

FEDERAZIONE MONDIALE DEI CLUB E CENTRI UNESCO (WFUCA)

Consiglio Esecutivo e Convegno Internazionale

“Il Linguaggio Universale della Musica e dell’Arte per un’Etica Globale”

Lucca e Firenze, 8-13 marzo 2013

SERGIO GIVONE

Assessore alla Cultura del Comune di Firenze

About the idea of city

Florence, 11 March 2013

In a passage of the *Operette Morali*, Giacomo Leopardi writes: “It is not possible deceive ourselves or hiding anymore. Through the philosophy we knew so much that the inattention to ourselves, once simple, now is impossible. Oh...life will be again an alive thing and not a dead one, and beauty and greatness of the things will come back again... and religion will be appreciated again; or this world will become a menagerie of barbarous, and maybe a desert”.

Leopardi casts over the present world and the future one a shifty look sorrowful and disenchanted.

Reality which hangs over appears to him as a gloomy light or anyway frightening. Philosophy, science and technique revealed reality, showing it to us as it is: a territory of anonymous and inhuman forces that have nothing to do with man, his trusts, his faiths, and that seem to mock his fragility and his fate to death. In these conditions we do not know how to look at the future except with desperation. Only an uncertain and unpredictable event – this is his thought – will save us.

What is this event, Leopardi do not hesitate to say. According to him it is necessary to come back to the very sources of life: that is art and religion. Maybe they will be illusions, art and religion, but without them it would be as our life die. Without art there is no beauty, and so there is no love; without love there is no religion, and so there is no ethics essence that could make the relationships between men steady and strong, without ethics... without ethics world will be simply unlivable”.

In this way our poet becomes commentator of a perceiving that right in those years was circulating in Europe and that even now has no name, but soon it will find it: nihilism. It will be this, in fact, the disturbing guest of the more prudent consciences, but ready to come out into the open, changing into a popular and even mass opinion, as if the deep belief of men by now would consist in no longer have any. “We are all nihilist!”, will say Dostoevskij not without an impulse of horror and fear. But even as Nietzsche will see in this prospect an occasion for humankind. Being

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nihilist means to take cognizance of the way things are and to act consequently: with a freedom that makes everyone the maker of his life and put him beyond the good and the evil.

Dostoevskij saw a close link between nihilism and terrorism. Uprooted the faith, any faith, from the heart of the man, according to Dostoevskij is not only arbitrary and gratuitous but murderous and suicidal. And it is on this basis that nihilism turn out to him as a nightmare. On the contrary the nihilism according to Nietzsche makes the mind free from violence and ancient terrors (that is from the idea of scourge, punishment, revenge), bringing us back to the joy of living that seemed lost. But it is not a matter of decide the one of both – whether Dostoevskij or Nietzsche – who had seen more deeply in the phenomenon of nihilism and the one of both who had revealed better its nature, making us see in advance what nihilism would be nowadays. The question which remains is that of Leopardi. Is still possible ethics in a world ruled by nihilism? Living the earth, for the man, unlike other animals, is not a deed but a duty.

It is not conceded to him living but for contributing to the construction of the city – the city of the human being that is the civitas, the civilization the result of a cultural process, as well the latin term *cives* in italian language means “cultured”. Insomuch as there where human life is limited to its natural elements, pure and simple life, essential life, it is not a human life anymore but inhuman one, barbarian: it is a kind of violated life that try to find relief, a life that represents the greatest outrage. As in the case of those who live in an human condition of a complete neglect, at the limit of the survival, it doesn’t matter if it is in the most desolated plagues of the planet or on the fringes in the immense number of large cities that attack him as a cancer. Or in the case of those who experience neglect as the most hateful violence: reject and deported in some *gulag*.

We know damn well too that phenomenon in our over civilized universe instead of decreasing are more and more diffused. It is true that man comes from a state of nature, comes from an ancient savagery that cannot be repressed. But it is as much true that coming into the world for all the human beings already means to leave behind their state of nature and savagery.

There is no humanity except where there is treatment and devotion. Being born can’t be dissociated from the act of taking care each other. Insomuch as said before, we are born when our essential nature is upholstered, that is denied, rejected, returned to inhuman. The condition of inhuman, savage, is not our beginning, for if anything it is our end, since we always fall back again

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into savage or risk to fall into it and so we are not originate from it, we are not made for it. Birth means to be received.

The house is the native space, is the maternal care. It is the city. That is already there to protect and save us and that make possible our living the earth.

