

FOR A GENEROUS SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

Here, at the start of this book, we feel the need to make some warnings to our readers, as they should not be misled by the apparently idyllic topic of generosity. It is not a text for charitable ladies, nor for noble spirits or kind souls. Neither is it the mournful postmodernist whine of those who have introjected their critical position towards reality as a precondition for existence and a natural way of being.

The text speaks of traumas, pain, social evolutions still to be played out, of civil, economic and political upheavals, misleading cultures and traditions, predatory practices, of how necessary a radical change in the praxis and interpretation of our way of 'being together' is. What emerges is the necessity to effect a cultural and civil revolution, starting from our way of doing business, influencing politics, relating to others and interacting in a democratic society.

Hence, the proposed revolution has an 'ethical' meaning first of all, the expression ethos meaning the system of common and shared values which enable men and women, taken singularly, to exit the state of nature and combine their intents to form a civil community regulated by laws and working for the common good of all. The problem brought up is ethical and not moral, in the sense that the reasons prompting us to build societies that are respectful of others do not derive from a revealed

morality, or from religion, particular commandments, transcendent principles, or the desire to guarantee ourselves happy eternal lives. As it is meant in this book, 'ethical' is instead what goes beyond our subjective boundaries, concerning what we build within a community of intentions and becoming one of its orienting values.

The term 'ethical' is taken more as a question of our society's as-yet-unexpressed potential rather than a simple request for moral uprightness which we should take for granted. The demand for ethicality, and the essential question that it contains, is pertinent to the very foundations upon which state, economy, politics and civil society should work to guarantee the potential of fair development for all.

The phenomenon of generosity, analysed starting from the explicit forms of the gift and then compared with the phenomenon of economic exchange, reveals some unexpected aspects which force us to re-examine the values at the very centre of society. Far from being a subjective phenomenon and limited to the sphere of private interactions, generosity extends its sphere of action to the whole social fabric. It is a gravitational force prompting phenomena of recognition and gratitude, indispensable in enabling society to happen. Much more than laws regulating relations between citizens, and much more widely than the economic relations behind relationships between subjects with interests, generosity lies at the basis of civil subjects' – whether they be people or institutions – 'being together'. Hence generosity is an original phenomenon that needs nothing further to be justified. It just needs to be traced back to the idea that, by way of the gift, the other comes to be recognized, and the essential core of common living comes to be formed.

Generosity finds expression in many forms of relationship among individuals. Nevertheless, it is explicitly asserted, in an organized way, in forms of philanthropy, not only and not so much of a religious origin, but also and above all of secular derivation, which make this original

human characteristic the foundation of their identity.

Hence a close relationship is formed between generosity, philanthropy and civil society. And the traditions of an enlightened humanism, which make up the structure of the values and thoughts common to philanthropy and civil society today, also come back to life and are rekindled. The link to the enlightened tradition of the eighteenth-century philosophes, whose thinking gave rise to civil society as distinct from the political entity of the state and the economy, a concept then obscured during the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, is evident. It is this idea that paves the way for notions of a civilization with strong social roots, a critical and autonomous way of regarding power; a different and alternative way of thinking; a new openness to scientific and rational method in investigating social problems; as well as a new demand for culture marked by the desire to place man and his universal and natural rights in the centre, and to rethink his relationship with the environment, nature and other men.

In this vein, the strength of modern philanthropy and the thinking generated in civil society are expressions of a creative effort prompted by the presupposition that all men and women have an equal right to happiness, that this happiness can only be achieved by an ethical manner of 'being together', and that the community which is formed has to be distinguished by justice and equity. These values of evolved, free and critical civil society are the same as philanthropy. So much so, it could be said that philanthropy represents the very voice of civil society in the form of ethical generosity.

In other words, it is necessary to assert the transition from the narcissistic culture of the self, particularly professed in the second half of the twentieth century, to the new culture of 'us' and to trace the lines of a new namely an agreed outline of the common good. Growing psychological suffering deriving from increasingly widespread psychoses,

recent economic and financial catastrophes, rampant fraudulent practices in politics and business, frequent and repetitive planetary crises, persisting economic and class inequalities and various predatory forms of unbridled capitalism cause us to think that something in the set of common rules and practices is not working as it should be.

Never before has a new balance so urgently needed to be struck in order to once more emphasize those requirements indispensable to generosity.

As such, the social model which sees civil society as the terrain for testing state policies and exploiting economic tactics could change for the better. Civil society might not only be considered as abstractly composed of vassals or consumers. Individuals within society should ultimately be seen as subjects and the terms of reference for any state policy or economic relationship. Both the economic area and the state would have a great strategic advantage if, in principle and in practice, they collaborated with philanthropy, the expression of local civil communities. At present, things are changing, both through the expansion of corporate social responsibility initiatives in the economic sphere, as well as the odd, sporadic international example of a public policy to boost local philanthropy in the political field.

