SOCIABILITY AND FRATERNITY: NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR REFLECTION, RESEARCH AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

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The evolution of sociological thinking has efficiently represented the behaviour of society and the forms of human conviviality, above all those which have characterised the Western World in the last two centuries. In addition to intuitive coordinated theories, functional, symbolical, structural, systematic, interactive and other theories have been added. The effort to describe has very often been confused with that of explaining, of identifying reasons and causes why social organisations work in a certain way and how they will fare in the future.

This effort succeeded with great difficulty to free itself from those ideologies, social philosophies and political science, which, contemporarily, animated the debate and the cultural scene. Social action theories in particular have absorbed great theoretical and observational commitment. In front of analytically interpreted scenarios in terms of aggregation, social classes and groups of reference, the individual has remained in the background, rarely considered as a person, in scenarios, which dominate and direct him towards acting and conforming to social rules.

The vital unity to build a social structure is looked at more keenly by other sciences, in particular psychology in its various branches, ranging from intra-psychic to psychosocial.

Sociological diminution of the person has, however, in time been compensated with the development of greater reflection on social groups, on identity and belonging, on symbolic foundations which orientate and regulate choices. In addition to important theories, other more specific theories of medium range were developed, studies on daily behaviour were undertaken, shedding light upon normality as a question of consciousness and comprehension, making it coexists with matters raised by major social changes.

This great effort (of the analytical or synthetic kind) has not been enough to carry convincing synthesis and the predominant result is describable in terms of a dominating attention to "strategies": of the market, of communication, of social influences, etc. that is, of ways to manage power, not on a grand scale (as used to happen in relation to classes) but on a smaller scale to obtain and manage advantages

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on a medium and micro-social level. In a certain way, a cycle was completed, giving its best in the expert management of techniques: multi-factorial study, shared observation, the combining of quantitative and qualitative approaches and the mix of horizontal and longitudinal analyses. This is facilitated by technological support (information technology and others) functional in the big sociological reflections to strategies about hermeneutical knowledge. That is to prevalent interpretative orientation, with the support of quantitative data. It seems, therefore, the victory of methods and techniques on capability to manage singularly analytical and synthetic dimensions of scientific thought. In the background all that is left is the effort to know the history of sociological thought. Nevertheless, the contribution is less evident that this thought succeeds to give today to the ways and prospects of social cohabiting or as used to be said, of social change which today there is so much need of. We are therefore presented with sociological thinking but more fragile and difficult on the level of capability to develop new theories and new explicit capabilities. One may think that this evolutive crisis is partly a reflection of the crisis of two paradigms which, in good measure, have inspired its evolution: on one side the individual and on the other the individuals both to be freed with liberalism and collectivism. Liberalism is loaded to propagate and promote the liberation of the individual, denouncing slavery, the negation of rights, the perverse effects of a sociality based on a few who are privileged and a lot who remain excluded. Collectivism, especially Marxist, but also in other expressions, has made out of the social emancipation fight the main question, even when it has become other than itself, a fight against race, nation, often losing sight in the last century the reasons which "justified" this fight, the freedom from oppression, making in itself an ulterior instrument of oppression.

Today we witness and remember with dramatic effect, the rights negated of groups, social classes and other human and social belonging trampled upon, even eliminated on an ethnic base, racial and other diversity.

Sociology has a tendency to consider these phenomenon from the side of the weakest, without considering the devastating potentials which the strongest social aggregation could have expressed, making of the need of social cohabiting a question of domination, of safeguarding itself, of negating the other. In certain cases one may hypothesise that one's own freedom is carried legitimately. The elimination of diversity. The wounds of this story have been painfully reopened and a long time needs to pass to be able to understand the ways of healing. That which binds us –

liberalism and collectivism – is, particularly the fact that both have lifted and taken revenge upon the rights of the excluded, identifying in conflict that is, in the fight for civil rights, in the fight for class and other forms of fights, the necessary cost for the conquest of good, the freedom, which although borne out of conflict, would have guaranteed a better world. For two centuries this conquest of rights and dynamics has become the principal object of study, research, reflection and proposal. Unincidentally, functionalism has found conditions of development in the United States and not in the "Old Europe" because the problems of social organisation including the new dynamics of the market, had a ground for culture which was freer from the quests of the great belongings, manageable at micro level and social-medium for the physiological cohabitation of many diversity.

