

Guest Editor's Preface

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The texts listed below under the common title "*Political Ethics and metaphysical Ontology: Liberty, Justice and Good in post-modern Thinking*", are the first result of a two-years long enquiry under the direction of the "Veritatis Splendor" Institute, Bologna, and of the recently-born cultural department of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI), created in order to support and develop the cultural activities of the Roman Church. It is important to remark that this is only a *first* result, since other contributions will be issued (and published) soon. Some of them are still under the author's revision.

The aim of the project is to open a discussion on the state of the Western world after the death of ideologies within the contemporary philosophical thought, with particular regard to the anglo-saxon area (the so called "analytic" thinkers), although the European "continental" thinkers are involved as well. The fall of the Berlin wall, in 1989, appeared to be the beginning of a new era: the end of a long-lasting nightmare, and the Western world of liberal tradition promptly presented itself as the only candidate capable of ruling the whole planet. The recent carnage of September 11th has been but the last sign that it might not be as simple as that: and thus we all have to reconsider many of our precedent short- and long-termed forecasts. We are now forced to think in *global* terms, after and well beyond the facts in Genua. After the collapse of the communist galaxy, another kind of foe has appeared on the scene, disguised in different, and far from being more pleasant, garments. The problem of the corrupted relation between North and South must be *added* - in a tragic guise - to that of the yet dramatic relation between West and East, which is characterised by the not irrelevant detail of being deeply connected with international terrorism. The whole image of our fragile cohabitation on earth, with its outstanding inequality and its tremendous injustice, could now be said complete. And there is still China awaiting...

Faced with such serious problems, the debate on liberty, justice and good seems to be but a matter for idle intellectuals. Honestly, it is not. On the contrary, such an enquiry lies at the very gist of all these questions, since it constitutes their very *ground*. International terrorism is indeed nourished - though, of course, unconsciously - by the lack of liberty and justice (and, implicitly, of good) which characterises the relations between nations, and claims to take care - though, again, with inexcusable acts - of the rejected ones, of the forgotten ones, of the violated, of the massacred, of those abandoned with impudent light heart by the West to deadly diseases, to famine, to starvation: that same opulent West which fights obesity by seeking refuge in its overcrowded gym halls.

In this work, some common opinions have been carefully analysed, with due respect for the personal convictions of the writers. The three, ancient words - Liberty, Justice and Good —have helped us to agree on what, in these different opinions, is properly common, i.e. remains identical. Common is the close tie between truth and good (Sequeri); common is to consider liberty not as the pure arbitrary exercise of free will, but as the choice of values which are both right and shared (Botturi); common is the idea of everyone's to strive for an individual self-

identity of his/her own, not at the expenses of the self-identity of others, but on the contrary with constant relation to others (Pinkus). This very relation to the other human beings, moreover, should find its goal in the recognition of their being "transcendental" subjects as well. This implies an effort of widespread solidarity (Totaro, De Sandre), since the latter is possible only on the basis of mutual recognition (Vigna). Common is the constant attention that the circle of good and justice may be interrupted: in this case, justice would turn out to be but a mere neutral procedure, incapable of putting an end to injustice and even, sometimes, allowing it to be perpetrated. The three ancient words cannot be comprehended but in their necessary, circular tie. But they still conserve an inner order of precedence, and an inner law: the Self may certainly blossom, but not separately from the life of the others, and viceversa.

All these issues have been constantly in touch, and illustrated in strict comparison with the post-modern climax, with its fragilities, but also with its request for new forms of freedom and with its aspiration to a different kind of universalism (Ferrara). The group of enquiries on the most outstanding representatives of the post-modern thinking (Bataille, by Chiurco; Cacciari, by Catapano; Vattimo, by Grion) have enabled a critical re-discussion of the so-called "weak thought" (Vattimo), of the "necessary" recall to permanent conflictuality in human existence (Cacciari), of the apparently invincible and liberatory charm of transgression and excess (Bataille).

In order to illustrate the ultimate meaning of our enquiry, it is worth pointing out that a question still remains in the background: why is a reference to metaphysical ontology *necessary* in order to deal with such topics as ethics, and political ethics in particular? Because the post-modern age is essentially unified *by* something different, and *within* it. It is unified by an *opposition* - openly, the opposition to metaphysical ontology, to any theoretical defence of a necessary, indisputable ground for every and each argument. Such categories have, for post-modernism, a very precise name: they bare — deeply and essentially rooted in themselves - the mark of violence. It is this common "foe" the only thin *trait d'union* among the various souls of postmodernism — this and nothing else. Without such a foe, all these souls would be hopelessly damned to an unavoidable fragmentation. By paradox, therefore, it is but the incontrovertible truth, together with the idea of (shared) good, that protects post-modernism against itself, against its suicidal wreckage into incomprehensibility, into a way of thinking which, by denying any solid basis from which to start from, cannot be but fanciful.

Thus we looked at what Truth and Good are (Freedom and Justice depending on them), we tried to understand them, and thus we let them conduce our enquiry. Or, at least, this has been our wish from the very beginning.