupil to the good and thus evoking the desire for it. That desire is crucial because it alone will lead to the required action becoming a habit. This process must be repeated until the pupil has overcome errors in this regard and until a good habit is formed, a good behavioural disposition. Once those habits have been formed, the pupil, guided by justice and virtue, will be ready to perfect himself, that is, to attain happiness.[62] The educator must therefore rouse his pupil to the pursuit of humanity and virtue. That aspiration characterises the true citizen, the true community member. Only with individuals raised in this way will it be possible to form a well-functioning community. To Gualandi, the *civilis facultas* is nothing less than a guide to happiness.

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[58] See op. cit., Lib. 6, cap. 14 , 15 and Lib. 12, cap. 5. Gualandi's source was probably Seneca, *De beneficiis*. Cf. Cicero, *De officiis*, I, 20.

[59] See op. cit., Lib. 10, cap. 9, 201.

[60] '... à nobis alibi demonstratum eſt, bonum virum legibus fieri non poſſe, neque leges omnia imperare, neque iuſtitiam vniuerſalem eſſe vniuerſam virtutem. Non enim cogere ciues, niſi ut ea agant, ſine quibus ciuilis ſocietas conſeruari non poteſt. Qua rerum agendarum menſura contenti non ſunt boni viri, qui humanitatis vi impulsi, & honeſtatis pulchritudine attracti plurima ad aliorum commodum agunt, quæ ciuilium legum terminis, præceptiſque non continentur; quippe quibus nihil omnino præter ipſum ius curæ ſit' (ibid.).

[61] 'Huius autem facultatis principia, cum natura conſtene, & ea in ſe ipſo quilibet optime ſentiat, vel puero ipſi haud difficilia cognitu ſorc, & nequaquam durum ea admittere arbitramur' (op. cit. Lib. 10, cap. 10, 202).

[62] 'Agibilis igitur boni cognitio, ciuilis facultatis explicatione tradetur, qua docebitur puer, tum quomodo ſoli ſibi, tum quomodo in cæterorum hominum ſocietatibus, præſertim iuridica, & benefica, & in conuentionibus degendum ſit; vt iure, honeſtateque ducibus, eam felicitatem, ad quam à natura, ſummoque opifice genitus eſt, adipiſcatur' (Lib. 10, cap. 10, 202).

9. Epilogue

As has already been said, after the seventeenth century, Gualandi's book falls into oblivion. His name is only mentioned in Tiraboschi's history of Italian philosophy from the sixteenth century.[63] In the other histories of philosophy, especially those written after the eighteenth century, Gualandi's name is conspicuous by its absence.[64] Until the second half of the nineteenth century his name is mentioned in several encyclopaedias,[65] and then, Gualandi and his work, *De civili facultate*, are no longer mentioned, until recently, when, at the close of the twentieth century his name appeared once again in a philosophical reference work.[66]

[63] See note 39. Tiraboschi presented his history as a supplement of *Jacobi Bruckeri Historia critica philosophiae a mundi incunabulis ad nostram usque aetatem deducta* (Lipsiae,1741–1744 et 1767). Already here, Gualandi is no longer mentioned.

[64] Auction catalogues suggest that halfway through the eighteenth century Gualandi's book was hard to get. See Catalogus *Bibliothecae luculentissimae, et exquisitissimis ac rarissimis ... libris* ... quorum auctio publica fiet ... per ... Joannen Swart. Den Haag, 1741; *Bibliotheca anonymiana sive catalogus continens exquisitissimos & rarissimos libros* ... Isaacum Beauregard, 1743.

[65] See *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexikon*. C. Jöcher. Zweyter Theil. Leipzig, 1750; *The dictionary of biographical reference.* Lawrence B. Phillips. 1871. London, p. 461. See further, note 39.

[66] In *Syllabus auctorum*. Vol. 9 van Risse, Wilhelm, *Bibliographica philosophica vetus: repertorium generale systematicum operum philosophicorum usque ad annum MDCCC typis impressorum*, Hildesheim. G. Olms, 1998, there is mention of 'Adovardus Gualandus (fl. 1598) episcopus Caesenae' (p. 131).

Sebastiano Franci: A Forgotten Philosopher, Enlightener and Feminist

Wolfgang Rother

I.

When we are asked which philosophers had the most lasting influence on the thinking of the European Enlightenment, the first authors that come to mind are Voltaire and Rousseau, Montesquieu and Condillac, Diderot and d'Holbach, La Mettrie and Helvétius, Maupertuis and d'Alembert, Locke as an important precursor and Hume as a central figure, Thomas Reid and of course Adam Smith, then Christian Wolff and especially Kant or Lessing and Moses Mendelssohn, authors from the French, English and German-speaking cultural areas where the centres of the European Enlightenment were located. France undoubtedly played a leading role. The French word *philosophe* was also synonymous with enlightener in the eighteenth century.[1] But philosophy of the Italian Enlightenment? We are, of course, inclined to answer that there was such a thing, just as there was Enlightenment in Spain and Portugal. But on the map of the European Enlightenment, these countries were on the periphery. They were and are considered — not unlike the countries of Scandinavia, Central and Eastern Europe in this respect — to be resonant spaces rather than centres of the European Enlightenment. For this reason, research into the philosophy of the Italian Enlightenment is still largely doomed to a shadowy existence.[2]

If we are then asked which Italian philosophers of the eighteenth century are thinkers worth mentioning, Vico certainly comes to mind. Or, to stay in Naples, Antonio Genovesi and Gaetano Filangieri. And last but not least, Pietro Verri and Cesare Beccaria in Milan, which, along with Naples, was not only an important resonance space for the ideas of the Enlightenment but was also definitely involved in the development of such ideas itself. Beccaria is known above all as an opponent

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1 For the almost synonymous use of the expressions *'philosophe'* and 'Enlightenment philosopher' and on the concept of the *philosophe* as a 'circumscription of the Enlightenment ideal of life' in France, cf. Jochen Schlobach, 'Zum Bild des *philosophe* in der französischen Aufklärung', in *Die Teilung der Vernunft. Philosophie und empirisches Wissen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Manfred Hahn, Hans Jörg Sandkühler (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1982), pp. 62–77, cf. pp. 62, 70.

2 More recent attempts to liberate Italian philosophy of the Enlightenment from its shadowy existence include the monograph by Wolfgang Rother, *La maggiore felicità possibile. Untersuchungen zur italienischen Philosophie der Aufklärung in Nord- und Mittelitalien* (Basel: Schwabe, 2005) or the *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie. Die Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 3: *Italien*, ed. Johannes Rohbeck, Wolfgang Rother (Basel: Schwabe, 2011).

of capital punishment and was read throughout Europe,[3] Pietro Verri, after all, inspired Kant[4] and was the central figure of a Milanese circle of Enlightenment thinkers, the Accademia dei Pugni and the founder of a short-lived but high-circulation journal, *Il Caffè* (1764–1766). The authors of this journal wanted to liberate philosophy from its academic context and establish it as a socially and politically relevant science for a broad middle-class audience, thus propagating the ideas of the Enlightenment and initiating practical reforms.[5] Among the authors of *Il Caffè* was Sebastiano Franci, who contributed six articles — just fifty of the eight hundred pages that comprise the two volumes of the journal in the critical edition.[6] By way of comparison, Pietro Verri published nineteen articles in *Il Caffè* during the same period; the first series of the *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Pietro Verri,* which brings together his published writings, comprises several thousand pages in six volumes; whereas there is only one book by Franci, comprising two hundred pages. In this respect, Franci, as a philosopher of the Italian Enlightenment, can be said to be on the periphery of the periphery. Whether rightly or not cannot and should not be decided in this essay. Just as, as we learn from Hegel in the preface to the *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, philosophy* is 'its own time comprehended in thought', so too is the view of the *history of philosophy* shaped by its time. It is all the more surprising that Franci is still one of the forgotten and underestimated thinkers today, although he published an essay in *Il Caffè*, 'Difesa delle donne', for which he would have deserved a place in the ancestral gallery of modern feminism. The 'Difesa delle donne' is, in fact, the only text by Franci that — unlike his other writings — has at least been taken note of in historical research.[7] After all, Franci's *Caffè* article on women is 'one of

[3] For an overview of Beccaria's reception, see W. Rother, *La maggiore felicità possibile*, op. cit., pp. 266–87.

[4] Cf. *Pietro Verri, Immanuel Kant: Sul piacere e sul dolore. Immanuel Kant discute Pietro Verri*, ed. Piero Giordanetti (Milano: Unicopli, 1998).

[5] Cf. Wolfgang Rother, 'Publizistik im Dienste der Aufklärung. Zum philosophischen Selbstverständnis der Zeitschrift *Il Caffè*', in *Kulturen des Wissens im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ulrich Johannes Schneider (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 243–50.

[6] *Il Caffè 1764–1766*, seconda edizione riveduta, ed. Gianni Francioni, Sergio Romagnoli, 2 vols (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998), CLXXVIII, 1252 pp.

[7] Cf. Silke Segler-Meßner, *Zwischen Empfindsamkeit und Rationalität. Der Dialog der Geschlechter in der italienischen Aufklärung* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1998), cf. pp. 47–86; Perle Abbrugiati, 'L'accusateur accusé, le défenseur défendu: la "Défense des femmes" dans *Il Caffè*', in *Femmes italiennes*, 3 (1999), pp. 197–214, https://doi.org/10.4000/italies.2581; Rebecca Messbarger, 'Reforming the Female Class: *Il Caffè*'s "Defense of Women"', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 32, no. 3: *Constructions of Femininity* (1999), pp. 355–69; Silke Segler-Meßner, 'Der Begriff *bene comune* in der Diskussion über die Studien der Frauen', in *Beiträge zur Begriffsgeschichte der italienischen Aufklärung*, ed. Helmut C. Jacobs, Gisela Schlüter (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern etc.: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 91–117; W. Rother, *La maggiore felicità possibile*, op. cit., pp. 101–107 ('Der Geschlechterdiskurs').

the first texts in Europe to address the problem of the status of women in a medium that by its very nature is intended to appeal to a wide audience'.[8]

However, there is only a two-and-a-half-column entry on Franci's life and work in the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*[9] and a one-and-a-half-page account in the *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*.[10] In addition, there are scattered references in the critical edition of *Il Caffè*[11] and in the first volume of Franco Venturi's *Settecento riformatore*[12] as well as isolated and hardly noteworthy mentions in the context of the debates on monetary policy that took place in Italy in the eighteenth century.[13]

II.

Anna Paola Montanari has gathered the little information we have on the life of Sebastiano Franci.[14] Franci came from an old Palatine noble family based on Lake Maggiore and was born on 1st June 1715 in Pallanza, which is now a district of Verbania. His father ran a company dealing in wool and silk, which had already been founded in the seventeenth century, probably by Sebastiano's grandfather. After his marriage to Lavinia Prata (1747), who came from a Milanese noble family, he moved to the Lombard metropolis. Nothing is known about his education and studies. Montanari rules out the possibility that he studied law or medicine or trained as an engineer. That he studied theology or belonged to the clergy, as Messbarger and Abbrugiati assume, cannot be verified.[15] In any case, there are no reflections on theological topics or ecclesiastical questions in his writings. Where he acquired his profound economic, philosophical, and historical knowledge cannot be ascertained.

He participated in the broad debate on monetary and currency policy that took place in Italy in the middle of the eighteenth century.[16] To this end, in 1757

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8 P. Abbrugiati, 'L'accusateur accusé', op. cit., par. 1.

9 Anna Paola Montanari, 'Franci, Sebastiano', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani,* vol. 50 (1998), pp. 134–35.

10 Wolfgang Rother, 'Sebastiano Franci', in *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie,* op. cit., pp. 270–71.

11 *Il Caffè*, op. cit., cf. the 'Indice dei nomi', p. 1232 (34 entries).

12 Franco Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. 1: *Da Muratori a Beccaria* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1969, 1998), cf. the 'Indice dei nomi', p. 761 (7 entries).

13 *La riforma monetaria in Lombardia nella seconda metà del '700*, ed. Carlo Antonio Vianello, *Annali di Economia,* vol. 13, no. 2 (1938); *Economisti minori del '700 lombardo*, ed. Carlo Antonio Vianello (Milano: A. Giuffrè, 1942).

14 A. P. Montanari, 'Franci, Sebastiano', op. cit.

15 P. Abbrugiati, 'L'accusateur accusé', op. cit., par. 1, n. 1 refers to him as 'abbé', R. Messbarger, 'Reforming the Female Class', op. cit., p. 367, n. 16 as 'a learned prelate from an aristocratic Milanese family'.

16 Cf. F. Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, op. cit., pp. 443–552 ('Il dibattito sulle monete'); Massimo Amato, *Il bivio della moneta. Problemi monetari e pensiero del denaro nel Settecento italiano* (Milano: Egea, 1999).

he wrote 'Pensieri politici, civili ed economici in forma di sistema per regolamento delle monete nello stato di Milano';[17] the text, however, was not published until twelve years later under the title *La moneta, oggetto istorico, civile, e politico.*[18] In this work, Franci argues that the disorder caused by the various currencies in circulation could be remedied by declaring the fineness of the coins, but not by legislating the monetary value; rather, this should be freely constituted through trade relations.[19] Franci shows himself here not only as a practically oriented economic analyst, but also as a well-read and classically educated mind: he quotes not only authors such as Homer, Aristotle, Plutarch, Titus Livius, Bodin and Erasmus, but also thinkers such as Grotius, Pufendorf, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Hume.

Franci soon frequented the Accademia dei Pugni, founded by Pietro Verri in 1761, which formed the centre of the Milanese Enlightenment. Franci was by far the oldest there: Pietro Verri was thirteen, Beccaria twenty-three and Alessandro Verri twenty-six years younger than him. Between 1764 and 1766, the group around Pietro Verri published the journal *Il Caffè.* Franci, as mentioned, contributed six articles, which are the focus of the following study.

Franci was wealthy — thanks to his origins and thanks to the generous dowry that Lavinia Prata brought into the marriage — and does not seem to have been gainfully employed until the Habsburg government appointed him Inspector of the Mint of Milan and Mantua in 1771. He held this office only briefly, however, as he died three weeks after reaching the age of 57 on 20th June 1772.

III.

The first essay Franci published in *Il Caffè*, 'Dell'agricoltura', is devoted to Milanese economic policy.[20] Franci chooses the literary form of the dialogue. The names of the dialogue partners, Afranio and Cresippo, are probably allusions to figures of antiquity:[21] 'Afranio' to the Roman politician and consul Lucius Afranius, who lived in the first century B.C., and 'Cresippo' perhaps to 'Creso', Croesus,[22] who was king of Lydia in the sixth century B.C. and known for his immense wealth, whereas '-ippo', *hippos*, horse, could refer to agriculture. So, while Afranio stands

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17 MS Milano, Biblioteca Braidense, AH.IX.14.

18 [Sebastiano Franci,] *La moneta, oggetto istorico, civile, e politico. Parti due* (Milano: Giuseppe Galeazzi, 1769) (12), 198, (3) pp. The book was published anonymously. On the half title of the Austrian National Library's copy is added by hand 'Sebastiano Franzi'.

19 Cf. especially *ibid.*, Parte seconda, chap. 6, pp. 158–63: 'Sistema monetario più semplice'.

20 Sebastiano Franci, 'Dell'agricoltura. Dialogo. Afranio e Cresippo', in *Il Caffè,* op. cit., pp. 60–72. The dialogue appeared in vol. 1 (June 1764–May 1765), fol. 5–6. In the original version, all of Franci's contributions are signed with the abbreviation 'F.'.

21 Gianni Francioni and Sergio Romagnoli argue on the contrary that the names Afranio and Cresippo have 'no evident references to persons of antiquity' (*ibid.*, p. 1030).

22 It would also be possible, but from my point of view not very plausible, to connect 'Cresippo' with 'Crisippo', that is the Stoic Chrysippos of Soloi, but the dialogue figure does not represent Stoic positions.

for the politician, Cresippo is not only an expert on agriculture and agricultural issues, but someone who has recognised, or at least argues for, how important and fundamental agriculture is to the wealth of the state.

The question that the politician Afranio poses to the expert on agriculture is an economic-political one: Afranio asks Cresippo to explain to him 'how we can use agriculture, handicrafts [*arti*] and industry to redress the imbalance [*sbilancio*] from which our trade [*commercio*] suffers'.[23] If the question Afranio raises is not a genuinely philosophical one, it reflects the central practical concern of the Italian Enlightenment: the reform and improvement of the political-economic conditions of life.[24] In an anticipation of Marx's eleventh *Thesis on Feuerbach,* Enlightenment thinkers like Franci were not philosophers who interpreted the world, but those who wanted to change it.

In his answer to the question put to him, Cresippo deals only with agriculture — in this field he is an expert. Franci depicts him as a figure inspired by physiocratic thought, and in his dialogue he shines with agronomic and botanical expertise, both practical and theoretical. He cites the relevant recent and latest French, English and German works — Franci had already shown himself to be a profound specialist of political-economic literature in his book on money, which had not yet been published at the time.

What is Franci's issue, what is Cresippo arguing for? Even if agriculture in Lombardy does not need to fear comparison with other European regions, it can still be improved in many respects. However, 'progress in agriculture' is not only achieved through the management of arable land based on scientific knowledge, but above all through economic policy measures such as land consolidation for the purpose of optimising cultivation and the promotion of long-term leases, as well as through projects to increase the area under cultivation, specifically through the clearing and cultivation of heaths and marshes. Cresippo's main focus is on the application and utilisation of botanical and agro-economic knowledge, as well as the spread of agricultural science academies, as they already exist 'in many provinces of France, in Switzerland, in Tuscany, in Modena'.[25]

The initial question, namely how agriculture could contribute to 'redressing the imbalance from which our trade suffers', the dialogue partners largely lose sight of — Cresippo seems to be too caught up in his great detailed knowledge when he talks knowledgeably about the cultivation of rye, wheat, oats, spelt, wine, olives, peaches, plums, pears, figs, apples, flax, rape, turnips, nettles and tobacco. But at the very end of the dialogue, after Afranio has raised the question of whether Cresippo believes 'that fruits, herbs and plants from across the sea can thrive in our country', the problem of monocultures is discussed from an economic perspective. Cresippo argues that instead of using agricultural land for more cereals than the national population needs and thus being forced to sell superfluous raw material

[23] S. Franci, 'Dell'agricoltura', op. cit., p. 60.
[24] Cf. W. Rother, *La maggiore felicità possibile,* op. cit., pp. 345–46.
[25] S. Franci, 'Dell'agricoltura', op. cit., pp. 60–63.

abroad, it should be used to grow new crops that can provide raw materials for national manufacturers, thus increasing national wealth.[26]

IV.

Shortly after this dialogue on agriculture, Franci published his essay 'Alcuni pensieri politici',[27] which was also designed as a dialogue between Afranio and Cresippo and was originally to be published under the title 'La guerra senza sangue'. In his editorial work, Pietro Verri had reformulated the dialogue into a text that focused on general political and economic considerations and had therefore also deleted all references to the economic situation in Milan.[28] The original text had begun with Cresippo's question as to what was new, to which Afranio replied that it was assumed that the election of a king in Poland would take place without bloodshed.[29] As is well known, after the death of Augustus the Strong (1763), the Russian Empress Catherine the Great, in agreement with Frederick the Great — the Prussian-Russian Alliance Treaty was concluded in 1764 — saw to it that her lover Stanisław Antoni Poniatowski was elevated to the Polish throne in 1764, in order to bring Poland under Russian rule. Possibly Pietro Verri considered this issue politically sensitive, since Austria, under whose rule Milan then stood, had not been included in this decision-making process.

The published text begins with a definition of the purpose of the state that Franci had originally placed in the mouth of Cresippo, who — also with regard to 'Dell'agricoltura' — is Franci's *alter ego: 'Alla conservazione ed accrescimento della pubblica felicità sono naturalmente indirizzate le sollecitudini d'ogni corpo politico costituito dalla società degli uomini'*, 'The preservation and increase of public happiness is naturally the concern of every political body formed by the society of men'.[30] Franci intervenes here in a discussion of political philosophy that was not only central to the Italian Enlightenment, in which — along with freedom — public happiness was a leitmotif of political thought;[31] the discussion was also conducted

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26 *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 71.

27 Sebastiano Franci, 'Alcuni pensieri politici' in *Il Caffè*, op. cit., pp. 143–50. The essay appeared in vol. 1 (June 1764–May 1765), fol. 13.

28 Gianni Francioni, 'Storia editoriale del *Caffè*', in *Il Caffè*, op. cit., pp. CXXXIII–CXXXIV.

29 *Il Caffè*, op. cit., 'Apparato critico', p. 883.

30 S. Franci, 'Alcuni pensieri politici', op. cit., p. 143.

31 See generally, for example, *Gli italiani e Bentham. Dalla 'felicità pubblica' all'economia del benessere*, ed. Riccardo Faucci (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1982); Ulrich Dierse, 'Öffentliches Glück und anderes. Beobachtungen an einigen politisch-sozialen Begriffen der italienischen Aufklärung', in *Beiträge zur Begriffsgeschichte der italienischen Aufklärung*, ed. Helmut C. Jacobs, Gisela Schlüter (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern etc.: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 9–21; W. Rother, *La maggiore felicità possibile,* op. cit.; 'Felicità e libertà – concetti principali della filosofia politica dell'illuminismo italiano', in *Giornale di filosofia. Filosofia italiana*, no. 6 (maggio 2010), pp. 1–11; *Felicità pubblica e felicità privata nel Settecento,* ed. Anna Maria Rao (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2012).

in the Accademia dei Pugni: Pietro Verri had already published his *Meditazioni sulla felicità in* 1763, and the topic is present in quite a few articles of *Il Caffè.*

To secure the happiness of its citizens, the state protects its cities with walls, it has built fortresses and armed numerous citizens. International security, however, according to Franci, is only possible when there is a 'balance of powers' (*equilibrio del potere*) — Franci takes up a leading concept of the political discussion of the eighteenth century here —[32] when European nations form defensive alliances 'in order to weaken powers that are too big and by which they could possibly be oppressed'.[33] In contrast to the wars of antiquity, which in Franci's view were less 'political wars' than wars in which nations wanted to prove their superiority in terms of their heroic virtues, they were less concerned with conquest than with their own honour and the humiliation of the enemy.[34]

A change in this war policy and the motivation to wage wars had occurred in the thirteenth century, when Italian cities such as Florence, Pisa, the Amalfi, Venice, and Genoa, and later also the Flemish, Dutch and English metropolises, the Hanseatic cities and France had pursued a policy of expansion in the course of scientific and technical development and economic upswing, which permanently threatened the balance of power.[35]

Franci counters this policy of expansion with a resolute policy of peace. War has achieved nothing other than 'the shedding of human blood in torrents without achieving the desired intention'.[36] From an economic point of view, Franci says, wars are not profitable; wars incur immense costs and are a loss-making enterprise. From a human point of view, they are a disaster: Alexander and Caesar would have destroyed more than two million people and left only pain and horror to the conquered peoples as well as to their own. Franci concluded from these considerations that — in view of the purpose of the state defined at the beginning — peace was the prerequisite for the 'lasting happiness of states' (*felicità durevole dei Stati*).[37]

Against this background, Franci develops a concept of peace that is succinctly expressed in the original title of the essay, 'La guerra senza sangue'. The 'war without blood' is a metaphor with which Franci marks a change of perspective. If it is assumed that public happiness consists in wealth, then poverty is the greatest enemy of humanity.[38] The 'most appropriate weapons' in the fight against poverty

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[32] Hans Fenkse, 'Gleichgewicht', in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), vol. 2, pp. 959–96, here pp. 971–75.
[33] S. Franci, 'Alcuni pensieri politici', op. cit., p. 143.
[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 143–44.
[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 144–45.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 145.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 146.
[38] *Ibid.*

are 'the sciences, craftsmanship, industry and commerce' (*le scienze, le arti, l'industria ed il commercio*).[39]

For Franci — here he returns to the theme of 'Dell'agricoltura' — agriculture is considered the 'basis of commerce and wealth', entirely in the sense of the Physiocrats and Richard Cantillon, on whose *Essai sur la nature du commerce en général* (1755) he draws. The raw materials that the earth provides and the creation of wealth through the 'labour of men' — these are the 'weapons' with which the nation defends itself against its enemies, against poverty.[40] War, Franci concludes, is moved from the bloody battlefield to the field of economics and trade: the old wars destroy wealth, the 'war of industry' (*guerra d'industria*) brings happiness and prosperity to the people and prevents the bloody wars.[41]

V.

The short essay on luxury products, for which gold and silver are processed,[42] inserts itself into the discussion that took place in the eighteenth century regarding the moral and economic dimensions of luxury.[43] In this essay, Franci takes a position that fundamentally values luxury positively and critically examines the common moral and economic objections to luxury. In the first sentence of his essay, he refers to the consensus of 'politicians' according to which luxury and the luxury products produced in domestic factories, which neither corrupt morals nor harm health, must be promoted by 'wise legislators'. But the luxury products of gold and silver spinning, and such products as are gilded or silver-plated would be judged negatively by most economists, since the precious metals, when they adorn the churches or the mansions of the rich, are withdrawn from commerce. In this respect they are useless — useless in the same way as gold and silver lying in the mines — and above all useless because that gold and silver can no longer be used as a general medium of exchange. For it seems plausible that the circulation of money contributes essentially to the 'happiness of a nation' (*felicità d' una nazione*): if a lot of money is in circulation, production is increased, 'the merchant becomes more courageous, the worker more industrious, even the farmer goes to the plough with more joy'.[44]

Franci, however, does not share this view and, in contrast, wants to show that the luxury from the gold and silver processing factories is by no means pernicious for a nation, but rather brings it considerable advantages. He based his argument

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[39] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

[42] Sebastiano Franci, 'Del lusso delle manifatture d'oro e d'argento', in *Il Caffè,* op. cit., pp. 494–98. The essay appeared in vol. 2 (June 1765–May 1766), fol. 8–9.

[43] On the discussion in Italy, see Cosimo Perrotta, 'Il "lusso" negli economisti italiani del Settecento, in *Gli italiani e Bentham. Dalla "felicità pubblica" all'economia del benessere*, ed. Riccardo Faucci, vol. 1 (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1982) pp. 171–89.

[44] S. Franci, 'Del lusso', op. cit., pp. 494–95.

on the third of Hume's *Political Discourses* (1752) — 'Of Money', where the theory that increasing money circulation leads to a nation's prosperity is refuted. Rather, high money circulation would increase the prices of goods and food. The high price of commodities, though a necessary consequence of the abundance of money, does not follow directly from the abundance of money, but it is necessary that money circulate for a time to have this effect. The interval between the acquisition of the money and the price increase is favourable to the population and the industry.[45]

On the basis of this relationship analysed by Hume, Franci argues that the processing of gold and silver extends this advantageous interval for the national economy and thus promotes industry. By limiting the use of these precious metals as money through the processing of gold and silver, demonetisation and thus inflation are efficiently counteracted. By processing precious metals into luxury goods, nothing is actually lost, because these goods secure a lucrative income for the goldsmith, the embroiderer or the weaver, because the trader remunerates them for their work in gold and silver coins. The merchant now sells the luxury goods at a profit to the rich man, who has more money than he needs to satisfy his basic needs. So, when the rich man indulges in his luxury, when he spends superfluous money on useless things, he harms no one.[46]

Franci thus rehabilitates both the miser and the collector of luxury goods, types of people towards whom one hardly harbours sympathy, especially since miserliness is considered morally reprehensible, even a mortal sin. Franci judges the miser and the collector of treasures as positive because both serve the public good and promote public happiness without wanting to. This idea, however, comes from Alessandro Verri, who edited the article for publication;[47] in Franci's original text, the argument went in a different direction, distinguishing between the state and private accumulation of wealth: Franci had in fact written that accumulation of treasures (*tesoreggiare*) was necessary for a prudent and clear-sighted sovereign, but not for a private person 'to whom it serves either as an incentive to a thousand dissolutions or as a foundation for shabby avarice' (*cui serve o d'incentivo a mille dissolutezze o di fondamento ad una sordida avarizia*).[48] In the published formulation — *'Gli avari, i tesoreggiatori sono viziosi e obbrobriosi uomini, che servono però mirabilmente al ben pubblico'*, 'The miserly, the treasure collectors, are vicious and odious people, who nevertheless serve the public good admirably' — the original moral condemnation of private treasure collecting is reinterpreted in terms of the argument of Bernard de Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714): *Private Vices Publick Benefits*, as the book's subtitle puts it. The 'Public Benefits', after all, are owed to the 'vicious and vile people': they provide an income for the craftsmen who make the gold and silver jewellery, they offer an exclusive comfort to the rich, and they make the funds they temporarily remove from circulation

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 495–96.
46 *Ibid.*, pp. 496–97.
47 G. Francioni, 'Storia editoriale del *Caffè*', op. cit., pp. CXXXIX–CXL.
48 *Il Caffè*, op. cit., 'Apparato critico', p. 927.

available for future needs. Luxury products for which gold and silver are processed, it is concluded, neither spoil morals nor harm health, but have exclusively beneficial economic effects.[49]

VI.

Franci's reflections on the question of 'whether trade corrupts customs and morals' also belong in this thematic area.[50] His answer is even more resolute than in the case of the question of gold and silver processing — he points to the consensus of contemporary political authors that trade was 'the most important means of politics' because it brought wealth and 'happiness' (*felicità*), which is to say, wealth to the states.[51] The judgement of the ancient authors — Tacitus and Caesar are mentioned — was quite different:[52] they equated trade with corruption. Trade therefore enjoyed a bad reputation because it directed people's striving towards trivial and void things and thus distracted them from the sublime. Franci denies that trade corrupts morals. Rather, he argues that trade, as the 'image of the heavenly fire', animates culture and civilisation (*la copia di quel fuoco celeste fatto per animare le belle anime*) because it creates wealth. It is true, as Franci again argues in allusion to Plato's doctrine of ideas, that gold and silver 'are only an image of true wealth', but these images, as Franci concedes, can certainly cause people to chase after luxury and tend towards wastefulness, or that their hearts harden and they become miserly.[53] Since these views are also shared by modern authors — Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* (1748) and Montaigne's *Essais* (1580) are mentioned —[54] Franci feels compelled to refute them.

Before proceeding to his refutation, he presents himself as an enlightened philosopher who does not rely on authorities but on his own reason, on the critical examination of other views: 'The reason of others must first be approved by our own inner feeling [*l'approvazione dell'interno nostro sentimento*], and then it becomes our own reason'. Franci deduces the necessity of action from the sociality of human beings and their different talents and preconditions. There are great differences among people in terms of strength, mind, and body, in the face of which the individual, left to his own devices, recognises his weakness and his neediness.

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49 S. Franci, 'Del lusso', op. cit., p. 498.

50 Sebastiano Franci, 'Osservazioni sulla questione se il commercio corrompa i costumi e la morale', in *Il Caffè*, op. cit., pp. 655–61. The essay appeared in vol. 2 (June 1765–May 1766), fol. 24.

51 S. Franci, 'Osservazioni', op. cit., p. 655.

52 Tac., *Germ.*, 21; Caes., *Gall.,* 6,21. Franci apparently takes the references from Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des loix* (1748), liv. 20 — thus the note in *Il Caffè,* op. cit., p. 1155, where the editors point out the inaccuracy of Franci's references.

53 S. Franci, 'Osservazioni', op. cit., pp. 655–56.

54 Franci, *ibid.*, p. 656 refers in the footnotes to Montesquieu, *Esprit des loix,* liv. 20, chap. 2 ('De l'esprit du commerce') and to Montaigne, *Essais,* to. 2, pag. 372 (it is the chapter, 'Des loix somptuaires' in liv. 1, chap. 43, cf. *Il Caffè*, op. cit., p. 1156, n. 4).

The individual is dependent on the help of others and thus experiences that he can only develop his strength in exchange with others. Thus, people develop the 'love of trade' (*l'amore al commercio*), which regulates the exchange of goods. Trade is thus indispensable for human society.[55]

Against this background, the view that trade corrupts morals seems absurd,[56] especially since, according to Plato, wealth is the highest good,[57] and wealth, according to Franci, is produced by trade. Franci also does not accept the differentiation between 'necessary trade' and trade in 'superfluous things and luxury goods'. Evil does not lie in goods and 'innocent trade', but in 'human passions'. For Franci, there is absolutely no connection between trade and evil, between the wealth gained through trade and the vices of avarice and extravagance.[58] On the contrary, the most hospitable and humane nations are those that trade. Trade makes man a 'citizen of the world' (*cittadino del mondo*). Through trade, poverty is fought.[59] It is not wealth that is to be feared, but poverty.[60] The elimination of poverty is the prerequisite for culture and civilisation: *'Tolti d'intorno gl'incomodi d'una vergognosa povertà, non ha lo spirito umano ostacoli ad avere nobili sentimenti della gloria'*, 'Once the inconveniences of shameful poverty are eliminated, the human spirit no longer has any obstacle to the noble feelings of glory'.[61] 'First comes food, then comes morals', as Macheath later put it in Brecht's *Threepenny Opera.*

VII.

The call for a critical attitude towards authority, the recommendation to rely on intuition, the 'inner feeling' in examining the views of others, and to arrive at a sound judgement by thinking for oneself, by means of one's 'own reason',[62] is deepened in a short essay in which Franci urges caution with respect to 'opinions'.[63] This is the only text that is not devoted to a question from the fields of practical or applied philosophy, in which moral, economic or political issues are not discussed, but in which the question of truth is central. The key words are found in the first sentence of the essay — *'Chi ama la verità ha da esser indifferente nel ricevere o rigettare una opinione che gli venga proposta, sino a che per mezzo di un accurato esame non venga a conoscere la solidità dei fondamenti sopra de' quali essa si sostiene'*, 'He who loves truth must be indifferent as to whether he accepts or rejects

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55 S. Franci, 'Osservazioni', op. cit., p. 656.
56 *Ibid.*, p. 657.
57 Franci, *ibid.*, refers in the footnote to Plat., *Gorg.*; the relevant passage is 452 c–d.
58 S. Franci, 'Osservazioni', op. cit., pp. 657, 660.
59 *Ibid.*, p. 658.
60 *Ibid.*, p. 660.
61 *Ibid.*, p. 658.
62 *Ibid.*, p. 656.
63 S. Franci, 'Della precauzione contro le opinioni', in *Il Caffè*, op. cit., pp. 671–77. The essay appeared in vol. 2 (June 1765–May 1766), fol. 25–26.

an opinion presented to him, so long as he does not find out by careful examination how solid are the foundations on which it rests'.[64] What drives the enlightener and philosopher is truth, and he who loves truth must be indifferent to opinion, and must first abstain from judgement — Husserl will later call this *epoché.* The philosopher is not concerned with accepting or rejecting an opinion, but solely with its critical examination — not only of the opinion, but also of its foundations. But instead of 'thinking for themselves' (*a pensar da se stessi*), many people adopt the opinions of others unchecked and in 'puerile credulity' (*credulità puerile*). Credulity leads to 'blindly believing every opinion instead of clarifying it through examination'. In this context, Franci addresses the reluctance of many people to critically engage with the 'mainstream', 'the common opinion of the century, of the place where they live', under the title of Alcuin's dictum that the voice of the people is God's voice.[65]

What Franci then argues against is book learning. He takes an ambivalent stance on this: books are a great support for our minds, they provide the 'raw material' (*materia prima*) of thought, but they also prevent people from thinking for themselves. Those who read must exercise the same caution as against prejudice, because books contain many errors and falsehoods. The view held in books must be empirical, 'verified by experience' (*essere verificati colla esperienza*). Book knowledge is secondary knowledge, the appeal to authorities is 'borrowed knowledge' (*scienza imprestata*).[66] In the remaining pages of the essay, Franci uses examples taken mainly from ancient literature to show what untruths and unbelievable stories can be found in many books, and how authors copied from each other — 'without verification, without criticism and without experience' (*senza esame senza critica e senza esperienza*).[67]

VIII.

