

THE UNCERTAIN FRATERNITY, OPAQUENESS AND DETERMINATION OF A CONCEPT BETWEEN “POLITICS OF FRIENDSHIP”, “POLITICS OF ANIMOSITY” AND THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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It is very difficult to imagine a theoretic formulation according to Hobbes's theory, which does not consider politics as that human reality - historically determinative and essentially built on animosity. It is, actually, a known fact that it was Thomas Hobbes himself, the first spokesperson of that profound and significant transportation of modern Europe, immediately after the “peace of Westfalia”, who prepared the way to the consolidation of a reality problematically assembled; the nation states are, in fact, the various “Leviatans” hosted in this “new”, intrinsically and extremely heterogeneous assembly, still lacerated, as a result of the conflicts of the past. It is actually this scenario to suggest the idea that politics should become solely the instrument ‘par excellence’, with which to proceed towards what we could define as a “perpetual armistice”, as each state, in order to ward off the invasion of the other states, strategically seeks to make alliances with the more powerful states. This vision of politics, - which, in spite of its innovative character, includes some residue of the old *pax romana*¹, even though subtle, continues to survive inside the diverse interpretations in the field of modern thought; both in Locke and in Kant, the problem of the latent conflictuality between the European states remains unchanged.²

In the 1900's, this same theme, came up again inside new theoretic perspectives like those of Carl Schmitt, who - without avoiding to resort to arguments of a philological nature, in force of which, it is possible to maintain that there is a close link between the notions of a city (*pol-is*), politics (*pol-itikos*) and war (*pol-emos*), in force of the affinity with the identical root (*pol-*) comes to form a political-juridical theory which recognises, in an *ex nihilo* decision, to establish a social order (that originates from that normative void), the basis and even the *arché* of every expression of positive law in today's world.

Jacques Derride was in antithesis to this approach when, in the second half of the same century, he provided a new key of interpretation of the word *politics*, starting mainly from the assumption of an indomitable relativism of the ideal sphere of association and of ideology. Such relativism, from this French philosopher's point of view, has an immediate corollary, that the idea of building a

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1 The Leviatan State, in fact, is well distinct from the empire established by the *pax romana* due to its exquisitely lay characteristics – totally free from all references to the transcendental and to relationships with “gods”. Yet both have in common an attitude of “dominion over that other person”. Being an expression of *the stronger State* (no longer an Empire but a Monarchic State), it is still able to impose its hegemony on the international state of equilibrium.

2 As Lia Formigari states, there are several interpretations emerging from Hobbes, Locke and Kant which show a significant theoretical continuity at the foundation of understanding lay middle class law, a continuity which takes into account the “contractual-conflicting” character from which such law inevitably originates (ref. L. Formigari, Introduction to J. Locke, *Trattato sul governo* by L. Formigari, Editori Riuniti, Rome, 1992, p.XIII).

new framework of encounter–confrontation is based on close agreement, on dialogue marked with the search of and the codification of *alterity*.

It is necessary to note that, if the intellectual tradition that emanates as a result of the assumptions of Hobbes and of Schmitt, establishes the contractual and decisive dimension of politics - thereby giving way to the notion of a “firm foundation” (a perspective that conceals characteristics peculiar to a real “negation of fraternity”) - the direction of Derride’s assumptions leads to and even promotes the breaking down of the notion of philosophy and reflection taken *in toto*, as a vision of politics being closely correlated to the presentation and the outcome of an “non-founding thought”. In other words, if for Hobbes and Schmitt politics is “the feat of the enemy”, for Derride politics is the “building” of order, departing from differences, moving on to the breaking down and criticism of tradition (or rather the theoretical basis for a prospect of agreement)³. In order to attempt to further clarify this point, even risking to banalise the prospective, we can say that in Derride European cultural tradition is marked by progressive logocentric sedimentation, to which corresponds, almost inevitably an irremediable ethnocentrism. Both contribute to crystallize some conceptual traditional opposites, such as speech and writing, nature and culture, slavery and liberty. The persistence of these opposites - present mainly in Rousseau and Levi-Strauss, according to Derrida gives rise to the inflexibility of a “metaphysics in its original sense”, a metaphysics that has, as a corollary, the vision of a “society, pure and indistinct at its core”⁴. It is however the “difference” which gives an added value to writings, to thought, in relation to the ‘other’ and in relation at all social levels, from the moment that, as the ‘sign’ begins to be conceived in its material incidence and in its difference and contiguity, in respect of other signs; an incidence that forks out from a possible meaning and from its historical original instance.⁵ The specific political, cultural and ethnic reality should also be read in this perspective of continuing to relate oneself with other realities.

In our opinion, however, it is appropriate to say, that the two positions an outline of which has just been presented, even though in conflict with each other, implicitly spring from a proposition of an identical basis, or rather, from the notion that an ‘origin *ex nihilo* of politics’ can be found. In fact, even in Derrida, notwithstanding that there is an explicit non-fundamental inclination one paradoxically comes to a “strong” position. In fact, as soon as there is the decline of schemes orientated towards closely linked ties, and the vision of political-judicial regulations firmly built on a normative framework, the

3 A prospect which, when seen from a considerably different point of view such as that of Juergen Habermas, becomes a discursive rationality (ref. *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 2 voll., Suhrkamp, Frankfurt; It. Tr., *Teoria dell'agire comunicativo*, 2 voll., Il Mulino, Bologna, 1986).