The national constitution has represented and legitimised in a noble way this research, marking in a contractual way of social contract, the ground for its own values and its own rules of human co-habiting. On the contrary the wars of the 90's have become the sacrificial altar where blood of contrasting tensions was shed. It is a drama which confounds our conscience and forces us to take paths of memory, without losing, however, the attitude to manage the memory in a selective and conflicting way. Even now the memory of victims is managed as a legitimate sense of belongings, without exploring others keys of reading like perhaps a "new" interpretable sense of human brotherhood may seek to do. A sociality traditionally based on conflicting sides cannot not respond to the call of its proper supposed naturalness. On the other hand, the same rights, or better still, the modern culture of rights is born and finds its reason to be precisely because of contracts between equals, where the limits include those who have rights and excludes others.

It is in fact in the marriage of advantage inside this belonging which cements the difference against the outsider over the limits of a social community of interests. The person outside is "*extra moenia*" analogously to whom, as much as extra communitary; does not have a title to benefit from rights which do not belong to him and who has not historically gained for succession reasons of race, nationality, even regional belonging nowadays or for reasons to gain territory, as in the animal world.

Therefore, there have prevailed some of the big promises of French revolution, the first two *"liberte' "* and *"égalite'"* understood as affirmation of individual rights and of nations (constitutionalised groups) whereas the other big promise of *"fraternite'"* has been lost along the way. Its absence has substantially rendered impossible

experiences of sociality of which we are discussing, based on research on giving equilibrium and fertility to the coexisting of the three dimensions.

Fraternity could have been explored by searching its social potential, not only as a value in itself, but also as a necessary balance between a culture of individual rights and of a social group which has prevailed and a culture of duties which has remained in the shade of private choices. On the criteria, one can affirm that it has been a great occasion lost or nearly, suspended for two centuries, maybe perhaps the challenge was and is so high that it required or requires a toil which is longer than historically or reasonably one can think of.

It might have been able to develop, by studying the social potential of brotherhood not only as a value in itself both human or spiritual values but also as a vital social value and therefore a vivifying balance of categories just quoted, almost totally oriented to having, that is about the issue of individual and social issues, not yet put in direct rapport to personal and social duties (the Italian Constitution has tried doing this bit with very little results). We have, therefore, to explore this possibility and prospect and to understand how to find a happy medium between rights and duties not in moral terms. The experience of fraternity with its values and potential represents therefore a promise which is too fragile for new sociality frontiers, maybe, for more, for new ways of being a society. The global challenges which we are faced with daily speak to us of needs that cannot be avoided, of new roads to be explored because those which are known, as has already been said, are based on conflict, on reasons of diverse belonging, starting from the tacit understanding of the other person as an obstacle and as a problem to tackle and, in the worst of scenarios, to negate.

To commence with good reason (that is with motivation which is culturally capable of social gathering value), the building of positive ideas for brotherhood it is first of all, necessary to learn from experience, which has already shown us that we have lost. It tells us that at present and in the future, the consequences are that we are really thriving to leave behind the reasons for conflict and violence. These dominate even now the daily news scene and above all our social life.

Isn't there an alternative then? It is not enough to recognise it and take note because the apparent temporary resolution of a conflict leads to irreparable harm, even if it's just for a short while, because it keeps away more stable solutions.

