

Guest Editor's Preface

Individual and Universal in Latin Medieval Moral Theories

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The assimilation of the lesson of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which took place during the 13th century, gave way to a philosophical theory centred on virtue and happiness (worldly although speculative): this cultural conception seems to constitute a new cultural body in juxtaposition to the religious moral doctrine founded on the rules of the divine law and on the call to a supernatural purpose. This duality however does not exclude the various connections between philosophical and theological ethics, which the present research is trying to underline: from the way in which different issues of the *Nicomachean Ethics* were at first understood (happiness intended as fruition of God, reconduction of *phronesis* to *sophia*), to the comparison (and harmonisation) between the new classification of virtue and the platonic-stoic-Augustinian tradition, to the firm affirmation of the idea of a *lex naturae* within the confrontation with the Aristotelian theleologism, to the discussed connections between knowledge and will within the ambit of action, in a precarious balance of Aristotelian intellectualism and Christian voluntarism.

In the present monographic issue of *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics* we have tried to propose a question which involves both ambits and their reciprocal overlaps and which interests the whole development of the moral reflection during the Latin Middle Ages: therefore no bounds of time nor cultural environments are allowed. From an ethical point of view the relations between individual and universal cannot be ignored: in their philosophical fonts medieval authors found such a problematic, and therefore variously developed it. Lets only remember, as for the theological tradition, the Augustinian doctrine of the hereditary character of the sin which brands mankind forever, in relation to one single episode committed by Adam, who broke God's harmonious order of the Universe in an act of self-exaltation. As for Aristotle, lets think of many important passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: the relation between political justice and family justice, the (un)resolved tension between the ethical virtues in connection to the corporeal dimension, and the apartness of *nous* (knowledge of all that is good and beautiful), that leads a life of its own.

Many scholars of medieval ethics have been eager to offer their knowledge for the realisation of this project. The first two articles are centred on the structure of the capital vices which, up to the 15th century, constitutes one of the strongest basis of the theological ethics and has proved capable of mutations and developments. Carla Casagrande focuses on the structure's evolution from Cassiano to Gregory the Great and throughout the successive integrations. Born as an exclusively monastic instrument meant to favour a process of individual perfection, the seven vices' scheme becomes expression of a social ethics addressed to everyone and defends a sociopolitical model based on hierarchy and solidarity (particular relevance assumes the vice of envy): the psychological and individual component is however neither rejected nor neglected. Silvana Vecchio, on her side, focuses on the classification of vices in "carnal" and "spiritual" which both Cassiano and Gregory

use in order to explain the different involvement of soul and body in the generative process of vices. During the course of the Middle Ages, however, the rigid chasm between carnal and spiritual vices gradually weakens (particularly towards the 13th century) as a result of the newly acquired medical and psychological knowledge: the "flesh/soul" movement submits to the "inside/outside" dynamic, which sees in the body the visible dimension of a vice, whose roots are however the human soul and will.

In Luciano Cova's contribution some inner tensions of the Thomasian doctrine of lust emerge. Although Thomas, as principle, defines as "permissible" those venereal acts which aim at procreation, he delineates, as fundamental elements of his analysis of lust, various types of injuries to other men: the execrable "sins against nature", although they do not cause an injury to others, are nonetheless considered as injuries to God. Tiziana Suarez-Nani's article is also dedicated to Thomas Aquinas, who in his doctrine of the original sin (characterised both by an evident Augustinian component and by a remarkable anthropological optimism) offers an answer (within the myth of the *Genesis*) to what we could call the problem of universal evil as root of moral evil: if any personal evil is related to the universal evil of the original sin, then evil is never merely individual and, within the solidarity of a common condition, each individual is called to the responsibility of a redemption, made possible by the guide of reason and by following one's humanity. Guido Alliney's essay also focuses on the problem of evil and is centred on an analysis of the limits of human action in Duns Scotus's thought. In spite of some fluctuations, which however are not relevant within his coherent doctrinal scheme, Scotus denies the possibility that man may want evil for itself: it is the immoderate desire of freedom that leads man astray towards universal evil. Evil, therefore, is not purchased as an aim, but as an instrument of a faint experience of freedom: the vacuity of such an act constitutes the worse sin a creature can commit against God.

The last two contributions are more specifically dedicated to politics. Roberto Lambertini follows the development of the Scholastic interpretations of the passage from Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle states an "imperfect identity" between *prudentia* and politics. This overview produces two important results: firstly, a *communis opinio* can not be found for the medieval authors have given different interpretations of the Aristotelian passage. On the other side the authors taken into consideration do not seem eager to renounce to the idea of the unity of practical reason: the medieval thinkers would not even take into consideration an individual *prudentia* disconnected from politics, nor a political *prudentia* disconnected from moral life. Italo Sciuto's essay is centred on Dante's analysis of the relation between political philosophy and ethical reflection. The *Convivio* and the *Monarchia* clearly demonstrate that Dante's philosophy is not simply "for laymen" but is in itself "secular", as it is proved by the priority that the political reflection has in comparison to other philosophical ambits. Dante thus states the superiority of practical reason by presenting, as the highest point of scientific reflection, politics instead of metaphysics. This innovative conception gives birth to Dante's theory of the duality of powers exemplified by the metaphor of the two suns, symbol of the equal balance between imperial and papal power.