The Moral of the Fable

BRUNELLO LOTTI

It is indisputable that the cohesion of a political community is a structural condition for its existence and its proper functioning. Multiculturalism, that is the presence of different cultures in the same territory under the same jurisdiction, is a potential threat to social and political cohesion. In Western political thought awareness of this danger has been documented since antiquity. Aristotle wrote: "Whether a communication with the sea is beneficial to a well-ordered state or not is a question which has often been asked. It is argued that the introduction of strangers brought up under other laws, and the increase of population, will be adverse to good order; the increase arises from their using the sea and having a crowd of merchants coming and going, and is inimical to good government"[1]. If we wanted to read our current situation through these Aristotelian lenses, we would be compelled to say that multiculturalism and globalization are intrinsically incompatible with the ideal of good government. Of course, Aristotle cannot be our guide today: after all, he looked at the traditional Greek *polis* as the normal and ideal form of political community: a homogeneous population so limited in number, and a territory so small that both the land and the inhabit-

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[1] Aristotle, *Pol.* VII. 6 1327a 11-18, trans. Jowett.

ants "should be taken in at a single view"[2]! Everyone knows that when Aristotle wrote his *Politics* Greece and the whole Eastern part of the Mediterranean area were about to be temporarily unified under the multicultural empire created by Aristotle's pupil, Alexander the Great. So if we want to understand how multiculturalism has coexisted with common political institutions we should rather forget Aristotle and his idealized *polis*, and consider political formations of a different kind, such as the great empires of our distant and recent past.

Multiculturalism has been a feature of many political communities throughout history, and it is even stronger today in a world characterized by swifter and easier opportunities of travelling and moving from one territory to another. The ever increasing means of transport and of communication in a globalized context, while favoring the creation of multicultural societies, tend also to integrate cultural diversities and to produce common lifestyles and shared ways of thinking. In this respect, as often happens in the dialectical rhythms of human history, the illness provides its own remedy, at least in the long run. A process of assimilation and the emergence of a common unified culture is always under way when different cultures meet each other or even when they clash with each other. This inevitable process of fusion may require a long time and may be more or less deep and wide; so, it does not guarantee by itself a smooth and easy solution to the political difficulties arising from the cohabitation of different cultures. Tensions are part of every process of cultural interaction and, depending on circumstances, can be so strong as to disintegrate common political institutions.

Traditionally, Europe is a multicultural area, at least in the sense that our continent consists of many countries with a complex stratified past, with many different languages and several religions. The different Christian confessions, the presence of non-Christian religions, and the massive influence of a secular culture and mentality from the French Revolution onwards have rendered Europe a multicultural space over many centuries. One may say that the very formation of the European political union in the last sixty years is an attempt to overcome the divisive features of the different European cultures and the traditional national closures. The aim is to enhance the common traits of the European tradition as a basis upon which to build the future common destiny of the countries and populations of this old continent. Examining the issue of multiculturalism from this point of view is tantamount to reconstructing historically the evolution of the European Union, its limits and uncertainties. It is a question and a task more for an historian than for a political philosopher. Multiculturalism as such belongs to the European tradition, and the whole of European history is pervaded by it; in this sense only an historical view might instruct us in how the unity of politi-

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[2]   Ibid. VII. 5 1327a 1.

cal communities has been achieved notwithstanding the coexistence of different cultures. Cultural differences, however marked, do not undermine the stability of a society as long as there are strong political institutions which create the frame for a communal life. Efficient bureaucracy, a unified economy, a common legal system, a recognized political leadership, a set of ideological symbols standing above cultural differences, and a common military force which protects the integrity of the state, all of these are standard ingredients necessary for keeping together groups of different cultures and traditions in a single political entity. Of the aforementioned factors, only one (a unified economy, at least in terms of free trade and of a common currency) characterizes Europe today. The other factors exist only in an inchoative state or are entirely missing (a European army). The whole situation is further confused by the overlapping of competence and sovereignty between European and national institutions.

Taking into account the 'experimental' and precarious quality of Europe as a political community, we must ask ourselves whether multiculturalism today can be seen as the traditional background from which a richer and stronger European community can emerge or if we are facing a new form of multiculturalism, which is no longer the effect of traditional differences among European countries and which presents new challenges to the stability and the very existence of European democracies.

The main aspect to be considered is the massive flux of immigrants coming to Europe from other continents, mainly from Africa and Asia. The fundamental cause of this wave of immigration is economic, sometimes disguised under the pretext of seeking political asylum: western Europe is a more prosperous area and is perceived as offering better life opportunities to masses of people living in poorer countries. An observer of this phenomenon, which has dramatically increased in the last twenty years, cannot help noticing the almost complete absence of an immigration policy both in the European Union as a whole and in each single country. Whatever the different laws and practices in various European states, it is correct to say that there is no planning and no selection of immigrants to be admitted according to economic, social and cultural criteria. The effective expulsion of illegal immigrants is very limited and very often means simply that expelled immigrants move from one European country to another. In many European countries there have been amnesties which have legalized the condition of many immigrants. The idea that Europe as a whole or that a single European country might select which immigrants are allowed to be admitted and which of them should be refused has never been put into place. In short, the phenomenon of immigration from extra-European areas is not governed, it is passively accepted.