But what does it happen when the earth, as Leopardi, Dostoevskij, Nietzsche saw, and so did other, suddenly becomes inhospitable, unknown to the man, as for example it is proved to be for the city, every city, is no more what it used to be, but it became something else: it was the place of a shared *ethos*, of common and shared expectations, of solidarity and of commitment to mutual support; actually it is the place where these qualities fall through. What remains of the city is an hollow shell that represents the perfect scenario of the destiny we expect: a new return to the state of nature and savagery. It is not surprising that Leopardi could have seen the desert in the heart of the city. So we could rephrase what Leopardi questioned this way: how reconstruct the city of man?

Modern philosophy, which exactly derives from this problem and originates starting from this, answers: the city of man can and has to be reconstructed through the social contract. That is the contract which binds citizens to abide by laws not because good or right, but for they are the condition for people to live associated. Beyond which there is nothing, because there is only the state of nature. And it doesn't matter if the state of nature seem to Hobbes neither more or less as the state of life which it is not life but inhuman one, beastly, or for example it seem to Rousseau as an utopia which helps us to understand who we are and how we live. In both cases it is about a negative paradigm, from which derives an ominous light threaded on our society and we see just the way it is: a necessary trick, a functional construction to survival but completely unable to keep inside a meaning, a truth for which is worth living. We could even glimpse a concept about the city of the man already projected in a nihilist context which in a little while will burst on the european scene. Furthermore there is someone who, not without reason, considered Hobbes and Rousseau the precursor of the ideologies that would distressed Europe.

Hobbes theorist of the absolutism legitimates that kind of supremacy from the State over the individual which will bring forth to the totalitarianisms aberrations. In turn Rousseau disapproval to society as an institution basically and irremediably abusive, for based on denial and repression of those that would be true human vocations, gives an underlying justification to the revolutionary and

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Jacobin terror. Whence a gloomy future in a prospect which is deeply and drastically anti-humanistic. Therefore we have to conclude that humanism by now is a form of rhetoric which has little to say to men of our time?

Nevertheless the great humanistic tradition found the way to express itself, claiming its modernity. See for instance Giambattista Vico. According the great neapolitan philosopher the state of nature is a predetermination for destiny too. We come from it and in it we fall again. But watch out: we are not born for it. Albeit in a unclear way, everywhere – in the world as in our heart – there are signs that reveal our belonging to a world which is not a degraded and corrupted world of *bellum omnium contra omnes* and of *homo homini lupus*. Proofs that describe our highest destination. In Vico there is a Dante’s concept. “The flowerbed that makes us so savage” appears as the forest which harbor every possible wickedness but it is really a garden, a heavenly garden: from which we have been turned away, but where we can and we must come back (as Dante says: “You were not born to live like brutes but to follow virtue and knowledge”). Of course reality is what it is: mediocre, poor, empty, and we have to square with it, beginning from our condition, which is that of who fell in a state – the state of nature – which is not its own, but represents a extreme condition of alienation. Man must take reality back. But to do this the main thing is turning it into his own image and likeness. That is making it human. Making sure that it may belong to him again: his house, his garden, his homeland.

According to Vico the prime instinct is not to survive, no matter what the cost, killing to save themselves, along the logic that only knows the prey and the predator, but the instinct to shape the reality, to give form to the world, to change the world from that frightening forest which was in a place designed for humankind as humankind. No, violence do not save us. On the contrary: it humiliates us, blinds us, it prevents us from seeing the final and real aim. So it confuses us, loses us. Of course shaping the reality can be done only by attempt: deciphering the signs which in the confusion we fell invite us to look at a widest and highest horizon, in a word more human. It is often about wrong guesses, false guesses, not to say out-and-out fables. Nevertheless telling these fables, these stories – their stories – men become men, for they come out the state of nature and learn to live the earth as men. The stories build the city, found the city of the man.