Whether Franci, when he wrote his 'Difesa delle donne',[68] knew the 'Defensa de la mujeres', which Benito Jerónimo Feijoo had published in 1726 in the first volume of his *Teatro crítico,*[69] is not known, but it is by no means impossible, since the 'Defensa' was then available in French[70] and the entire *Teatro crítico* was

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64 *Ibid.*, p. 671.

65 *Ibid.*, pp. 671, 672.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 672.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 673.

68 Sebastiano Franci, 'Difesa delle donne', in *Il Caffè*, op. cit., pp. 245–56. The essay appeared in vol. 1 (June 1764–May 1765), fol. 22.

69 The 'Defensa de la mujeres' appeared as Discurso 16 in Benito Jerónimo Feijoo, *Theatro Crítico Universal, o discursos varios, en todo género de materias, para desengaño de errores comunes,* vol. 1 (Madrid: Lorenzo Francisco Mojados, 1726), pp. 313–80.

70 *Défense ou éloge des femmes*, trans. Nicolas-Gabriel Vaquette d'Hermilly (Paris: Pierre Clément, 1743); 'Apologie des femmes', trans. Abbé Prévost, in *Journal Étranger* (Paris, Juillet 1755), pp. 208–37.

accessible in French and Italian translations.[71] The fact that Franci's 'Difesa' appeared in *Il Caffè* is probably due not least to the journal's avowed orientation in support of women, since Beccaria, who is regarded as one of the most important figures of the Italian Enlightenment, will explicitly ascribe philosophical competence to women in his essay 'De' fogli periodici', which precedes the second volume of the journal, and attribute to women a special ability as teachers of virtue — in contrast to men, who often oppose truth. For Beccaria, women are the true philosophers thanks to their better natural disposition towards the essential objects of philosophy, namely truth and virtue, compared to men. And as such, they are the preferred audience of a philosophical periodical dedicated to the Enlightenment: *'Felice quel filosofo che dalle amabili donne sarà letto'*, 'Happy is the philosopher who is read by amiable women'.[72]

The first, long section of the article in which Franci presents and analyses the current situation of women in Europe may at first glance reproduce the common gender stereotypes.[73] He seems to join in the 'endless complaints about women' who lead otiose, inert lives and are in no way useful to society. This is not only true of the noble women, who are characterised either by 'extreme laziness' (*pigrizia estrema*) or by vain pleasure-seeking: they get up late and spend all their time combing their hair, after dinner they go for a walk and in the evening they are bored at the theatre. Or they hang around in town, gossiping and chatting, attending balls, and wanting to be seen in society. Similarly negative is the picture Franci paints of the 'plebeian women', that is, the common women of the lower classes: They shirk housework, they flirt and coquet, and they dwell extensively on their beauty.[74]

But in the next section, the accusation of women tips over into an accusation against men, that is, against the patriarchal system shaped by men. *'Con noi stessi bisogna lagnarsene, perché noi stessi loro additiamo questa tenebrosa strada e le costringiamo a battere questo fangoso sentiere'*, 'We ourselves must complain about this because we ourselves put them on this dark road and force them to take this muddy path'.[75] He analyses the causes of women's alleged gendered behaviour

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71 *Théâtre critique ou Discours différens sur toutes sortes de matières pour détruire les erreurs communes*, trans. Nicolas-Gabriel Vaquette d'Hermilly (Paris: Pierre Clément, 1742–1743); *Teatro critico universale per disingano del pubblico su i comuni errori*, trans. Marcantonio Franconi (Roma: Pagliarini, 1744).

72 Cesare Beccaria, 'De' fogli periodici', in *Il Caffè*, op. cit., pp. 412–13.

73 This is the interpretation of S. Segler-Meßner: *Zwischen Empfindsamkeit und Rationalität*, op. cit., pp. 73–76; 'Der Begriff des *bene comune*', op. cit., pp. 106–108; on this, see W. Rother, *La maggiore felicità possibile,* op. cit., p. 104, n. 138. P. Abbrugiati, 'L'accusateur accusé', op. cit., par. 3, aptly speaks of a 'surprise effect' and a 'cruel caricature' that 'seems to refute the title', with which Franci succeeds in 'seducing the most misogynistic readers' in order to ultimately show that it is men — that is to say patriarchal social structures — who are responsible for what women are accused of.

74 S. Franci, 'Difesa delle donne', op. cit., pp. 245–46.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 246.

and laments the neglect of their upbringing and education. They are denied the study of science and fine arts. *'Diamo loro i lacci per impedire i voli del loro spirito, imprigioniamo loro il cuore, affinché non sentano l'attrazione della virtù'*, 'We — and this is the men, the patriarchy — put shackles on them to prevent the flight of their mind, we lock up their heart so that they do not feel the attraction of virtue'.[76] Finally, Franci reminds us that the education of children is the responsibility of both parents. The argument concludes with a sentence that succinctly deconstructs gender stereotypes, gender stereotypes based on 'false opinions', men's prejudices about the nature of women, which hinder their possibilities for development: *'I vizi sono degli individui e non del sesso'*, 'Vices are a matter of the individual and not of sex'.[77] What Poullain de la Barre asserted as a rationalist about the sexlessness of reason — *'L'Esprit n'a point de sexe'* [78] — Franci reformulates for the realm of morality.

Franci's change of perspective, which is now directed at men and mutates the 'defence of women' into a critique of 'male' behaviour, leads to a critique of what we would now call the sexist view of women, which reduces them to their appearance, their beauty. Franci calls beauty the 'most graceful spectacle' that nature has to offer, but beauty is only perfected through virtue and education.[79] For this, he invokes Montaigne, who attributed to women a quick and sharp mind, and to a profound philosopher — Malebranche is meant — who attributed to them imagination and good taste.[80] As evidence of the intellectual qualities of the 'graceful and educated woman', he outlines the achievements of three Milanese contemporaries, although he does not mention them by name.[81] They are probably the poet Francesca Bicetti (1712–1788), most certainly the mathematician Maria Gaetana Agnesi (1718–1799), author of the *Istituzioni analitiche ad uso della gioventù italiana* (Milano, 1748), and probably the writer and translator Francesca Mazoni Giusto (1710–1743).[82]

Franci does not reduce good taste to aesthetic competence, but understands it as intellectual and moral competence based on the agility and adaptability of mind (*aggiustatezza di mente*) and empathy (*sentimento delicatissimo del cuore*) — qualities that have enabled many queens to rule great empires.[83] This idea is taken up again at the end of the essay, in which Franci pays homage to Maria Theresa,

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76 *Ibid.*, p. 247.

77 *Ibid.*

78 François Poullain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes. Discours physique et moral, Où l'on voit l'importance de se défaire des Préjugez* (Paris: Jean Du Puis, 1673), p. 109.

79 S. Franci, 'Difesa delle donne', op. cit., p. 248.

80 Michel de Montaigne, *Essais* (1580), liv. 3, chap. 5: 'Sur des vers de Virgile', Nicolas Malebranche, *De la Recherche de la vérité* (1674–1675), liv. 3, part. 2, chap. 5: 'De l'imagination des femmes', cf. *Il Caffè*, op. cit., p. 1079, n. 3 & 5.

81 S. Franci, 'Difesa delle donne', op. cit., p. 248.

82 Cf. *ibid.*, n. 4; P. Abbrugiati, 'L'accusateur accusé', op. cit., par. 23.

83 *Ibid.*, pp. 248–49.

under whose rule Milan then stood and 'whom we obey out of love and duty'. She is praised as the epitome of feminine virtue. She combines religion, magnanimity, strength, tireless care, prescient counsel, incorruptible faith and justice, mildness and gentleness coupled with majesty, heroism, and steadfastness amidst extreme danger. The text culminates in the exclamation: 'Happy the peoples who are subject to such rulers'.[84]

The fact that women lead, rule and command is nothing unusual for Franci, since men learned early on to obey women, namely their mothers, without delay.[85] And if women have skills of political leadership, there is nothing to be said against the idea that they are equally suited to leadership positions in business and the military. Because of the aforementioned agility and adaptability of mind (*aggiustatezza di mente*), female citizens are quite capable of occupying leading positions in the economy, that is, of managing a bank or a factory, and women of the common class could exercise many trades.[86] Franci explains that women also possess military and martial qualities, that there are women who have undaunted heroism and bravery and can even surpass men in this (*capacissime di superare gli uomini*) by saying that 'military bravery requires neither weapons of steel nor hands of iron', but that 'the heart is the most important part of bravery'.[87] In particular, the arguments for leadership and competence in the military field, which even today is in many places a purely male domain, leave no doubt that Franci's 'Difesa delle donne' aims unreservedly and resolutely at full equality for women.[88]

IX.

Although Franci, who published very little, was not a central figure in eighteenth century Italian philosophy, in many respects he fits the type of Enlightenment philosopher.[89] Like many other Italian enlighteners, he came from an aristocratic background: he belonged to the nobility and was wealthy. Nothing is known about his education, but judging from his writings, he had the typical classical education that was imparted at Italian religious colleges and universities. However, he showed

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84 In the published article, the eulogy of Maria Theresa was shortened, presumably for reasons of space, cf. *ibid.*, p. 1080, n. 17, the deleted text: *ibid.*, pp. 905–906. The view of R. Messbarger, 'Reforming the Female Class', op. cit. p. 358, that Franci's 'article, more explicitly than any other in the journal, aimed to curry favor with Maria Theresa', seems to me to be a narrow perspective and not to do justice to the claim and intention of Franci's essay.

85 S. Franci, 'Difesa delle donne', op. cit., p. 249.

86 *Ibid.*

87 *Ibid.*, pp. 252–53.

88 Different, but from my point of view not entirely convincing, is the conclusion of the essay by R. Messbarger, 'Reforming the Female Class', op. cit., p. 366: 'Ultimately, the "Defence" renovates the traditional feminine paradigm according to the new terms and tenets of the Enlightenment'.

89 On the typology of the Italian Enlightenment philosopher, cf. Wolfgang Rother, 'Il "filosofo" nella cultura italiana del Settecento', in *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, 7th series, vol. 10, no. 3 (2014), pp. 610–19.

himself to be a critic of that traditional education which he had presumably received himself and which, as he asserted in one of his articles, was only book learning and secondary knowledge and could therefore never replace one's own critical thinking.

Like many other Italian Enlightenment thinkers, he did not pursue an academic career, but embodied, at least at the end of his life, the philosopher as public servant.[90] Unlike the French *philosophes*, who usually kept a critical or even oppositional distance from the *Ancien Régime*, and like many other Italian Enlighteners, Franci seems to have had an unbroken relationship with the state and the monarchy. He did not want to reform the state and the political system, but the economy, education, and society, especially the position of women in society. And he was not, like many *philosophes*, a critic of religion, but like most of his Italian contemporaries, he was silent on religious issues.

Even though Franci is today one of the forgotten philosophers of the Italian Enlightenment, the articles he published in *Il Caffè* must have had a broad impact at the time — the periodical's sheets were published in a circulation of 500 copies, which was not inconsiderable by the standards of the time.[91] And in terms of his ideas and positions, Franci had a sound grasp of contemporary developments. He was influenced by the Physiocrats and put forward proposals for agricultural reform. As an alternative to the bloody war of expansion fought with weapons, he pleaded for a 'war of industry' to defeat humanity's worst enemy, poverty, and to promote common prosperity, 'public happiness'. In general, the happiness of the citizens is for him the central purpose of the state. Against this background, neither luxury nor trade appear morally reprehensible since they precisely serve this purpose. Trade connects people, has a peacemaking function, and makes people citizens of the world. On all these points, Franci is not a pioneer, but he is undoubtedly a typical enlightener whose ideas are inspired by the European Enlightenment. But as the author of the 'Difesa delle donne' he is — and this is his lasting merit — one of the early feminist thinkers.

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[90] Cf. Carlo Capra, 'Il funzionario', in *L'uomo dell'illuminismo,* ed. Michel Vovelle (Roma, Bari: Laterza, 1992), pp. 353–98.

[91] G. Francioni, 'Storia editoriale del *Caffè*', op. cit., p. LXXXIII.

Towards a Holistic Concept of Landscape
From Croce to Pareyson

Paolo Furia

Abstract

This article outlines the evolution of the concept of landscape from an idealistic and dualistic framework to a more integrated and holistic approach in Italian philosophy of the twentieth century. I will single out Benedetto Croce's perspective on landscape and Luigi Pareyson's aesthetic theory as the two poles of such a course. On the one hand, Croce's name is associated with the first great Italian law devoted to the protection of landscape, but his conception of landscape still stems from a dualistic understanding of nature and culture, art and science. On the other hand, while Pareyson has never expressly addressed the issue of landscape, his philosophical aesthetics provides useful elements to radically rethink landscape in non-idealistic terms. In the present work I will discuss some of these elements, namely, Pareyson's conception of physical matter, the role played by wonder in the process of knowledge, and the contemplative dimension of aesthetic appreciation.

1. Introduction

The notion of landscape has recently gained much attention in the international debate in and out of academia. It has been remarked that almost every theoretical inquiry on landscape, in philosophy, geography, and the social sciences, starts from the recognition of the undetermined and ambiguous nature of the concept (Tanca 2012). However, it is possible to recognise a general pattern in the evolution of the concept of landscape across disciplines during the twentieth century in both Europe and the US (Olwig 1996, Wylie 2007, Kühne 2008). At an earlier stage, while geography was establishing itself as a fully scientific, 'positive' discipline (Cresswell 2013), the landscape of geographers (Sauer 1925, Lehmann 1950), objective and naturalistic, tended to be sharply differentiated from the landscape of historians of art and philosophers (Simmel 1913, Ritter 1974), related more to the artistic, aesthetic, subjective gaze. In recent decades we are witnessing the emergence of more holistic approaches, which rather emphasise the interconnections and the interactions between the aesthetic/subjective and the environmental/objective sides of landscape (Berleant and Carlson 2007). Even those scholars who continue to highlight the aesthetic, cultural, and artistic relevance of landscape, in order to

differentiate it from cognate concepts such as the 'environment' (D'Angelo 2021) or 'territory' (Salvatori 2003), are not reaffirming an idealistic contraposition between the subjective element of appreciation and the objective assessment of landscape features. On the contrary, the specific character of landscape is acknowledged in the priority of the connections over the parts, and in its resistance to any dualism. The natural and the cultural, the objective and the subjective, the wild and the domesticated, the real and the representational, the material and the spiritual, life and gaze coalesce into landscape forms that are always singular and ever changing (Wylie 2007, Marano 2017, Furia 2021).

It is possible to single out an evolution in the conceptualisation of landscape from an idealistic and dualistic point of view to a more integrated and holistic one in the Italian philosophy of the twentieth century as well. My article will identify Benedetto Croce's approach to landscape and Luigi Pareyson's aesthetic theory as the two poles of such an evolution. On the one hand, Croce's conception of landscape still depends on an idealistic framework which separates nature and culture, art and science, while, on the other hand, Pareyson's aesthetics allows for a rejuvenation of the notion of landscape more in line with the contemporary sensibility. The main obstacle to our task is that if, on the one hand, Croce's name is associated with the first Italian law devoted to the protection of landscape, on the other hand, Pareyson does not elaborate any explicit philosophical theory of landscape. A hermeneutic effort will therefore be required in order to find elements in Pareyson's aesthetics and theory of interpretation that can open up the way towards a radical rethinking of landscape in non-idealistic terms. I have identified those elements in Pareyson's conception of physical matter, in the role he attributes to wonder in the process of knowledge, and in the contemplative function he claims for aesthetic appreciation.

In general, the evolution from a dualistic to an integrated conception of landscape should not be considered only as a historical shift of emphasis. There are good philosophical reasons for it. As I will show in the following, a holistic conception of landscape has the advantage of reconnecting human territorialisation processes with ecological features and equilibriums in a portion of space. By emphasising the mutual influence of the cultural and the natural rather than their separation, not only will the impact of human action on the environment be underscored but so will be the constraints imposed by the environment on human action. That is particularly important if we consider landscape as the open result of differentiated acts of landscaping, in which agency finds itself distributed among a plurality of agents, both human and nonhuman. A landscape, understood in holistic terms, is not only the reflection of a specific human culture, but also the non-recursive and non-mechanical outcome of multiple interactions between a culture and natural constraints. A dualistic approach separating the natural and the cultural has often been at the basis of conceptions of space as homogeneous, isotropic and quantitative, according to which the sensible and qualitative features of a portion of space only depend on the human factor. Conceptions such as these

have been fraught with heavy practical and political consequences: many examples of irrational land use (Mazúr 1983, D'Angelo 2021) have been based on a misrecognition of both the idiographic, 'total' character of each landscape and the non-human formative powers operating within each landscape. Other ways to overcome a dualistic conception of landscape have been elaborated by authors such as François Jullien (2014), who affirms that landscape is not a matter of vision but rather one of living, and Giorgio Agamben (2014), who criticises those ideological misconceptions which overemphasise the active and operative side of human action on landscapes to the detriment of humans' passivity. In my article I will show that already the earlier work of Luigi Pareyson laid some foundations to surpass the dualistic conception of landscape in the direction of a more integrated and holistic one.

2. The geographic and the aesthetic landscape: from opposition to integration

The holistic and somehow ambiguous nature of landscape has often been neglected by the dualism between the geographical landscape,[1] which refers to the actual shape of a geographical area, and the aesthetic landscape, which is rather related to the artistic representations of usually excellent, beautiful, depiction-worthy landscapes in painting and photography.[2] The landscape of geographers and the landscape of historians of art rarely crossed paths. Things have started to change in the last few decades. The overcoming of the rigid divisions between the geographical and the aesthetic can be noted in the definition provided by the European Landscape Convention (signed in Florence, 2000).[3] There, landscape is defined as 'an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' (p. 2). It is not only scenic panoramas, but all landscapes that are worthy of consideration, insofar as they are inhabited by and associated with emotional values and meanings. The change of perspective in the Convention's definition parallels an evolution in European aesthetics, including the Italian, which is progressively shifting its focus from the representational/scopic character of landscape to the aesthetic dimension of

[1] Geographer Marc Antrop says: 'Once the study of landscape was a core topic of geography. It was seen as a unique synthesis between the natural and cultural characteristics of a region. This synthesis embraced geo-ecological relations, spatial patterns and aesthetical properties. To study landscape, information was gathered from field surveys, maps, literature, sketches and photographs' (2000, p. 9).

[2] Philosopher Ed Casey (2002) has investigated the differences and the connections between maps, considered as the main heuristic tools of geography, and landscape painting, understood as an artistic tradition dating back to seventeenth century Dutch painting. The author carefully deconstructs the commonsensical view that relates objectivity to maps and subjectivity to landscape painting, in order to reveal both the scientific-geographic-contemplative contents of landscape painting and the aesthetic-cultural-practical elements of maps.

[3] https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=176.

practices and performances through which landscape is continuously re-made and re-interpreted (D'Angelo 2014, 2021, Griffero 2016, 2021).

In the philosophical debate, as well as in social sciences, the concept of landscape has often been considered as reducible to allegedly more primitive concepts. Maybe because of its inherent visibility, which seems to confine it within the realm of the mere appearance, or maybe because of its troubled epistemological status, landscape has often been considered as either an aesthetic variation of 'absolute space', *in se* objective, homogeneous, and isotropic, or the surface part of 'idiographic place', essentially related to specific qualities, subjective feelings, and cultural and symbolic meanings.[4] Sometimes the objective and the subjective sides of landscape have been traced back to different cultural traditions, witnessed by the difference between the Anglo-Saxon lemmas *land-scape* / *Land-Schaft*, where the emphasis is put on the real shape taken by a portion of land, and the Italian and French lemmas *paesaggio*/*paysage*, which contain an explicit reference to the term *paese*, the living place of local communities (D'Angelo 2014, pp. 14–15). That makes of landscape a tensive concept, which assumes different connotations in different cultural, linguistic, and argumentative backgrounds, but which in principle combines heterogeneous and often contrasting factors, such as the natural and the cultural, the subjective and the objective, belonging and distantiation, art and science, form and meaning. The conceptual challenge consists in avoiding reductionism, that is, the logic of 'either objective or subjective'. Landscape, rather than being reduced either to absolute space or idiographic place, can be seen as the mediating term between the two, in the middle between the open of space and the closure of place, phenomenologically prior to the poles mediated by it (Furia 2021). In the actual experience, we do not see just space, but always varied and differentiated landscapes where natural and anthropic forms are combined in always specific ways; we do not see just places, but places inserted in broader contexts, endowed with spatial vanishing points and references to elsewhere. In other words, we have experiences of space made concrete in landscapes, and we have experiences of places as 'implaced' in landscapes.[5] It is no accident that many holistic approaches to landscape are grounded on a phenomenological basis (Tilley 1997, Wylie 2007), particularly effective at warding off idealism, objectivism, and reductionism in general. A phenomenological understanding of landscape recognises, on the one hand, the inherent dynamism of space and, on the other hand, the embedded and embodied nature of human cultures and actions. Agency is not an exclusive characteristic of culture, and physical matter is not understood as merely passive and shapeless.

[4] About the opposition between abstract and homogeneous space, on the one hand, and qualitative and affective place, on the other, see at least Massey (1994), Casey (1997), Agnew (2011).

[5] The expression is drawn from Casey (1997).

Italian philosophy has not dealt with the issue of landscape very often,[6] but it is possible to recognise an evolution in the conception of space and places, that begins with a dualistic pattern, where space and matter are considered the mere backdrop for human initiative, and progresses towards a more holistic one, where space is recognised as an active and qualitatively differentiated dimension of human cultures and actions. The two poles of such an evolution are represented by the idealistic approach of Benedetto Croce and Luigi Pareyson's aesthetics of formativity.

3. The landscape preservation law no. 778/1922

In his philosophical essays, Benedetto Croce does not specifically deal with the issue of landscape, yet the philosopher's name is associated with the first Italian law devoted to the protection of both natural beauty and historic heritage, the law n. 778/1922.[7] Salvatore Settis has recently recalled how tortuous and laborious it was to get that law passed.[8] The challenge was to reconcile the processes of Italy's modernisation, urbanisation, and industrialisation with the necessity of preserving the traditional features and characteristics of the landscape, in which the spirit of the country was said to be reflected.

In his introductory remarks, *Per la tutela delle bellezze naturali e degli immobili di particolare interesse storico*, presented in the Italian Senate on September 24th 1920, Croce makes several points that are worthy of consideration. First of all, the philosopher makes explicit reference to natural beauty and conjoins it with cultural heritage, both of these constituting goods which are said to deserve specific protection from invasive planning and over-exploitation.[9] Considering the

[6] During the second half of the twentieth century, it is rare to find an Italian philosopher dealing with the issue of landscape. A noteworthy exception is represented by the massive contribution of Rosario Assunto (1974, 2 vols.). More recently, a resurgence of philosophical interest in the issue of landscape can be seen not only in the already cited work of Paolo D'Angelo, but also in the development of the geo-philosophical approach of Luisa Bonesio (1997) and Caterina Resta (2012).

[7] The law n. 778/1922 represents one of the fundamental steps in the history of the juridical protection of landscape and heritage in Italy: 'The analysis of legislative action in Italy focused on the protection and enhancement of the landscape can be summarised in six key moments: the "Rosadi-Rava" law approved in 1909, the law promoted by the Minister Benedetto Croce in 1922, the "Bottai" laws in 1939, Article 9 of the Italian Constitution of 1948, the "Galasso" law n. 421/1985, the Code of architectural and landscape heritage, approved in 2004' (Forti 2017, p. 534). Croce was Minister when the law was proposed and exposed in September 1920, but was no longer in charge when the law was approved on May 11th 1922.

[8] Salvatore Settis has dealt with the genesis and the effects of Benedetto Croce's law in a talk given at the University Ca' Foscari in Venice on October 3rd 2011. A written version of his talk is available online at www.comitato-arca.it.

[99] Croce declares that the aim of the law is 'to defend and to put in value, to the widest possible extent, the major beauties of Italy, the natural ones and the artistic ones' in order 'to put an end

wariness that idealistic approaches generally display towards the very possibility of natural beauty, the reference to it here may be slightly disorienting.[10] In one of the rare passages of his *Aesthetics as Science of Expression and General Linguistics* (1902) explicitly devoted to landscape, Croce's argument runs as follows:

> It has been observed that, in order to enjoy natural objects aesthetically, we should withdraw them from their external and historical reality, and separate their simple appearance or origin from existence; that if we contemplate a landscape with our head between our legs, in such a way as to remove ourselves from our wonted relations with it, the landscape appears as an ideal spectacle; that nature is beautiful only for him who contemplates her with the eye of the artist; that zoologists and botanists do not recognise beautiful animals and flowers; that natural beauty is discovered (and examples of discovery are the points of view, pointed out by men of taste and imagination, and to which more or less aesthetic travellers and excursionists afterwards have recourse in pilgrimage, whence a more or less collective suggestion); that, without the aid of the imagination, no part of nature is beautiful, and that with such aid the same natural object or fact is now expressive, according to the disposition of the soul, now insignificant, now expressive of one definite thing, now of another, sad or glad, sublime or ridiculous, sweet or laughable; finally, that natural beauty, which an artist would not to some extent correct, does not exist. All these observations are most just, and confirm the fact that natural beauty is simply a stimulus to aesthetic reproduction, which presupposes previous production. Without preceding aesthetic intuitions of the imagination, nature cannot arouse any at all. (Croce 2017, p. 54)

In his *Breviary of Aesthetics* (1913), Croce reinforces the idea by evoking Henri Frédéric Amiel's famous line: 'every landscape is a state of the mind' (Croce 2007, p. 25).[11] However, on closer inspection, the introductory remarks to the law no. 778/1922 do not contradict the positions maintained in the philosophical essays.

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to the unjustified devastations perpetrated against the most known and loved characteristics of our soil' (my transl. of the introductory report pronounced by Croce in 1920).

[10] As is well known, Hegel delimits his aesthetics to a philosophy of art: 'by adopting this expression, we, at once, exclude the beauty of nature' (Hegel 1975, p. 1). He maintains that beauty is a proper artistic issue because of the superiority of art over nature: 'Now art and works of art, by springing from and being created by the spirit, are themselves of a spiritual kind, even if their presentation assumes an appearance of sensuousness and pervades the sensuous with the spirit. In this respect art already lies nearer to the spirit and its thinking than purely external spiritless nature does' (passim p. 12).

[11] Rosario Assunto will return to Amiel's quotation in the first volume of *Il paesaggio e l'estetica* (1974), where he seeks to provide a non-subjectivistic interpretation of it.

What really matters in the introductory remarks is the juxtaposition of natural beauty with cultural heritage. Natural beauty is itself a spiritual dimension infused into nature by the gaze of the country's inhabitants and it unfolds into the anthropic artefacts that have been built over the centuries. Croce also affirms that landscape is 'nothing else than the material and visible representation of the homeland': the evolution of landscape mirrors the evolution of the national soul.

In the law no. 778/1922, landscape is regarded as equivalent to a scenic view or panorama: there is no landscape without a gaze that frames the environment in *vedute* (Italian term for "views") worthy of aesthetic consideration and appreciation. Settis emphasises the juridical meaning of this assimilation of landscape to panorama, for, in this way, landscapes could finally receive the kind of protection which, in the Italian legislation of the epoch, was already accorded to paintings.[12] However that may be, the philosophically relevant point is that landscapes are considered worthy of protection thanks to the analogy with artworks. An analogy that has not gone unnoticed even among geographers overseas. In his 1925 text, *The Morphology of Landscape*, Carl Sauer, one of the fathers of modern American geography, distances himself from Croce by asserting that landscape is not only a matter of art, for it is endowed with a substantive character requiring also the contribution of the natural sciences in order to be understood.[13] While Croce was overall lined up with other aesthetic interpretations of landscape from his time, such as the one proposed by Simmel in his *Philosophy of Landscape* (1913), geographers already emphasised the scientific relevance of the notion of landscape,

[12] l. 364/1909 (Legge Rosadi-Rava).

[13] In his essay, *The Morphology of Landscape*, Carl Sauer assigns to geography the task of 'the establishment of a critical system which embraces the phenomenology of landscape, in order to grasp in all of its meaning and colour the varied terrestrial scene'. What is fundamental here is the dialectic between the experiential ground of the geographer (the 'phenomenology of landscape' through which the geographer has an actual experience — also endowed with aesthetic value — of the chosen portion of land) and the development of geographical knowledge as a critical system. In Sauer's view, the experience of actual landscapes lies at the basis of a process of abstraction which leads to the identification of landscape types, or generic landscapes. Those types are more similar to the Weberian ideal-types than to platonic ideas, as tools that are useful to carry out comparisons, interpretations, classifications. This is why, Sauer continues: 'Croce's remark that "the geographer who is describing a landscape has the same task as a landscape painter" has therefore only limited validity. The geographer may describe the individual landscape as a type or possibly a variant of a type, but always he has in mind the generic, and proceeds by comparison' (Sauer 1996, p. 300). The level of discussion was therefore epistemological in the first instance: for Sauer, at stake there was the status of geography as a fully-fledged science. By making landscape an issue of scientific knowledge and not only a matter for the artistic gaze, Sauer meant also to defend geography's intermediate position between the natural and the cultural sciences. On the other hand, Croce was far less sensitive to the epistemological concern of Sauer: by making landscape a matter of art, the Italian philosopher meant to emphasise landscape's original connections to human imagination and values, charging it with ethical and political relevance.

understood as an actual interconnection between natural and anthropic forms that presents itself as a dynamic totality calling for scientific processing.[14]

Even if the historical importance of Croce's conceptualisation of landscape cannot be denied, nor can its dependence on the philosophical dualisms of modernity. It can be found in the overemphasis Croce places on human agency to the detriment of other kinds of agencies, like those investigated by the natural sciences: the atmospheric agents, the climate, the characteristics of the soil, the characteristics of the vegetation, highly regarded by the morphological tradition inaugurated by Alexander von Humboldt. There is also a 'romantic' side to Croce's landscape. As 'visible and material representation of the homeland', it takes on at the same time an aesthetic and an ethical value. The landscape, as the concrete manifestation of the soul of the nation, is the place that makes self and mutual recognition possible. The idea of landscape as home for the people is of course present also today, as one can see in the formulation of the European Convention of 2000. But, at the same time, by reducing landscape to the domestic dimension of national self-recognition, it ends up being deprived of its inherent otherness, its enigmatic qualities, which may elicit wonder and other unexpected feelings calling for further interrogation and interpretation. In that sense, space and nature themselves cannot be considered as worthy of protection by virtue of the inappropriability of the environment. On the contrary, landscapes should be protected precisely because they belong to the soul of the nation, and they must be protected from the alienating forces of the wild industrialisation which challenges the continuity of tradition. There is great wisdom in Croce's warning against the overexploitation of nature and irrational land use; yet, space finds itself deprived of its inner agency and formativity, nature assumes aesthetic and ethical value only as long as it offers a basis for spiritual development, and landscape owes its worth to the fact that it holds up a mirror to the soul of the nation.

4. Pareyson's aesthetics and landscape

In Luigi Pareyson's departure from the idealistic premises of aesthetics there is the potential to rethink landscape in new terms.[15] At first sight it does not seem like that. The word 'landscape' does not appear either in the essays collected in *Existence, Interpretation, Freedom* (ed. Diego Bubbio, 2009) nor in those collected in the volume edited by Robert Valgenti, *Truth and Interpretation* (2013).

[14] Alain Roger, in his *Court traité du paysage* (1997) has noted that Benedetto Croce, Georg Simmel and Charles Lalo claimed, more or less simultaneously, that landscapes are invented by the human gaze. These were the same years in which geographers such as Vidal de la Blache, Max Sorre, and Carl Sauer were laying the foundations of modern regional geography. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the dualism between aesthetic landscape and geographic landscape was particularly sharp.

[15] To find out more about the confrontation between Pareyson and Croce, see at least the essays of Umberto Eco and Paolo D'Angelo published in Annuario Filosofico 27 (2011).

Moreover, even though in Pareyson's *Estetica* (1954) there is a chapter devoted to natural beauty, the term 'landscape' is not mentioned. But even if Pareyson does not formulate explicit criticisms regarding landscape, it is possible that Pareyson's diffidence towards that concept depended on the primarily visual meaning it had in the aesthetic debates of the twentieth century. Pareyson's aesthetics instead pursues the retrieval of the material, tactile, embodied aspects of aesthetics and art: but this interpretation of the aesthetic field is consistent with a holistic conception of landscape, as I will try to show in the following paragraphs.

There are some tangential points of intersection between Pareyson's philosophy and the issue of landscape that are worthy of further investigation: the first one involves the conception of matter formulated by Pareyson in relation to the formativity of artistic activity.[16] In his *Estetica*, Pareyson maintains that pure artistic formativity must adopt as its proper matter physical matter as such, 'blunt and genuine' (Pareyson 1974, p. 41),[17] with its qualities and resistances. If, on the one hand, matter is chosen by the artists according to their formative intention, on the other hand, matter is not chosen because of its malleability and pure passivity, but precisely because of its capacity to offer resistance to the artist's formative intention. The freedom of the formative intention is limited by the character of the chosen matter. Physical matter does not display its character only by limiting and resisting the formative intention. On the contrary, the character of the chosen matter orients and supports the formative intention by suggesting ways to realise the work of art. Now, the view of physical matter as endowed with an agency and life of its own is conceptually consistent with a conception of intense space, where qualities and variations interact with the human subject rephrased in terms of body rather than abstract consciousness. Such a conceptualisation of intense space lays at the basis of any understanding of landscape in terms of openness and otherness, that does not limit itself to the manifestation of the beholders' feelings, but represents for the beholder a fascinating challenge. Space is not just the empty container of things and it is not the mere backdrop for human action. Space is inherently animated by the determinations of matter, which, far from being reduced to mere passivity or indetermined *chora*, develops into a multiplicity of dynamic forms.

One could object that, in Pareyson's thought, this framework applies only to matter seen under the lens of art and aesthetics. In other fields, matter can actually be viewed as pure passivity, as happens with instrumental rationality, which sees in nature a reservoir of resources to be exploited so as to obtain benefits and economic value. But in Pareyson's thought, art, far from being reduced to an isolated practice, represents the opportunity to rethink the otherness of things, matter and nature as such. In order to operate with matter, artists must turn into

[16] Pareyson's formativity theory represents a solid source of inspiration and a theoretical reference for contemporary Italian aestheticians such as Vercellone (2020) and Bertinetto (2021).
[17] Quotations from essays included in *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* and not translated in English are taken from the 1974 Italian edition and translated by the author of the present work.

interpreters: 'must study and research and investigate it like only an effort of interpretation can do'. The artist, Pareyson says, 'studies its matter amorously', where 'amorously' means that the artist/interpreter recognises matter in its personality, so to speak. Matter must be interrogated, heard, and answered.

The issue has been dealt with in analogous terms by the philosopher and geographer Jean Marc Besse, in a recent book devoted to the necessity of landscape (2018). He maintains that landscape planners and architects should not impose their creations *ex nihilo* on the preformed landscape. Much urban and landscape planning has been realised in spite of and to the detriment of what we could call the 'landscape personality'. Besse has called this attitude 'acting on' landscape:

> The 'acting-on' attitude presupposes a sort of exteriority between the matter on which human action is exerted and that same action, or, more precisely, the intention or the idea animating that action from within and providing it with its purpose. 'To act on' means to produce, or to put oneself into the perspective of the production. Or, putting it another way, it means trying to produce objects by methodically applying an already elaborated mental pattern to a more or less resistant matter. (Besse 2020, p. 43)[18]

The author suggests replacing the 'acting-on' attitude with a different one, which he calls 'acting-with landscape' and that takes very seriously the metaphor of landscape as a living organism endowed with an everchanging but still quite defined personality:

> In this case, human action is not exerted from the outside on matter understood as lifeless, but blends into the movements, the contours and the morphologies of a matter endowed with its own vital animation, with which human action interacts in responsive and dynamic ways. That sequence of interactions deals more with transformation than production. Whereas in the demiurgic paradigm of the technical action, which corresponds to the implementation of a plan previously elaborated, the technical action understood as transformation is rather defined through adjustments and corrections, which allow us to tailor our action to an evolving situation. (Besse 2020, p. 61)

Pareyson's artist, who is at the same time a hermeneut and an explorer, looks much like Besse's landscape architect in the 'acting with' attitude.