The tacit ideological assumption underlying the lack of a selective policy of immigration is that such a policy would be discriminatory and therefore unac-

ceptable. This assumption is part of a commonplace ideological attitude towards immigration, centered around vague humanitarian ideas such as 'hospitality', 'compassion', 'acceptance', 'solidarity', 'inclusion'. These ideas express a 'false moral conscience', and do not have any political significance other than being a justification of the passive and lax policy which I have described. A typical 'official' ideology invoked to justify the acceptance of 'migrants' is the theory of human rights[3]. I have defined this humanitarian approach a form of 'false moral conscience', since it is only a way to gratify the self-righteousness of those who entertain these views. If they were adopted consistently, they should not be practiced in a passive way, but should become the guidelines of an active foreign policy: Europe should actively promote and encourage the indiscriminate entry into its territory of all those who aspire to live there in order to improve their economic condition, and even more of all the people coming from states where democratic rights are not guaranteed according to European standards, welcoming them as political refugees. A consistent application of the theory of human rights – for instance taking into account The Universal Declaration of Human Rights – would imply that Europe should open its doors and actively offer its protection and its resources to all the people in the world living in countries in which human rights are not implemented. For instance, Article 24 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay". If the theory of human rights, apart from being a list of good intentions, would or could become an effective instrument of international policy, the European Union should help all those living in countries where this right is not implemented to come to Europe, to offer them the opportunity of enjoying here "the right to rest and leisure". The result of this hypothetically "consistent" humanitarian foreign policy would be the collapse of European societies as well as of every other society promoting so called 'human rights' actively and to their full extent. The gap between reality and ideal humanitarian principles is so wide that it clearly shows the utopian character of those principles.

The absurdity of a humanitarian foreign policy which, if genuinely practiced, would lead to the self-destruction of every political entity, reverberates to a lesser degree in the passive and non-selective acceptance of immigration. The effect of this policy has been and will be a progressive change in the composition of the European population with an increase of groups coming from different cul-

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[3]   The Universal Declaration of Human Right, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948, states at the article 13 (2) that "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country", but it does not state an unlikely 'cosmopolitan' right to be admitted as a citizen in whatever country everyone would like to move, unless you are seeking asylum from persecution (art. 14).

tures and lifestyles: some of these groups share aspects of the European traditions (such as religion or the second language) due to their colonial inheritance; other groups, such as the Chinese or the Muslim immigrants, are much more alien to European history, tradition, cultural values and social behaviours.

The passive attitude towards immigration has had the effect that all the undesirable consequences of multiculturalism have grown uncontrolled to the point of constituting a real danger for the security and stability of European societies. In the current situation the threat is posed by Muslim immigration, due to the widespread aggressive ideology of Islamic fundamentalism. In a sense, the examination of the growth in the last century of Islamic fundamentalism in terms of its historical and cultural roots is of secondary importance; what matters more is to become aware that radical Muslims, who hate western values, culture and lifestyle, live and act within European societies, enjoying the freedom and rights which democracies accord to their citizens and to every person living in their territory. The long string of violent terrorist acts, fueled by a fanatical ideology in which religious faith and political beliefs are merged, constitute the most severe threat to a safe and free existence in European society today. Islamic fundamentalism in Europe is the degenerative factual consequence of a process of multiculturalism left ungoverned and pushed beyond any reasonable limits; however, due to its absolute negation of freedom and its subordination of all aspects of human existence to the *sharia* (the Islamic law directly drawn from the precepts of the Islamic religion), Islamic fundamentalism is also the very negation of multiculturalism insofar as it denies the peaceful and free expression of those differences which have made European liberal and democratic societies so rich and free. More than one hundred and fifty years ago, in his essay *On liberty* (1860), John Stuart Mill theorized that the essence of freedom is pluralism and multiculturalism:

> What has made the European family of nations an improving, instead of a stationary portion of mankind? Not any superior excellence in them, which when it exists, exists as the effect, not as the cause; but their remarkable diversity of character and culture. Individuals, classes, nations, have been extremely unlike one another: they have struck out a great variety of paths, each leading to something valuable; and although at every period those who travelled in different paths have been intolerant of one another, and each would have thought it an excellent thing if all the rest could have been compelled to travel his road, their attempts to thwart each other's development have rarely had any permanent success, and each has in time endured to receive the good which the others have offered. Europe is, in my judgement, wholly indebted to this plurality of paths for its progressive and many-sided development[4].