So therefore the intellectual and cultural acts of paradigms which have now been overcome forces us to go through paths of negation and suffering, there is a need to explore and practise new sociality, keeping in mind that the intellectual exploration of

a solution is not at stake but the birth and growth of new practices which liberate us from present difficulties. The hope is one of a reconciled sociality which can be equivalent to a high standard of civilisation, not in a presumptuous way which this term usually conjures but an expression of a more positive way of human co-habiting. It has already happened in the past and therefore, it will not be the first time that it will happen. The efforts have been numerous of an ambivalent nature and perhaps it is because of these that the outcomes have been inadequate. For example, in a negative sense, behavioural utopia has for a long time accompanied the sociological illusion of understanding and therefore dominating the rows of decisional paths and the determining factors. This has happened while contemporarily the theories of relativity and of complexity were seeking to act as a counterweight to the prevalent thought and to the illusion of technical domain on the social dynamics.

The same evolution of philosophical thought, particularly generous in feeding the liberal development and the socialist inspiration has put on guard from the temptations of total (final, end) thought Even the logic reflection has provisionally taken note that the end of the rules cannot contain the infinite. (according to Goedel's theorem). This teaches us even today the potentialities of social experiences not based on the constituted (the present/past) opening opportunity towards possible worlds, new ones to explore and live in.

A good model of this dominating culture that is of having, shows its profound and radical limits even though having found noble expression. As for example, the idea of the demand for fundamental rights. The same notable opposition between having and being today does not help us. In fact, the dominance of a certain way of understanding being, in terms of a definite identity of opposition, has not done anything except sustain and feed the positive vision of conflict and the costs it incurs as a substantial alternative to peace. That is the possible co-existence of difference, which is an idea for fraternity. The dualism between having and being, in fact as in all cases of dualism, has ended up by soliciting positively, a basic thought on an apparent obligatory option (being), hindering the recognition of traps of opposite identity, for the reason, the prospects of fraternity may help us, to overcome the dialectic forms of thinking and being, of integrating them, making them evolve, towards forms in which fraternity is the source of a new way of personal and social life.

For example, fraternity may characterise in a new way the dimension of the gift, not only as altruism and reciprocity, that is in terms of exchange, which is prevailing in

today's culture, even in voluntary work, but a gift in it. One can, in fact, give not only for the sake of justice or altruism but also for ulterior motives very difficult to think of in human relations. It might sound disrespectful, discussing mental and evaluative schemes, which have inspired the growth and the reflection of generations. If we do not seek to do this, they would find a substantial continuity, of individual thought not "bother", that is capable of thinking, in terms of reciprocity and justice. But not yet capable, of thinking in free terms and a gift without exchange, which are not the good of the other and of all.

The icon which best describes the condition of a leap, not only of a choice of faith, but also as a cultural prospective towards a new sociality, is presented to us in the Bible, in John 15, when he talks of the real vine:

> I am the real true Vine, and my Father is the Gardener. He chops
> off every branch they doesn't produce. And He prunes those
> branches that bear fruit for even larger crops. He has already
> tended you by pruning you back for greater strength and
> usefulness by means of the commands I gave you. Take care
> to live in me, and let me live in you. For a branch can't
> produce fruit when severed from the vine. Nor can you
> be fruitful apart from me.
> Yes, I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever lives
> in me and I in him shall produce a large crop of fruit. For
> apart from me you can't do a thing. If anyone separated from me,
> he is thrown away like a useless branch, withers, and is gathered
> into a pile with all the others and burned. But is you stay in me
> and obey my commands, you may ask any request you like, and it
> will be granted! My true disciples produce bountiful harvests.
> This brings great glory to my Father.