[18] I am translating from the Italian edition of Besse's book (2020)

5. Wonder and the aesthetic dimension of geographical knowledge

In his *Estetica*, Pareyson makes use of spatial metaphors to describe and explain the movements of interpretation in general, in his attempt to vindicate the aesthetic nature of knowledge[19]. Interpretation 'goes slowly and cautiously' or 'advances quickly and urgently', it 'proceeds at random and without a guiding principle' or it 'concentrates intently on a single direction', it 'boldly and confidently follows a path' or 'it stops to try another' (Pareyson 2009, p. 87).[20] The point that elicits the attention of the landscape theorist is that it is not only the intellectual or the artistic act of interpretation that can be explained through spatial metaphors, but that our presence in space, our spatial practices, can be seen as interpretative acts. When we boldly follow our paths, we are resting on certain interpretations of our spatial surroundings, that with the passage of time and as a result of their everyday use go without saying and are taken for granted. But when, for any reason, the being taken for granted of the everyday is interrupted and we are urged to change our paths, intense space demands unusual attention, it arouses dormant feelings, shakes our sense of familiarity, and requires further interpretation. In that interruption of our everyday relations with lived space the possibility is raised for landscape to be configured as an aesthetic object. And it is an object relevant to aesthetics not only because it establishes non-obvious affective relationships with the dweller/beholder, but also because it calls for interpretation, understood as 'a process of production that consists in configuring the images in which it defines the sense of things' (Pareyson 2009, p. 87).

Landscapes considered as aesthetic objects are still the same landscapes in which we dwell and where we carry out our everyday practices. But they are in some way refreshed by a renewed, rejuvenated, attentive gaze. They are recognised in their power to elicit aesthetic appreciation. Here again, Pareyson provides a powerful model with which to understand the nature of aesthetic appreciation that is perfectly suited to the landscape experience. In the essay, 'Contemplation and Aesthetic Pleasure', included in his *Estetica*, wonder is defined as 'a multi-faceted feeling which gives rise to a mixed pleasure' (*Estetica* 1974, p. 200). It is in fact

[19] It has been claimed that 'no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 20). This is especially true of spatial metaphors, those that have spatial movements, practices and locations as their source references and are used to explain *in se* nonspatial objects and phenomena. Lakoff and Johnson call this kind of metaphor 'orientational', but the expression 'spatial metaphors' is now predominant (Visioli 2012, Bongo 2014).

[20] The influential American geographer Ed Soja noted that the philosopher Paul Ricoeur 'filled his approach to narrativity with subtly double-coded terms and concepts which, in French and English, resound with ambivalent spatial and temporal meanings: plot, emplotment, configuration, world, trope, trajectory, peripeteia, time-span, story-line'. Soja would like to 'believe that Ricoeur was aware of the pronounced spatiality of time that rings in these terms and concepts' (Soja 1996, p. 169). Something similar could be said about Pareyson: many concepts summoned up in his theory of interpretation resound with spatial meanings that warrant further investigation.

constituted by 'a moment of surprise and a contemplative side' (ibid.): as 'perception of something new' (ibid.), it elicits a feeling of bewilderment and awe; but since that awe is elicited by the self-presenting form of an object, wonder opens up the path to contemplation. The beholder is captivated by the features of the considered object and would like to know it better. This is why Pareyson affirms that wonder anticipates interpretation and contemplation: wonder really is the way to knowledge.

The motif of wonder resounds in the geographical tradition dating back to Alexander von Humboldt, who underlines how *das Zauber* lies at the basis of both our poetic and scientific relationships with nature (Rossi, 1988, p. 826). The earth, Humboldt says, is a system of correspondences, the knowledge of which is prepared for and anticipated in the sensible impression (*Eindruck*).[21] Nature, far from being reduced to a homogeneous entity, presents itself in various aspects, or forms, taken in the Goethean sense of dynamic, metamorphic and immersive entities with which human beings are in relation.[22] Those natural entities include and encompass human artifacts such as buildings, architectures, cities, artworks, monuments, gardens: physical matter, disposed and organised in forms, is the same matter of which buildings, cities and artworks are made. The anthropic forms are located within broader contexts which, when viewed from a certain distance, can be seen as landscapes. In Humboldt, it is possible to find a continuity between the most intense wonder elicited by geographical forms and the most detailed, erudite, and sometimes even pedantic scientific explanations.[23] That collaboration between aesthetics and the scientific enterprise can be grounded philosophically in the recognition of the aesthetic consistency of every process of interpretation, as shown by Pareyson in his essay on natural beauty. To really know things, Pareyson argues, means to see things 'not as tools, but as forms' (Pareyson 2009, p. 100). But to consider things as forms implies that things are not in the first instance accounted

[21] Von Humboldt's conception of the process of knowledge successfully integrates aesthetic motifs into the scientific endeavour. A positive collaboration between aesthetics and geography has been researched and enhanced by geographers, sometimes taking direct inspiration from Von Humboldt (Quaini 2002, Greppi 2021). Insightful research into Alexander von Humboldt's theory of landscape from an aesthetic-philosophical vantage point has been elaborated in the Italian literature by Franzini Tibaldeo (2015) and D'Angelo in the second part of *Il paesaggio. Teorie, storie, luoghi* (2021).

[22] An updated overview of the Goethean concept of 'form' is provided by David Wellbery, author of the relevant entry in the *Goethe Lexicon of Philosophical Concepts* (2021: https://goethe-lexicon.pitt.edu/GL/article/view/38). In the Italian philosophical literature, morphology as the science of forms in the Goethean sense is the main object of the international volume, *Glossary of Morphology* (2021), edited by Federico Vercellone and Salvatore Tedesco.

[23] One of the aims stated by von Humboldt in his *Preface* to the first volume of *Kosmos* was 'to show [...] that a certain degree of scientific completeness in the treatment of individual facts is not wholly incompatible with a picturesque animation of style' (Von Humboldt 1858, p. IX). The literary quality of von Humboldt's text can be considered as another element of the collaboration between aesthetic appreciation ('enjoyment in the contemplation of nature', (passim, p. 23) and scientific endeavour.

for by their sheer usability and functionality. The beauty of nature, Pareyson argues, is not just the beauty of its image, as if the image depended entirely on the representational codes of the beholder's gaze. The point is that the forms of nature have the power to present themselves to the gaze of the beholder, to such an extent that things are identified with their images:

> The beauty of nature is a beauty of forms, and so it is evident for a gaze that is capable of seeing the form as a form, after having searched for it, inquired into it, surveyed it, interpreted it, to finally admire it and enjoy it. Therefore, the vision and the appreciation of the beauty of nature presuppose an effort of interpretation, an exercise of faithfulness, discipline of attention, a concentrated gaze, and the cultivation of a way of seeing to reach that deep and all-seeing view, which is, in one way, vision of forms, and in another, production of forms, since interpreted form and formed image must coincide in that conformation which is peculiar to contemplation. (Pareyson 2009, p. 101)

Landscape can be seen as a good example of what is known as a form in the Pareysonian sense. Landscape elicits wonder: it suffices to conjure up the sight of the mountains that crowd the horizon during a road trip, or the harmonious rolling countryside silhouetted against the sky. The kind of wonder elicited by landscapes really seems to work in the vein of Pareyson's conception of wonder. Firstly, the beholder / wanderer /driver is surprised by the novelty, intensity, and beauty of the forms standing over against him. Secondly, that surprise 'develops into interpretation and contemplation' (Pareyson 1974, p. 201) as long as it creates an impulse of curiosity and attention paid to the geographical forms themselves. Wonder elicited by the landscape image might awaken the interest of the beholder /wanderer /driver in learning more about its physical and cultural characteristics. Landscape invites him to dive into its secrets. A subtle thread connects the visible and the invisible. The beholder /wanderer /driver can feel the atmosphere of landscape but he would like to develop his impressions into judgements and positive knowledge. But the movement that runs from aesthetic appreciation to interpretation and knowledge does not suppress, delete or deconstruct the wonder of the first meeting. The aesthetic self-presentation of landscape is not reduced to the mere epiphenomenon of something allegedly more real and substantial lying behind the curtain.[24] Interpretation does not dismantle the appearance of the image, but elaborates the reasons why a landscape appears in this or that way. It is a reconstructive kind of knowledge that aims at enhancing the. In this sense,

[24] A largely comprehensive overview of the critical approaches towards landscape, approaches in which landscape is understood as an ideological product concealing the real productive forces and movements governing socio-spatial processes, is provided by the third chapter of John Wylie's book, *Landscape* (2007).

Pareyson can maintain that, 'the concept of natural beauty is already implicit in the very fact of sensitive knowledge as interpretation' (ibid., p. 206).

Of course, the viability of this position depends on how beauty is defined. If beauty were defined in the abstract, as universal and objective, it would be nonsense to claim that sensitive knowledge as interpretation implies the discovery of natural beauty. In Pareyson's aesthetic theory, natural beauty is 'the possibility of contemplating those forms in which the process of interpretation is fulfilled: to really know things does not mean to sketch out blurred schemas of them [...] but to see things as forms, that is, to contemplate their beauty' (ibid.). Two powerful ideas are implied in Pareyson's way of conceiving natural beauty. In the first instance, beauty takes on a relational character which springs from the encounter between two agencies: the formative power of nature, that gives birth to expressive forms; and the interpretive intention of the human subject, stemming from wonder. This moves Pareyson's conception of beauty away from the idealistic preconception according to which the only active force endowed with formative power would be the spirit, while nature would be devoid of agency and formativity. Secondly, beauty results in the successful match between a thing in its unicity and its image. In this sense, any thing has beauty as an inner possibility, or, putting it another way, any thing could be beautified according to its pre-given and pre-formed characteristics. When a thing is fully found in its image, when image captures and enhances the atmosphere of the thing, there is beauty. Beauty is always specific, local, idiographic. Pareyson's concept of beauty potentially shifts the focus from the excellent landscapes and panoramas considered worthy of legal protection in the idealistic approach, to the ordinary living environments protected by the European Landscape Convention. There is a diffused aesthetics in ordinary landscapes, which nourishes everyday practices and is raised to the level of conscious awareness when our everyday spatial practices are interrupted. Of course, to say that every landscape can be beautiful in principle does not mean that every landscape is actually beautiful. But at this point, following the Pareysonian way, the benchmark by which the beauty of a landscape can be assessed is not given a priori through the definition of an abstract category of beauty. A greater role is assumed by the peculiarity of feelings elicited by a specific landscape. Wonder can also be mixed with feelings of bewilderment, uncanniness, and discomfort, as happens in the case of sublime landscapes (Bodei 2008, Tuan 2013). From a philosophical point of view, wonder is the encounter between affective surprise and intellectual curiosity. The beholder /wanderer/driver can also be surprised by ugly landscapes in which people have a hard life, land has been over-exploited and material relics of former factories and mills dot the area. He can also feel bewildered at the sight of the impeccable landscape of the enclaves (Saarinen 2019, Pastor, Torres 2020): beautiful for those who are included, but artificially disconnected from their surroundings, as if their picturesque beauty depended on the externalisation of every uncontrollable factor of metamorphosis and contamination. In all those cases, landscape has not lost its enigmatic dimension. It is still capable of arousing wonder, therefore, to call for

interpretation and contemplation. The process of interpretation and contemplation, in the case of ugly or exclusionary landscapes, seeks to understand their genesis and to single out different possibilities of adjustment and amendment. In that sense, beautification is still an act of interpretation, as it responds to the question: how to save places from standardisation, depletion, and ugliness. To know a thing implies learning how to make it flourish in order positively to reconnect with nature and humans.

The case of the landscapes of the enclaves is important in that they display an unrelated kind of beauty, frozen in a stereotypical image (suffice it to think of the magnificent meadows and palms of the holiday resorts in Africa) reproduced without any change in different parts of the world. The landscape of the enclaves establishes an artificial boundary that sharply separates it from the connections with the ordinary landscapes of the surroundings. As we have maintained, landscapes are always singular and idiographic, but they owe their dynamicity and vitality to their interconnection with the totality they belong to. Again, Pareyson helps to re-elaborate the articulation between nature, seen as a totality, and its forms, interpreted as its idiographic parts, in a way that avoids both the reduction of the singularity of the form to a qualitatively indifferent particular subsumed by the universal and the reduction of the totality of nature to the mere sum of its geographical forms.

6. Landscapes and the unavailability of nature

Pareyson argues that there could not be any natural beauty if nature were reducible to mere mechanism: 'if nature is frozen in laws which are different from those regulating the coherence of forms from the inside [...], the possibility decays of interpreting it and contemplating it in the vibrant and inexhaustible wealth of its forms' (Pareyson 1974, pp. 216–17). Nature should be seen as endowed with a 'formative power' (ibid., p. 217) that produces forms which call for interpretation and contemplation. There is a mutually enriching interplay between nature and things seen as forms. On the one hand, nature realises itself by unfolding into a variety of spatial forms endowed with a peculiar character and specific qualities. On the other hand, the interconnections between forms continuously hint at the totality of nature: they are all encompassed, preserved and transformed within it. Even if Pareyson does not use the term 'landscape' here, landscapes can ultimately be seen as those forms in which nature proceeds and realises itself. Through this conceptual move, in the wake of a Humboldtian interpretation of nature, the category of landscape is stripped of its primary visual and cultural meaning and draws nearer to the formative power of nature, of which the formative power of human beings is seen as a continuation. By this move I do not intend to deny the cultural consistency of landscapes and their being subjected to the formative intentions of societies and cultures. Nevertheless, human acts of 'landscaping' (Lorimer 2005) should be seen as encompassed by the broader formative process of nature, rather than as opposed

to it. This also implies the idea of nature as 'self-organised and capable of organising', which at the same time 'encompasses and respects the forms it crafts thanks to its formative power' (Pareyson 1974, p. 217).[25]

To consider human formative intentions and acts as encompassed by a more general formative power of nature seems to be in contradiction with the now largely accepted theory of the Anthropocene (Latour 2014, Wark 2015), which puts the emphasis on the major impact of man-made action on the terrestrial surface, the biosphere and the atmosphere. Nature and culture now overlap to such an extent that it is difficult even for a landscape theorist clearly to distinguish, in considering a specific landscape, which elements and processes depend on natural processes and which ones depend on the anthropic intervention. The peculiar character of a landscape results from a chain of events in which human interventions might, sooner or later, play an important role. The plants we find in one locale might have been transplanted from one hemisphere to the other during colonial expeditions, or could have been modified by cultivation techniques and genetic interventions. On the other hand, to recognise that we live in the epoch of the Anthropocene does not imply that humankind has reached (or can reach in the future) full control over nature. Whenever human activities are suspended, by reasons of force majeure, or freely chosen political action, nature seems to recover areas of activity that are not under the strict control of human planning: suffice it to recall the changes in the lagoon landscape of Venice when large portions of the accustomed activities of transportation were suspended during the lockdown relating to covid-19.[26] But even the manipulative actions carried out by humans in normal times find in physical matter every kind of resistance and reaction. We return to the Pareysonian idea that physical matter is endowed with a peculiar formativity with which human formative intentions have to deal. Although the issue of the relationships between nature and culture is likely undecidable from a metaphysical point of view, in the idea of nature as a totality encompassing human activities, a normative ideal can be glimpsed. By considering landscapes as the products of both human and nonhuman agencies that mutually overlap and superimpose themselves upon one another, it is possible to dethrone human formative intentions from a position of omnipotence and to recognise a remnant of unavailability and inappropriability in nature.[27] This brings us back to the main argument we can draw from Pareyson's aesthetics in order to develop a holistic and

[25] This is another idea that Pareyson shares with von Humboldt: 'The principal impulse by which I was directed was the earnest endeavour to comprehend the phenomena of physical objects in their general connection, and to represent nature as one great whole, moved and animated by internal forces' (von Humboldt 1858, p. VII).

[26] The transparency of the water markedly increased during the lockdown: https://www.igg.cnr.it/ricerche/research-highlights/la-trasparenza-delle-acque-nella-laguna-di-venezia-rilevata-dai-satelliti-sentinel-2-della-missione-copernicus-durante-il-lockdown-covid-19.

[27] According to Agamben, landscape, like language or body, is a figure of the 'inappropriable'. See *L'uso dei corpi*.

ecologically informed notion of landscape: far from being reduced to the mere results of human production, landscapes must be seen as alterities where human agency finds itself always mingled with other agencies which do not mechanically follow the directions prescribed by human intentions. To recognise nature as endowed with a specific formative power, as Pareyson does in his aesthetic theory, implies that nature must be respected as a self-organising totality which encompasses humans and their formative intentions and acts.

In conclusion, I think that Pareyson's philosophy provides, better than Croce's, a powerful contribution to overcoming the common misconception according to which aesthetic landscape must involve subjective interpretations of nature, and geographical landscape an objective exploration and explanation. By inserting aesthetics into knowledge, art into science, human formativity into the cosmic formativity of nature, landscape may be left to its original alterity and considered worthy of respect as part of the greater whole of nature.

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From the Problem of Modern Subjectivity to Giorgio Colli's Concept of Expression

Alberto de Vita

Contemporary philosophy has neglected and almost forgotten Giorgio Colli's thought. Very well known as a translator of Nietzsche, Kant and Schopenhauer, Colli is barely considered and even rarely mentioned as a philosopher *stricto sensu*, in both international and Italian philosophical discussions (the latter defined according to the paradigm of *Italian thought* — *see* Esposito, 2010).[1]

Actually, Colli is a lone, untimely thinker, who preferred to avoid direct confrontation with the philosophers of his time: as pointed out by N. A. Tusell (see 1993, p. 192), Colli is simply *irreducible* to every other twentieth-century philosophical paradigm.

By the way, Colli's 'philosophical solitude' seems less the result of a personal or hermeneutical decision than the necessary consequence of his own philosophy: indeed, it is the same originality of Collian thought that makes comparisons with other contemporary thinkers hard, because his philosophical solutions and his methodological approach are quite peculiar.

In this respect, Colli's philosophy must be analysed first *in* and *with* itself (at most with the authors of the past whom Colli himself had confronted), before being faced with other contemporary authors. This means that the originality of Colli's thought does not exclude comparisons with twentieth-century philosophers (see C. La Rocca, 2008, p. 76); on the contrary, its uniqueness requires a confrontation with other authors who discussed the same theoretical problems, even though in a different way.

In this paper I will analyse some central issues in Colli's philosophy, showing their link to Nietzschean philosophy (*1. Nietzsche's Modernity* and *2. The Hypothesis of Expression Beyond the Metaphysics of the Subject*). I will try to clarify the meaning of the Collian notion of expression, indicating how it presents itself as a negation of the modern concept of subject. Finally, I will attempt to analyse and, in a certain sense, weigh Colli's criticism against the modern philosophies of the subject, specifying its characteristics, to compare Collian philosophy with other contemporary philosophies, where subjectivity is

[1] References to Colli's philosophy are rare, even in Italian. In the course of this work, I will indicate the main contributions that have been made to an understanding of the theoretical aspects of Collian philosophy.

(in an apparently similar manner) rejected (*3. The Meaning of the Collian Negation of the Modern Subject*)[2].

1. Nietzsche's Modernity

One of the ways to approach Colli's thought is to analyse the Collian interpretation of Nietzsche. Indeed, Colli is an interpreter of Nietzsche quite *sui generis*, because he did not want to be a mere Nietzschean scholar: Nietzsche is rather the starting point of the properly Collian philosophical thesis. Nevertheless, Colli immediately feels the need to distance his philosophy from that of Nietzsche.

This emerges clearly in *Dopo Nietzsche* (1974), the Collian work which 'presents the greatest affinities with and, at the same time, a sovereign distance from the philosophy of Nietzsche' (Montinari, 2018, p. 141). In this respect, the remark of G. Campioni seems legitimate, who, in a speech in 1981, asked provocatively: 'Did Giorgio Colli want to be the interpreter of Nietzsche and, in general, is it possible, according to Colli, to give an interpretation of Nietzsche?' (Campioni, 1983, p. 19).

So, in *Dopo Nietzsche*, Colli credits Nietzsche with breaking away from the modern metaphysical philosophical tradition. Nonetheless, Nietzsche himself is repeatedly criticised for still being overly attached to modern philosophy: according to Colli, Nietzsche remained 'too modern' (DN, p. 197), because the centrality of subjectivity, claimed by modern philosophers, remains unchanged in Nietzschean thought. Colli argues: 'The belief in the subject that Nietzsche helped demolish is intrinsically connected to his thought, even to his last works. Calling the substance of the world "will" already refers simply to a metaphysical subject' (ibid., pp. 87–88). In other words, according to Colli, Nietzsche posed 'a field of obstacles, a form of inner resistance to a subject. In metaphysical terms, this means postulating a plurality of substantial entities' (ibid.) — and this because of his hypothesis of a *will to power:* 'There is no will power without a subject that supports it, i.e. a subject that is substantial, because the discourse is here metaphysics: and it was Nietzsche who had destroyed the subject!' (ibid.).

In so doing, Colli proposes a very useful hermeneutic operation with respect to the Nietzschean philosophy; in fact, he points out a theme of

[2] The quotations from the works of Colli, in Italian, and from the works of Nietzsche, in German, are all translated by the author of the present work, in order to make them consistent with the general sense of the article. The titles of Collian works (indicated fully in the bibliography) are abbreviated as follows (and always followed by the page number): *Dopo Nietzsche* = DN; *Filosofia dell'espressione* = FE; *La ragione errabonda* = RE. For Nietzschean works, we will quote from *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden* (Her. von G. Colli und M. Montinari).

Nietzsche's thought that has been overlooked very often by Nietzschean *Forschung* in the last century: in fact, despite the widespread tendency to consider Nietzsche a philosopher 'beyond the subject',[3] thereby the post-modern destroyer of the (modern) metaphysics of philosophical subjectivity, Colli recognises the unavoidability and the inescapability of the instance of the subject in Nietzschean philosophy.

In fact, examining the problem of the subject, Nietzsche performs a double operation:

(i) First, he denies that subjectivity is definable through the attributes developed by the modern philosophical tradition (from Descartes to Kant): thus, according to Nietzsche, the subject cannot be considered a *res*, an eternal, fixed and stable *substantia*, because it is nothing continuous or immutable, present or permanent in our reflections. Put otherwise, Nietzsche aims to deny that the subject is a firm foundation (as Descartes presented it[4]). Indeed, the essence of the subject is not stability, but becoming: its consistency is fluid, fleeting, temporal. 'The individual is nothing fixed and constant' (HH, 222), writes Nietzsche: thinking subjectivity as a substance means thinking of it as a fiction, as a counterfeit of becoming that represents its own essence.

Nietzschean claims on the problem of subjectivity converge in a fragment dated 1885:

> What divides me in the deepest way from the metaphysicians is this: I do not allow them that 'I' is what it thinks; on the contrary, I consider the *ego* itself a construction of thought [...]; therefore only a regulatory function, by which one can introduce and invent in a world of becoming a kind of stability and therefore of 'knowability'. [...] However customary and indispensable this fiction may be, nothing proves that its nature is not fictitious. Something can be a life condition and yet false (FP: 1885, 35[35]).

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[3] This is the title of the famous book written by G. Vattimo: *Al di là del soggetto. Nietzsche, Heidegger e l'ermeneutica* (1981); Vattimo's theses on Nietzsche are inscribed in a post-modernist philosophical theory, which identifies Nietzsche as the father of contemporary nihilism, which means the dissolution of the notion of subjectivity. These positions were recently taken up by J. Constâncio, in *Nietzsche on Decentred Subjectivity, or the Existential Crisis of the Modern Subject* (2015).

[4] Descartes described the *ego cogito* as a stable and permanent centre; he even compared the subject to the concept of Archimedes' fulcrum: 'Nihil nisi punctum petebat Archimedes, quod esset firmum et immobile, ut integram terram loco dimoveret; magna quoque speranda sunt, si vel minimum quid invenero quod certum sit et inconcussum' (Descartes, 1904, p. 24). In passing, one should admit that the Cartesian theme of the subject is much more complex than it appears; a comprehensive reading of this problem, including the Nietzschean interpretation of Cartesianism, is offered by J.-L. Marion, who recognises a paradoxical proximity between Descartes and Nietzsche (see J.-L. Marion 2021).

Nietzsche defines the subject as an expression of becoming, i.e. a derivative entity which is ontologically subordinated to becoming itself: it does not bear anything 'immediately certain' (ibid.), because it is comprehensible only as a mediated and secondary expression of the incessant flow in which reality consists essentially. Moreover, since the fluid and becoming nature of reality does not admit any form of ontological fixation or stability, which would be required by the definition of the *ego* as a permanent and immutable substance or substrate, the perspective of the subject tends to falsify the becoming it expresses. For these reasons, the subject is described by Nietzsche as a fiction, an alteration or falsification of the infinite becoming: it has a fictitious consistency, since it exists only by denying, masking its own becoming essence. Ultimately, the becoming is described by Nietzsche as infinite, understood as a 'primordial fact' which indicates the original vitality 'from which the finite' — that is every determination, including that of subjectivity, understood as 'illusion' — 'originates' (FP: 1872–73, 19[139]). In a word, the subject is a derivative manifestation of becoming, as Nietzsche states in *Genealogy of Morality* (I, 13): 'A substratum does not exist: there is no "being" below doing, acting, becoming; "he who does" is only added to doing — doing is everything'.

(ii) On the other hand, in passing, Nietzsche recognises in the fictional nature of the subject an expressive function of becoming as such: the alteration in which the positing of subjectivity consists allows the becoming to proceed unceasingly, exceeding any determination within which it is defined, fixed and therefore denied. Becoming reveals its infinity only by surpassing and transcending the perspective of the subject in which it occurs. Indeed, the falsity that characterises the concept of the subject does not prevent it from being a condition of life, according to Nietzsche, because 'the falsity of a concept is not an objection to it' (FP: 1885, 35[37]): therefore, the fiction of subjectivity does not entail the inconsistency of the subject *as such*, because its fictitious nature reflects (by contrast) the irreducibility of becoming to any subjective fictional definition. Ultimately, the fiction of subjectivity reveals its own necessity in relation to the essential vitality of becoming. Indeed, according to Nietzsche, becoming understood as 'fundamental certainty' is constituted as the foundation of a multiplicity of representations, within which it discharges itself, denies and alters its own nature: while becoming is the being of representing ('representing *is* nothing equal to itself, or immutable' — my emphasis), representing 'affirms the opposite of being', because 'it *must affirm* the substance and what is equal, since it is impossible to know what is entirely flux' (FP: 1881, 11[330] — my emphasis).

In summary, to Nietzsche, on the one hand, it is necessary to admit the inevitability that characterises the perpetual and infinite becoming, whose alteration 'is the condition for the existence of the species of being that has representations' (ibid.); on the other hand, the irreducibility of becoming to this finite determination, i.e. its transcendence, must also be noted. Therefore, if 'it is

impossible to know what is entirely flux', it becomes necessary to postulate a subject that 'must invent and attribute qualities of being, in order to exist itself' (ibid.); and nevertheless, an original becoming must be admitted regarding the same definition and alteration of the fictional subject, since becoming is a condition of possibility and 'fundamental certainty'.

Thus, in Nietzsche's thought an irreducible *aporia* between becoming and subject emerges, which suggests the ineluctibility of the perspective of the subject itself: 'A world without a subject', Nietzsche asks, 'is it possible to think of it? But think now of all life cancelled at once. [...] Eliminating the subject with thought is a contradiction: representing without representation!' (FP: 1881 (beginning), 10d[82]). Certainly, Nietzsche describes the subject as a point of view within which the vital becoming is altered and realised as incessant life flow.

Therefore, the ambivalence entailed by Nietzschean criticisms of the modern subject becomes blatant: while Nietzsche rethinks its fundamental attributes, he continues to maintain its centrality; Nietzsche considers the onto-epistemological reality of subjectivity to be unavoidable, like every modern philosopher, although it reconfigures its nature:[5] subjectivity is a fiction, a finite expression of the infinite becoming, since it is doomed to pass; nevertheless, subjectivity itself is precisely the expression where becoming realises itself, and thus it is a necessary, indefeasible (typically modern) fiction. In a word, subjectivity is that fiction which — according to Colli — makes Nietzsche (still) 'too modern' (DN, 197).

2. The hypothesis of expression beyond the metaphysics of the subject

Colli's philosophical aim consists exactly in overcoming the (still Nietzschean) metaphysics of subjectivity, radicalising and surpassing Nietzschean theses. 'Nietzsche's philosophy went a long way. The job was almost complete', Colli writes (DN, p. 81). In this respect, one could consider Collian philosophy as the complement of Nietzsche's, and especially with regard to the problem of the subject — in truth, according to Colli, 'Nietzsche is dragged to a conclusion opposite to the one he wanted to reach' (DN, p. 176).

Collian criticisms of (Nietzschean) subjectivity emerge in the opening of *Filosofia dell'espressione* (1969), the theoretical *summa* of Collian thought. Colli

[5] In this sense, some Nietzschean aphorisms become quite clear — for example, BGE, 16: 'Naive observers of themselves still continue to exist, those who believe that there are "immediate certainties", for example "I think", or, as in Schopenhauer's superstition, "I will": as if here knowledge could grasp its object pure and naked, as "thing in itself" and no falsification could take place either on the part of the subject or on that of the object. But I will not tire of repeating that "immediate certainty", as well as "absolute knowledge" and the "in itself", involve a *contradictio in adjecto:* one should also get rid, at last, of the seduction of words'.

states that the subject is 'always slimy and elusive' (FE, p. 5). In fact, he continues, the notion of subject 'is not only misleading, but even seriously dangerous. We must reduce it to a merely relative concept, trying to eliminate it completely from any deep speculation' (ibid., pp. 8–9).

According to Colli, subjectivity is definitely relative, ungraspable and therefore inconsistent. Indeed, the relative status of the subject depends on the continuous relationship that it entertains with objects, with respect to which it is precisely defined as subject: 'It is only by talking about objects that we can deal with the subject, or more concisely: if we talk about anything, we talk about objects' (ibid., p. 5)

The relationship subject-object relativises the subject, making it fluid, because

> each subject is provisional, and each subject is the object of a more comprehensive subject. The concept of a universal subject conditioning all objects is the product of modern philosophy (Kant - unity of apperception), but in reality this subject does not exist (RE, [281] — my emphasis).

In fact,

> every time you analyse a representation you find an object, even in the context of a relationship, that is, according to a perspective, as a specific projection. But there is no point in looking for the point from which this view is opened: the moment it is discovered, that subject becomes an object, absorbing the old object in itself, and it escapes once again the origin of perspective. (FE, p. 13)[6]

Nevertheless, it must be remarked that the Collian decentralisation of the subject in favour of the object does not entail the hypostatisation of the horizon of the object itself. In other words, the removal of the subject does not result in a form of 'objective hyper-realism'. According to Colli, the 'subject-object' relationship is rather insufficient as such, because both subject and object are relative as related: 'The relationship between subject and object does not grasp the essence of representation. [...] It is therefore permissible to speak about a subject-object relationship only provisionally' (FE, p. 7). In this respect, in *La ragione errabonda*

[6] In his posthumous work, *La ragione errabonda*, Colli had argued against Husserl about a real 'narrowing of the subject by the object' (RE, 411). As pointed out by L. Torrente, 'the attacks that Colli makes upon the modern subject are often stinging and aimed above all at depriving it of its autonomy and substantiality. Within the representative context, the subject is the complementary term of the object and derives its existence from that of the representation itself' (Torrente, 2021, p. 66).

(257), Colli states: 'The Subject-object opposition in epistemology is very modern and misleading'.

Thus, according to Colli, it is necessary to go beyond the representation regulated by the subject-object logic in order to indicate the essence of representation itself, i.e. the depth that the relationship 'subject-object' does not express: 'To determine representation as a relationship between subject and object means to consider it in light of the categories of possession and situation. One should try to determine it in light of the category of substance' (FE, p. 7).

The essence of representation is defined by Colli as immediacy (*immediato*), the flux of the expression (*flusso dell'espressione*), substance (*sostanza*), and being (*essere*).[7] In fact, to Colli, every representation must be understood *literally* as a re-presentation, a re-enactment of something else, that is immediacy, substance: this is the source and the background of the representation as such. 'The word "representation" is not to be understood as a translation of the German word *Vorstellung*, but rather in the primitive meaning of "to make something reappear in front", in short, as a "re-enactment"' (ibid., p. 6). In this regard, one could state with certainty that immediacy is the original evidence of reality, the condition of possibility of any representation that declines in terms of subject and object. Indeed, in *La ragione errabonda*, immediacy is described as pure representability, the implicit presupposition of every representation. Immediacy is life as such, reality by force of which representation is defined as such; every representation is a determination, a definition that specifies a totality irreducible to representation itself. In a word, representation must presuppose a context, a totality (the representability of the representation as such) in which it fits, but which it cannot reduce. Immediacy then constitutes the background of the representation, its substance — not by chance, in *La ragione errabonda*, Colli specifies the synonymy between expression, which conveys the immediate, and substance: 'Expression is the term that replaces substance' (RE, 366).

Now, according to Colli, representations are in contact (*contatto*) with the immediate substance, that nevertheless cannot be represented as such: every definition of the immediate is its mediation,[8] i.e. a reduction of the reality of the substance to an object for a subject, within a representational context. On the contrary, the immediacy remains hidden in the representation, and therefore can only be *expressed* by overcoming its logic and its 'subject-object' distinction: 'By expression', Colli writes, 'we mean here a representation from which the perspective of an object is subtracted from the point of view of a subject, and which is therefore considered as something simple' (ibid., p. 22). Thus, the

[7] A basic overview of the Collian concept of expression is presented by V. Meattini (2018).

[8] Colli explicitly defines 'contact' as the essence of representation: 'Being is the category that expresses the representation of the nexus — as union within the simple or compound object — as referring to metaphysical contact' (FE, p. 71).

expression becomes in Collian philosophy the device that conveys immediacy and attests to the reality of the substance, overcoming the representational context where subject and object are distinguished. *Espressione* manifests the simplicity and evidence of immediacy, as well as its irreducibility to the logic of representation. It reveals immediacy as representability, i.e. as the background implied by every representation.[9] In this sense, the metaphysical hypothesis of expression (as Colli defines it) exhibits the limits of representation when it comes to indicating its own essence, testifying to representation's inability to manifest the contact with its immediate essence, from which it derives and to which it refers. In fact, the contact of the representation with immediacy re-enacted remains outside the representation as such, because it is merely reduced in the representational perspective to the status of an object. So, in *Filosofia dell'espressione*, Colli argues that: 'contact is something where subject and object are non-detached. [...] In the contact there is no subject that determines, nor any object that is determined', because they 'seem to be confused': subject and object 'cease to be such' (ibid., p. 39). The contact shows the partiality of the representation, its dependence on an (indefinable) other to which it refers: 'The contact, as a metaphysical element, must still be only an unknowable limit, postulated by the structure of appearance, and to which the expression, analysed, refers' (ibid., p. 40). In fact, according to Colli, the contact with immediacy is the content of the expression, an interpretation (not a representation) of the 'unrepresentable': originally alien to the logic of representation that sees subject and object as opposed to one another, contact

> indicates nothing that represents anything, a metaphysical *interstitium*, which however is a certain nothing, since what it is not, its representative surrounding, gives it an expressive determination (ibid., pp. 41-42).