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[4] Mill 1991, 80.

This long difficult process, which has led to the achievements of liberal democracies in the Western world, is entirely alien to the Islamic civilization. In particular, the tension and then separation between the political and religious spheres, which have characterized the whole of European history, is incompatible with Islamic fundamentalism. Even more, a liberal, open, multicultural society is antithetical to the oppressive theocracy pursued by Muslim fundamentalists.

How this danger, arising from the acceptance of the enemy on our soil, should be tackled and neutralized is again something which does not concern political philosophy as such (even less practical philosophy in its most general form): it is a question which should be posed and resolved in the concrete political actions of statesmen *if* they are willing to act against this threat. No strategy should be excluded *a priori* and a variety of means can be adopted to eliminate and eradicate this threat: from preventing more Muslim immigrants from entering the European territory, to an adequate military response, from an educational campaign addressed to the Muslim population already living in Europe to the support and dialogue with all those forces which in the Islamic world do not accept the involution of fundamentalism. The contribution of philosophy, in tune with common sense, to the analysis and solution of this dangerous situation should consist in exposing some unpleasant elementary truths, which are likely to be concealed by the false humanitarian consciousness dominating the official public discourse in western Europe today.

The first truth is that multiculturalism has reached the point of denying itself through an unlimited openness which 'includes' its most radical enemies; this is equivalent to the contradiction of making use of freedom in order to fall back into slavery. We should remind ourselves in Lockean terms that toleration cannot be exerted in order to tolerate groups or individuals whose aim is to suppress any toleration of ideas other than their own. The second truth is that dialogue is impossible with an antagonist who is determined to refuse any dialogue and who craves to kill its enemies and to subjugate them by means of a generalized and barbaric holy war. The third truth is that in a political community governing institutions lose any legitimacy if they fail to protect the lives of their citizens threatened by acts of violence perpetrated by enemies which have been allowed to live within that community where they operate to subvert its institutions. Admitting into European territory potential terrorists, offering them the opportunity to diffuse their ideas, to establish a network of affiliates, and to conduct their initiatives is unwise to say the least. It is simply foolish to grant freedom of action and of speech to radical Muslims who, exploiting the freedom accorded to them by European societies, want to establish here as everywhere else the negation of freedom, that is the absolute blind obedience to their religious law. In sum, a multicultural community which accepts and protects groups whose main goal is

to suppress any culture other than their own is a community which shows either a high suicidal instinct or a self-complacency close to reckless madness.

I am aware that the situation which I have outlined in clear cut traits would be interpreted in a more 'sophisticated', convoluted and 'original' way by a certain type of moral philosopher, so common in our culture today, who displays his/her wisdom in the ritual *proskinesis* in front of the idolized Other. It's a current version of what Hegel in his age justly despised as "the brew and stew of the 'heart, friendship, and inspiration'"[5,] meaning by that a reflection based on subjective sentimental delusions and on the projection of wishful thinking rather than on the consideration of the structures of social life and of political institutions. If we want to understand brutal facts, we need a way of thinking adequate to them and not rhetorical exorcisms; we need a realistic political philosophy which does not preach lofty empty ideals in disdain of common sense and of the most elementary logic. Better than any philosophical essay, a fable can help us to understand in the most simple terms the danger which Europe is facing today:

The Countryman and the Serpent

A countryman, as Æsop certifies,
A charitable man, but not so wise,
One day in winter found,
Stretch'd on the snowy ground,
A chill'd or frozen snake,
As torpid as a stake,
And, if alive, devoid of sense.
He took him up, and bore him home,
And, thinking not what recompense
For such a charity would come,
Before the fire stretch'd him,
And back to being fetch'd him.
The snake scarce felt the genial heat
Before his heart with native malice beat.
He raised his head, thrust out his forkèd tongue,
Coil'd up, and at his benefactor sprung.
"Ungrateful wretch!" said he, "is this the way
My care and kindness you repay?
Now you shall die." With that his axe he takes,
And with two blows three serpents makes.
Trunk, head, and tail were separate snakes;
And, leaping up with all their might,
They vainly sought to reunite.

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5   Hegel 1821/1896, xxii.

'Tis good and lovely to be kind;
But charity should not be blind;
For as to wretchedness ingrate,
You cannot raise it from its wretched state[6].

The moral of the fable is clear, the finale is not so certain. If you read Aesop and Phaedrus you find another version in which the story ends with the death of the generous and naive farmer. As with every similitude, this one too presents an inexactitude: Europe cannot be seriously compared to a naive farmer; rather it seems like a fat old man who in his senescent decadence has lost both his clarity of vision and his strength of will. Europe has lost above all the first political quality of every protagonist in human history: the will to lead and dominate historical processes instead of being carried away by them.

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[6]   La Fontaine 1900, 102.

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