4 One here particularly remembers the “myth of the good primitive” which permeates all the works of Rousseau, and which finds its most meaningful corollary in *Le Contrat Social* (in *Oeuvres complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, 1923; It. tr., *Il contratto sociale* in *Scritti politici*, Utet, Torino, 1970), when dealing with the image of man seeking to improve his condition in his environment and with others through “a contract”, attempting to “retrieve” the original level of purity and goodness which were in place before the establishment of private property.

5 Ref. F. Papi, *Filosofie e società*, vol.III, Zanichelli, Bologna, 1975, p.711.

nullification of the determinative historical framework in which the state and politics find their right of citizenship is created - everything is redirected instead to an extra-temporal and de-temporal hermeneutic circle.

Therefore, both “politics of friendship”⁶ of Derrida and the “resoluteness” of Schmitt present themselves as “Absolute”.

In our opinion, it is legitimate to believe that even a concept like that of “fraternity” - which, in *lato sensu*, could be very closely related to the concept of a “politics of friendship” - seems even more void when it finds its riverbed in which to germinate, and develop in the aridity of an absolute thought.

Together with the general concept of “good” and “evil”- concepts that have been elaborated in the tracks of metaphysical tradition -, the concept of “fraternity” becomes sterile if embalmed in a vision which continues to qualify it as a basis of thought that cannot be renounced, as already destined not to develop and to create problems for knowledge and to give in again, uncritically. If, however, a similar concept is placed against a background of historical-social significance, then, probably, it could revitalize itself, and it could assume its meaningfulness with reference to a concrete relationship with “another resolute”, and not with the abstract problem of *alterity*. If one keeps to the same context, then “fraternity” assumes the characteristics of a concept of a historic nature, and this could – hopefully - create the premise for an interpretation and understanding of defined individual problems. In order to support this, it is necessary to start from a basic unavoidable consideration, that although philosophically interesting, it is useless to prepare the ground towards agreement and *inter*-pretation, towards a specified *inter*-est, in other words, of a specific existing framework giving a historical sense and an *inter*-subjective public plan, towards dialogue among people, representative of distinct cultures, social realities or religions. In other words, in the perspective of Derrida there further is - in our opinion - the networking of a “romantic 18th Century idealism”. A perspective that - even though springing from non-metaphysical intentions – hypothesizes that the process of interpretation needs different subjects *a priori* (both active and passive).

At this stage, we are faced with the problem of determining the criteria to define ‘difference’. Both in the Christian and lay point of view, the process of defining ‘difference’, being social, ethnic and cultural (and having a psychological and personal affinity), merits to be qualified as problematic - methodically and ontologically - given that it requires us to ask which are, if any, the conditions ‘hic et nunc’, inscribed in life, on which to identify the parameters of an alleged discontinuity or continuity (material, cultural, religious etc.) between two or more nations, for example, or between two different social groups. Moreover, to depart from this problematic premise means to seek, not without difficulty, the ‘path of direction’, if one may say so, that experience suggests, knowing that acknowledging difference, or differences, may not be *sic et simpliciter* because of a pre-constituted dualism.

It is only by moving from this premise, we believe, that the stages of agreement, of dialogue and even of fraternity can become practicable on condition that this

⁶ Refers to the volume that in a direct way has to do with the subject at hand, that is, the text *Politiche dell'amicizia*, Cortina, Milan 1994.

does not become a 'simple' concept, corrupted in an all comprehensive definition. Instead, having understood the premise of the value and the adhesion to the proposed dogma of the Christian perspective, like the 'koinonia of the Risen Christ', this becomes the nucleus from which irradiates a plan of ecumenical, and non-unilateral approach (and not, therefore, as a result of an enforcement of one's own definition). On the other hand, in doing this, one cannot elude the "diplomatic-interpretative" attitude which aims to cautiously search for every possible person in order to recognize possible and reliable paths towards friendship⁷ given that, in an authentic Christian spirit, fraternity, as well as mercy, can in no way be imposed. In these parameters, fraternity, especially because it presupposes the sociological acknowledgement of differences and the ethical-religious inter-est in them, is destined to become an opaque concept and subject to a continuous historical-biographical re-definition. Nevertheless, although this opaqueness brings with it a constant stimulus which, notwithstanding the uncertainty that it can become reality within diversified and complex contexts, does not discourage, but rather, involves the scholar and the wise (Christian or lay, whoever he may be).

⁷ Paradoxically, a more congruent approach would be a diplomatic-interpretive one, inspired by Hobbes (one of cautious trust, we could say), rather than the one that draws, for example, from H.G. Gadamer, that author, who much like Derrida, developed the idea that had a Pauline flavor, the idea of "a hermeneutical charity" towards "another undetermined and unspecific person" (see H.G. Gadamer, *Kleine Schriften I. Philosophie. Hermeneutik*, Mohr, Tuebingen, 1967; tr.it.parz., *Ermeneutica e metodica universale*, Marietti, Genova 1973)