In the end, *contatto* is what indicates that there is an otherness with respect to representation, which representation cannot determine: 'Interpreting the unrepresentable according to the representative structure, we can say that it is the contact between the subject and the object' (FE, p. 39). In a brief and concise manner, Colli points out that the representation of the subject and the object refers to a non-representable otherness in which subject and object do not exist, which must be presupposed by the representation that is defined as such: such otherness limits the representation, and defines it:

> Of course, this common element cannot be explained through the subject and the object, which in the immediacy are absent. In the

[9] The need to understand the notion of expression in Colli as pure representativity was claimed by C. La Rocca (2008, p. 79).

> unreasonable the sphere of expression finds a limit, which it cannot reduce to itself, but which it must interpret, precisely because it bears witness to it. (FE, p. 42)[10]

Therefore, Colli strives to delineate an antinomy between the horizon of representation and its other (its very foundation), also proposing to maintain the antinomy as such, in its irreducibility and irresolubility: each representation (subject-object) makes sense as it emerges from a background devoid of subject and object. Although the representation cannot be transcended (everything, in effect, is determined, represented, put in perspective), it must be maintained in relation to an otherness that is not reducible. Neither the representation nor its background can be eliminated, although they cannot know each other and reflect one another. The Collian notion of contact definitively ratifies the inconsistency of the subject and the impossibility for it to be constituted on a transcendental level.

Indeed, the subject (as the object as such) is a nothing which refers to immediacy, while the latter is the ultimate essence of reality.[11] Thus, subjectivity does not exist except as a temporary, contingent, relative occurrence of the flow of expression: it is simply immediacy empirically defined and thereby mediated, negated:

> In the tissue of knowledge there is no pure or absolute subject. Neither as substance, nor as form, nor as synthesis: an empirical subject, however, is a reality of appearance; it is a grouping of representations endowed, among other things, with a certain overall

[10] 'The expression is by nature defective, but precisely because its nature is to express, it also expresses something that is defective in itself. In the abyss of immediacy there is a resistance, an obstacle, a contraction (speaking symbolically), and the expression brings all this with it. The lack that lies in the contact is something unsurpassable: the expression reiterates this insufficiency even as its meaning, in manifesting that resistance, would be to escape it, to overcome it' (FE, p. 47).

[11] It is no coincidence that Colli often criticises Descartes, in a way that is not unlike Nietzsche's. In addition to the numerous references in *La ragione errabonda*, see for example: 'For Descartes the principles of our knowledge are that doubt gives us the first certainty (*coincidentia oppositorum*!), that this first certainty concerns the existence of the thinking subject, that the mind is separated from the body and that the latter exists on its own, outside of our thinking, that the existence of mind and body is guaranteed by the existence of God, that the existence of God is guaranteed by the fact that we think it, that the freedom of our will is manifested to the point of being an innate notion, and so on. As for the body, the extended matter, the proof of its existence is amusing: if God made us present the idea of this extended matter by way of something in which there was no extension, one could not help but consider God a deceiver: but God does not deceive, so extended matter exists. Cartesian reason is based on this evidence: the Greek and Indian traditions had not attained even one of these truths' (DN, pp. 53–54).

> persistence. [...] What distinguishes one spatio-temporal representation from others is its location in an empirical subject, or, more precisely, the fact that the series of representations constituting the movement is related to the group of representations forming the empirical subject [...]. But the empirical subject is an unstable compound. (DN, pp. 28–29)

In this respect, according to Colli, the subject understood as absolute and permanent substance remains an absurdity: [12] subjectivity is only a fleeting, evanescent expression of the immediate, within an empirical context: the ego is namely and simply 'the empirical subject' related to a 'certain knowledge, that is not conditioned by it' (ibid., p. 175). In a word, subjectivity is a mediation where immediacy denies itself, because it is prone to transcend every subjective definition that it makes possible. The definition does not 'attest to the immediate, because "it cannot be attested", because it is the ineffable, and not because "it must not be said"' (DN, p. 176).

However, unlike Nietzsche, Colli believes that immediacy, considered as original, does not need to manifest itself through the subject, since the fiction in which the subject consists does not express immediacy, not even by contrast. Indeed, for Colli, what is fundamental is not manifested in fiction, in alteration, in the illusion of the subject (Nietzsche), but rather in going beyond the latter. In other words, Colli does not consider the negativity of the subject as a positive manifestation of the other by the subject (life, immediacy, becoming).

For these reasons, Colli intends to go beyond Nietzsche's thesis on the subject as such, i.e. beyond Nietzschean modernity: his aim is not simply to rethink the modern subject, like Nietzsche, but even to deny it, through the hypothesis of expression, through the hypothesis of immediacy: 'The path of expression is the path of the cancellation of the subject' (RE 411) — in fact, Nietzschean will and in general a subject as such 'don't exist' (DN, p. 151), because subjectivity is simply 'a lie' (ibid., p. 86).

3. The Meaning of the Collian Negation of the Modern Subject

Criticising the notion of subjectivity, Colli points out definitively the shortcomings of modern philosophy (within which he also includes Nietzschean thought). As Colli states:

[12] In this respect, L. Torrente noted that in Collian philosophy 'the subject appears as something negative, and anything but original or even founding the essence of representation. [...] If the fundamental datum is *re-præsentatio*, the absolute presence of the subject to itself is something unattainable' (L. Torrente, 2021, p. 67).

> Ancient Greek philosophy is not a stuttering anticipation of the modern, or its as yet unformed anticipation. [...] It is rather that modern philosophy barely rebukes the ancient thoughts, as one who due to trauma has lost his voice and then begins laboriously to recover it by fragments, mumbling. (FE, p. 166)

Nevertheless, the Collian criticism of the metaphysics of the subject (and more generally of the assumptions of modern philosophy) do *not* make Colli a post-modern thinker. Indeed, according to Colli, the negation of the subject does not imply the impossibility of any form of absolute, certain or epistemic truth. In other words, unlike what happens in post-modernist philosophies (often inspired by Nietzschean philosophy), the disappearance of the subject does not lead to the end of the 'great fictions' (J.-F. Lyotard, 1979) or toward a form of 'weak thought (*pensiero debole*)' (G. Vattimo, P. A. Rovatti, 1988). On the contrary, Collian goals are quite different: indeed, it is precisely the disappearance of the instance of subjectivity that makes possible a philosophy based on the strongest sense of truth, that is, a form of epistemic thought.[13] Therefore, Colli writes: 'If the inconsistency of the subject is proved, or at least that the subject is not a fixed or final term, it can no longer be said that the suppression of the subject implies the suppression of the world, and generally the solipsistic thesis will fall' (RE 370a).

According to Colli, subjective inconsistency testifies to the truth of the world, which reveals its own incontrovertibility, its own absolute (and not post-modern) character. In other words, Colli aims to recover the authentic sense of truth, not to demolish it: consequently, he tends to suppress the subject's perspective, which reduces the reality of truth to its own object, mediating, objectifying and denying immediacy. If the history of philosophy has led to the theses of modern philosophers on subjectivity, philosophy itself must be overcome and 'unmasked'. In this regard, Colli maintains, 'the death of philosophy, precisely in so far as its lying nature is exposed, clears the field for wisdom' (DN, p. 82). In other words, Colli aims to reconstruct the authentic sense of rationality, of the ἐπιστήμη; he does not want to give up logic, the λόγος. Thus the logic of which the subject is a figure can be maintained if it is rethought as an expression of something else (like the subject as such): thus considered, rationality is admitted, and not nihilistically questioned, as happens in post-modern philosophies.

[13] Colli, in DN p. 175, defines the paradox of the truth, according to which the truth cannot (rather than *must* not) be said, but at the same time it is maintained as such: 'Only the one who is truthful is defined by the truth. But those who know the truth "cannot" say it, because it would sin against life, they would reject it. It is a conflict between the duty to tell the truth and the duty — or the pleasure — of affirming life. [...] This truth is not hideous, because the predicate only indicates a reaction of our empirical subject to a certain knowledge, that is not conditioned by it'.

Philosophy, the subject, its rationality: all this has only a partial, determined value, conditioned by something else: 'A two-faced figure belongs to reason, which is an extreme expressive tip, an inexhaustible impulse of exploration, albeit unilateral, in life' (FE, p. 172). As the subject is only empirical, its rationality is purely 'spurious' (Ibid., p. 162). Actually, according to Colli, philosophy must ultimately recover its character of greatness, it must return to thinking the absolute truth (immediacy), without renouncing it, and rather renouncing the subjective philosophical perspectives: philosophy must recover its own wisdom, not accept the end of its grand narratives.

Indeed, wisdom is the essence, the source of philosophy, which cannot be grasped by subjectivity's philosophical outlook: wisdom is described by Colli as the knowledge of the real structure of truth, i.e. as the insight into the extra-subjective essence of reality. According to Colli, ancient wisdom had correctly understood the relational value of reason and subjectivity, as opposed to their (modern) autonomy. They express another that they cannot represent or determine: 'The latter understood reason as a simple "discourse" on something else, a *logos* (subject and object together) whose nature is to express something different from itself. This origin was then forgotten, we no longer understand this allusive function of reason, expressive in a metaphysical sense, and we consider "speech" as if it had an autonomous value, as if it were the mirror, the perfect equivalent of an idea or an object therefore called rational, or even an independent substance itself' (FE, pp. 183–84).

These elements indelibly mark Colli's distance from any post-modern thought. Hence, one could ultimately note that Colli moves between modern and post-modern thought, without embracing either: both were unable to think the truth, the origin of wisdom, which must be admitted (as is maintained by modern philosophers, not by post-modernism) without assuming any subjectivity (as claimed by post-modern philosophers): finally, wisdom can be recovered by investigating the origins of philosophical thought, in antiquity (not modernity).[14]

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[14] Colli argued about the need to recover the ultimate essence of Ancient thought in *Nascita della filosofia* (1975). Moreover, the Collian perspective in *Nascita della filosofia* is widely critical of Nietzschean philosophy.

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Eternity as Relationality: The Problem of the External Foundation of Time in the Thought of Emanuele Severino

Andrea Righi

When Jacques Lacan said that 'God does not know he is dead (that's why he is alive)', he implied that Nietzsche's scandalous affirmation did not free believers from the grip of culpability and judgement. Affirming, as Nietzsche did, that 'God is dead' does little to vanquish the position of power held by a transcendent entity and its related social order. As Gilles Deleuze points out, the inexistence of God does not free humankind from a bond of obedience, because rather than 'being burdened from the outside, man takes the weights and places them on his own back'.[1] The symbolic force of God cannot be declared null and void once and for all. And even if one reached that conclusion, as the Italian philosopher Emanuele Severino notes, nothing prevents people from 'going back to believing again'.[2] Because of this reversibility, it is plausible to state that the finite domain cannot simply erase the ancestral pact with transcendence. Paradoxically, it seems more reasonable to state that it is the entity that occupies that position of power that shall rescind its obligation towards mankind.

Although the difficulties in asserting radical immanence are not easy to overcome, the formula for dissolving the hold of transcendence is essential to a proper understanding of this immanence. As the claim of the death of God shows, immanence seems to assert what it wants to abolish: although completely self-inherent, it appears to be relying on a non-immanent principle. In other words, the erasure of transcendence seems to be enunciated from a transcendent standpoint, thus surreptitiously re-introducing the concept of transcendence. Because of this, the strategy to disclose the truth of immanence must take a roundabout way, entering into a strange relation with transcendence. By following a series of appropriate steps, one must dance with transcendence in order to deflate it, so to speak. The first step within this dance involves taking up the argument of transcendence *as if* it were true. Greek Philosopher Aristides Baltas explains the reason for this philosophical twist as follows: 'if there can be no position outside the world (and thought and language), then there can be no position from which to issue this proposition — talking, as it does, of the world (and thought and language)

[1] Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 71.

[2] Severino, *Il Muto di pietra*, 92 (all translations from the Italian are mine unless otherwise indicated).

from outside'. This is a serious objection because stating that immanence is all that exists risks replacing the previous metaphysical position with a new transcendence. Baltas continues, 'the strategy should involve provisionally accepting the possibility of a world — thought — or language transcending standpoint', in other words, this path 'involves granting legitimacy to the philosophical views opposing the perspective of radical immanence'.[3] Once this stance is assumed, the next move is to have this position show its own impossibility or 'self-annihilation'.[4]

While the possibility of dissolving transcendence in spatial terms is conceivable — an endless landscape is intuitively imaginable — the temporal side of this issue is harder to articulate. As temporal creatures marked by growth, decay, and death, we normally picture time as an absolute universal order following an inflexible direction.[5] Such progression forces upon us notions like *beginning* and *end* that circumscribe life (including that of the Universe), thus reinstating an externality that calls into question a form of transcendence. Put differently, questions regarding what was there *before* time — which perhaps caused it to exist — and what will be there *after* its end, point toward a concept of time limited by — but also based on — external conditions: again a form of transcendence. Yet, dissolving these transcendent markers creates the problem of describing an immanent concept of time without falling into some version of subjectivism — where reality turns into a possession of the subject. In the following pages, I want to discuss how the complexities of immanent infinity can be understood from a temporal point of view. To do so, I will delineate the tenets of Severino's thought, examining his autobiography, *Il mio ricordo degli eterni* (2011) (*My Recollection of the Eternal Beings*), which offers a meditation on the inconsistency of an exterior temporal foundation to reality. I will study the structure of immanence by way of a discussion of time focusing particularly on two main points of Severino's philosophy: the understanding of nihilism as the structure of Western civilisation, and the oracular announcement of its overcoming, which discloses the necessity of *eternity* as the singular instantiation of immanence. Severino reaches this point through the idea of *Appearing*, a form of eternity that excludes annihilation, in

[3] Baltas, *Peeling Potatoes*, 5.

[4] Baltas, *Peeling Potatoes*, 6. Lorenzo Chiesa reformulates in psychoanalytic terms a similar concern: 'Lacan suggests that speech cannot convey the incompleteness of language without immediately giving it a meaning, and thus transforming it into an apparent completeness. Saying "there is no meta-language" inevitably institutes this very statement as a meta-linguistic semblance', *The Not-Two*, 85.

[5] In the words of physicist Carlo Rovelli, 'we conventionally think of time as something simple and fundamental, independently from everything else, from the past to the future, measured by clocks and watches', *The Order of Time*, 3. Albert Einstein's notion of Spacetime has already disclosed how Newtonian time as a universal order is an illusion. As Rovelli writes, 'the world is not like a platoon advancing at the pace of a single commander. It's a network of events affecting each other', 16.

other words, *death* as non-being. In order to examine this point, I will draw on the work of an unlikely companion for Severino: Ludwig Wittgenstein.[6]

The Temporality of a Philosophical Autobiography

The reader should approach *Il mio ricordo degli eterni* with caution. The recollection (*ricordo*) of that which is eternal should not be understood as a return to Plato's Hyperouranion. On the face of it, this title seems a parody of the biographical object par excellence: My recollection of the events x, y, z. Yet, no one can remember eternity because one remembers only the past, which, according to common sense, does not exist anymore. Does the locution *recollection of the eternal beings* imply that in the distant past, eternity was and now has ceased to be? Certainly not. A substance that is everlasting cannot cease to exist — else it would be returned to the status of quantitative time, perhaps a time that took a long time to pass. This is why Severino argues that recollection is possible only because reality is eternal. In this sense, remembering is not the retrieving of something that does not exist anymore, but the appearing of an image that is, was, and shall always be. It is the *appearing* that discloses the eternal essence of the remembered content and that of the subject who thinks it.

Il mio ricordo is a calibrated sampling of the life of an academic: the milestones, the controversies (Severino was excommunicated by the Church and fired from The Catholic University of Milan), the encounters with important (and less important) people, intimate portrayals of loved ones, voyages, etc.[7] Most significantly, the narrative begins with trauma and ends with its denouement. Severino's earliest memory is of a kitchen — a persistent image in the book — where a boy is hiding under the dining table. The tablecloth falls from the edges of the table and provides a curtain that conceals what's underneath. The young Severino is anxious. A storm is brewing in the distance. His mother is waiting to meet the new housemaid. When she arrives the boy relaxes, but a feeling of uncertainty still troubles him as it begins to rain.[8] The scene encodes several themes of Severino's philosophy: 1) the anguish and pain that produce the need for protection; 2) the idea of destiny: here the storm that is approaching; 3) the theme of the appearing and disappearing of things, not only the arrival of the maid but the premonition of a future event: several years later in that same kitchen, the family will receive the news of the death of Emanuele's older brother, Giuseppe, who took part in the disastrous military campaign of the Italian army in Russia, during WWII.[9] This trauma has reverberations, as Giuseppe's death is superimposed on another painful

[6] In this essay, I will leave aside the other transcendent delimitation of time: beginning.

[7] On Severino's excommunication, see Carrera, 'Severino vs Western Nihilism', 47. I would like to thank Carrera for his precious comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this essay.

[8] Severino, *Il Mio Ricordo Degli Eterni*, 7.

[9] Severino, *Il Mio Ricordo Degli Eterni*, 7–8.

casualty, the passing of Esterina.[10] This is not a simple narrative ploy — a prolepsis that brings together two events that are distant in time — but it rather illustrates point number three. As I will discuss later on, the belief that things die and turn into nothing obfuscates the true singular dimension of eternity.

Giuseppe was not only a model for the young Emanuele, he was also involved in the crucial function of introducing Severino to philosophy, particularly Giovanni Gentile's version of Italian neo-idealism, actualism. Esterina, in turn, was the loyal companion, who sacrificed her career (she was a talented linguist) to support the unorthodox philosopher. Both deaths represent the fault line where trauma emerges in all its clarity or, I may add, in all its undeniable truth. According to Severino, trauma (not wonder) gives rise to philosophy. The etymology of the famous Aristotelian definition of 'marvel' as the cause of philosophy, in ancient Greek *thaúma* (or *thaumadzein*), is inadequate. *Thaúma* connotes a shock as it refers to 'the blow and terror that man feels before the becoming of life, of pain, and death'. This explains why 'Aristotle affirms that philosophy leads to a state that is the opposite of *thaúma*, that is to say, happiness, which ensues from resolving problems afflicting the meaning of rightful human actions'.[11] Philosophy is the response to terror and produces a discourse that seeks to immunise us against existential anxiety by offering protection — as I pointed out, this is the table of Severino's youth.

Giuseppe's memory is also tied to another primal scene that appears at the end of the volume. This event records the beginning of speech for Severino. Giuseppe jokingly asked his younger brother, 'Can God be overbearing [*prepotente*]? I answered — and this is the first sentence I remembered having said — No! Because if he is omnipotent, he doesn't need to be overpowering [*prepotente*]'.[12] This is not a moral but a logical statement, one that is typical for children of this age, who are almost invariably visceral logicians. God's power cannot transcend itself because his movement would negate his own essence by trespassing it, thus implying that divine essence was, at a certain point in time, not all-embracing. According to Severino this is his first memory because it illustrates the paradox of *becoming other*. God is absolute perfection: even his own (absolute) power cannot encroach on his being. To be consistent with his absoluteness, he must keep on being what he is. Severino places this episode at the end of his memoir, although it chronologically happens much earlier in his life, because this fact is not the premonition of his future philosophy but rather the manifestation of

[10] I will not consider the figure of Esterina, Severino's wife, who died of cancer in 2009. Esterina's death becomes unreal, as she turns into one of the proofs of the eternity of all that exists, first symbolically through the figure of the sun and then apodictically when these memories will appear as eternal. See *Il Mio Ricordo Degli Eterni*, 150–51, 163–63. When speaking about the impossibility of death, Esterina doubted, however, Severino's confidence in eternity. See Ursini, 'Il pensiero di Emanuele Severino'.

[11] Severino, *Immortalità e destino*, 116.

[12] Severino, *Il Mio Ricordo Degli Eterni*, 160.

its eternal presence. The critique of the foundation of metaphysics echoes in a timeless persistence. Severino's literary style privileges the fragmentary but the result is not a post-modern pastiche; the fragmentary is the anchor that guarantees eternity, while the lyrical intensity of some of his symbols reflects the richness of meaning that is secured in a depiction of Being that lacks transcendence.

The Three Discourses of Western Civilisation

The kitchen table, conjugal love, and Giuseppe's philosophy are shields forged by existential traumas. According to Severino, death and the transience of the world generate a reaction that brings forth the structure of the three great discourses of Western civilisation: myth, philosophy, and *techne* (technology). This periodisation begins with a mythologeme that is common to all ancient tales which perceive becoming as a marker of destruction. Severino writes:

> By becoming other, man keeps on dying. First, by becoming other, all stages of life that he leaves behind die. Then he becomes other in a different way: he turns into a corpse. Primitive people find a way to coexist with the defunct by considering it another mode of being alive. To those who survived, the corpse has the appearance of that which has been subtracted from the visible.[13]

The mythical relationship with death is based on a form of permanence of all that exists; what changes is its visibility. The dead are still with us, they are just less visible. They are spirits. In the myth of Chronos, for instance, the father of the gods does not put an end to his children by eating them, because he vomits them right back into the world so that they keep on living.[14] However, even this type of non-final death produces suffering, which, in turn, requires a response in the guise of some saving mechanism. Severino points out that Genesis offers a template for the mythical response to the afflictions of mortality. The story attests to how mankind attempted (unsuccessfully) to defeat God. Adam's and Eve's eating of the apple is an example of divine cannibalism which signals the will to replace God. But this effort fails. Hence, 'after having killed the divine in order to live, mankind is urged to strike up an alliance with God so as to find a remedy against the anguish of death'. At this point, mankind begins to imagine transcendence 'as the supreme power [...] as the dimension where everything must return to find salvation from death and its anguish', and this is what the myth of Chronos, who devours and expels his children, shows.[15] The divine beyond turns into the substance that guarantees permanence and thus offers relief from the transformation of reality into nothing.

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[13] Severino, *In Viaggio Con Leopardi*, 62.
[14] See Severino, *Il muro di pietra*, 19–22.
[15] Severino, *In Viaggio Con Leopardi*, 63.

The age of myth is replaced by philosophy, the second moment of Severino's periodisation, which begins with early Greek civilisation and ends with Hegel. The discourse of philosophy consists in understanding and thus assuming the full power of becoming via a series of different intellectual structures or epistemologies that explain and thus control how reality mutates. Severino writes that this trait is already manifest in Aeschylus, who 'thinks that truth is the supreme remedy against suffering, anguish, and death'.[16] Philosophy, however, marks a shift from mythical thinking because it formulates the doubt about the credibility of the ancestral belief in persistence. Modern epistemologies embrace the idea that 'the beings of the world (wholly or in part, all or some aspect of them) issue from and return to Nothing — passing from their nothingness to being a not-Nothing and vice-versa [...]. The supreme evidence of Western civilisation consists in the purest and most abysmal alienation — the conviction that being is nothing'.[17] There are different degrees to which this conviction is held; but at its core, nihilism proves to be the shared foundation for Western philosophy. Even those who believe in the afterlife follow the general template of this form of knowledge. All monotheistic religions do this. Consider Christianity. As it professes the eternity of the soul and the belief in the afterlife, Christianity may indicate a return to mythical thought but it is firmly rooted in Greek epistemology because it believes in a depreciated version of this world. God is said to have created the world *ex nihilo*, from nothing. Creation, thus, becomes the locus of transition between being and nothing, it is the dimension where things disintegrate. Functioning as the guarantee for the existence of being, God populates the outer edge of reality standing motionless in its perfection. Creation splits reality in two. On one side, the ontic dimension, i.e., the reality of beings marked by transformation and decay. On the other side, the divine is eternal and immutable. The price one pays to secure salvation is that eternity is irrevocably reduced to something splendid but ossified so as to become the elsewhere of heaven. This dualism is based on what Severino calls the supreme evidence of Western civilisation, which believes that something is and, at a certain point, ceases to be. The age of philosophy recognises and takes advantage of nihilism. Fully immersing itself in the transformation of things, modernity wants to control and direct the process of things' becoming other (i.e. annihilation).

The erasure of the divine proclaimed by Nietzsche inaugurates modernity. Severino interprets this gesture as follows: 'God is dead means that the world has realised not only that it has no need of a transcendent immutable being, but that such a being would make man's creativity impossible [...] because the creation and destruction of beings is itself the immanent process of their becoming'.[18] When immanence proclaims its priority, transcendence emerges as a blockage that must be dislodged. The true meaning of Nietzsche's affirmation is that in order for man

[16] Severino, *Il Mio Ricordo Degli Eterni*, 121.
[17] Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, 276.
[18] Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, 281.

to act and dominate the world, divine omnipotence must vacate that world and relinquish its overdetermination.[19] As Severino points out, the actual infinity of God overflows space and time, reducing reality to the domain where the simple mechanical execution of his will occurs. Hence, he writes, 'from the Christian God one cannot pull the knowledge of a single breadcrumb because if one eliminates God's awareness of it, that breadcrumb ceases to exist'.[20] The consequence for mankind is significant. A world governed by the perfection of the God of the Judeo-Christian theology precludes any possibility for human intervention in life. This is why Severino maintains that 'the void of nothingness is necessary to becoming, that is, to the supreme evidence of creativity [...] hence there cannot exist any immutable entity filling that void with its presence'.[21] In a sudden reversal, the divine is transformed from the condition for the possibility of existence (as the guarantor of permanence) into the blockage that prevents movement and becoming. Its perfection pre-determines everything, thus disabling change.

At this juncture, *technology* takes over philosophy by producing a new discourse that subsumes both myth and philosophy, while embracing the open-ended nature of becoming. Modern technology claims the status of God and demands to preside over creativity and the transformation of the world. It does so by erasing God's overdetermining knowledge and replacing it with the full mobilisation of reality. Technology declares that 'any existing limit (or law) is only factual, historical, provisional, and contingent', and that its apparatus 'can and must extend its dominion over things indefinitely', and deploy 'its capacity [...] to avert death'.[22] As an impersonal will to transform, dominate, and thus alienate reality, *techne* now rules the world by drawing upon scientific potentiation.

The death of God also implies that *techne* is not an instrument but an end in itself. One can say that *techne* inherits the divine prerogative of theology. Modern technology is autonomous; it posits itself as the necessity to optimise its structures. It does not serve the purpose of human ends but uses humanity as a means to exert and expand its power. Severino points out that technology is omnipotent because it 'does not allow itself to be reduced to a means; in contrast, it reduces the voices of the past to means for the indefinite increase of its capacity to realise aims'.[23] And yet, despite the enormous power of technology, the promise of ending death by controlling becoming is in vain. Technology advances nihilism

[19] Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche is different and points to a transmutation of values that 'elevates multiplicity and becoming to their highest power and makes of them objects of an affirmation', *Pure Immanence*, 84.

[20] Severino, 'Le Radici Del Nichilismo', 97.

[21] Severino, *Immortalità e destino*, 13.

[22] Severino, *Immortalità e destino*, 13, 14.

[23] Severino, *Il muro di pietra*, 14–15. Severino brings into focus the radical autotelic movement of technology, echoing thinkers like Günther Anders, who argued that under capitalism humans must increase consumption not to fulfill their needs but to ensure that technology grows indefinitely. See Anders, *Gewalt.*

by automating the transformation of things into nothing and then into being, pulverising and recreating *ad infinitum*.

The Three Players

Mankind seems to enjoy seeking remedies that are worse than their afflictions: protections that further enslave people. According to Severino, Western discourse, and thus science as well, is not completely rational, that is to say, it does not follow the logical consequences of its premises. Italian Poet, Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837) is the thinker who illuminated these insoluble contradictions, and Severino considers him the greatest Italian philosopher and true anticipator of Nietzsche. Severino dedicated extensive work to showing how Leopardi is the fearless thinker of modernity, who stares into the void of Western civilisation, particularly its senseless understanding of progress.[24] In particular, Severino illustrates Leopardi's philosophy, the *Zibaldone* (1898), by using the metaphor of a game between two players. Leopardi embodies the Black Player, while Western Civilisation embodies the White Player. Both players begin from the framework I have previously outlined: the essence of reality is that of becoming as the alternation of life and death. The difference is that,

> [t]he White Player maintains that a reality that becomes nothing and comes from nothing is impossible — it is contradictory — unless an immutable Being exists, in other words, the world would be unthinkable without the existence of God. The Black Player, instead, shows how a reality that becomes nothing and comes from nothing is impossible because an immutable Being exists — i.e., the existence of God would make the world unthinkable.

The two positions are not equal. The Black Player easily outmatches the White Player. As observed, any divine principle is ultimately absurd because its omnipotent perfection and immutability prohibit the transformation of reality, which religion professes to be the realm of death and decay.[25]

As transcendence becomes an obstacle that must be removed, the Black Player's move makes the whole metaphysical construction of the White Player implode. At the same time, however, the Black Player reaches an impasse as well, for he declares that beyond our small and senseless life there is *nothing*. But by affirming the principle of immanence as a foundation of reality, his discourse slips into an unfortunate meta-level, a beyond that occupies a position analogous to the 'elsewhere' of religion. Severino thus mentions the need for a Third Player, who uncovers a different kind of truth, one that is buried by our faith in the becoming

[24] See Severino's trilogy, *Il nulla e la poesia. Alla fine dell'età della tecnica: Leopardi* (2005), *Cosa arcana e stupenda. L'Occidente e Leopardi* (2006), and *In viaggio con Leopardi* (2015).
[25] As Severino notes, 'Leopardi establishes the necessity of the death of God sixty years earlier than Nietzsche's Zarathustra', *In Viaggio Con Leopardi*, 78.

other of the world. The Third Player changes the rules of the game, thereby affirming that becoming must be explained differently. This is a difficult step to take because it defies the structure of the field in which both players (and us) normally play.

To illustrate the nature of the third position I will refer back to the issue of the illegitimate foundation established by the claim of immanence. As discussed, nothingness cannot constitute the beyond that circumscribes immanence because it would occupy the place of transcendence. But if immanence is all there is then we need to explain what happens at the temporal level, that is to say, what happens to beings when they come into the world and leave it behind. The plane of immanence confronts us with a situation that parents will likely understand. Consider the case of a young child looking at a picture of her mother or father from before she was born. The girl asks: where was I when the picture was taken? Her parent will casually remark: 'you did not exist back then'. The response engenders various degrees of disbelief in the child. She regards the parent as mad (perhaps this is not far from what Severino calls the folly of Western Reason). The idea of her non-existence is inconceivable since, for the child, a visceral attachment to life does not admit of exceptions because it is tailored to what Deleuze calls the 'unity of life and thought', where 'life activates thought, and thought, in turn, affirms life'.[26] To a certain degree, this is analogous to the perspective of Severino's Third Player. The child has no problem in admitting a before and an after, but her non-being is simply incredible. The concept of nothingness must be rigorously crafted over time as a leap of faith. The child must be coaxed to bend her intuitive logic, which assumes that whatever can be said regarding her must presuppose the being of her being. Likewise, the mindful parent experiences logical discomfort as well because, from the standpoint of their identification as a parent, they must attest to the truth of a point in time that obliterates the being of that relationship.[27] And yet who would object to the fact that people are born, grow old, and die?

The position of the Third Player wants to keep together transformation as well as the impossibility of nothingness. This means that reality is singularly eternal, while its transformation is due to a change in perspective, which Severino calls 'the appearing and disappearing of the eternals, that is their entering and leaving the eternal circle of appearing'.[28] Severino is not using a metaphor here; the logical concatenation of his argument brings him to this conclusion. This is how he explains the timeless duration of being in *Il mio ricordo:*

> What passes disappears for some time. The dead that leave us disappear for a larger portion of time. Later on, all that which has

[26] Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 66.

[27] Using an example that similarly regards infancy, Carrera notes that, 'if the past disappears from the horizon of appearing, the relations (or configurations) that every instant creates [...] cannot altogether vanish from Being', 'La pagina della strega', 122.

[28] Severino, *In Viaggio Con Leopardi*, 204.

> disappeared shall reappear. Everything: from that winter kitchen, to the burning fire in the hearth, to my family around the table, to the child that I was [...] *et gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis* [and your joy no man shall take from you, *Vespers* 16:16] [...]. Beyond Christian faith, to go home to the Father means that the eternals of the world appear, in everyone, together with the eternals of the world in everybody else, because the world that shall draw to a close our being separate individuals will come forth. The world saves us because it is the appearing of Joy, that which our destiny ultimately and truly is.[29]

Beyond the lyrical tones of this description, there is a clear effort to think multiplicity in immanent and non-theological terms. For instance, Severino writes that this truth is more democratic than the previous mythical or religious one. He observes that 'the philosophical tradition affirms the existence of eternity. But it is a type of eternity that is above the perishable things of the world and ultimately presents itself as their Lord and Master. Eternity acquires a different sense when we realise that all things, all configurations of the world and soul, all the instants are eternal and are not the serfs of a Master'.[30] Eternity cannot be the Biblical paradise, which immediately produces the vexing question that Wallace Stevens asks in his famous poem, *Sunday Morning*, 'Is there no change of death in paradise? Does the ripe fruit never fall?'[31] Paradise cannot be a fulfilment that lacks life.

On January 17th 2020, Emanuele Severino passed away. The Third Player would rephrase this fact as follows: the circle of Appearing moved beyond the philosopher, who did not go anywhere. What does it mean to assert that Severino did not cease to exist? It certainly does not mean that the molecules and atoms that were once part of the organism formally known as Emanuele Severino live on. The Third Player points to something beyond the law of conservation of mass. Yet even when conceding Severino's point regarding the impossibility of non-being, something prevents us from taking the impossibility of his death seriously.

I agree with Alessandro Carrera: at its core, Severino's philosophy rests on its power of confutation; it is one of those logical systems designed 'in such a way that the opponents [are] bound to contradict themselves even before they [have] voiced their objections'.[32] Instead of elaborating definitions and spaces of operations, Severino stuns the reader with 'theological or mystical names such as Joy and Glory' that do not function as 'metaphors or metonymies but rather as absolute and mystical *symbola'*, which preclude any further interpretation.[33] Still, that leaves us with the task of working through these exoteric names by way of

[29] Severino *Il Mio Ricordo Degli Eterni*, 160–61.
[30] Severino, *Il Destino Della Tecnica*, 224.
[31] Stevens, *Collected Poems*, 69.
[32] Carrera, 'Severino vs Western Nihilism', 61.
[33] Carrera, 'Dalla Gioia Alla Gloria', 82.

comparisons. To better understand the eternal form of *Appearing*, it is necessary to consider the concept of the field of vision as elaborated by Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Appearing: The Impossibility of Negating a Picture

Severino does not negate difference and its processual nature. At the same time, the horizon of immanence precludes nothingness both in its spatial and temporal dimensions because it would occupy a point of exteriority that negatively circumscribes the manifold. The problem is to conceive of this wholeness as a plane that cannot be boxed in by something else. This is the *becoming other* that Western folly accepts, prompting the endless movement of domination typical of its logic. This same issue is noticeable at a temporal level as well. The White Player relies on a false origin while the Black Player falls prey to the desperation of an ending. On the one hand, if time is God's property, as the White Player or Mediaeval theology claimed, transcendence emerges as the inhibiting factor for the becoming other of reality that mankind, and now technology, wants to control. On the other hand, if we follow the Black Player and say that things will end by crumbling into nothingness — that very nothingness that was there *before* time — we would have again to admit that a beyond exists that surrounds and presupposes reality. But how do we explain change and difference?[34]

The idea of a prior dimension to the ontic is not only a metaphysical problem. Asked about the Big Bang and the origin of the Universe, Italian Astrophysicist Margherita Hack favoured the theory that the universe was eternal, a solution that simply eradicated the infinite regression that asks what was there before time.[35] Eternity is not just a religious concept. When vacated from the anthropomorphic entity that reigns over it, it turns into a crucial component of radical immanence. Severino remarks that 'being and death, growth and change, generation, corruption, and destruction are the various ways in which Being *appears* and *disappears* (i.e. they are the various aspects assumed by any Being in

[34] Faced with a similar problem, Baruch Spinoza offered a solution that entailed the idea of incompleteness. It is our partial knowledge of infinity that skews our view, creating confusion and contradiction. The final totality of the manifold will line up facts showing that there was no real contradiction, wherein the whole is safe in its final arrangement. Severino argues that his idea of infinity is different from Spinoza's, for the Sephardic philosopher is still working within the folly of Western reason. 'The truth of Being', Severino argues, 'demands that all Being be immutable and eternal', but 'this is not to say that the becoming of things is mere illusion (as Spinoza thought), and thus that the appearing of change is merely phenomenal; rather, it means that the changing and becoming of things do not appear as an annulment of Being', Severino *The Essence of Nihilism*, 168. For a study of the limits of Spinoza's notion of eternity in Severino, see Farotti, *L'eternità mancata*. Modern physics takes, however, a Spinozan twist/turn/ gives x a Spinozan twist. Rovelli, for instance, writes that our perception of time, which is based on thermal time, 'is determined by a macroscopic state, that is, by a blurring, by the incompleteness of a description', *The Order of Time*, 137.