It is a proposal of a deep sense of fraternity. In sociological language, of bygone times, one might say, mistakenly, organic and functional. It, in fact, does not propose a source of security, almost an assurance to keep us bound to the source of life, but, it proposes a profound sense of fraternity, and a tie of sonhood (a blood tie), that is vital blood (the nutritional liquid which runs in the branches and the vine), and the less intuitive meaning of the content not being contained,("*Whoever lives in me and I in*

him shall produce a large crop of fruit") which is "another" thing and an ulterior respect, to a generative belonging of difference and conflicts. Even, the risk of conflict is shown clearly by John with the possibility of being *"thrown away like a useless branch, withers, and is gathered into a pile with all the others and burned."*. The fire, which burns, when thrown, is the war as the strategy of social solution, to all problems. Cain had summed this up in his question "Am I perhaps the guardian of my brother?" and the answer of a brother less society, which breaks its vital ties ,which instead is the symbol of the Vine which represents us. It would be shameful, to liquidate the potential of "fraternity", humanly understood as mere utopia. On a different level, in fact, the challenges of globalisation are adding up – even better showing us accumulated debts, – of a human and social development, but eco-environmental) no more sustainable, at least until Cain's apparent reasonable logic prevails. From here onwards, a challenge to sociology, better still to its capacity, to develop theories, knowledge and solutions, to experiment and to put to the service of the problems, which are facing us and inside of us.

If, for example, we abandon the macro sociological prospect, which might appear presumptuous, and for this reason, discouraging, we are brought back to a circumscribed horizon, we may recognise, the traces of these contradictions, in certain social "novelties" which have characterised the last 20 years of social politics. The scenario is of an Italian system of welfare and of dynamics, between subjects and groups dedicated to offering a service to people. In the 80's, the answers to fundamental human needs, (healthcare, care and promotion of the weakest, social integration needs) were attributed and carried out by the institutions, (the state, regions and local enterprise), thanks to the work of fiscal solidarity. A misunderstanding arose, that is, that the welfare system was a welfare state, forgetting, that the institutions, were given the responsibility to administer the

patrimony of solidarity, and redistribute it, seeing that socially there were no other solutions. (those which today are defined as welfare communities).

The main reaction, was in trying to relocate the responsibility in more social terms, broadening the responsibility to suit our needs, replacing certain institutional subjects, to the social organisation, part of the responsibility of taking care of the problems of the weakest, to the fight of inequality, and to the promotion of the common good. Therefore, more organised voluntary roles have arisen, more co-operation to social solidarity, and other non-profit organisations, which have answered the demands of welfare to human needs.

One has also tried to go beyond, risking more, because one has been freed from the weight of solidarity, and expressed in peremptory terms, "less state and more market". That is less solidarity government and more competitive exchange, in the hope that this would increase productive efficiency. The dual thought and dialect, did not stop to generate differences and counter positions obscuring the potential, of a wider meeting of responsibility, which only a reconciled society and more capable of fraternity may adequately express.

It may seem paradoxical, but nowadays a certain way of defining and legitimising social voluntary work puts pressure on categories of reciprocity and economic exchange and not on deeper meaning of voluntary work, as social capacity of organising experience of proximity, gift, fraternity. It might seem, that the new ways of being a society are sought in reverting back to extreme reasons, (liberalistic and the more liberal) in a creed, in which the individual becomes norm to himself.

Even Lucifer, may have reasoned so when he condemned himself to thinking alternatively, to his well - being, cutting himself from the tree of fraternity and life.

The research, made on fraternity, nowadays in the services to others as concentrated upon its ties, relations, solid networks (reti solidali), collaboration among diverse backgrounds. In certain cases, it has been treated as re-editing of functionalism in modern ways (subject networks and of responsibility).

The tendency, is always that of privileging the dynamic and functional problems, rather than of new foundations, necessary for a meeting of responsibility, capable of going beyond exchange. Thus making of the gift, that is bearing fruit, a new social value, considering the positive in meanings of grafting to be able to bear fruit.

The culture of rights solicits, without declaring it, the utopia of unlimited development, that of social living. It is the same house, which to our brother appears large, beautiful and better to live in and which, instead, to our non-brothers appears inevitably narrow and scarce, to "free oneself from", but also with the consequences that we know so well.