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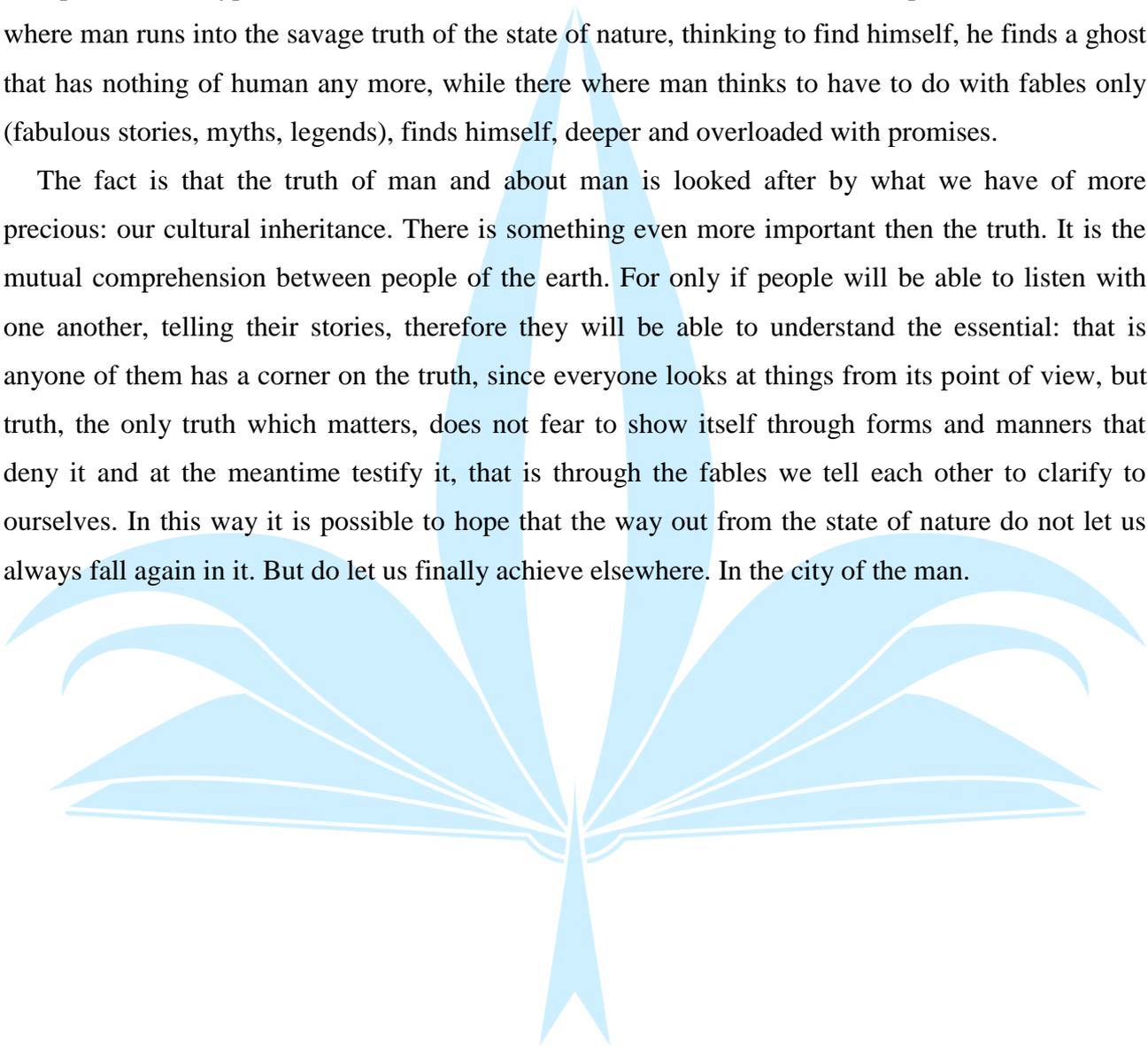
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So what kind of truth is more specifically human? That which talk to us about a savage animal, that hides itself behind social hypocrisies absolutely imaginary, or that which talk to us about a citizen educated to beautiful things and able to take charge of his own deeds? Here we are in front of a paradox – a typical one of the humanistic tradition. Which we could express like this: there where man runs into the savage truth of the state of nature, thinking to find himself, he finds a ghost that has nothing of human any more, while there where man thinks to have to do with fables only (fabulous stories, myths, legends), finds himself, deeper and overloaded with promises.

The fact is that the truth of man and about man is looked after by what we have of more precious: our cultural inheritance. There is something even more important then the truth. It is the mutual comprehension between people of the earth. For only if people will be able to listen with one another, telling their stories, therefore they will be able to understand the essential: that is anyone of them has a corner on the truth, since everyone looks at things from its point of view, but truth, the only truth which matters, does not fear to show itself through forms and manners that deny it and at the meantime testify it, that is through the fables we tell each other to clarify to ourselves. In this way it is possible to hope that the way out from the state of nature do not let us always fall again in it. But do let us finally achieve elsewhere. In the city of the man.



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