[35] Similarly, Stephen Hawking has elaborated a 'no-boundary' proposal in terms of time, *A Brief History of Time*, 145.

its appearing and disappearing)'.[36] The structure of Being must be singular, punctual and, I may add, metonymic. In the manifold, the multiplicity of relations is the contiguity of eternal moments. Severino's solution is a form of philosophical pointillism: the *punctum* is eternal in its dense state, and so are the relations with other *puncta*.[37] The instant names what is beyond measurability, beyond any succession of time. Eternity is the juncture in which the incalculably big and the infinitely small are the same thing.[38] Eternity is the manifold of the eternal instants. As Carrera writes, this view of reality 'does not mean that the empirical you and I are immortal in time (eternity is not immortality) but that each moment, every slice of reality is'.[39] This is why Severino calls destiny what we normally understand as future. He writes this word as de-*sti*-ny because of the Indo-European root *'stha'*, that which persists. *Gioia* (Joy) is the appearing of Glory precisely as the glowing of the multiplicity of all events that persist in an endless series.[40]

What makes these eternal *puncta* emerge, giving us the illusion of the flow of time, is the structure of *Appearing*, or the circle of destiny, that is to say the condition of possibility for something to appear. Severino states that 'the truth constitutes itself, insofar as Appearing itself belongs to the Being that appears', hence 'the Appearing that appears is the very appearing of all the determinations that appear, and in this sense is not 'among' them, but envelops or embraces them, positing itself therefore not as a simple part of the content that appears, but rather as the very horizon of that content'.[41] The structure of Appearing is arguably one of the most complicated and seemingly unnecessary schemes in Severino's philosophy, because it seems to establish a dualism between Being and the circle of Appearing. Let us work through it by way of the notion of 'similitudes'.

Severino's treatment of visibility echoes Wittgenstein's point regarding the limits of the world, which is a distorted figure of speech that portrays whatever

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[36] Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, 168.

[37] Alessandro Carrera explains this scheme as follows: 'Severino's universe is to all intents and purposes a theory of parallel universes. The totality of that which appears — let's say [...] the totality that comprises Hiroshima an instant before the explosion of the atomic bomb — is surpassed by a coming totality — i.e., the instant when the bomb explodes over the city —, so that the surpassed totality — i.e. the instant before the bomb — leaves behind the circle of appearing', 'Dalla Gioia Alla Gloria', 84.

[38] See Soncini and Murani, *La totalità e il frammento*. Difference as the appearing of these different states must then be accounted for with the idea of destiny.

[39] Carrera, 'Severino vs Western Nihilism', 46. Severino repeats many times that he is not afraid of death. Not because he believed in some kind of immortality, but because his disappearing simply meant entering the totality of that which has disappeared, the infinite network of singularities that still are. One might speculate that entering the totality of Being overcomes the solitude of the earth, that is to say the blurred vision that we as living species have developed. Certainly, it would also mean to take leave of the folly of the West and its belief in time as an absolute universal force.

[40] Carrera, 'Dalla Gioia Alla Gloria', 94.

[41] Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, 258.

appears in the field of vision as the projection of the eye.[42] But there is no eye in the field of vision, in other words, I see whatever appears but I never see my eye seeing. No eye can capture the vision, it is rather the opposite, the field of vision is all that appears, while the eye is hidden. In this approach to the field of vision as the condition for the possibility of visibility, one contemplates the brilliance of immanence, for if we posit a point of view that controls the limits of the emerging of the world, one is reproducing a transcendent exteriority based on the finite. Similarly, for Severino, there cannot be any intentionality of the world that masters how this world comes forth, 'precisely insofar as one is convinced that the world appears, the world brings about an inevitable phenomenalisation or subjectivisation of the things that appear'.[43] Our world is not the totality of Being, but rather a form of eternal view that is limited by the Western Folly and its belief in becoming. Severino describes the earth as isolated, because it represents the illusion of a system surrounded by nothingness. If we take heed of Wittgenstein's idea that there is no eye in the field of vision, we begin to imagine a plane of immanence that is all appearing. The fact that this plane is uncircumscribed implies that there are no final points of view (God) and that there is no limit that separates the being that is from the being that is not.

The comparison with Wittgenstein allows us to grapple with the scopic dimension of the circle of appearing, which is a self-presenting and impersonal totality. We can take a further step in this direction when considering what Wittgenstein called the 'mystery of negation'.[44] In his *Notebooks 1914–1916*, he asks a fundamental question: 'Can one negate a picture?'[45] That is, can an image portray the fact that, for instance, *it does not rain* just as a proposition asserts the case that *it does not rain*? Let us ask ourselves what sort of an image would depict the non-rain event? If the answer is a picture of a sunny countryside, then actually the picture of two puppets fencing would negate rain just as much. We cannot deny *what* the picture shows, we can only deny its meaning. Negation does not bring forth nothingness. Negation is not a fact but an operation, for it 'reverses the sense

[42] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 5.6331. Similarly to Severino's notion of Being, Wittgenstein describes a world of positive facts, for he maintained that in reality, negative states of affairs, in German, *negativen Tatsachen*, do not exist. For psychoanalysis, the solution to the structure of the field of vision is ontological. Kiarina Kordela writes that 'it is by imagining a specific gaze there where is the series of appearances that the object can appear at all and that the series of appearances is subjugated to a principle and obtains the structure specified by this appearance. The gaze, therefore, is altogether *within*, in that it manifests itself *in* the aspect of the finite gaze I imagine in the field of the Other; but it is also altogether *outside*, for the gaze itself, as the infinite series of possible points of view, cannot appear', *Being, Time, Bios*, 6.

[43] Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, 171.

[44] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 15.11.14.

[45] Ibid., 26.11.14.

of a proposition'.[46] Negation merely produces difference: by stating ~p, we may be affirming a plethora of meanings (q, a, b etc.). Thus, negative facts (*negative Tatsachen*) are logically impossible.

Just as Wittgenstein dismisses the existence of negative state of affairs, Severino attests to the impossibility of non-being. This assumption, sometimes called the 'golden implication' of Severino's argument, grounds his affirmation of the eternal positivity of Being.[47] This matter would take too long to discuss here. Suffice it to say that Severino argues that when we negate the existence of any shape or form of Being we fall into an aporia, because we actually affirm that something positive is negative, or that something that exists is non-existent. We should remember, warns Severino, 'that Nothing can be predicated only of Nothing; that "is not" can be said only of Nothing; that if the subject of a proposition is not Nothing, but is any determination whatsoever, then the predicate is "is", and is never "is not".'[48] Hence things must eternally be what they are and must reveal themselves as an image that manifests its contents.[49]

Granted the impossibility of non-Being, the problem now is to reconcile eternity with the movement of variation. As observed in *Il mio ricordo*, the sequence of the eternal instants is *destiny*, that which comes forth in the field of Appearing. As an ordained structure, Appearing is not intentional; rather it inevitably happens. Severino offered a depiction of the eternal landscape analogous to an optical mechanism when referring to Einstein's explanation of the universe as 'a film where all the frames that constitute the events in the world eternally co-exist'.[50] Glimmering under the circle of light, reality is the tape rolling with all its discrete states. Severino writes that 'obviously, the content of the Appearing varies',

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[46] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 5.2341. My interpretation here is greatly indebted to the work of Roberto Dionigi, *La fatica di descrivere*, 76–79. For a similar argument, see Paolo Virno, *Multitude*, 175–190.

[47] See Goggi, 'The Golden Implication', 44.

[48] *The Essence of Nihilism*, 45. Severino's idea of the eternal positivity of Being can be compared to the concept of the unconscious, which is equally timeless and affirmative, in Freud. See Pulli, *Freud e Severino*. Immanence is not an area of concern for those who study Severino's philosophy. This is particularly true in Italian academia, where scholars either dispute or praise the consequences of Severino's logic whilst leaving untouched the most fascinating aspects of his work, which I believe expose the radicality of the immanence of time. See Cardenas et al., 'Giornata di Studi'.

[49] Severino differentiates the empirical appearing of something concrete, that which comes forth and recedes into the twilight, from a transcendental appearing which is not in motion, and which is not, in his words, 'the coming forth of that which keeps on coming forth'. (https://books.openedition.org/res/633). He refers to Bertrand Russell's paradox, arguing that a set which includes itself is precisely the structure of the transcendental appearing, one that does not establish itself via a transcendent externality. The coming forth of a single object always involves a visibility that is self-reflexive. Although it is partial, the object must be implicated in the space of appearing and, by appearing, it, so to speak, is carved forever in its instant. This totality involves a negation that always results in a self-negation.

[50] Severino, *Il Destino della Tecnica*, 225.

but for the Third Player this movement reflects the series of events that are illuminated by the circle of Appearing and are then left behind without becoming nothing.[51] The coming forth of reality structures what Severino calls the *destiny* of truth: every possible configuration of being: in short, 'every thing, relation, instant, experience, state of consciousness and nature, every event, from the most irrelevant to the most significant, everything appearing in any way and also everything that does not appear and cannot be experienced'.[52] It is easy to misunderstand the nature of the circle of Appearing, perhaps by conflating it with common images such as the eye of providence or the probing lens of a microscope. These are not good comparisons because they rely on intentionality and the agency of the entity that casts light on reality. They are also constructed as a spectacle performed for somebody who watches. But Appearing attempts to describe the scopic: a scene without a spectator, the pure presenting of an open system. It defines the ways in which things democratically interact with each other, or better it expresses the entanglement between visibility and events as eternal *puncta*. In the scopic structure, we encounter what is universal and immanent because there is a coming together of the object in the field of vision. Severino usually adopts the verb *sopraggiungere*, which implies that something is coming forth or catching up with its horizon, thus avoiding any elements of intentionality in the reconstruction of the perception of reality.[53] Severino argues that Appearing is the totality of the relations between every interaction, that emerges as a timeless dimension. Only a thought that can live up to the task of thinking this eternal multiplicity may follow the path of the non-Folly that Severino attempts to describe while reflecting on his life. This is a path along which transcendence has imploded as a result of its non-sustainability, thus opening the horizon of eternity. Therein we encounter the true nature of transcendence itself. Reframing this problem using our terminology, we can say that transcendence is the originary exception that negates immanence, but by so doing, transcendence actually reveals that it is grounded on immanence. The negative is not external to the founding principle; rather, it derives from it.[54] To the extent that it works as a negation, transcendence is an effect of immanence, not its

[51] Severino, *Immortalità e destino,* 194.

[52] Testoni, 'Fear of Death?' XV.

[53] In Severino's language, whatever exists is inextricably bound up with its appearing as Being. Severino was well aware that his philosophy pointed in the direction of modern physics, which has now experimentally proved that time exists only at certain magnitudes. Rovelli writes that, 'if I observe the microscopic state of things, then the difference between past and future vanishes', and that the difference upon which we ground our life, 'refers only to our own blurred vision of the world', *The Order of Time*, 33. Similarly, he asserts that there is no present of the universe: the now 'is an illusion, an illegitimate extrapolation of our experience', 44.

[54] Similarly, Severino redefines the Aristotelian *elenchos* by disclosing how the negation of the negation works to affirm the positivity of Being. Non-being (Nothingness) 'exists, only if it affirms that which it denies. Indeed, denying, it denies its own ground'. Thus it self-implodes, because, 'the negation of the opposition effectively includes the declaration of its own non-existence [...] it says, "I am not here", "I am meaningless"', *The Essence of Nihilism*, 63.

foundation. As in Severino's and Wittgenstein's refutation of non-Being and *negative Tatsachen* respectively, we can conjure up transcendence only because a negative operator acts on immanence. We imagine an exception only by including a positive content (immanence) that is negated.

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Emanuele Severino
A Testimony of the Language that Testifies to Destiny

Damiano Sacco

Abstract

This essay contributes to further introducing the English-speaking world to one of the most challenging and radical thinkers of the 20th century, Emanuele Severino. Recent years have seen an increasing number of translations of Severino's works, as well as different critical contributions concerning Severino's thought. This essay presents the principal traits of the 'testimony of the destiny of necessity', and situates them in the context of the philosophical tradition in which this testimony appears. In so doing, this essay introduces the principal axes along which Severino's philosophical thought can be unfolded, which include the questions of the incontrovertible truth of being, the contradiction of becoming, the essence and history of nihilism, and the relation between being and eternity.

1. *Introduction*

The last century has seen countless philosophies testify to the impossibility of attesting or bearing witness to an unconditional notion of truth: to *the* unconditional and incontrovertible notion of the truth of everything that is. Accordingly, these voices have attested to the very impossibility of delivering a testimony of the incontrovertible truth of being — a statement that appears to be intuitively connected to the impossibility of delivering an incontrovertibly true testimony. At the same time, however, the *content* that is testified to by these voices appears to bear relevance for *the conditions of possibility* of these testimonies themselves, as well as for the conditions of possibility of the notion of testimony itself. Which is to say that the conditions for the possibility of testimony in general, and of these testimonies in particular, appear to be called into question by virtue of the content of these very testimonies. In other words, and according to a most familiar sceptical theme, the question is raised as to how, or why, one should trust a testimony that renders the truth of testimony altogether impossible. But then, again, not trusting these sceptical testimonies would entail, precisely, the possibility of trusting testimonies *tout court* — including the sceptical ones.

Beside this most immemorial aporia, which evidently cannot be resolved in this framework, the question remains as to the conditions for the possibility of the very appearing of these testimonies. Namely, regardless of the infinite hermeneutical dimension that each of these testimonies contains — for each of these testimonies can be read according to infinitely different singular contexts, translational paradigms, hermeneutical horizons, etc. — and regardless of their own

aporetic character, these testimonies *do* appear: for if they did not, neither would the manifold aporias and interpretative dimensions that they give rise to.

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The work of Emanuele Severino sets out from these considerations in order to enquire into the conditions that make it 'possible' for these aporias and contradictions to appear'. Severino asks the following question: what must the originary structure of everything that is, and appears, be like — what must the originary structure of being be — *in order for* these aporias and contradictions to arise and to appear in their aporetic character? Or, and this will turn out to be the same question, can something like the originary structure of truth — of the truth of anything that is, the truth of being — be testified to?

Emanuele Severino's work attests to the originary structure of the concrete totality of being within which the aporias and contradictions of truth and testimony — and of the truth of testimony and the testimony of truth — first appear. Following Severino along this path, it will gradually become apparent that the domain of contradiction is not restricted to a few selected instances, but rather extends unconstrained across *the whole* plane of linguistic signification, covering each and every corner of a landscape that has always had, in truth, a completely different meaning. Under the cover of the contradiction that encompasses the totality of linguistic signification, there has in fact always been nothing — or, rather, nothingness itself has always coincided with the meaning of this cover itself. The whole of linguistic signification has *one* positive meaning: the meaning of nothingness. The contradiction — everything — means: nothing.

And yet, at the same time, the essence of nihilism that is seen to pervade every aspect of the life of humans can, and does, appear — Severino testifies — only in accordance with the originary structure of the truth of being. The truth of being is, Severino continues, *the incontrovertible* —that the negation of which is self-negating. As the testimony of the truth of being unfolds, Severino comes to bear witness to one of the most crucial determinations of this truth and this testimony: testifying to the originary structure of the incontrovertible, Severino argues, is equivalent to testifying to the originary structure of the destiny of necessity. As this implication first appears, Severino comes to refer to his work as 'the language that testifies to destiny' (*il linguaggio che testimonia il destino*).[1]

In what follows, the principal traits of the language that testifies to destiny are introduced, and the conditions of possibility — or, rather, the conditions of necessity — for the language that bears witness to the destiny of necessity are presented. As the (infinitely many) determinations of the truth of being all belong originarily together in the incontrovertible, it becomes clear that the language that testifies to destiny is unable synchronically to present this concrete totality, and can

[1] Emanuele Severino, *Destino della necessità: Kata to chreon* (Milan: Adelphi, 1980).

only unfold the determinations one by one, abstracting them from the whole to which they belong. Abstracted — 'isolated' — in this way, the determinations of the truth of being no longer possess their unique and singular trait of incontrovertibility: the language that testifies to destiny necessarily mistranslates the untranslatable, and thus errs. But even when it errs, the language that testifies to destiny errs according to the destiny of necessity — and errs in a way that is irreconcilable with the error of the languages that do not testify to the truth of being.

2. *The Language that Testifies to the Destiny of Necessity*

It is at this point necessary to provide a testimony of the language that testifies to destiny — i.e. to give an account of Emanuele Severino's philosophical thought.[2] Emanuele Severino (1929–2020) belongs to, and at the same time well exceeds, the philosophical tradition that may be traced back to Gustavo Bontadini and Giovanni Gentile — a tradition of 20th century Italian philosophy that, for the most part, has not enjoyed significant attention or been widely promulgated outside of the cultural borders of Italy.[3] Severino studies at the University of Pavia with Bontadini, one of the principal exponents of Italian neo-scholasticism, who advances a return to classical metaphysics informed by the developments of post-Kantian philosophy. Bontadini's philosophical endeavour indeed takes place against the backdrop offered by the work of one of his, and later Severino's, most decisive references — Giovanni Gentile. Gentile, one of the two key figures of Italian (neo-)idealism (the other one being Benedetto Croce, from whom Gentile comes to be separated by an irremediable philosophical and political distance), identifies in Hegel's philosophy, and in particular in the essence of the Hegelian dialectics, the remnants of a 'naturalistic' (that is: presuppositional, non-idealist) philosophical stance. Leading the Hegelian system to its own self-coherence and accomplishment, according to Gentile, entails considering thinking as real, and actual, only insofar as it is a *pure act* (*atto puro*): a purely present and actual thinking that does not presuppose anything outside of the act in which it realises itself ('Actual Idealism' [*Attualismo*]).

With this philosophical background, and profoundly influenced by the thought of Martin Heidegger (which is the focus of his dissertation with Bontadini,

[2] If, on the one hand, a testimony of the language that testifies to destiny is (and can only be) a controvertible interpretation — for it is only an interpretation that this testimony is an 'account' of the 'philosophical thought' of 'Emanuele Severino' — in what follows the relationship between the language that testifies to destiny and the present testimony will be clarified.

[3] See in particular Gustavo Bontadini, *Conversazioni di metafisica* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1971); Gustavo Bontadini, *Metafisica e deellenizzazione* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1975); Giovanni Gentile, *Sistema di logica come teoria del conoscere* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1955); Giovanni Gentile, *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1959).

Heidegger e la metafisica[4]), Severino proceeds to advance one of the most untimely and challenging philosophical proposals of the last century. In addition to Heidegger's own testimonies,[5] the singular nature of Severino's philosophical thought is attested by the dispute that takes place in the 1960s between the philosopher and the Catholic Church. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the body that in 1908 takes over from the Office of the Inquisition the task of defending and promulgating the Catholic doctrine) subjects Severino and his work to an investigation reminiscent of some most eminent precedents. At the end of the inquiry, Severino leaves his professorship at the Catholic University of Milan, to which he had been invited, and his philosophical thought is declared by the Congregation to be radically incompatible with the message and the teaching of the Christian faith. Leading the investigation is Father Cornelio Fabro, a crucial figure of 20th century Thomism, who concludes in his report for the Congregation (included in the *Acta Apostolicae*): 'Severino has critiqued the very ground of the conception of God's transcendence and the tenets of Christianity like arguably no atheism or heresy has ever done before.'[6]

As early as 1958, Severino publishes the text that will serve as the background wherein all his subsequent writings receive their sense and their meaning, *La struttura originaria* (The Originary Structure).[7] If *La struttura originaria* is the text that provides the background for the appearing of Severino's later writings, the 'originary structure' that is mentioned for the first time in that text constitutes the background (*sfondo*) for the appearing of everything that appears *tout court*. The originary structure is the structure of the truth of everything that is and appears, namely the structure of the truth of being. The originary structure is the incontrovertible: that whose negation is self-negating. Or, the originary structure is the incontrovertible self-being of everything that is — the impossibility for any being to be other than itself.

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[4] Emanuele Severino, *Heidegger e la metafisica* (Milan: Adelphi, 1994).

[5] The recent archival discovery by Friedrich-Wilhelm Von Herrmann and Francesco Alfieri of Heidegger's fragments on Severino's work has called for a new assessment of his knowledge of the latter, as is also testified to by Fritz Heidegger and Heinrich Heidegger: Giulio Goggi and Ines Testoni, eds., *Heidegger nel pensiero di Severino*, (Padova: Padova University Press, 2019). In the 1973 Zähringen Seminar, Heidegger explicitly refers to Severino's essay, 'Returning to Parmenides', in which the thesis of the eternity of all beings is first put forth; Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell, François Raffoul (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 77.

[6] Emanuele Severino, *Il mio ricordo degli eterni* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2011), 98–99. Translations from the Italian are mine throughout.

[7] '*La struttura originaria* remains to this day the ground where all my writings receive their very own meaning', Emanuele Severino, *La struttura originaria* (Milan: Adelphi, 1981), 13. Concerning the translation of the Italian term *'originario'*, see: Damiano Sacco, 'The Translation of Destiny, and The Destiny of Translation', in Emanuele Severino, *Law and Chance*, ed. Giulio Goggi, Damiano Sacco, Ines Testoni, trans. Damiano Sacco (London: Bloomsbury, 2023).

In 'Returning to Parmenides' (1964) and in the 'Postscript' (1965),[8] Severino sets forth the most challenging implication of the originary structure of the truth of being: the eternity of all beings. Since becoming — the being-other of what is — contradicts the truth of being, every being must be eternal. Every being — this firewood, these ashes, this thought, this fear — is eternal; to be means to be eternal. The becoming of beings cannot appear; what experience attests to is the appearing and disappearing of the eternal beings.

Over the course of six decades, Severino unfolds the testimony of the truth of being. One of the most crucial advances made by this testimony consists in the attestation of the necessity with which the appearing and disappearing of the eternal beings is to take place. The originary structure entails the necessity of destiny, as first testified to in *Destino della necessità* (The Destiny of Necessity) (1980).[9] Henceforth, Severino refers to his work and philosophical project as to 'the language that testifies to destiny'. From 1980 to 2020 (*Testimoniando il destino* is published in 2019),[10] this testimony explores the determinations of the destiny of necessity, and in so doing continues to attest to the fate of humans — 'mortals', 'the inhabitants of time', persuaded of the 'folly': the nothingness of everything.

2.1 *The Originary Structure of the Truth of Being*

It is then first necessary to delineate the principal traits of the testimony of destiny and of the language that presents this testimony. The testimony of destiny is the testimony of the incontrovertible, the destiny of necessity. The incontrovertible — what appears at first to be the 'content' of the testimony — is that away from which it is not possible to turn (*contra-vertere*). That it is not possible to turn away from the incontrovertible means that it is the ubiquitous background (*sfondo*) that precedes every turning: wherever one turns, one is always turning within the background offered by the incontrovertible.

The incontrovertible is: that whose negation is self-negating; that whose negation, in negating itself, cannot be. That which cannot be negated is that which cannot be different from itself: the truth of being is *the self-being of being itself*. The originary structure of the truth of being is the 'structure' of being that allows every being-that-is to be itself. A being's being-other (than itself) would presuppose, precisely, the very being that is being negated, and whose negation thereby negates itself: 'The originary structure is the meaning whose negation is self-negating. It is the appearing of beings, and of the impossibility that a being, *qua* being — namely, every being — not be'.[11]

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[8] Emanuele Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, ed. Alessandro Carrera and Ines Testoni, trans. Giacomo Donis (London: Verso, 2016).

[9] Severino, *Destino della necessità*.

[10] Emanuele Severino, *Testimoniando il destino* (Milan: Adelphi, 2019).

[11] Severino, *La struttura originaria*, 72.

Equivalently, the testimony in question attests that what is *not* incontrovertible — namely: what is controvertible, or what is said to be other than itself — *cannot* be. The controvertible is not; the controvertible is nothing. As such, the language that testifies to destiny asserts that every testimony, every language that is not incontrovertible, testifies to this very nothingness — where to testify to nothingness itself is altogether different from not testifying to anything. In what follows, it will become clear that, according to the language that testifies to destiny, every language that has ever been spoken has always and only testified to this nothingness — and this includes the very language that testifies to destiny.[12]

2.2 *Becoming, Contradiction, Eternity*

After the publication of *La Struttura Originaria* (1958), Severino unfolds the implications and determinations of the originary structure of the truth of being. A few of the most essential ones appear already in the essays, 'Returning to Parmenides' (1964) and in its 'Postscript' (1965), later collected in *The Essence of Nihilism* (1972).[13]

According to Severino, the truth of being, the self-being of being, has always been subjected to an essential negotiation — a negotiation that has attempted to reconcile the firmest principle (*bebaiotáte tôn archôn pasôn*, *Metaphysics*: 1006a5[14]) with the originary self-evidence of the becoming of every being. As soon as the truth of being emerges with Parmenides — who could hold it in view only at the cost of sacrificing the becoming and the multiplicity of all beings — according to Severino, this truth is immediately renounced in order to uphold the most originary self-evidence: that of the becoming of every being. If Parmenides can

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[12] It is not possible here to address the secondary literature and the critical perspectives that have originated from Severino's philosophical proposal. For a comprehensive overview, see: Giulio Goggi, *Emanuele Severino* (Vatican: Lateran University Press, 2015).

[13] *The Essence of Nihilism* is Severino's first and, to date, only book to have been translated into English (see, however, the edited collection, Emanuele Severino, *Nihilism and Destiny*, ed. Nicoletta Cusano (Milan: Mimesis International, 2016)). The translations of *Legge e caso* and *Oltre il linguaggio* are forthcoming in 2023; Emanuele Severino, *Legge e caso* (Milan: Adelphi, 1979); Emanuele Severino, *Oltre il linguaggio* (Milan: Adelphi, 1992); Emanuele Severino, *Law and Chance*, ed. Giulio Goggi, Damiano Sacco, Ines Testoni, trans. Damiano Sacco (London: Bloomsbury, 2023); Emanuele Severino, *Beyond Language*, ed. Giulio Goggi, Damiano Sacco, Ines Testoni, trans. Damiano Sacco (London: Bloomsbury, 2023). The thesis of the eternity of all beings is first prefigured in the essay, 'La metafisica classica e aristotele' (1956), now collected in Emanuele Severino, *Fondamento della contraddizione* (Milan: Adelphi, 2005). An excerpt from the essay appeared in English in *Philosophy Today* already in 1958, see: Emanuele Severino, 'Aristotle and Classical Metaphysics', *Philosophy Today* 2:2 (1958), 71–82.

[14] Quotations from Aristotle and Plato are given directly in the text, following the complete English editions of their works, see Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

affirm the truth and eternity of being only by excluding the multiplicity of difference (the multiplicity of the different beings), Plato's attempt at saving the appearance of becoming and the multiplicity of beings — at saving the phenomena, *sózein tà phainómena* — aims to reintroduce difference within being. This is the content of Plato's seminal 'parricide', the inaugural act of Western tradition, where the failure to testify to the truth of being can first explicitly be attested. In the *Sophist*, the visitor from Elea tells Theaetetus: 'We're going to have to subject father Parmenides' saying to further examination, and insist by brute force both that *what is not* somehow is, and then again that *what is* somehow is not' (*Sophist*, 241d).[15] But neither demoting the world of experience to the illusion of *doxa* (Parmenides) nor disavowing the firmest principle (Plato) can be part of the testimony of the truth of being.

Plato's parricide testifies to the essence of the history of nihilism: beings become, and, in becoming, *something* of what they are must turn into nothing, for otherwise they would remain the same. The tradition of the West conceives of becoming as an emergence from and a return to nothingness. Severino writes:

> Indeed, if the thing from which becoming begins, and which is swept away by becoming, did not turn into nothing, that thing would remain self-identical, and there would be no becoming-other. [...] And if the other of the thing, with which the thing becomes identical, did not issue from nothingness, that very other would already be together with the thing — and, once again, there would be no becoming-other of the thing.[16]

But, according to the truth of being, believing that something can, and does, turn into nothingness (which is necessary for anything to become anything else) entails stating that there exists a time in which what-is is not — and vice versa, that there exists a time in which what-is-not is. Aristotle's formulation of the principle of non-contradiction in *De Interpretatione* reads: 'What is, necessarily is, when it is; and what is not, necessarily is not, when it is not' (*De Interpretatione*, 19a24). But if it is admitted that there exists a time in which every being-that-is is not, the testimony of nihilism, in trusting the most originary self-evidence of becoming, *attests that everything that is is in fact nothing*. This, according to Severino, is the true essence of the history of what he names 'the folly', the history of nihilism: the conviction or persuasion that what-is is nothing. According to the language that testifies to destiny, nihilism is neither a consequence of the 'fable' of the true world nor a result of the forgetting of the question of being. Nihilism means: willing or believing everything that is to be nothing — *nihil*, the content of the contradiction.

[15] See also: Emanuele Severino, *Il parricidio mancato* (Milan: Adelphi, 1985).
[16] Severino, *Oltre il linguaggio*, 23–24.

Returning to Parmenides entails, on the contrary, returning to the site of the parricide and upholding *both* the truth of *logos* (the firmest principle) and the truth of appearing (the *phaínesthai* of becoming):

> Returning to Parmenides means repeating the 'parricide' — without, in so doing, being at fault before the truth of being: repeating the foundation of multiplicity [...] by asserting *of every being*, and of the *concrete totality* of all beings, what Parmenides has asserted of being itself: 'It is impossible that it not be'.[17]

From these premises, Severino draws the most challenging implication of the truth of being: which is to say, *the eternity of all beings*. Every being — this book, this thought, this fear — is eternal: it is forever saved from 'the assault of nothingness'.[18] In the same way in which the sun does not turn into nothing when it sets over the horizon, so *every* being that leaves the horizon of appearing does not, as a result, turn into nothing. Severino writes:

> If it cannot be thought of being (of every being and of all being) that it is not, then it cannot be thought of being (of every being and of all being) that it becomes. For if being were to become, it would not be — it would not be, that is, before its birth and after its corruption. Thus, *all* being is immutable. It neither issues from nothingness nor returns to it. It is eternal.[19]

If 'Returning to Parmenides' contains the 'abyssal' claim of the eternity of all beings, the nihilist conception of becoming — nihilist in that, once again, it entails that *something*, of what becomes, must turn into nothing; that a being should coincide with nothing — is overcome in the 'Postscript' (1965). Severino concludes that the birth and corruption of beings (their emergence from and return to nothingness) is not only impossible according to the truth of being, but it cannot be — *and it is not* — a part of the content of experience. Experience does not, and cannot, attest to the annihilation of beings, for the *disappearing* of a being does not, and cannot, attest to its becoming-nothing. Severino draws together all the theoretical elements advanced up until that moment, and asks once again: what is the 'veritable' [*veritativa*] configuration of becoming that does not contradict the truth of being? The answer, which concludes this first part of Severino's enquiry, determines that becoming consists of *the appearing and disappearing* of the eternal beings. In the 'Postscript', Severino writes:

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[17] Emanuele Severino, *Essenza del nichilismo* (Milan: Adelphi, 1982), 315. (Note: the essay 'Risposta ai critici' is not included in the English translation of *Essenza del nichilismo*).
[18] Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, 46.
[19] Ibid., 85.

> For indeed, appearing *does not attest* to the opposite of what is demanded by the *logos*. The *logos* demands the immutability of being — it demands, that is, that being not be nothing, and thus not issue from and not return to nothingness — and appearing, *in its truth, does not attest* that being does so. [...] The becoming that appears is not the birth and death of being, but rather its appearing and disappearing. Becoming is the process of the revelation of the immutable beings.[20]

As part of the truth of being, becoming coincides with the appearing and disappearing of the eternals. Severino's reflection appears here in its irreducible untimeliness. An untimeliness that is due, first of all, to the break that it establishes with the tradition of the history of nihilism, according to which being is believed to be (in) time, wherein it issues from and returns to nothingness. Time itself is (thought to be) the very medium that allows the impossible coincidence of the being-that-is and the being-that-is-not. Humans, Severino argues, insofar as they are 'the inhabitants of time', are mortal — but, crucially, they are mortal *because* they believe that becoming, and every birth and death associated with it, are instances of an impossible emergence from and return to nothingness: 'Humans', Severino writes, 'are not mortal because they are born and die; rather, they are born and die because they are mortal.'[21] Secondly, but perhaps primarily, Severino's meditation appears irreducibly untimely because it attempts to think the untimeliness and eternity of every being: its being always and forever saved from the assault of nothingness.

2.3 *The History of Nihilism: The 'Folly'*

According to Severino, the entirety of the history of the West — a history that, insofar as it results in the global domination accomplished by Western civilisation, turns every other history into its own prehistory — is immersed in the essence of nihilism, and thereby coincides with the history of nihilism. This is the history of the 'folly', the belief that there is a time in which *every* being, insofar as it becomes, is not — that is to say, the belief according to which *every* being, *qua* being-that-is, is not: is nothing. This belief represents the unconscious of every unconscious dimension, the essential alienation that grounds and underlies every other alienation or separation (from god, nature, truth, the moral conscience, the ownership of the means of production, etc.).

At the origin of the history of the 'folly', the feeling experienced upon encountering the appearing of phenomena — Severino argues — is not one of wonder (*thaûma*: *Theaetetus,* 155 c–d, *Metaphysics*, 982 b12–13), but rather one of a most abyssal dread and terror caused by the becoming of the existent: namely,

[20] Ibid., 109–112.
[21] Ibid., 253.

by its always imminent annihilation. Confronted with the incessant assault of nothingness, humans resort to the invocation of an immutable being that would be able to escape the ruin of becoming ('the being always safe' [*phûsis aeì sozoméne*], *Metaphysics*, 983 b13). The sequence of immutable beings invoked by the West in order to be saved from the annihilation of becoming is the sequence of the gods of the West.

In the last two centuries, the history of the invocation of the immutable beings becomes the history of their destruction. The tradition, however, enacts this most essential destruction — Heidegger's *Destruktion*, Nietzsche's *Götzen-Dämmerung*, Hegel's *Erinnerung* and *Unruhe des Geistes* — without being aware of the *necessity* of its taking place. For, indeed, according to Severino, the destruction of the immutable beings is rendered necessary by the very becoming that has prompted the invocation of these beings, and which, sooner or later, must necessarily overthrow everything — including, eventually, all the gods and 'immutable' beings of the West. The West, however — Severino continues — cannot see the essential necessity of the destruction of the immutable beings (only Nietzsche, Leopardi, Gentile, and perhaps a few others, Severino argues, can see that, *given* the becoming of the world, the fall of the gods of the West must necessarily follow). In any case, the West may not become aware of the essential alienation of nihilism, outside of which *every* being is forever safe in the eternity of being. Even the language that testifies to this alienation must remain an alienated language, a language that is part of the 'folly'.

The faith in the becoming of the world is, ultimately, a form of *will* — the will for a being to be other than itself (which is to say, for a being to be nothing); and, conversely, every will is a form of faith, for it is the *controvertible* assertion of a certain content. According to Severino, every form of will is a form of the will to power: the will that wills the becoming-other of all beings — the will that can have power over beings precisely insofar as it can create, transform, and destroy them. Every form of will, action and production is a form of *poíesis* — namely the failed attempt at creating, destroying or transforming a being: 'Everything that is responsible for creating something out of nothing is a kind of *poíesis*' (*Symposium,* 205b–c; *Sophist,* 219b, 265b). The essence of the history of nihilism comes to thus coincide with the essence of the history of technics (for 'the productions of every *téchne* are a kind of *poíesis*', *Symposium,* 205c). The age of technics, in particular, is the age that follows the destruction of the immutable beings — the age in which it is believed that beings are subjected to an unconstrained becoming, operated by the forces that have freed themselves from the constraints of the immutable beings. Severino testifies to the essential alliance that exists between the philosophies that carry out the destruction of the immutable beings and the unfolding of the age of technics: for it is only because every obstacle to the irruption of becoming has been

removed that the *poíesis* of technics knows no limits.[22] And it is only because every obstacle to the irruption of becoming has been removed that violence knows no limits: for violence (*bía*) is precisely the (failed) production, destruction, and transformation of any being (the formula of the parricide, as already quoted, reads: 'We are going to have *to insist by brute force* [*biázesthai*] both that *what is not* somehow is, and then again that *what is* somehow is not', *Sophist*, 241d).[23]

2.4 *Appendix: The Aporia of Becoming and the Critique of Heidegger*

An essential aporia — which, however, presents a certain technical complexity — is presented in this appendix. Its resolution introduces further determinations of the testimony of the truth of being, and allows the introduction of Severino's critique of Heidegger.

The eternal being of the firewood enters the circle of appearing (the circle of appearing is the site in which the content of appearing appears; the site that, in welcoming all becoming, does not itself become: 'it is the totality of the beings that appear, it is appearing, insofar as its content is everything that appears').[24] That is to say, the firewood appears. The eternal firewood leaves the circle of appearing: the firewood disappears. The eternal being of the ashes enters the circle of appearing: the ashes appear.

'The inhabitants of time' — the inhabitants of the 'isolated earth': namely, that part of the appearing content (the *earth*) that, within the history of the folly, is *isolated* from the truth of destiny — promptly reply: it is then to be objected that, according to the very logic to which Severino resorts, it is now *the appearing* of the firewood that turns into nothing when the firewood disappears. The problem has simply been transferred to a different level, but in no way has it been resolved.

Some of the most crucial determinations of the language that testifies to destiny emerge at this juncture. First, it is to be remarked that 'the isolated earth' *wants* to raise this objection — it *believes* that the content of this objection is what it (the isolated earth) wants it to be. But the isolated earth cannot know, or show, the incontrovertible character of the content of its objection — for otherwise it would not be, precisely, *isolated* from the truth of being (this aspect will be expanded on in the next section). Second: even if the language that testifies to destiny were not

[22] See Emanuele Severino, *La tendenza fondamentale del nostro tempo* (Milan: Adelphi, 1988); Emanuele Severino, *Il destino della tecnica* (Milan: BUR Rizzoli, 2009); Emanuele Severino, *Capitalismo senza futuro* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2012).

[23] Emanuele Severino, *Ontologia e violenza: Lezioni milanesi*, ed. Nicoletta Cusano (Milan: Mimesis, 2019).

[24] Severino, *Destino della necessità*, p. 140. The circle of appearing, as the site that welcomes the appearing of everything that appears, does not itself begin to appear or disappear (whereas the relation between a being that begins to appear and the circle of appearing is a being that itself begins to appear).

able successfully to address this or other seeming aporias and contradictions, this very inability would in no way be able to shake the unwavering stance of the originary structure. The originary structure is that whose negation is self-negating; or: every negation of the originary structure is utterly unable to stand. If the solution to a seeming aporia does not appear in the originary circle of appearing (that is, it does not appear in the circle in which the language that testifies to destiny appears), the absence of this solution cannot possibly entail that the aporia constitutes a negation of the originary structure. For, once again, every negation of the originary structure is self-negating, and therefore utterly unable to stand. *Every* attempt at negating the originary structure is only seemingly such an attempt, for it is in fact self-negating and can itself appear *only* according to, and by presupposing, all the determinations of the originary structure. Every attempt at refuting (*elénchein*) what is presupposed by the attempt itself must be self-defeating.[25]

Notwithstanding this, the language that testifies to the destiny of necessity does attest to the resolution of the aporia that seems to afflict the originary structure. Once again, when the *eternal* firewood leaves the circle of appearing, the isolated earth objects: granted, its being has been saved, but it is now its appearing that has turned into nothing. According to Severino, the aporia arises in separating — *'isolating'* — the appearing of the firewood from the appearing of this very appearing.[26] On the contrary, the appearing itself of the firewood appears, but the appearing of the firewood and the appearing of this appearing are not two different beings. The appearing of the firewood appears, but this does not add anything to the appearing of the firewood; the appearing of the appearing of the firewood is the same eternal being as the appearing of the firewood. The eternal firewood enters the circle of appearing: the firewood appears; it appears that the firewood appears; the appearing of the firewood appears — these three statements say one and the same thing. When the firewood leaves the circle of appearing, its appearing *no longer appears* — but it is, *qua eternal being*, also saved in the eternity of being. One is then not to ask whether *the appearing* of this latter eternal being turns into nothing (namely, whether the appearing of the appearing of the firewood turns into nothing), for it is not a being that is separated from the appearing of the firewood.[27]

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[25] It is most apparent that the originary structure stands in an essential relation to the Aristotelian *élenchos:* 'Returning to Parmenides' shows that the *élenchos* is an instantiation of the fundamental opposition between being and non-being (the positive and the negative) that appears in the originary structure.

[26] Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, 121–23.

[27] Since the appearing of the appearing of the firewood is the appearing of the firewood, there is no *regressus ad infinitum* whereby the appearing of the appearing of... of the firewood would turn into nothing. To this extent, it can be affirmed that the appearing of the destiny of necessity is a form of 'consciousness of self-consciousness' (Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, 256–58), wherein, once again, consciousness, self-consciousness and the consciousness of self-consciousness are not three separated beings. The 'isolated earth', on the contrary, separates — *abstracts*, *isolates* — the moments that in the originary structure of being are immediately

It is at this juncture that Severino can include Heidegger's thinking in the history of nihilism. For, in the Heideggerian framework, what happens to the presence of a being — to its appearing — once a being is no longer present (once it no longer appears)? The most essential tenet of the thinking of being (*das Denken des Seins*) is that presence (*das Anwesen*) is *not* itself something present (*das Anwesende*) — in accordance with the principle which affirms that being (*das Sein*) 'is' not an ontic being (*das Seiende*). But if the presence of what is present is not itself present (if the appearing of what appears does not itself appear), the language that testifies to destiny can assert that, according to the thinking of being, when a being is no longer present — namely: when a being leaves the region of unconcealment (*Un-verborgenheit*, *Lichtung*) — something is lost. When a being returns to concealment, it is its very being-unconcealed (its unconcealment, its presence or appearing) that is lost: it turns into nothing. One cannot repeat, as in the case of the language that testifies to destiny, that it simply disappears, because the thinking of being categorically denies that presence is present, that unconcealment is unconcealed, that appearing appears. And neither can it be stated that presence or being is really 'nothing', and that thereby no annihilation takes place. For if being and 'nothing' are the same (*das Selbe*), and presence is 'nothing present', Heidegger also repeatedly states that in no way is this nothing a *nihil absolutum*.[28] But then, Severino argues, when a being leaves the region of unconcealment, what becomes of its very being unconcealed — of its appearing — remains unaccounted for. How can the appearing of what appears (which is argued *not* to be a *nihil absolutum*) turn into nothing once that being returns into concealment?[29] For Severino the only solution is for every being (including that being that is the appearing of a being) to have always been saved in the eternity of being: 'Becoming is possible only if *everything* is eternal'.[30]

3. *Further Determinations of the Truth of Being*

In order to elucidate the relationship between the truth of being and the language that attempts to testify to it, it will be necessary to introduce some further determinations of this truth and of this language.

identified. The relationship between this triadic structure and the belonging-together of the abstract moments in Hegel's dialectics cannot be confronted here, but it represents one of the most crucial traits of Severino's conceptual apparatus.

[28] Heidegger writes: 'To be sure, this nothing is not the *nihil absolutum* [*Allerdings ist dieses Nichts nicht das* nihil absolutum]', Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[29] Emanuele Severino, *Dike* (Milan: Adelphi, 2015), 31, 75 ff.; Emanuele Severino, *Oltrepassare* (Milan: Adelphi, 2007), 152–55.

[30] Severino, *Oltrepassare*, 18.

3.1 *Language and Isolation: Will, Faith, Doubt*

Once again, the truth of the destiny of necessity is the incontrovertible self-being of every being that is. It follows that every *abstract* part of what is — where abstract means: isolated, abstracted, extracted from the concrete totality — *is not*, for it is other than itself as connected to the concrete whole. As such, every abstract part of the concrete totality of being is nothing.

The firewood appears (according to Severino: the eternal firewood appears). The 'isolated earth'[31] states: 'The firewood appears'. Severino argues that in order for language to designate the firewood by means of the word 'firewood', the firewood itself must first be abstracted (isolated) from the totality in which it appears; concurrently, the sign, the written or spoken mark that designates the firewood, must also have been isolated from the totality in which it appears so as to function as an ideal unity that designates the firewood. Only as such abstractions can the sign and the designated be linked to one another. Severino writes:

> The interpretive will and the will that wills that something should be a sign of something else belong to the will that separates the earth from the irrefutability of destiny. On this foundation, the West conceives of the earth as a secure region, as part of which things issue from nothingness and return to it.[32]

At the same time, it is impossible for the relation through which the sign designates the thing to be incontrovertible. Only the concrete is incontrovertible: the abstract parts are nothing, and as such they cannot be; the faith in their existence is the conviction or persuasion that grounds the essence of the history of nihilism. Humans can only *will* that the sign should designate the thing; they can only *believe* what they will and they can only will what they believe. But since what they will is an abstraction (i.e. the impossible), what they will is, in truth, nothingness itself.

Humans are nevertheless convinced of what they say. They are convinced that they say what they will to say and that they say what they believe they are saying. But no matter what they say, they never say the incontrovertible: when they state that the firewood burns, they can be certain neither of what they say nor of what they will to say.[33] Whenever they speak, even when they say that God does not exist or that everything can be doubted, an infinitely more abyssal doubt inhabits their speech. Humans state: 'the firewood burns', 'God does not exist', 'I cannot doubt that I am doubting'; and yet, at the same time, each of these utterances can be doubted or negated, for it is not incontrovertible. The hyperbolic doubt itself,

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[31] The 'isolated earth' is that part of the appearing content (the *earth*) that, within the history of the folly, is *isolated* from the truth of destiny. See Appendix 2.4.

[32] Severino, *Oltre il linguaggio*, 156.

[33] *'Voler dire'*, in Italian, means both 'to will to say' and 'to mean'.

in doubting everything, does not doubt its own being-doubt: but how can the hyperbolic doubt be certain that it *is* doubting? How can it be certain that it doubts what it wills to doubt? The isolated earth can only *believe* what it says; it can only *will* that what it says should mean what it is believed to mean. But every will is just a faith so long as it remains a controvertible will. Humans say what they will and they will what they say; but they cannot know whether they *do* say what they will to say and whether they *do* will what they say they will.[34]

What is willed, what is believed, is the controvertible; but the controvertible cannot be the incontrovertible — what is. What humans say, no matter the language that they speak, is always something other than what is; what humans say, no matter the language that they speak, is always nothing: nothingness itself. Every speech, every text, every system of signs that human beings have used to communicate has always communicated this nothingness. And saying this nothingness is, once again, altogether different from not saying anything — in the same way that stating 'the circle is square' is altogether different from not stating anything.

No language and no testimony can rid itself of the doubt that inhabits it: the transcendental doubt that prevents it from being incontrovertibly certain of what it says and what it testifies to. At the same time, all languages and all testimonies cannot but *will* (and therefore *believe*) to have rid themselves of this transcendental doubt — for otherwise they would not be able to utter a single word. Every human testimony isolates itself from this transcendental doubt, and in so doing it testifies to the controvertible: nothingness itself.[35]

3.2. *The Ground of Contradiction*

The content of the contradiction cannot appear, for otherwise nothingness itself would appear.[36] If the isolated earth, namely everything that appears in the history of nihilism, is the appearing of this nothingness itself, there must then be a place where this contradiction is negated.[37] As it is necessary for the circle *not* to be square in order for the contradiction 'the circle is square' to appear, *so* it is necessary that the contradiction of the isolated earth be negated for the isolated

[34] See Severino, *Destino della necessità*, 387 ff.

[35] Emanuele Severino, *La morte e la terra* (Milan: Adelphi, 2011), 265 ff, 371 ff.

[36] The content of the contradiction, nothingness itself, cannot appear — for precisely it is nothing. However, the contradiction itself, or contradicting oneself, can, and must, appear. This is what Severino refers to as the 'positive meaning of nothingness'. The meaning 'nothingness' is the self-contradictory meaning: the being-meaningful of what is meaningless. The two moments of the contradiction are: the meaningless and the being-meaningful of the meaningless; this latter moment appears. (In other words, the contradiction, 'the circle is square' appears, but nothingness itself, the content of the contradiction — the being-square of the circle — does not). See Severino, *La struttura originaria*, 209 ff; Emanuele Severino, *Intorno al senso del nulla* (Milan: Adelphi, 2013).

[37] The isolated earth is the appearing of the *positive* meaning of nothingness.

earth to appear.[38] This is what Severino refers to as the foundation or the ground of contradiction.[39]

The contradiction cannot however be negated *within* the isolated earth itself, for otherwise truth would appear within the domain of untruth. This is however impossible: if truth were to appear in the domain of untruth, the latter would instead be the domain of truth, i.e. the domain in which what is true appears.[40] It is therefore necessary for the negation of the contradiction of the isolated earth to appear in a different place. *The destiny of necessity is the site where the truth of being negates the contradiction of the isolated earth.*

Conversely, it *is* possible for the isolated earth, and therefore also for the language that testifies to destiny, to appear (as negated) within the truth of being. In other words, it *is* possible, and therefore necessary, for untruth to appear within the domain of truth, precisely as the truth of its own untruth — as the nothingness that being is not.

3.3. *The Necessary Possibility of a Testimony of the Destiny of Necessity*

Severino's work attempts to testify to the truth of the destiny of necessity. And yet, this very testimony must, according to Severino's own admission, be part of the 'isolated earth'. If the attempt at testifying to the truth of being must, *of necessity*, fail to do so, this entails that the testimony of the destiny of necessity must, as a result, testify to something other than this destiny itself (which, as such, is 'the untestifiable'). But, once again, the destiny of necessity is that which cannot be other than itself; therefore, the language that testifies to destiny must testify to what every language spoken by human beings testifies to: nothingness itself, that which is other than what is.

Let us take stock of some preliminary aspects of every theory of alienation. Namely: every testimony of alienation (be that ideological, theological, ontological, etc.) from a certain domain of truth must be able to give an account of its own conditions of possibility. Which is to say that every testimony that attests to a certain domain of alienation from truth must *either* set itself outside the alienated domain — for the testimony, in order to testify to the alienation successfully, *cannot* itself be alienated; *or*, particularly if the testimony is asserting the alienation of the totality of a domain, it must give an account of the conditions of its own possibility — of the possibility of a testimony of truth within a domain that is precisely alienated from

[38] Equivalently, the difference between two beings must be presupposed in order to be negated and produce a contradiction: for if the difference is not given in the first place, it is not a contradiction that appears, but rather an identity. See Emanuele Severino, *Tautótēs* (Milan: Adelphi, 1995).

[39] See Severino, *Fondamento della contraddizione*.

[40] See Severino, *Dike*, 169 ff.

truth itself. Let us then address the question of the conditions of possibility of a testimony of the truth of being within the alienated domain of the isolated earth.

With the appearing of the language that testifies to destiny, the truth of being does not appear within the untruth of the isolated earth. The language that testifies to destiny, like all of the languages spoken by mortals, testifies to nothingness itself. Severino is in this respect unambiguous:

> The testimony of destiny (the mortal language that arises in the circle of appearing as the pedestal upon which destiny is placed) is a mortal language not only because the words to which it gives an unheard-of meaning are *mortal* words — but, fundamentally, because *it gives a meaning* to its words. 'Giving a meaning' means *deciding* that certain events are the pedestal and the image of a meaning.[41]

The language that testifies to destiny is then, on the one hand, one of the languages of human beings (of 'mortals'): namely the failed attempt to make destiny other than it is, i.e. to turn destiny into something designated by means of a sign. At the same time, however, the testimony of destiny negates, in its content, the very possibility of its own linguistic performance, and therefore it negates what it itself is. As such it stands out uniquely among all the mortal languages of mortals:

> The alteration of destiny accomplished by the language that testifies to it differs from the alteration that asserts the becoming-other of beings. This latter assertion not only *is* (like that language) a will to make things become other, but it also *asserts* their becoming-other, and hence *asserts* what it itself *is*. On the other hand, the testimony of destiny *is* indeed a will to make destiny, as a being, become other, but it *negates* the becoming-other of beings, and hence *negates* what it itself is.[42]

The language that bears witness to the destiny of necessity cannot speak the truth of being, for it remains an abstraction and a designation (the conviction or persuasion of having made something become other than it is). As such, Severino's testimony says nothingness itself, like all human languages. And yet, whereas all of the languages of mortals claim to say something but end up saying nothing (i.e. they end up saying nothingness itself), the language that bears witness to destiny testifies to its own alienation, to its own speaking nothingness itself. In other words, it utters *its alienation* in alienated terms, which is altogether different from uttering *the alienated* in alienated terms.

It is indeed possible for the alienated notion of the alienation to appear within the alienated domain itself, for it does so in alienated terms. When the

[41] Severino, *Destino della necessità*, 547.
[42] Severino, *La morte e la terra*, 128.

essence of nihilism, the contradiction, and the saying-nothingness-itself of every language are attested to by the language that testifies to destiny, this testimony can only take place in alienated terms. Even though it cannot say the truth of its untruth, for that would constitute an appearing of truth within the domain of untruth, the language that testifies to destiny is the only alienated testimony *of alienation itself* — and, as such it occupies a singular place in the domain of truth.

3.4. *Appendix: The Topology of Truth*

The language that testifies to destiny thus stands in a non-trivial topological relation with the domain of truth. What is designated and therefore abstracted by a mortal language shares a 'segment of identity' with the truth of being: this identity obtains between a certain being *qua* separated from the determinations of the isolated earth and the same being, in the destiny of necessity, *qua* distinct from the totality of determinations that pertain to it. In other words, as part of the concrete totality of being, every being has a meaning that (infinitely) differs from the one it exhibits as part of the alienated domain of untruth (as part of the isolated earth); nevertheless, these two meanings must share a certain identical meaning (a certain 'segment of identity'), for, otherwise, that abstract meaning would actually be abstracted from the concrete (and this abstraction constitutes precisely the originary meaning of impossibility). The singular difference that specifies the language that testifies to destiny among all human languages is then given by the singular segment of identity that is shared by the destiny of necessity and the language that testifies to it — i.e. that is shared by destiny regarded as unsayable and by destiny regarded as designated: this segment of identity is different from the one that is shared by the destiny of necessity and any other language.[43]

It is then also possible to gain more insight into the relationship between the language that testifies to destiny and the testimonies of that very language (such as the present one). For, indeed if it is only a controvertible interpretation that a testimony should be a testimony *of* the language that testifies to destiny — or an 'account' of the 'philosophical thought' of 'Emanuele Severino' — insofar as a testimony shares with the language that testifies to destiny the singular segment of identity that is shared by that language and by the destiny of necessity, that testimony of the language that testifies to destiny comes to share that same segment with the destiny of necessity: and it therefore comes itself to be a testimony of the destiny of necessity. Equivalently, insofar as a testimony testifies to its own alienated nature (*qua* empirical or abstract testimony), and testifies to the incontrovertible determinations of the originary structure testified to by the language that testifies to destiny, that testimony does not simply testify to the language that testifies to the destiny of necessity, but testifies to the destiny of necessity itself. That testimony

[43] See e.g. Severino, *La morte e la terra*, 121 ff; Severino, *Testimoniando il destino*, 227 ff, 338 ff.

and the language that testifies to destiny thus *testify together*, and share the same segment of identity with the destiny of necessity (a segment of identity that is, nevertheless, connected to and enclosed within an infinite series of differences, insofar as the two testimonies differ in the natural language in which they are expressed, the empirical person that utters them, and the material signs that comprise them, etc.). Among other determinations of the originary structure, the language that testifies to the destiny of necessity testifies to the necessary appearing of the age in which the peoples of the earth come to speak the language that testifies to destiny: that is, it testifies to the necessary appearing of a community of testimonies to the destiny of necessity.[44]

4. *The Destiny of Necessity: A Testimony that Bears Witness to Itself*

The destiny of necessity — the totality of being: the totality of what is — appears to itself, and in this appearing testifies to its own truth. That the destiny of necessity appears 'to' itself means that the destiny of necessity bears witness to itself: it appears to itself and it appears that it appears to itself — it gives a testimony to itself and it attests to this very testimony. That the destiny of necessity testifies to its own truth means that it attests to its own self-being — to the self-being of being itself.

The language that testifies to the destiny of necessity unfolds the testimony of the truth of being. This testimony, interpreted by the isolated earth as the unity of Emanuele Severino's works, 'appears in the gaze of the destiny of necessity' (*nello sguardo del destino*): which is to say, the eternal beings that constitute this testimony appear one after the other. As part of the isolated earth, the language that testifies to destiny differs from both the truth of being and from the 'mortal' languages that testify to the originary self-evidence of becoming. As it unfolds, the testimony of destiny attests to the implications of the originary structure — the self-being of being itself: that the negation of which is self-negating. Accordingly, it testifies to the necessary fate of the isolated earth and the necessary determinations of the destiny of necessity.

It testifies to the first attestation of the ontological meaning of becoming in Greece, and to the emergence of the *epistéme*, the immutable dimension of being that makes becoming itself possible. It testifies to the reversal of the action of becoming on the immutable itself, and to the twilight of all idols; to the domination of the will to power that wills and believes itself able to produce and transform every being; to the holding sway of the age of technics, in which the will to power believes itself to have all beings at its disposal.

It testifies to the violence of the history of the folly — the violence that wills the impossible: that something be other than itself. It testifies to the heights that the violence of the folly reaches in the age of technics, and to the secret alliance

[44] See Emanuele Severino, *Storia, gioia* (Milan: Adelphi, 2016).

between the philosophies that want to accomplish the destruction of the immutable beings *and* the essence of technics itself — an essence that requires the complete availability of all entities for being and non-being.[45]

It testifies to the paradise of technics, the age in which technics will believe itself to have eliminated all pains and sorrows, including that which it believes to be the pain and sorrow of death. It testifies to the realisation that the paradise of technics is not the incontrovertible, and to the terror that belongs to the immanent (and constantly imminent) possibility of losing this controvertible paradise.

The language that testifies to destiny bears witness to the necessity of an end to the earth's isolation from the truth of being.[46]

It bears witness to the necessary coming to pass of the epoch in which peoples come to speak the language that testifies to the destiny of necessity — the epoch that prepares for the coming of the earth that saves: the earth that appears after the isolation of the earth has come to an end. It bears witness to the link between death and the coming to pass of the earth that saves.

It bears witness to the Glory (*la Gloria*) of the earth that appears after the end of the isolation from the truth of destiny, and to the infinite path that parts ways with the path of Night. It bears witness to the eternal being of every entity that has always been saved from the possibility of turning into nothing, and which belongs to the infinite and eternal self-appearing of the concrete totality of being: the Joy (*la Gioia*).

The language that bears witness to the destiny of necessity testifies to all of this according to the originary structure of the truth of being: the self-being of being — that the negation of which is self-negating.

* * *

[45] In the tradition inaugurated by the parricide, this essence is *epamphoterízein*, the oscillation between being and nothingness. See Severino, *Destino della necessità*, 19 ff.

[46] This crucial step forward takes place with Emanuele Severino, *La Gloria* (Milan: Adelphi, 2001).

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Exclusion as a Blessing: The Italian Retrieval of Cynicism

Roberto Mosciatti

Abstract

Relying on historical considerations and on the reevaluation of Greek Cynicism promoted by authors such as Peter Sloterdijk, Paul Navia, and William Desmond, this paper will explore why contemporary Italian philosophical theories acquire a more valuable significance if examined from a 'cynic' perspective. This standpoint provides a better understanding of how Italian philosophers look at their predecessors, while also explaining the uncanny combination of anti-humanistic and cosmopolitical elements embodied in the 'Italian difference'. Furthermore, a cynic reading makes it easier to justify both the ascetic categories of 'mysticism', 'weakness', 'bareness', etc. that have shaped the Italian Heideggerian Left beginning in the 1980s, and the relevance of the Franciscan message in philosophical debates.

Non è vero che agli Italiani non piaccia la serietà.
È semmai un popolo cinico.
Il problema è che gli Italiani vedono troppo avanti.
Osservano in anticipo il disfacimento

(It is not true that Italians do not like seriousness.
If anything, they are a cynical people.
The problem is that Italians see too far ahead.
They observe the decay in advance.)

Emanuele Severino

Solving a Riddle: A New Cynic Enlightenment

1.

In these stressful weeks when the pandemic crisis is destabilising everyone's life and it is challenging to maintain even a bit of mental lucidity, critical reflection is not only called for, but rises as a moral duty. All the more so when thoughtful analysis can be beneficial both for containing collective panic and anxiety and for providing oneself with some idea of how to cope in a global cataclysm whose end seems nowhere in sight.

In fact, the current 'state of emergency' does not represent an entirely abnormal deviation from previous historical flows. It is true that this crisis is dismantling many of our conceptual points of reference, forcing us to rethink some of the parameters we have used to interpret reality up to now. This may be explained by the fact that the crisis, far from being a mere anomaly, is unfolding as a sudden acceleration; it has pushed us with an exponential increase in speed towards ways of existence we would have reached anyway in a few years. It is all too obvious that in Western societies, where individualism and egocentrism have grown relentlessly since the 1960s, people were already predisposed to the grotesque and vicious practice commonly referred to as 'social distancing'. But it is less obvious to ask why, in this pandemic context, this expression has been adopted and promoted rather than, say, 'spatial distancing', 'physical separation', etc., which seem more appropriate.

If words matter, as it is reasonable to suppose, the formula 'social distancing' implies a disengagement not limited to the material domain, but also involving the spiritual sphere, including affects, emotional connections, and relationships. As if by using this expression, we are confronting the crisis not only with immunity in mind, but also to dissolve well-established interpersonal bonds. Assuming for a moment that this linguistic slip is not merely random, to what extent had Western social dynamics evolved precisely by relying on the intensification of 'social distance'? What was the level of interpersonal separation we already tolerated before the Covid-19 calamity? Wasn't a high degree of emotional self-estrangement already part of the human experience and weren't social opportunism, political scepticism, and a sharp *cynicism* already spreading around the Western world?

As I have amply clarified elsewhere,[1] one should express gratitude for the work of German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, who first strove to quantify the cynicism propagating across contemporary Western societies. Sloterdijk's suggestive *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983) portrays cynicism as a disenchanted state of despair that afflicts the world of business and the media as well as several intellectual environments, unfolding as a sickness he ironically christened *enlightened false consciousness*. This is a pathology that distresses those who no longer trust the great narratives of modernity — i.e., the belief in human progress and knowledge, Christian Providence, Marxian utopia, the Hegelian Spirit, etc. — but are incapable of converting their disillusionment into effective critical activity, pioneering ideals or sociopolitical innovation. Neo-cynics direct their existential uncertainty towards petty-minded ends such as material wealth, greedy profit, or individual success: 'Cynicism is *enlightened false consciousness*. It is that modernised, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has laboured both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably is not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the

[1] Mosciatti (2019).

same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered'.[2]

Such a neo-cynical phenomenon is for Sloterdijk a product of contemporary mass society, where materialistic and consumerist values prevail, generating cultural homologation, narcissism, and self-centredness. Neo-cynicism is the outcome of a social milieu that undermines the uniqueness of each human being and boosts behavioural massification as it flattens human thinking. Such a depressive climate is partly explained as an outcome of the high level of urbanisation that has characterised post-WWII Western history. Neo-cynical mentalities and attitudes proliferate across contemporary metropolitan environments, which isolate people and destroy both social bonds and feelings of empathy, while feeding egoistical perceptions of reality. In so doing, urban milieus give rise to forms of 'integrated alienation', whereby the individual's attitude is employed and exploited to reinforce and reproduce the status quo: 'Today the cynic appears as a mass figure [...]. It is a mass figure not only because advanced industrial civilisation produces the bitter loner as a mass phenomenon. Rather the cities themselves have become diffuse clumps whose power to create generally accepted public characters has been lost [...]. Modern cynics are integrated, asocial characters who, on the score of subliminal illusionlessness, are a match for any hippie'.[3]

Despite these disconsolate presuppositions, Sloterdijk is convinced that enlightened false consciousness can potentially trigger the reemergence of a more virtuous and beneficial type of cynicism, one that has been forgotten for centuries and which would be able to restore health to the social body. The values and ideals defended in ancient times by the Greek Cynics and the thought of Diogenes of Sinope should serve as a paradigm for this cultural rebirth. Refusing the cerebral abstractions elaborated by classical metaphysicians, the Greek Cynics did not conceive of philosophical activity as limited to the domain of academic ambitions and professional goals but, more importantly, as a practical exercise of virtue that exposed the moral degradation distressing the Hellenistic world.[4] In disagreement with the degenerate and corrupt lifestyles that characterised Greek urban centres of their epoch, the Cynics rejected the ordinary values of wealth, fame, and power, while promoting frugality, simplicity, and self-sufficiency as a path to ultimate wisdom. Similarly, they mainly dismissed social convention and status, including marriage and political citizenship and, despite their significant democratic inclination, they believed that true knowledge can be attained exclusively by maintaining oneself at the margins of well-established communities.

For the first time in Western history the Cynics evoked a cosmopolitan utopia conjured up by exclusion. Far from advocating the formation of a universal state, the Cynics nonetheless proclaimed themselves 'citizens of the world' and simultaneously 'citizens of themselves', refusing to be fully part of any specific

[2] Sloterdijk (1987), p.5.
[3] Ibid., pp.4–5.
[4] An exhaustive account of ancient Cynicism can be found in Desmond (2008).

demos. They were able to endorse philanthropic values of tolerance, respect, and magnanimousness — not restricted by Diogenes to family and friends but extending to all human beings — while also employing a sharply polemical rhetoric. Although scholars have occasionally interpreted the 'kynical'[5] *self-exile* from society as a passive disengagement from politics, in reality Diogenes and his disciples often employed cosmopolitan ideas as tools for uncovering injustices and inequalities perpetrated across the Hellenistic communities.

Importantly, kynical cosmopolitanism was not restricted to the human world, but extended to all living creatures. Partly because Greek language and thought did not possess the Roman concept of *'humanitas'*,[6] signifying humans' noblest aspects, the kynical cosmos does not coincide with the human world, but *'exists beyond human control and even conception'*.[7] This aspect is not marginal if one considers that *homo* is generally associated with Western civilisation whereas, starting with the modern age and the development of academic anthropology, the Greek term *anthropos* has been identified as an object of knowledge pertaining to non-Western cultures.[8] Critically, although cosmopolitan ideas are commonly inscribed within human-centred systems of thought such as the philosophies of the Enlightenment and Neo-Kantian discourses, Western cosmopolitanism was born within a pre-humanistic anthropomorphic climate wherein *non-human otherness* played a fundamental role. This pre-humanistic significance reverberates within the very word 'Cynicism', deriving from the Greek κύων, dog, which recalls the wild living habits adopted by Diogenes' adepts. They embraced extremely minimalistic routines, imitating the austerity of natural life and incorporating both ascetic practices and hard physical training among their daily rituals.

Could these kynical ideals be reclaimed in the contemporary Western world to help us deal with the ideological and materialistic shallowness of the consumerism that has taken over society? Could a kynical ethics vigorously resurface and denounce the exploitation and abuses that occur constantly in the globalised climate of the present? Could one employ a kynical type of cosmopolitanism to oppose self-absorbed Westernising perspectives and prevent the human species from sinking into the filth of parochial and bigoted mentalities? Sloterdijk is not the only one who would answer these questions affirmatively. More

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[5] Adopting Sloterdijk's terminology, I will hereafter use the adjective 'kynical' to differentiate the ancient significance of the concept from the way contemporary common sense understands the term 'cynical'.

[6] Nybakken reminds us that, '[f]rom Homer down through the classical Greek writers the word *anthropos* remained a generic term for individuals. It signified a creature that, although having some characteristics of the lower animals, nevertheless possessed faculties and powers above them [...]. The Greeks were familiar with this two-fold nature of man, and yet their word *anthropos* seldom, if ever, signified the noble or humane aspect of man; it was not used to mean ideal mankind' (1937), pp. 397–98.

[7] Desmond (2008), p. 204.

[8] See the compelling justifications provided by Nishitani Osamu (2006).

recently, Paul Navia also thinks optimistically about a potential rebirth for Cynicism, which he sees as capable of undermining the societal framework leading humanity toward ecological collapse, cultural homologation, and moral downfall.[9]

2.

In support of these expectations, scholars remind us that kynical phenomena have appeared in different forms throughout Western history. They tend to re-emerge in epochs that to some extent display sociohistorical features that had characterised Greek Hellenism. Among these, we might list imperialistic expansion, economic development, cultural blending, a high rate of urbanisation, and sociopolitical instability. As in the Roman imperial age when the Stoics explicitly looked to the Cynics as their predecessors, the aforementioned factors also apply to the contemporary age of globalisation. Above all, Sloterdijk points to the urbanist developments characterising present-day Western communities and reminds us that the authentic kynical spirit

> presupposes the city, together with its successes and shadows. Only in the city, as its negative profile, can the figure of the cynic crystallize in its full sharpness, under the pressure of public gossip and universal love-hate. And only the city can assimilate the cynic, who ostentatiously turns his back on it, into the group of its outstanding individuals, on whom its liking for unique, urbane personalities depends.[10]

This standpoint acquires crucial importance when comparing the post-Westphalian global scenario, wherein nation-states have lost part of their sovereign autonomy, with the shortfall of independence that the Greek *poleis* suffered under Alexander and subsequent Macedonian rulers.[11] The hypothesis runs that these geopolitical similarities might potentially elicit analogous sociocultural practices, thus triggering a possible re-emergence of kynical phenomena. As I have already elucidated[12] the recent diffusion of postmodern and post-human doctrines, from Foucault's 'death of man' to Derrida's deconstruction, from Gianni Vattimo's critique of Western knowledge to some of the most radical transhumanist projects, should be looked at from this perspective. Employing different strategies and conceptual tools, those discourses have all highlighted the narcissistic and harmful essence that distinguishes any purely humanistic standpoint, thus converting the

[9] 'We have — Navia argues through his scholarship — taken too little thought of the wisdom of the ancient Cynics: live simply, scorn unnecessary desires, do not follow the slavish crowd but speak the truth clearly in righteous war against untruth and, most of all, cultivate the virtue of *philanthropia* and learn to love others now, for it is from this that everything else will follow' (Desmond 2008, p. 236).

[10] Sloterdijk (1987), p.4.

[11] See Kennedy (1999), p. 31.

[12] Mosciatti (2019).

philosophical domain into fertile ground for the resurfacing of pre-humanistic kynical values.

It is also important to consider the kynical attributes of the revolutionary origins of the Christian tradition, which Sloterdijk highlights in several parts of his *Critique*. Historians have revealed multiple spiritual values that were inherited by Christianity from ancient Cynicism,[13] explaining why several Christian fathers expressed sympathy for the Greek Cynics, and Pauline churches in particular were strongly influenced by their legacy. Intuitively, Diogenes' praise of frugality displays similarities with the Christian conception of 'poverty' as a way to gain a heavenly kingdom, while the kynical dismissal of laws chimes with the free-spirited figure of Jesus who 'lived on the edges of official society, like the Greek Cynics',[14] among fishermen, prostitutes, and tax-collectors. Moreover, ascetic practices have been endorsed by both traditions, where the kynical pre-humanistic adoration of the cosmos resounds in Jesus's parables, which praise animals as champions of wisdom and expresses unconditional love for mankind: 'Such possible commonalities are stressed by Downing, Mack, Vaage and others when they conclude emphatically that Cynic influence on Jesus was predominant, and that we should view Jesus not primarily as a Jewish rabbi or prophet, but as an itinerant Cynic'.[15]

It is not the intention here to unravel this complex issue, nor to assess in what ways, shapes, or forms kynical elements were transmitted and survived across the centuries through Christian doctrines and institutions. One can nonetheless observe with empirical certainty that those values have a tendency to re-emerge in their revolutionary purity whenever Christianity takes the shape of a power exhibiting worldly greed and authoritarian tones. As Sloterdijk points out, this is what happened across Europe, and particularly in Italy, at the end of the Middle Age, when heretic sects and religious orders mourning the loss of Jesus's original message aggressively questioned the authority of the Church:

> As soon as a power state in the robe of Christianity — whether it be as Papacy or as the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation — was established and the brutal world of the masters began to become too impudent, kynical ascetics appeared in the Middle Ages who, with the death skull and the Great Reaper tried to cut the haughty men of the world down to size.[16]

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[13] Historians such as F. Gerald Downing, Burton Mack, Leif Vaage, and John Crossan have recently advanced the claim that Cynicism considerably influenced the Christian doctrines, and that Jesus himself should be looked upon mainly as a kynic philosopher. Their arguments chiefly rely on the hypothesis that the Galilee of Jesus's time was not a provincial region but a cosmopolitan area where large towns such as Tiberias and Sepphoris were frequented by many non-Jews and Greek speakers: see Desmond (2008).

[14] Desmond (2008), p. 213.

[15] Ibid., p. 214.

[16] Sloterdijk (1987), p.281.

Sloterdijk assigns Franciscanism primacy, claiming that it was able to retrieve and accomplish kynical ideals during the Christian age more faithfully than others: 'Diogenes, however, really was without possessions and he could convincingly shake his contemporaries' consciousness, as later, on Christian soil, the Franciscans first were able to do again'.[17]

The assumption defended here is that, starting at the end of the 1970s, kynical elements have resurfaced within Italian philosophy more visibly than in other discursive contexts. This is arguably due not only to the Stoic[18] and Franciscan influences that Italian culture has somehow inherited, but also to the sociopolitical atmosphere that was animating Italy between the 1970s and the 1980s. The historical intersections between Greek Hellenism and contemporary globalised society previously identified took a stark form in Italian society at the end of the 1970s, when economic growth, urban expansion,[19] and immigration exploded all at once. Power was still solidly in the hands of the Christian Democratic Party, which had been founded at the end of War World II on the catholic values of fraternity and equality, but after thirty years had mostly forgotten its origins, becoming a conservative and capitalistic force. Values of frugality and collectiveness were gravitating toward the left side of the political spectrum, whereas the necessity to defeat internal terrorism led the Christian Democrats to carry out the aggressive repression of all forms of dissent and forcefully reassert their authority. Bearing in mind Sloterdijk's analysis, it is appropriate to think that the combination of these factors is part of the reason kynical elements resurfaced in Italian thought more visibly than in other cultural spheres.

Following this line of reasoning, Italian Theory should be considered from a kynical perspective, which is desirable insofar as it resolves a few aporias: a) the incongruity between the anti-humanistic aspects and the cosmopolitan inclination characterising the 'Italian difference'; b) the recurrent employment of ascetic categories including Cacciari's 'negative mysticism', Vattimo's 'weakness', Agamben's 'bareness', etc. which proliferated during the 1980s; c) the importance that Italian theorists have subsequently placed on the Franciscan message, which is

[17] Ibid., p.165.

[18] It was Gramsci's belief that Italian culture and intellectuals inherited cosmopolitan values from Roman Stoicism. One of my intentions here is to show how such a perspective needs to be further challenged and rectified by considering the contemporary globalised climate.

[19] The middle-class urban population in 1971 had represented 38.5 percent of the citizens and reached 46.4 percent in 1983. Such an expansion mostly depended upon the swelling number of public employees, including professional figures, technicians, and intellectuals, but a slight augmentation was also registered in the private sector. Urbanisation processes, developing wildly and uncontrollably, represented one of the most challenging issues that the country had to face. At the end of the 1970s, three important laws were approved with the purpose of normalising construction activities, but their implementation was hindered by the inefficient bureaucratic public apparatuses and by the paralysing alliance between State and private owners. See Ginsborg (1989), p.527.

interpreted in critical and counterhegemonic terms; and d) the evident similarities between Sloterdijk's conception of leftist Heideggerianism as a kynical phenomenon and the evolution of Weak Thought in Italy.

The Italian Retrieval of Cynicism

1.

The kynical element is indispensable for adequately understanding recent anti-humanistic accounts of Italian thought. Three of these studies are particularly interesting because they entangle posthuman factors with cosmopolitan components in a way that requires a kynical type of clarification.

According to *The Italian Difference* (2009), during the last four decades Italian thought has unfolded around the themes of nihilism and biopolitics. For the editors, Chiesa and Toscano, these topics offer a faithful portrait of contemporary Italian society, while also stimulating international philosophical discussion. Even though nihilistic and biopolitical approaches were elaborated first in Germany and France, they needed to be filtered through Italian exegesis before acquiring a global popularity. This is particularly true in the case of Foucault's anti-humanistic ideas, which gained international recognition only after 1990, when the concept of biopolitics became pivotal in the Italian debate.[20] Chiesa and Toscano explain this phenomenon as depending upon the Italian philosophical capacity to utilise abstract theoretical schemes for the comprehension of contingent epochal events. Both nihilism and biopolitics are particularly versatile categories in this regard because, thanks to their figurative character, they lend themselves to generating metapolitical concepts that travel readily across geographical borders.[21] Combining nihilistic and biopolitical arguments, Italian Thought is able to describe historical phenomena through long-term conceptual devices, thus proving a powerful tool for transferring philosophical discourses from the national to the transnational level: 'It is all too easy to imagine a Reading Agamben in Bogotà, a Reading Negri in Teheran, a Reading Vattimo in Beijing, a Reading Esposito in Seoul...'[22]

Toscano and Chiesa's view also relies on *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (1996), which a few years earlier had highlighted the relevance of Italian philosophy in the international sphere. In the introduction to this volume, Michael Hardt points out that this international predisposition rests on Italian Thought taking inspiration from the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s, when attacks on the State were more vigorous and persistent in Italy than anywhere else in Europe. Hardt observes that, although between the 1980s and

[20] As Esposito also reminds us, see *Dall'impolitico all'impersonale* (2012), chapter 4, *French Theory and Italian Thought*.

[21] Chiesa & Toscano (2009), p.5.

[22] Ibid.

1990s Italian Thought could no longer count on the material substrate supplied by those movements, Italy remained an active laboratory generating new forms of political thinking.[23] Due to the rebellious ideation of the 1970s, Italian philosophy is able to provide other traditions with a plethora of innovative paradigms essential to a deeper comprehension of ongoing globalising phenomena. With these observations, Hardt implicitly confirms Gramsci's intuition that in the post-Westphalian political era the cosmopolitan personality that Italian philosophy has always embodied would prove beneficial, and Italian intellectuals would no longer feel self-contradictory.[24]

This conclusion has been explicitly drawn in the remarkable accounts provided by Roberto Esposito, who also indicates its transnational reach to be the essence of contemporary Italian Thought. Particularly in *Dall'impolitico all'impersonale* (2012) and even more in *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy* (2012), Esposito clarifies the fundamental factors distinguishing Italian Theory from French Post-structuralism and German Postmodernism, specifically its insistence on the anti-humanistic and biopolitical notions of life, for the sake of which Italian philosophy always appears to be on the verge of transcending its own borders:

> la differenza con la filosofia francese sta proprio nella centralità della categoria di 'vita', colta dal pensiero italiano fin dal suo inizio. Mentre la filosofia francese, a partire da Descartes, ha privilegiato la dimensione della coscienza o quella, tipica di Pascal, del dialogo interiore, la filosofia italiana dalle sue origini — con Machiavelli, Bruno, Campanella, Vico, fino a Croce e Gramsci — si è concentrata sulla categoria di vita nella sua complessa relazione con quelle di storia e politica.[25]
>
> (the difference with French Philosophy rests precisely on the centrality of the category of 'life' captured from the beginning by Italian Thought. While French philosophy, starting with Descartes, has favoured the dimension of consciousness or, typical of Pascal, interior dialogue, Italian philosophy from its origins — with Machiavelli, Bruno, Campanella, Vico, up to Croce and Gramsci — has focused on the category of life in complex relation to the categories of history and politics.)

Unlike the French, German, and English traditions that privilege the reflective dimension of philosophy, Italian Thought favours historical and political themes. These lead theoretical activity out of its comfort zone to combine with outer

[23] See Hardt and Virno (1996), Introduction.
[24] See Izzo (2009), p.181.
[25] Esposito (2012), *Dall'impolitico all'impersonale*, p.161, English translation mine.

influences. It is one of the reasons why Italian philosophy is cosmopolitan in its essence:

> Contrariamente all'atteggiamento tipico di altre tradizioni — orientate all'introspezione filosofica, al ripiegamento della filosofia sul proprio movimento interno —, il pensiero italiano ha sempre guardato fuori di sé: alla città politica (con Machiavelli), alla vita infinita dell'universo (con Bruno), alla natura (con Leonardo e Galilei o anche, diversamente, con Leopardi), al mondo della storia (con Vico). Quella italiana non è mai stata una filosofia della persona, del soggetto, della coscienza – ma una filosofia mondana o mondiale, esterna persino ai confini dello stato nazione.[26]
>
> (As opposed to an attitude typical of other traditions — oriented towards philosophical introspection and to the retreat of philosophy towards its own internal movement — Italian Thought has always looked outside itself: to the political city (with Machiavelli), to the infinite life of the universe (with Bruno), to nature (with Leonardo and Galileo or even, in a different way, with Leopardi), or to the world of history (with Vico). Italian philosophy was never a philosophy of the person, of the subject, of consciousness — but an earthly or worldwide philosophy, external even to the borders of the nation-state.)

The problem now is to understand how all these accounts combine their anti-humanistic aspects with cosmopolitan components. That such a conflation of elements should be interpreted in kynical terms is confirmed by a careful reading of Esposito's *Living Thought* (2010), which analyses the history of Italian philosophy since the Renaissance.

In *Living Thought* (2012), Esposito grounds the cosmopolitan core of Italian philosophy in the pre-national milieu of the Italian Renaissance, when the national did not coincide with the territorial because early Italian intellectuals did not operate within the context of the nation-state. This pre-national milieu was characterised by a number of scattered cities, which fell short of representing a solid political point of reference.[27] Esposito portrays the cradle of Italian philosophy as de-territorialised; it was a cosmo-political environment shaped by a diversity of urban centres. At the birth of Italian philosophy we find again the city, which the Renaissance would revalue from both a financial and a cultural viewpoint, and which throughout history has provided Western cultures with kynical elements: 'Since antiquity, the role of the city in the genesis of satirical consciousness is

[26] Ibid. pp.166–67.
[27] Esposito (2012), *Living Thought*, p. 20.

sociohistorically uncontroversial'.[28] The view here acquires even more solidity if one considers again Sloterdijk's analysis. This unsurprisingly tells us that in the beginning of the modern age, kynical 'cheekiness always had a rougher time in Germany than in the Latin countries',[29] whereas 'the northern Italian city cultures, which Jakob Burckhardt described, exploded with sarcasm, and Roman and Florentine wit rang shrill in their citizens' ears'.[30]

Importantly, Esposito's take seems to converge with Hardt and Negri's idea that Renaissance Humanism[31], an expression of the de-territorialised scenario, should not be seen as in conflict with the anti-humanistic project developed centuries later by Foucault and then inherited by Italian biopolitics. Rather, the Italian Renaissance set up the conditions for a conception of the 'human after the death of man'; that is, a notion of human life that is not ontologically incompatible with nonhuman beings, machines, or even cyborgs:

> This antihumanism, however, need not conflict with the revolutionary spirit of Renaissance humanism we outlined earlier from Nicholas of Cusa to Ficino. In fact, this antihumanism follows on directly from Renaissance humanism's secularising project, or more precisely, from its discovery of the plane of immanence. Both projects are founded on an attack on transcendence.[32]

Cosmopolitanism and posthumanism find again within kynicism a third ingredient that is pivotal for understanding the way contemporary Italian philosophers look at their predecessors. Let us scrutinise Esposito's text more thoroughly through a kynical lens and see where this leads us.

2.

From a kynical perspective, one immediately sees that the de-territorialising essence Esposito ascribes to Italian philosophy is mostly characterised in negative terms. Italian Thought is not cosmopolitan because it constructs speculative notions that are universally applicable or elaborates comprehensive normative systems, but rather because it was always *excluded* from the philosophical domain. Due to the literary character of Renaissance speculation, Italian Thought was often considered a *non-philosophy.* For Hegel, true philosophical activity only resumed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while more recent philosophical

[28] Sloterdijk (1987) p. 115.
[29] Ibid. p. 116.
[30] Ibid. p. 115.
[31] Italian Renaissance Humanism — or Umanesimo — was a cultural tendency that took shape in the 14th century, and which was first animated particularly by the work of Francesco Petrarca and Giovanni Boccaccio, who rediscovered and revalued ancient Greek and Roman classical literatures, values, and ideals.
[32] Hardt & Negri (2000), p. 91.

inquiries into the problem of humanism — from Maritain's *Humanisme integral* (1934), to Sartre's *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946) and Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* (1947) — have completely ignored its Italian origins.[33] In agreement with Deleuze, Esposito believes that Italy was deprived of its own philosophical legacy.[34] Because of this denial, Italian philosophy was forced to establish a partnership with non-philosophical genres, thus acquiring a highly versatile argumentative personality: 'But what if this escape outside itself — its continual de-territorialisation — is the most originally living feature of Italian thought?'[35] This means that Italian Thought was born in *exile* and thrived in *exclusion*. Accordingly, the international tenor identified by Esposito should be seen as depending upon the kynical condition of political marginalisation.

The case of Machiavelli who 'with his cynicism, saw decidedly more clearly than the authorities of the land, empire, and town in the late Middle Ages'[36] is exemplary in this regard. Over the centuries, numerous Western thinkers have engaged with Machiavelli's ideas, which nonetheless have been relegated to the periphery of the philosophical sphere. For Esposito, this was due not only to the literary metaphors Machiavelli's texts often propose, but also to the practical purposes he pursues. As opposed to philosophical orientations chasing purely abstract targets, Machiavelli's discourse prioritises praxis over theory. Embracing a kynical conception, Machiavelli does not think of philosophy as an unemotional deliberation, but rather as an activity that is stirred by concrete life experiences, and which requires full personal involvement.

Following Machiavelli, it is due to the same pragmatic essence that Italian political philosophy speaks largely from a critical perspective. Italian thinkers rarely elaborate political concepts with the purpose of resolving social contradictions or conflicts. Unlike social contract theorists such as Hobbes or Locke, whose notions of sovereignty aim at moderating tensions that endanger human coexistence, for Machiavelli, Bruno, and Gramsci the political sphere structurally contains an antagonistic component which cannot be eliminated. This antagonistic spirit rings out in Machiavelli and Bruno's sarcastic tone, recalling kynical impertinent speeches, and it explains the dissociation Italian philosophers often proclaimed with respect to local and national ruling powers: 'Not only can Italian philosophy not be reduced to its national role, but its most authentic reason for being lies precisely in the distance it takes from that role'.[37]

Thanks to its transnational personality, Italian theory captures more accurately than other philosophical orientations the cultural diversity that is proliferating across the European continent and beyond. One should recognise the greater significance of this view in light of growing international interest in the Italian

[33] Esposito (2012) p. 35.
[34] Ibid. p. 16.
[35] Ibid. p. 15.
[36] Sloterdijk (1987) p. 239.
[37] Esposito (2012) p.18.

school that emerged with the 1989 publication of Giovanna Borradori's *Recoding Metaphysics: The New Italian Philosophy*, just as the European Union was rising and neoliberalism had begun to imperil national identities.

If we remove the kynical lens from our eyes, however, these developments lose a large measure of their significance. It is through a kynical account that one is able to justify both the conflation of cosmopolitan features and posthuman components and the characteristics that Esposito identifies. Besides, how can one not see Diogenes' shadow behind Esposito's genealogical reconstruction? How can one not look at Machiavelli's reflections on the political city as a kynical counterpart to Leonardo's veneration of nature? Is it from the same kynical perspective that one should justify the proliferation of ascetic philosophical categories, including Cacciari's *mysticism*, Vattimo's *weakness*, and Agamben's *bareness*, that materialised in the 1980s? Is it because of this kynical alter-ego that the Franciscan message has become in recent times increasingly vital for Italian theorists coming from divergent theoretical backgrounds?[38]

3.

If the kynical hypothesis formulated here is correct, it means we should re-conceptualise at least some of the categories recently employed by Italian philosophy, both to grasp their authentic significance and to reassess their potential contributions to ongoing international debates. While it is certainly not possible to pursue this purpose within the space remaining here, these last few pages will nonetheless offer a few theoretical insights that may support future research.

A first imperative is to re-evaluate the concept of 'weakness', which gained currency just when Sloterdijk's *Critique* was published (1983) and has significantly shaped Italian philosophy over the past forty years. While 'Weak Thought' has been fully examined from epistemological and ontological perspectives, on the political plane, its kynical and counterhegemonic significance has yet to be understood.

Vattimo has posed the crisis of humanism as essentially an outcome of Nietzsche's 'death of God', leading humans to roll from the ontological and moral centre to a tangential space 'X' wherein all ordinary values and beliefs need to be reformulated. This loss of centrality becomes even clearer in the de-humanising effects Heidegger detected in twentieth-century technological society and the rationalisation of labour. Following Heidegger's insights, in *The End of Modernity* (1988), Vattimo conceives of contemporary capitalism, technology, and science not as contrasting with humanism, but rather as what reveal humanism's inner essence and ultimately lead to its dissolution:

[38] It is enlightening to notice that Hardt & Negri's *Empire* (2000) and Agamben's *Homo Sacer* project, which ultimately flows into *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Forms of life* (2013), both conclude by emphasising the critical importance of the Franciscan message and that Vattimo's *After Christianity* (2002) also insists on the relevance of Franciscanism to the present-day globalised political scenario.

> Technology is a threat to metaphysics and to humanism in appearance alone, for it is in the very nature of technology that the defining traits of metaphysics and humanism — which both had previously kept hidden from view — should be brought into the open.[39]

Like Heidegger, Vattimo indicates nihilism as a way to recover balance once all the metaphysical platforms have collapsed and 'Being' reveals its essential historicity. Heidegger's historical 'Being in the world' is also a 'Being toward death'; that is, a life experience whose authenticity is measured according to the capacity to engage with one's own potential annihilation. Vattimo sees nihilistic modes of thinking as the key to safely exiting the space of modernity.

Here it is crucial to distinguish *passive nihilism* from *active nihilism*. The former sees the late-modern 'crisis of reason' and collapse of ultimate foundations as dramatic events that need to be redirected through acts of metaphysical substitution or re-appropriation. Whether this materialises as a Marxian effort to liberate social relations from exchange-value or discloses itself in the critique of mass culture elaborated by the Frankfurt School, in all circumstances *passive nihilism* presupposes the conviction that Western metaphysical discourses should be replaced with more authentic 'truths'. Vattimo argues that such an attitude will ultimately degenerate into nostalgic pessimism, political resignation, and occasionally violence.

Active nihilists, on the contrary, can turn the collapse of the ideologies and the de-essentialisation of the world into an opportunity for self-liberation. Achieving this ambitious purpose requires undermining the spirit of modernity by positing a *weak* form of subjectivity, replacing rigid conceptions of knowledge with more flexible and symbolic representations. Accordingly, truth can no longer reside within the domain of metaphysics, but must be relocated to the border which philosophy shares with rhetoric and art. Vattimo believes that knowledge should be grounded on neither transcendental nor logical foundations; its nature is essentially *hermeneutical* and, as such, dependent upon a wide variety of historical and cultural conditions that each life experience presupposes.

In all circumstances, truth comes into view from an impure horizon of meanings, because verifications and evaluations are always formulated within 'the space of freedom both of interpersonal relations and of the relations between cultures and generations. In this space no one ever starts from scratch but always from a faith, a belonging-to, or a bond'.[40] Epistemic statements do not materialise out of an objectivity towards which minds spontaneously converge; rather, they can

[39] Vattimo (1988), p. 40.

[40] Gianni Vattimo, 'Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought', in Vattimo and Rovatti (eds.) (2012) p.50.

be constructed exclusively as outcomes of successful dialogic interactions: 'truth is born in agreement and from agreement, and not vice versa, that we will reach agreement only when we have all discovered the same objective truth'.[41] Vattimo deconstructs Euro-humanism by positing a *weak truth* that unfolds by contamination and hybridisation, leading the Heideggerian 'Being' to its ultimate twilight.

One should note that the dichotomy *passive-active nihilism* posited by Vattimo exhibits analogies with Sloterdijk's cynicism-kynicism discourse, and more specifically his characterisation of a 'cynicism of means' as opposed to a 'kynicism of ends'. The former is disclosed as passive nihilism, insofar as it denotes the attitude of those who use their 'instrumental reason' and 'dirty realism' to pursue materialistic goals, including 'plundering of the earth, devastation of land and sea, and the decimation of fauna',[42] and to reinforce the tele-techno society of consumerism that Vattimo criticises. On the other hand, Sloterdijk's 'kynicism of ends' displays active nihilistic features, since it relies on the 'purposelessness' that structurally animates human life and challenges social privilege, inequality, greed, and totalitarian attitudes of all sorts: 'This means taking leave of the spirit of long-term goals, insight into the original purposelessness of life, limiting the wish for power and the power of wishing — in a word, comprehending the legacy of Diogenes'.[43]

The analogy with Vattimo's viewpoint emerges forcefully in consideration of how *weak thought* undermines the cultural primacy that science has progressively acquired in Western societies since the Enlightenment. Where science strives to penetrate and manipulate reality in different ways, Vattimo re-evaluates art and rhetoric as more creative and less controlling approaches to the construction of knowledge. Here *weak thought* provides disciplines normally pushed out of the domain of truth with an opportunity to speak. Simultaneously, it wages war against all sorts of 'totalitarian' philosophical discourse and comprehensive theories, thus 'pissing against the idealist wind',[44] as Sloterdijk would tastelessly put it. By way of the impurities Vattimo defends, philosophy takes off its rationalist attire and shamelessly exhibits its contaminated body, allowing emotions and instincts to infiltrate theoretical discourse and providing social outsiders with a voice.

It is no accident that Sloterdijk looks upon Heidegger as a contemporary personification of this 'kynicism of ends', and emphasises the necessity of endorsing a leftist interpretation of Heidegger's ontology, which Vattimo has strenuously promoted in Italy:

> However, it should be noted that Heidegger, with respect to his central philosophical achievement, would still not be a man of the

[41] Vattimo (2009), *Nihilism as Emancipation*, in Chiesa and Toscano (2009), p.32.
[42] Sloterdijk (1987) p. 193.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid. p. 103.

> Right even if he had said still more politically muddled things than he actually did. For, with his, as I call it, kynicism of ends, he is the first to burst through the Utopian-moralistic grand theories of the nineteenth century. With this achievement he remains one of the first in the genealogy of a new and alternative left [...] the new Left is an existential Left, a neokynical Left — I risk the expression: a *Heideggerian Left.*[45]

Considering the pivotal role leftist Heideggerianism has played in Italy from the early 1980s, and also the enthusiasm, scepticism, and occasional criticism that it still elicits within the philosophical community, it is arguable that we should reconsider this phenomenon, as well as Vattimo's subsequent re-evaluation of Christianity and the Franciscan message, from a kynical standpoint. I hope that the considerations here expressed will encourage others to pursue their philosophical inquiries in a new direction.

Conclusion

Contemporary Italian Thought offers a variety of perspectives that become more significant when considered from a kynical standpoint. Without the support of kynical interpretation, the uncanny combination of post-human factors and cosmopolitan elements that characterises the *Italian Difference* is challenging to explain. With a kynical explanation, however, it is possible to elaborate a realistic account of the pragmatic and critical essence that animates Italian Theory, while also understanding how contemporary Italian philosophers look at their predecessors. Furthermore, the ascetic philosophical categories formulated and employed from the end of the 1970s onwards, when historical events in Italy facilitated the re-emergence of sociopolitical challenges from the margins, find a more meaningful explanation in light of the kynical hypothesis. A basic analysis of the birth and evolution of *weak thought* reveals significant connections linking Sloterdijk's satirical discourse to Vattimo's critique of humanism. The exegetical framework illustrated here, it is hoped, will support future scholarship both as a model and as an inspiration, and that the *Italian Difference* will be re-evaluated from alternative and more authentic standpoints.

[45] Sloterdijk (1987) p.209.

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Hannah Arendt's Embodied Theory in Giorgio Agamben's Biopolitics and Adriana Cavarero's Vulnerability

Alessandra Montalbano

Hannah Arendt's use of 'natality' as a political category allows a fundamental shift in political philosophy, namely from the metaphysical construction of the universal Subject to his or her embodiment. By seeing in birth and death the 'general condition of human existence', Arendt defines human beings as incarnate and recognises in plurality (humankind is made of plural 'men' and not of a general Man) the condition for and of politics. In the introduction to *The Human Condition*, talking about the three human activities that her book analyses — labour, work, and action — Arendt writes:

> All three activities and their corresponding conditions are intimately connected with the most general condition of human existence: birth and death, natality and mortality. [...] However, of the three, action has the closest connection to the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought.[1]

Distinct from metaphysics, her embodied theory — an expression I use to refer to a theory for which the subject is embodied and not an essence — explores human activities as the ways through which human beings inhabit the world. Paraphrasing her words, we can say that labour, work, and action correspond to the incarnate condition of human beings in the sense that they are the correlate activities to natality and mortality: labour assures the life of the species; work (that is, human artifacts) bestows a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life; action creates the condition for remembrance and, therefore, for history. Natality is thus for Arendt a category that names the faculty of initiative, the human prerogative of being able to interrupt the biological circularity of natural life by beginning something artificial and historical. A phenomenological concept of

[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 8–9.

activities, artifacts, and actions as extensions, expressions, and manifestations of the human embodied condition gives a foundation to Arendt's political reflections. Politics is for Arendt phenomenology in so far as it is men's appearance to others ('phenomenon' in fact means appearance, being visible to someone) not just through the body's visibility (the mere physical distinct existence of each man) but through the initiative that permits men to distinguish themselves. Natality is for Arendt the beginning of this link, body/initiative, and the 'newcomer' embodies for her the potential for the appearance/action link of politics and change.

The originality of Arendt's category of natality did not go unobserved by Giorgio Agamben and Adriana Cavarero, whose political theories can in fact be considered opposite reflections on 'the most general condition of human existence: birth and death, natality and mortality'. While Agamben's thought approaches birth through a biopolitical lens, and the human body therefore coincides for him with natural or biological life, Cavarero's thought approaches birth from an ontological perspective for which the human body coincides with the condition of being vulnerable. This article explores the impact of Arendt's embodied theory on Agamben's biopolitics and Cavarero's ontology of vulnerability. I argue that, although the theories of these two prominent Italian philosophers radically diverge, both of their interpretations of Arendt's political philosophy neglect to emphasise the phenomenological link, body/initiative, that her category of natality instead envisions, and focus, on the contrary, on the body as being exposed to power (Agamben) and care (Cavarero). As a result, initiative, action, and speech disappear in their reflections and with them the fundamental legacy of Arendt's view of politics. Indeed, even if the biopolitical and ontological elaborations by Agamben and Cavarero, respectively, recognise and consider the novelty of Arendt's natality within western political thought, they both base their arguments not on the initiative that the German philosopher sees as the human faculty for action, but, as we shall see, on the passivity of the concentration camp's inmate and the helpless victim.

The first half of this article will focus on the analysis of Agamben's 'bare life' as linked to both death and birth — that is, as linked to the figure of the *homo sacer* and the Citizen. I argue that the continuity which Agamben establishes between the camp's interns and the citizen as two forms of *nuda vita* exposed to and by power derives from his opposite interpretation of what Arendt considers the paradox of the refugees and the crisis of 'the Rights of Man' in her book *The Origin of Totalitarianism*. Moreover, my analysis demonstrates that the theoretical equivalence that Agamben institutes between the different situations in which a human being can find himself (interned, refugee, migrant, or citizen) risks neglecting the reality of those in search of political rights and leads him to take an un-inclusive position on immigration in Italy today. The second half will examine Cavarero's ontological approach to violence and the concentration camps in her book *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* and to natality and the human condition in *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude.* By bringing together these two texts, my analysis shows how Cavarero shifts her theoretical reflection from the

political figure of the *inerme* (helpless) victim to that of the *inerme* infant and his/her mother. This shift, however, leads Cavarero to criticise Arendt's category of natality as solipsistic and abstract in order to emphasise the primordial human condition as ontologically relational as it is embodied in the relationship newborn/mother. Through an analysis of select passages from Arendt's *Origin of Totalitarianism,* I deconstruct Cavarero's claim and argue that Arendt's category of natality is not reducible to nativity (as Cavarero implies in *Inclinations*) simply because it does not coincide with birth.

By moving from the analysis of the camps' thanatopolitics to the constructions of their respective political theories, both Agamben and Cavarero consider the human condition as passive, which is the opposite of what Arendt's idea of natality envisions. Although their reflections offer a complementary lexicon and categories with which to elaborate the contradictions of our time, the agency that biopolitics and vulnerability leave out of Arendt's thought and her view of politics as a human artifact is, I argue, the legacy that our era most needs to explore.

1. From the *Homo Sacer* to the Citizen: Agamben's Biopolitical Birth

In *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* and *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben argues that the transformation of politics into biopolitics that the philosophers Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt (although she never used this term) examine in their analyses does not belong to modernity but rather to the western political tradition since its beginning. Foucault in the 1970s and Arendt twenty years before him had observed that in modern politics, human life becomes central. For Foucault, this transformation happens in terms of the increasing attention paid by power to humans as a species. For Arendt, this transformation depends on the fact that labour — or, what we need to do in order to survive as a species — becomes in modern times the most important human activity.[2] Surprised that Foucault apparently did not know Arendt's work, Agamben compares and develops their ideas by thinking of them through the concept of *nuda vita* (bare life), which, as is well known, is human life exposed to death without any protection from the law. In his analysis of the concentration camps, Agamben brings together the biopolitical model with the study of sovereign power and the conceptualisation of the state, claiming that power and bare life have always been inseparable.

[2] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 3–4. Agamben returns to Arendt's analysis of labour in his book *L'uso dei corpi* (2014), where in the first chapter, talking about slavery, he states: 'The slave's activity has often been identified with that which moderns have called "labour". As is well known, this is the more or less explicit thesis of Arendt: the victory of *homo laborans* in modernity and the primacy of labour over all other forms of human activity'. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 18.

Scholars have noted that Agamben gives to *nuda vita* different meanings depending either on the context or on the argument he proposes.[3] He begins to elaborate the concept of 'bare life' by considering the distinction between *zoē* (natural life) and *bios* (the life of the individual or group) in ancient Greek.[4] If *zoē* is the life we share with animals, as Aristotle articulates in his *Politics*, *bios* is a political life.[5] Agamben sees in this distinction the foundation of the *polis*. The origin of politics begins with the exclusion of natural life (the reproductive life) from the city and its coincidence with the domestic sphere. It is the Roman juridical figure of *homo sacer*, though, that allows Agamben to show how human natural life can be excluded from and at the same time included by sovereign power. *Homo sacer* is a human being convicted of specific crimes, whose punishment establishes that he can be killed but not sacrificed ('not put to death according to ritual practice'[6]). Whoever kills him will not be punished by the law and will not have committed a sacrilege. He embodies that suspension of law, in the Roman case human and divine, that only sovereign power can enact by imposing the state of exception. The *homo sacer* is therefore at the same time excluded from the law, which does not protect him from anyone's violence, but also included by the law, which makes his body biopolitical. In short, a biopolitical body is a human body reduced to bare life by law. For Agamben, as we shall see, in modern biopolitics sovereign power and natural life come to coincide.

Agamben considers fascism and Nazism to be quintessentially biopolitical powers and the camp especially to be the biopolitical paradigm (or *nomos*) of the modern. The question that moves his analysis is juridico-political in nature and based on Carl Schmitt's analysis of the 'state of exception'.[7] Rather than asking what made the camps possible in ethical terms, Agamben investigates what actualised them from a legal and political angle. The camp is a 'space of exception', he claims, a permanent space in which the state of exception (the suspension of the law) becomes the *'rule'*.[8] The principle according to which 'everything is possible' — which for Arendt supports totalitarian rule and 'comes fully to light in the camps'[9] — becomes truly possible, Agamben states, because the camp is where 'power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation'.[10] While the Roman *homo*

[3] Catherine Mills, 'Biopolitics and the Concept of Life', in *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond*, edited by Vernon W. Cisney and Nicolae Morar (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 82–101.

[4] See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* and *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Cesare Casarino and Vincenzo Binetti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

[5] See Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a.

[6] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 72.

[7] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[8] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 169. Italics in the original.

[9] Ibid., 170.

[10] Ibid., 171.

sacer is a man reduced to *nuda vita* because anyone can kill him without consequence, and therefore his bare life is linked to death, Agamben's modern biopolitics, I will argue, links *nuda vita* to birth as well, establishing a parallel between the camp's inhabitant (the modern *homo sacer*) and the nation-state's citizen.[11]

2. The Man and the Citizen (or the Biopolitical Subject)

To understand why 'the camp is the new biopolitical *nomos* of the planet',[12] Agamben argues, one needs to consider the continuity of its power with democracy and especially with the 1789 'French Declarations of the Rights of Man and Citizen'. It is at this point in his analysis that he places birth at the centre of his biopolitics and does so by departing from Arendt's examination of the problem of refugees, which she elaborates in the chapter, 'The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man' in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.[13] Agamben notes that 'the paradox from which Arendt departs is that the very figure who should have embodied the rights of man par excellence — the refugee — signals instead the concept's radical crisis' and adds that 'in the system of the nation-state, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of men show themselves to lack every protection and reality at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of a state'.[14] The condition of the refugee sheds light on the French Declarations as the starting point of modern biopolitics because, Agamben argues, these declarations 'represent the originary figure of the inscription of natural life in the juridico-political order of the nation-state'[15] — or, as we read in *Means Without End*, 'the inscription of the *native* (that is, of life) in the juridical order of the nation-state'.[16] Closely analysing and quoting the text of the Declarations, he stresses:

> it is not possible to understand the 'national' and biopolitical development and vocation of the modern state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries if one forgets that what lies at its basis is not man as a free and conscious political subject but, above all, man's bare life, the simple birth that as such is, in the passage from subject to citizen, invested with the principle of sovereignty. The fiction implicit here is that *birth* immediately becomes *nation* such that there can be no interval of separation [*scarto*] between the two terms. Rights are

[11] Mills also notes that in *Homo Sacer*, discussing Hannah Arendt, Agamben links bare life to birth. According to Mills, this link generates a conceptual confusion between bare life and natural life. See Mills, 'Biopolitics and the Concept of Life', 87.
[12] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 176.
[13] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest), 267–304.
[14] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 126.
[15] Ibid., 127.
[16] Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End*, 19.

> attributed to man (or originate in him) solely to the extent that man is the immediately vanishing ground (who must never come to light as such) of the citizen.[17]

As we can see from this passage, according to Agamben, 'the inscription of natural life in the juridico-political order of the nation-state' turns natural life into the political subject by law. For Agamben, a nation's political subject is not Man (not 'man as a free and conscious political subject', although the question here would be 'who is this free and conscious subject/man? The man of thought?') but is rather the Citizen who is a bio-political product. He is indeed the result of the inclusion of birth by law in the nation-state. Including birth in its own definition, the nation-state — the etymology of nation is *nascere*, to be born, Agamben recalls — makes the Citizen the sole (biopolitical) subject of rights. 'If refugees [...] represent such a disquieting element in the order of the modern nation-state, this is above all because by breaking the continuity between man and citizen, *nativity* and *nationality*, they put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis', Agamben concludes.[18]

Birth thus becomes for Agamben the key element in displaying the biopolitical fiction nativity/nation and man/citizen and helps us to understand why he claims that it is not the *polis* but 'the camp [that] is the very paradigm of political space at the point at which politics becomes biopolitics and *homo sacer* is virtually confused with the citizen'.[19] The continuity between the camp and the nation-state is thus the one that runs between the *homo sacer* and the Citizen. In other words, if the politics of the camp is a thanato-politics, a space in which man is turned into *homo sacer* exposed to the 'everything is possible' principle, the politics of the modern nation-state is a bio-politics, a space in which birth determines the subject of rights and turns Man into the Citizen. 'The refugee must be considered for what he is', Agamben concludes, 'nothing less than a limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state, from the birth-nation to the man-citizen link'.[20]

3. The General Man According to Arendt

Agamben's analysis finds its starting point in Aristotle, who in his *Politics* separates domestic and political spheres. Agamben not only seems to agree with the Greek philosopher about the exclusion of the natural (reproductive) life from the *polis*, and therefore from the foundation of politics, but the inclusion of birth within the definition of the nation-state generates a politics of man's bare life (of nativity 'invested with the principle of sovereignty') rather than Man (the political subject).

[17] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 128.
[18] Ibid., 131.
[19] Ibid., 171.
[20] Ibid., 134.

Although Agamben does not refer to Arendt's category of natality when he places birth as a foundational concept of modern biopolitics, his analysis of the camp and the figure of the refugee are clear indicators of Arendt's impact on the genealogy of his political thought. As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, Arendt's philosophy shifts the theoretical gaze from mortality to natality, from death to birth — a shift that Agamben also embraces within his biopolitics. However, whereas in her phenomenology Arendt does not focus on birth as natural life but rather reflects on natality as the human faculty of initiative and as the human condition of plurality (humanity is the plurality of 'men' born into the world as incarnate subjects, not the Man of metaphysics), in Agamben's biopolitics birth is natural life that immediately coincides with sovereign power (nation). Seen from Arendt's phenomenological perspective, birth becomes the category of natality; seen through Agamben's juridico-political lens (and from the standpoint of an Aristotelian dualism), birth is a matter of power (or bio-power). Yet, Aristotle leads Agamben to ignore any kind of gender consideration. The problem of the 1789 Declarations is not only that Man is more universal than the Citizen. It is that Man is less universal than men and women together. In short, the original exclusion from that declaration is the other half of human beings (the same half excluded by Aristotle). But the problem with identifying in birth the fiction of a modern biopower, I argue, is also the risk of ignoring the possible exclusion of citizens from rights. Being born in the same country, or with the same nationality, does not mean the same citizenship for everybody. That is to say that birth determines the relationship one has with power not just in terms of 'nation' but also in terms of identity. Gender, race, sexual orientation, and religion, for example, are all connected to birth, which never coincides with a neutral 'natural life'. Nationality is just one of these and, even if it is the one connected to citizenship, it is not the one that determines what kind of citizenship. In other words, identity can prevent a citizen from accessing those rights that citizenship guarantees.

My point is not to contrast Agamben's biopolitics with identity politics. It is rather to look at citizenship not as the reduction of the political subject to bare life — not to mention the fact that citizenship is not exclusively linked to birth — but as a right and a dynamic political status. The way Agamben frames citizenship in fact risks being negative and conceptual when it comes to embodied politics. Although the refugee theoretically reveals the paradox that Agamben aims to illuminate (Citizen excludes Man and includes birth in politics), he or she is never a 'limit-concept' but rather an incarnate human being who asks for political action. The result of Agamben's analysis — the connection *homo sacer*/Citizen — comes from his interpretation of the connection Man/refugee that Arendt recognises in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Yet the paradox that Arendt sees in the refugees is not the one that Agamben develops in his biopolitics.

It is true that Arendt notes that the refugee's condition challenges the concept of 'Rights of Man' but for the opposite reason that Agamben argues. For Arendt, the problem is not the banning of Man from the definition of the nation-

state, but the 'abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human'.[21] The nakedness that Arendt recognises in the refugee is the abstract nakedness of Man as a concept. 'The loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever', she argues, 'has been the calamity which has befallen ever-increasing numbers of people. Man, it turns out, can lose all so-called Rights of Man without losing his essential quality as man, his human dignity. Only the loss of a polity itself expels him from humanity'. [22] For Arendt, rights are rooted in a political community, not in an essence, and are constantly *in fieri* (in progress). Without a political space in the world, she argues, men no longer belong to humanity. 'The conception of human rights, based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such', she continues, 'broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships — except that they were still human. The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human'.[23] The impossibility of being part of a polity is the embodied condition of the refugee, who, far from being a 'limit concept', shows that the Rights of Man are conceptual (or abstract).

If, for Agamben, the paradox is that the exclusion of the refugee is already included within the definition of the nation-state, for Arendt, 'the paradox involved in the loss of human rights is that such loss coincides with the instant when a person becomes a human being in general — without a profession, without a citizenship, without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify and specify himself'.[24] As Arendt points out, the refugee 'becomes' a human being in general. There exists no preceding essential Man banned from politics by language or law. For Arendt, the human being in general is the *effect* of exclusion, not the Subject. And therefore for Arendt, the paradox is not that in the Nation-State biological life and not Man is the true bearer of rights, but that Man in general is the result rather than the Subject of exclusion:

> The great danger arising from the existence of people forced to live outside the common world is that they are thrown back, in the midst of civilisation, on their natural givenness, on their mere differentiation. They lack that tremendous equalising of differences which comes from being citizens of some commonwealth and yet, since they are no longer allowed to partake in the human artifice, they begin to belong to a specific animal species.[25]

[21] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 297.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 299.
[24] Ibid., 302.
[25] Ibid.

If Arendt links the refugee to the general Man in the opposite way to Agamben, she also links the refugee (and not the Citizen) to natural life. Outside of the artificial world of men, human beings in general indeed belong to a species. Arendt, unlike Agamben, does not have an essentialist concept of the political subject. What makes humans political is their actions, not their essence. Politics is for Arendt an artifice. If someone cannot partake in this artifice then he or she is dehumanised.

At the end of *Means Without Ends*, Agamben sketches a possible substitute for the nation-state system, which he sees as the cause of the refugee's condition as well as today's migration crisis. In brief, his proposal is to dismantle the biopolitical structure of the modern state (the birth principle and the Nation-state-territory trinity) because it is inadequate and already challenged, in industrialised countries, by a 'permanently resident mass of noncitizens who do not want to be and cannot be either naturalised or repatriated'.[26] He imagines instead an a-territorial Europe, modelled upon the proposal for Jerusalem to become the capital of two different states, in which all the inhabitants alike would be in the position of exodus or refuge. Shared by different communities, Europe would overcome the coincidence between birth and nation and would instead be a land of the people, a space in which 'external' and 'internal' would no longer exist. Suggestive but remote, this idea leads Agamben to conclude that 'only in a world in which the spaces of states have been thus perforated and topologically deformed and in which the citizen has been able to recognise the refugee that he or she is — only in such a world is the political survival of humankind today thinkable'.[27] Neither the refugee nor the migrant, but rather the citizen, is at stake in Agamben's thought because modern citizenship, in his view, hinders Man's political life. Provocative and critical of the nation-state system, Agamben's biopolitical analysis leads him to refuse citizenship and law *tout court*. From his theoretical perspective, these are in fact the correlates of bare life and exception, respectively. Yet, I would argue that the overlapping of these elements is due to the fact that Agamben's arguments always have the structure of paradoxes, the logic of which, as we shall see, comes to indirectly support immigration policies that are not inclusive.

4. 'Not a Common Good to Share'

Agamben's refusal of citizenship comes from his biopolitical approach to birth and from his essentialist interpretation of Arendt's analysis of refugees. For the Italian philosopher, the refugee becomes a 'concept' that proves the exclusion of Man from the nation-state. In a 2017 public response that Agamben gave when his name appeared, without his approval, among those who signed a petition asking for the adoption of *ius soli* (that is, birthright citizenship) in Italy, Agamben asserted

[26] Agamben, *Means Without End,* 22.
[27] Ibid., 25.

'citizenship is not something to be proud of or a common good to share'.[28] Instead, he added, he would sooner sign an appeal to invite people to renounce their citizenship. Italy currently assigns citizenship according to *ius sanguinis* (blood right), which states that one is Italian if born to Italian parents. As a result, there are those born and raised in the country who cannot be citizens because their parents are not, while people of Italian descent, who perhaps have never been in the country, have the right to citizenship. In the last decade, *ius sanguinis* has been at the centre of divisive public debate. Agamben sees the problem as 'social and economic' rather than political and calls 'migrants' people who may have only ever lived in Italy. The true political issue is in fact for him citizenship itself. It does not matter which birth criteria inscribes human beings within the State-Nation, he asserts, because the result is the same: 'a human being finds himself necessarily subjected to a juridical-political order, whatever it is in that moment'.[29] For Agamben, being subject to the law seems to be the real issue.

As soon as non-citizens (who in *Means Without Ends* challenged the state/nation) ask for citizenship, Agamben answers with the impossible (or paradoxical) solution of everyone becoming non-citizens. The urgent political question with regard to citizenship that history is posing to Italy today is not about the inclusion or exclusion of birth and Man from politics. It is about the inclusion of more than a million people waiting for their rights to be politically recognised and to become active in the country in which they live. It is a demand for a new law that reflects the social changes of the country, but especially, as Arendt would argue, a law that gives to the children of immigrants a community, and therefore, humanity. Agamben's concept of bare life becomes in his thought the lowest common denominator that allows him to associate the figure of the *homo sacer* and the citizen. Yet, the lack of their distinction, I argue, puts the refugee, the migrant, and the citizen at the same level, as if we were all suffering from the same risk of losing our humanity. Although the association *homo sacer*/citizen can theoretically prove the contradictions of the nation-state or sovereignty, it politically prevents us from recognising the specific condition of being a refugee or a migrant and the urgency of change. Being a citizen in a democratic state does not only mean to be subject to the law, as Agamben states in his response to the *ius soli* appeal; it also means to be a subject of the law, and to act and speak — to use Arendt's political lexicon — in order to initiate something new.

5. From the *Inerme* to the Mother: Cavarero's Relational Natality

In *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, Cavarero uses Arendt's natality to think of the victim as the *inerme* (literally, the unarmed one), a political figure (that is, a figure of political philosophy) that turns the approach of theory on violence

[28] https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-perch-on-ho-firmato-l-appello-sullo-ius-soli
[29] Ibid., my translation.

from the agency of the actors (the warrior, the terrorist, the soldier) to the passivity of the victims.[30] In an open dialogue with Judith Butler and her *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, Cavarero revises the vulnerable subjectivity that Butler delineates in her reflections on 9/11.[31] As opposed to the vengeful reaction of the United States to the suffered terroristic act, Butler elaborates an idea of community which takes as its point of departure the original dependency of the ego (or pre-ego) in infancy. Against the traditional concept of a closed and self-sufficient individual, which, she states, determines the logic of revenge, she proposes the idea of a relational subject. The roots of this subjectivity are not the independence and autonomy of the constructed rational subject of modernity but instead the vulnerability of his or her body that exposes him or her to potential wounding and abandonment by others.

In contrast with Butler, Cavarero emphasises that the body determines the vulnerability of the subject not only in terms of *vulnus* (wound) but also, and no less importantly, in terms of *cura* (care): 'As a body, the vulnerable one remains vulnerable as long as she lives, exposed at any instant to the *vulnus*. Yet the same potential also delivers her to healing and the relational ontology that decides its meaning. Irremediably open to wounding and caring, the vulnerable one exists totally in the tension generated by this alternative'.[32] In her discourse on the vulnerable subject, Cavarero discards any psychological reference and departs instead from an ontological interpretation of Arendt's category of natality. In the wake of Arendt's philosophy, Cavarero outlines a type of subjectivity which is not originally a mere biological body later shaped or included by a normative discourse, but is, instead, determined by its incarnate condition. The original condition of this subjectivity is infancy, which makes human relations necessary.

In Cavarero's reflection, though, the infant becomes not only the primary paradigm of vulnerability but also the paradigm of what she calls the *inerme:*

> defenceless and in the power of the other, the helpless person (*inerme*) finds himself substantially in a condition of passivity, undergoing violence he can neither flee from nor defend against. The scene is entirely tilted toward unilateral violence. There is no symmetry, no parity, no reciprocity. As in the exemplary case of the infant, it is the other who is in a position of omnipotence. [...] Though she remains vulnerable as long as she lives, from the first to the last

[30] For an interpretation of 'natality' in Cavarero, see Peg Birmingham, 'Adriana Cavarero and Hannah Arendt: Singular Voices and Horrifying Narratives', in *Open Borders: Encounters Between Italian Philosophy and Continental Thought*, edited by Silvia Benso and Antonio Calcagno (New York: SUNY Press, 2021), 301–324.

[31] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004).

[32] Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence,* trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 30.

> day of her singular existence, an adult falls back into defencelessness only in certain circumstances.[33]

Necessarily vulnerable, the adult can also be *inerme* due to contingency. When this contingency is not linked to a physical condition (old age or sickness), it is artificial. In other words, it is the product of a unilateral violence that recreates in its victims the lack of reciprocity that marks the newborn's relation with others. Cavarero's 'horrorism' names a crime against the vulnerable subject reduced to *inerme*. If Agamben finds in *homo sacer* — that is, in Roman law — the figure with which to frame the passivity of those exposed to the violence of the camp, Cavarero finds it in the ontological passivity of the helpless infant. Horrorism is an ontological crime, she claims, because it is a crime against a human condition. This condition is not that of a being situated between life and death. It is that of a being exposed to wounding and care. 'As every torturer knows', she argues, 'the vulnerable is not the same as the killable. The latter stands poised between death and life, the former between the wound and the healing care'.[34]

6. *Horrorism*

Cavarero coins the neologism 'horrorism' because in her view the traditional lexicon of political philosophy lacks a term with which to name contemporary violence against the *inerme*. Arendt's natality is here crucial again not because it is the condition of human plurality but because it is the condition of humans' singularity and uniqueness. The victimised body is for Cavarero the physical referent that allows her to recognise in language a linguistic correspondence capable of signifying contemporary violence without falling into the gap of abstraction between words and lived experience. The victim's body is therefore the measure of her discourse, which she opens by differentiating the spheres of 'terror' and 'horror'. Terrorism, she argues, names a violence that threatens life. The etymology of terror recalls the act of trembling, indicating a physical dimension of fear. The physical reaction horror provokes is radically different. Its etymology recalls a bristling sensation. If terror alludes to the fear of dying violently, horror refers to the repugnance for a type of violence that exceeds killing. Horror reflects the physical reaction to a violence that, by attacking the body, does not attack the life of the subject but rather its incarnate condition, which is its singularity. Disfiguring the unity and wholeness of the body, as 'a violence that labours at slicing', the act of dismembering horrifies. [35] Becoming unwatchable, unrecognisable, and deprived of their bodily figures petrifies human beings, who, reduced to mere flesh, can no longer appear to the world through their uniqueness. With the neologism

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 32.
[35] Ibid., 12.

'horrorism', Cavarero therefore names an ontological crime that dehumanises the victims, depriving them of their embodied singularity.

A biopolitical paradigm for Agamben, the camp is for Cavarero the paradigm of horrorism. Within modern violence, Auschwitz represents the 'extreme horror' because the Lager is the place whose scope is the complete dehumanisation of its inhabitants and the production of the *inerme*. Cavarero, unlike Agamben, is not surprised that in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt does not analyse the Lager through a biopolitical frame and argues that instead she approaches it ontologically:

> When the 'living dead' are her main topic, Arendt directs her attention to the classic question of ontology rather than to the questions of *'bios'* and 'bare life'. Even when she reflects on the Lager as a laboratory that manipulates the living so as to erase the discrimination between life and death, the very significance of 'death' and 'life' are decided on an ontological criterion. Extreme horror, for Arendt, has to do with the human condition as such. It consists precisely in the perversion of a living and a dying that, in the Lager, are no longer such, because they concern a living being understood as 'a specimen of the animal-species man' in which the uniqueness of every human being, and hence the necessarily unique dimension of a life that concludes with death, has been annihilated.[36]

The violence of the Lager is an ontological crime because it 'kills the uniqueness' and singularity of human beings, of which, in the Arendtian political lexicon, natality is the condition. But it is also 'an attack on the ontological material that, transforming unique beings into a mass of superfluous beings whose 'murder is as impersonal as the squashing of a gnat', also takes away from them their own death'.[37] However, it is by using the figure of the *inerme* to analyse Primo Levi's testimonial narrative of the Lager that Cavarero shows why, in her view, Levi's accounts go further than Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in the 'comprehension of the horrorism of which Auschwitz constitutes the unrivalled paradigm'.[38] Arendt would develop later in *The Human Condition* the ontology in which the human being is 'exposed to the other and [is] thus the vulnerable'.[39]

For Cavarero, the *Muselmann* (the camp's inhabitant that reaches the stage of the living dead) that Levi describes in *Se questo è un uomo* (If this is a man) is not only the vulnerable human being that the violence of the Lager turns into an *inerme;* the extreme horror of the Lager is that the vulnerable can no longer suffer the *vulnus*. The *Muselmann* is the *inerme* that is no longer vulnerable.

[36] Ibid., 43.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 46.
[39] Ibid.

'Invulnerability does not occur in nature', Cavarero states, 'it has to be produced artificially', and it is exactly what the Lager produces.[40] The ontological crime is here the dismantling of the vulnerable, the dehumanisation of a man who can no longer relate to others. Cavarero deliberatively offers here a reading of Levi's testimony far from the biopolitical lens through which Agamben reads it in his *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive,* where he sees the *Muselmann* through biopolitics. The living dead is 'the final biopolitical substance to be isolated in the biological continuum', Agamben writes, framing the *Muselmann* as a *homo sacer* beyond whom 'lies only the gas chamber'.[41] Instead of placing bare life at the centre of her analysis, Cavarero focuses on vulnerability, to the point that Levi's image of the camp as a Hobbesian 'struggle of each one against all', a struggle for survival, is not for her Hobbes' 'state of nature' but rather 'an artificial condition that the Nazi system of horror, vastly exceeding the imagination of the English philosopher, produced in the twentieth century'.[42] For Cavarero, in politics, as well as in the thanatopolitics of the camp, the 'natural' condition of humankind is not a biological condition that power manipulates. It is ontological and relational.

7. Relational Ontology

If Agamben's biopolitical interpretation of Arendt's thought leads him to criticise the modern nation-state and to identify in the 'ban' of Man from rights the original political relationship, Cavarero's ontological interpretation of Arendt's natality leads her to criticise and deconstruct the autonomy, independence, and rectitude of the modern political Subject — the philosophical construction responsible for the *horrorism* of contemporary violence. In contrast to this violent Subject, Cavarero elaborates a dependent, vulnerable, and relational subjectivity rooted in the original relationship mother/child. In her book *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, in fact, Cavarero shifts her analysis from the figure of the *inerme* to that of the infant and his mother and critiques Arendt's natality because, she asserts, 'the Arendtian newborn evokes an inhuman loneliness'.[43] On the contrary, the 'stereotype of maternity', [44] which Cavarero thinks Arendt sought to avoid, expresses the hermeneutical potential of the category of natality because it spotlights vulnerability as the ontological human condition.

[40] Ibid., 35.
[41] Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 85.
[42] Cavarero, *Horrorism*, 38.
[43] Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, trans. Amanda Minervini and Adam Sitze (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 120.
[44] Ibid., 120.

To contrast a biopolitical reading of Arendt's natality, according to which Arendt gives a biological foundation to freedom,[45] Cavarero states that 'in Arendt's reflections, birth, rather than being a biological phenomenon (incorporating, for example, the process of conception, pregnancy, and childbirth), is essentially a scenario, a given of the human experience — a theme for the imaginary in much the same way as death has been a theme for philosophy'.[46] Cavarero recalls that Arendt turned to natality specifically to contrast the concept of mortality in metaphysics and to ontologically ground politics, but her category of natality remains open to interpretation given that she never offered a clear definition of it. What strikes Cavarero is that even if Arendt looks at the Christian tradition to elaborate her idea of natality — she repeatedly refers to Augustine's sentence *initium ut esset homo creatus est* (that a beginning be made, man was created) and to his interpretation of the Creation story — she completely ignores the Christian iconographical tradition of nativity and the Madonna with the child. On the contrary, by analysing the Virgin's inclined posture toward the infant in Leonardo da Vinci's painting *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*, Cavarero elaborates her concept of 'maternal inclination' — an image that geometrically pictures the dependency of the child on maternal care. Although Cavarero recognises the originality of Arendt's natality within the western tradition, she believes that without the mother natality remains a rather abstract philosophical concept. Arendt's infant, she argues, incarnates the *initium,* but the true *primum logicum* of her argument is what she calls the second birth — that is, the birth of the agent who, through his actions and speeches, 'appears' to others:

> Even the most distracted interpreter easily will see that the Arendtian newborn, which is completely defined by the function of being a beginning, does not inspire any tenderness. Her representation of natality is, to say the least, quite abstract and cold; lacking in credibility, it is almost an homage to the old philosophical vice of sacrificing the real world's complexity to the purity of the concept. This is probably connected to the way that Arendt calls upon the analogy between first and second birth, which she narrates in numerical order but actually constructs backward. But in fact, despite this logical enumeration, the main scene — which is also central for the entire parable of her political thought — remains the one she designates as the second birth, which is to say, the theatre of action. Symptomatically, only this political theatre justifies a representation of appearance that, because it is reciprocal and occurs horizontally, can

[45] Cavarero refers here to Miguel Vatter's article, 'Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt', in *Revista de Ciencia Política*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2006.
[46] Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 113–14.

> afford to classify those who are present under the generic category of others.[47]

What happens, Cavarero asks, if we put the mother next to the newborn that Arendt sees as the beginning that interrupts the circularity of biological life? The original relationship would no longer be reciprocal and horizontal, but it would rather be a scene of dependency in which the mother, as in Leonardo's painting, inclines toward the vulnerable infant. The conceptual critique that Cavarero makes of Arendt, therefore, is that birth stands for her solely as an image of beginning, as a first appearance of men to others, while the relationship of the incarnate infant with the world cannot be the one of men in the 'political theatre' but the one with his caregiver who, in Cavarero's view, coincides with the mother. It is interesting to see how Cavarero, unlike Aristotle, puts reproductive life at the centre of her political thought, even if she does so by using a cultural mediation of motherhood and not maternity as biological (at least in *Inclinations*). This is to say that the body is ontological in Cavarero's reflections. If in Agamben's view Arendt's category of natality disappears into (or coincides with) biological or natural birth, in Cavarero's view Arendt's natality appears as (or coincides with) the nativity of Christian iconography. Yet, is birth truly just a scene of beginning in Arendt's thought?

While in *Inclinations* Cavarero focuses on *The Human Condition*, I would argue that a passage from Arendt's text on the refugees and the Nation-State (the same one that we read in the section on Agamben) illuminates why she later elaborates on the category of natality and her view of what politics is. Arendt is here analysing the condition of the human being who has lost his community, political status, and legal personality and 'is left with those qualities which usually can become articulate only in the sphere of private life', that is, he is left with his mere existence.[48] In a few lines, she offers the core of what would be her theoretical analysis in *The Human Condition:*

> the public sphere is as consistently based on the law of equality as the private sphere is based on the law of universal difference and differentiation. Equality, in contrast to all that is involved in mere existence, is not given to us, but is the result of human organisation insofar as it is guided by the principle of justice. We are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights. Our political life rests on the assumption that we can produce equality through organisation, because man can act in and change and build a common world, together with his equals.[49]

[47] Ibid., 115.
[48] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 301.
[49] Ibid.

If for Cavarero the thanatopolitics of the concentration camp is artificial, for Arendt politics itself is artificial. 'Our political life, our human artifice',[50] she states in one effective sentence that leaves no room for any biological or natural interpretation of her thought. It is not only the 'theatre of politics' that is the result of human actions, as Cavarero pinpoints in *Inclinations* when analysing *The Human Condition;* it is the possibility for equality to exist that results from action. Birth in the passage above is not a scene that reproduces the horizontal relationships among equals necessary for politics. 'We are not born equal', Arendt asserts, but 'we can produce equality'. If something is ontological for Arendt, it is the faculty of action, the ability to initiate and create something that is not given to us biologically or ontologically and not even taken from us bio-politically. Initiative is a human faculty, according to Arendt, and natality is the category through which she envisions this human prerogative. Natality is the faculty of action that comes with birth and the newborns, but it is not in itself birth. It is the faculty that permits action to exist, because action, unlike labour and work, does not have an object — that is, it does not have an end but rather a beginning, an initiative.

What brings together Agamben and Cavarero is that they both try to give a foundation to politics, a substance, a general subject or subjectivity that is for them the condition for and of politics. Agamben identifies this foundation in the banned Subject/Man, Cavarero in the *inerme*. In short, their reflections reconstruct a general subject that precedes politics and makes politics possible. Arendt's thought, I argue, does not do so. For Arendt, the subjects will always be the newborns, and politics the space produced by their actions and speeches. In her view, as seen above, the human being in general is not an essence but a person 'without a profession, without a citizenship, without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify and specify himself — *and* different in general', Arendt continues, 'representing nothing but his own absolutely unique individuality which, deprived of expression within and action upon a common world, loses all significance'.[51] Even his uniqueness, the dismantling of which is for Cavarero a horrifying ontological crime, loses significance if deprived of the possibility for action and speech — or, in Arendt's lexicon, the possibility that men have to 'distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct'.[52] Although Cavarero's ontology puts more emphasis on the natality/singularity link, the link natality/plurality is the political one. Plurality and not the Subject is indeed for Arendt the condition of politics.

[50] Ibid., 302.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

8. Conclusion

As this article has demonstrated, following Arendt both Agamben and Cavarero place birth at the centre of their political thought. For Agamben the birth/nation link brings natural life and sovereignty to coincide. The human body becomes a biopolitical body constantly included and excluded by law and exception. For Cavarero, natality shows that the incarnate subject of political thought comes to this world as an infant, and therefore we must consider the primary ontological condition of human beings as *inermi*. Moreover, life does not come into this world by itself, and care shows human beings as relational. These diverse approaches to the body are the result of opposite ways of looking at politics. Agamben sees politics through the lens of power. For Cavarero, the political does not coincide with institutional power but is *altrove* (elsewhere), in the space of relationships and particularly in the space of the relationships among women. Her feminist experience and theory are the core of her ontology. It is striking how the main political concepts of both Cavarero and Agamben — care and ban — resonated with the politics of the United States, where after the 2016 election of Donald Trump millions of women protested on the streets in front of institutions and a new ban (the Muslim ban) was imposed by power. However, if the relationships that Cavarero and Agamben posit as original illuminate their different visions of politics, they also show us their shadows, so to speak. Care and ban are in fact relationships that place the subject in a very passive position, which, if it gives us the categories through which to interpret our time, it denies us the agency to change it.

The biopolitical and gendered interpretations of Arendt's category of birth do not emphasise her phenomenological approach, which allows her to consider the novelty of the newborn, who appears in this world to act according to his or her embodied uniqueness and singularity. Agamben and Cavarero, unlike Arendt, separate birth from the body. For Agamben it becomes a biopolitical birth. For Cavarero, the subject can no longer say 'I was born' but 'I was birthed'. Natality is indeed connected to the nation and to motherhood more than to the physical act of coming into the world. Conversely, it is the body/world relationship that for Arendt is the original one. Natality is the action of appearing to others that interrupts the repetition and circularity of biological life by introducing a new beginning, the potentiality for change and therefore for politics and history. 'Men, though they must die, are not born in order to die', Arendt states, 'but in order to begin'.[53] If Arendt looks at natality to contrast the mortality of metaphysics, to think of a human condition for a *vita activa*, for Agamben and Cavarero *vita* is *passiva* — subjected to the law (citizen/*homo sacer*) and dependent (*inerme*). Yet in Cavarero the passivity of the *inerme* is what moves care and therefore what moves ethical actions. Arendt's category of natality, in fact, allows Cavarero to ontologically ground ethics in the primordial mother/child relationship. The vulnerable

[53] Ibid., 246.

subjectivity, however, is a mover rather than an agent (the subject of action is the caregiver, not the infant).[54]

Instead of refusing institutions or citizenship (without them we become the general and abstract human being of philosophy, Arendt warns), and without theoretically creating any universal subject, Arendt's thought urges us to resist the risk of totalitarianism through action and speech.[55] To renounce political phenomenology, the common world that appears and results from men's initiative (or natality), means today to give to authoritarian forces the power to isolate and psychologically pressure people through propaganda, and violence that bring loyal individuals to behave according to their leader's will. Seen through Arendt's lens, today's historical time calls for men and women to live an active citizenship (the *polis*) in order to protect themselves and democracy from the dehumanising threat of autocracy.

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[54] It is worth noting that by looking at Arendt's natality as a category of plurality more than singularity, in her last book, *Democrazia sorgiva: Note sul pensiero politico di Hannah Arendt* (2019), Cavarero goes beyond the dual relationship child/mother and considers instead the collective and democratic experience of political action. See Adriana Cavarero, *Surging Democracy: Notes on Hannah Arendt's Political Thought*, trans. Matthew Gervase (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021).

[55] For a recent emphasis on Arendt's concept of natality as initiative and of politics and citizenship as action and speech, see, among others, Samantha Rose Hill, 'When hope is a hindrance: For Hannah Arendt, hope is a dangerous barrier to a courageous action. In dark times, the miracle that saves the world is to act', in *Aeon,* 4th October 2021; and Roger Berkowitz, 'What Are We Fighting For?' in *The Philosopher*, Spring 2020, 'Questioning Power', Vol. 108, no. 2.

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Biographies

Marco Andreacchio was awarded a doctorate from the University of Illinois for his interpretation of Sino-Japanese philosophical classics in dialogue with Western counterparts and a doctorate from Cambridge University for his work on Dante's Platonic interpretation of religious authority. Having taught at various higher education institutions and published systematically on problems of a political-philosophical nature, Andreacchio currently directs the Florida Center for Moral Education (floridacme.org). His latest work was published by Routledge under the title of *Medieval Teachers of Freedom* and presents a rethinking of the problem of divine creation 'from nothing' as a cornerstone to any serious response to contemporary obscurantism.

E-mail: marco.andreacchio@cantab.net

Alberto De Vita is a PhD student in Philosophy at the Vita-Salute San Raffaele University in Milan. At the same university, he obtained a Bachelor's degree and a Masters degree, both under the supervision of Professor Massimo Donà. His fields of interest involve theoretical philosophy, the history of modern and contemporary philosophy, and phenomenology. Among his publications are:

- 'Francesco d'Assisi tra reazione e innovazione, tradizione e tradimenti', in «Quaderni di Inschibboleth», n. 14, 2/2020, pp. 75–92.
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Paolo Furia currently works as a fixed-term researcher in the Department of Humanities of the University of Turin. He has been working as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Turin since November 2017 and co-organises the Aesthetics Research Torino cycle of Seminars. He is a member

of the Italian Society of Aesthetics, the Inter-university Center of Morphology, the Centro Studi Luigi Pareyson and the Society for Ricoeur Studies. Paolo Furia participated in international conferences and seminars in Berlin, Paris, Palermo, Rome, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, Leuven, Ljubljana, and was a member of project teams in Paris (EHESS and Paris Nanterre). Among his publications are three Italian monographs (*Rifiuto, altrove, utopia. Una fenomenologia estetica del riconoscimento a partire da Paul Ricoeur*, Mimesis 2019; *Estetica e geografia*, Mimesis 2020; *Spaesamento. Esperienza estetico-geografica*) and various essays published in peer-reviewed journals in English, French and Italian.

E-mail: paolo.furia@unito.it

Michael Lewis is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne and General Editor of the Journal of Italian Philosophy. He is the author of *Heidegger and the Place of Ethics, Heidegger Beyond Deconstruction: On Nature, Derrida and Lacan: Another Writing, The Beautiful Animal: Sincerity, Charm, and the Fossilised Dialectic, The Elision of an Alternative: Philosophy, Biopolitics, and the Virus,* co-author of *Phenomenology: An Introduction,* and co-editor of the *Bloomsbury Italian Philosophy Reader*. He was educated at the University of Warwick and the University of Essex. He has previously worked at the University of Sussex and the University of the West of England. He is currently working on two monographs, one on philosophical anthropology and the other on the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben.

Alessandra Montalbano is Assistant Professor of Italian Studies at the University of Alabama. She received her PhD in Italian Studies from New York University and her *laurea* in Philosophy from the Università degli studi di Verona. Her recent and forthcoming publications engage with issues ranging from victim-centered narratives of terrorism, to kidnapping victims' experience of captivity, and the underworld of the Italian Republic. Other publications explore her interests in phenomenology, body, language, gender, and life writing, including studies of Pier Paolo Pasolini and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Dacia Maraini, and contemporary Italian feminism. Her book on the phenomenon of ransom kidnapping in Italy is forthcoming with the University of Toronto Press.

Email: amontalbano@ua.edu

Roberto Mosciatti currently works as a Lecturer in Italian at the University of Michigan. Specialising in philosophy, he studies and publishes on contemporary Italian Thought, while paying particular attention to themes such as cynicism, post-humanism, cosmopolitanism, capitalism, and bio-politics. Parts of his theoretical efforts appear in 'Closing the Space between

History and Knowledge: On Agamben's Apophatic Pragmatism' (Italica, Vol. 94, 3, Fall 2017), and also in 'Toward a Progressive Cosmopolitanism: On Gramsci's Reconstruction of Man' (Journal of Romance Studies, Vol. 19, 1, Spring 2019), exploring the borders that separate post-human discourses from cosmopolitan political theory.

Jan Prins studied psychology and philosophy at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. His special interest is in the relationship between renaissance philosophy and the rise of mechanicism in the seventeenth century. Apart from a thesis on the natural philosopher and mathematician Walter Warner, he has written articles on the origins of Hobbes' ideas about method as well as on the sources of his optical theories.

Andrea Righi is Associate Professor of Italian and Director of the Italian Studies program at Miami University. He is the author of *The Other Side of the Digital: The Sacrificial Economy of the New Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2021), *Italian Reactionary Thought and Critical Theory: An Inquiry into Savage Modernities* (Palgrave, 2015), and *Biopolitics and Social Change in Italy: From Gramsci to Pasolini to Negri* (Palgrave, 2011). He co-edited, with Cesare Casarino, *Another Mother: The Symbolic Order of Italian Feminist Philosophy* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

E-mail: righi@miamiOH.edu

Wolfgang Rother studied theology, philosophy, and German language and literature in Marburg, Tubingen and Zurich. He was professor of philosophy, especially the history of philosophy, at the University of Zurich (he retired in 2020) and conducts research in the fields of Enlightenment philosophy, existentialism, the philosophy of criminal law, hedonism, the philosophy of education, and Critical Theory.

Damiano Sacco is a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICI), Berlin. He completed his postgraduate studies in theoretical physics at King's College London and philosophy at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, Kingston University. He has articles forthcoming on the works of Barad, Derrida, Heidegger and Meillassoux.

E-mail: damiano.sacco@ici-berlin.org

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Department of Philosophy
University of Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU
United Kingdom
E-mail: michael.lewis@newcastle.ac.uk
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