This new movement, which in some international cases is already underway, nevertheless needs to be freed of some cultural dead wood hindering its progress. It seems that the cultural paradigms of the recent twentieth century are no longer useful and in some cases limiting. What we are talking about are all hard nationalistic tendencies, forms of totalitarianism, short-sighted, coarse localisms, all of which formed predominant trends in the first part of the twentieth century. At the end of the last century, sceptical and in some cases nihilistic stances prevailed, marked by ironic postmodernist approaches discrediting the quest for universality. These positions also pointed to the abandonment

of metanarratives in favour of a technological and local line, which, however, is not the way to judge what is true and just.

In the opposite direction to these recent legacies, today what is gaining ground is the need to reprove some categories, such as universality, abandoned over the second half of the twentieth century. And we can start from these very ideas, conscious that they will never be able to give us an arrogant, blinkered and definitive answer, but that they simply work as a necessary critical requirement for any investigation. To propose the concept of universality is to enable some questions and investigations that otherwise, without this global notion, could not be tackled to the full. To demand the universality of natural rights is to request any single will, if it has to act as a maxim or law, to conform to the principle of universal legislation, as already set out by Kant when he defined the fundamental law of pure practical reason.

Hence, today it seems as necessary as ever to seek to trace a new shared social totality, based on the ethical postulates of every person's right to happiness and equity. From these premises, Chapter 1 begins by analysing exchange and the emergence of reciprocity in a historical excursus that highlights the rise of a new concept of 'utility' and the gift's giving rise to a different way of accessing the other.

In Chapter 2 we wanted to examine the close relations that link generosity with creativity, while underlining how generous behaviour goes hand in hand with the growth and development of creative minds.

Chapter 3 pinpoints the practice of generosity as the original foundation of society when it first formed through relationships of mutual recognition. Hence, it becomes the foundation and primary expression of society and of the passage from the state of nature to a community of trust. And within a community, relations and the different kinds of relationship – civic, economic and generous – cannot but influence the constitution of identities. Hence, it was necessary to

examine how the latter are evolving in our society and to observe what clashes are being produced in contemporary life. This is the subject dealt with in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 examines the dichotomies of contemporary consciousness, caught up between the alternative of accepting alienating social forms by adapting to a process of social stupefaction or becoming detached from it, in borderline positions of marginalization and suffering.

In Chapter 6 we wanted to put the two dominating ethical areas of state and economy face to face with recent failures, that is, the great financial crisis which began in 2007 and the subsequent political sovereign debt crisis that risks to undermine the European project. All this against the background of a discomforting fact: the increase almost everywhere in class inequality both within nations and between different areas of the world.

Chapter 7 consists of an examination of new international and Italian philanthropy and an analysis of its cultural roots which link it to the principles of enlightened secular humanism, while tracing the postulates of the new philanthropic trends. The signs of change arriving from philanthropy, the secular expression of civil society, allow us to hope that the current process will continue, inspired by scientific culture, by a prevalent attention to 'us' rather than 'me', and by the construction of a universal ethic based on recognition.

I. EXCHANGE

*The gift needs to be thought of [...] as a relationship.
Indeed, it is the social relationship par excellence,
a relationship all the more fearful the more it is desirable.*
Jacques Godbout

Exchange and interaction. Between 'pact' and community

Exchange: particular phenomenon that assumes many facets and can take on many different forms. Analysis of its implications and philosophical meaning enables a fundamental characteristic to emerge: it is one of the possible objectifications of human interaction, object of the mediation of social relations and place where the individual and society in their totality come into play. Hence, the meaning that exchanges assume is not just material and objectual. The area of social relations as well as symbolic value are also important, perhaps even more so than the area of the simple exchange of material goods.

Anthropological literature, through authors such as Harold Schneider, has analysed social exchange in this context, likening it to those forms of human relationship and interdependence based on reciprocity and the receiver's obligation of restitution towards the giver. Also highlighted is the conviction that when we speak of exchange we cannot disregard the fact that it is something which penetrates the lives of individuals at

different levels, and with many implications, in a 'kind of interactional system we normally describe as a society'.¹

Exchanges and social interactions are thus not only measurable with 'money' and 'hard currency'. The exchange is a relationship that precedes and goes beyond merely economic logic. Suffice it to think of the interest aroused in the social sciences by the research of Marcel Mauss in 1923-24 entitled *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*,² which departed from the evolutionary theory that had dominated the ethnological and anthropological disciplines up to the nineteenth century. Instead, Mauss showed how humankind, from the outset, did not rely on the utilitarian and self-interested exchange of goods, but on a system of prestations and counter-prestations, for example, in the form of presents, feasts, offerings, sacrifices and donations. All phenomena retraceable to the typology of the gift.

Nevertheless, while the gift is the phenomenon that can be most immediately associated with social exchange, money is not alien to this field. An overriding example is given by the fact that the connection between social relations and flows of material goods is two-way: hence, in the same way a social relationship can influence an exchange of gifts, economic transactions are influenced by the social context that they are part of and imply a human interaction, with an underlying basis of reciprocity. But what is reciprocity? According to social psychology, it is a fundamental trait that characterizes any relationship, the general norm underlying the whole process of social exchange. The notion is complex and difficult to give a single definition. However, beyond the range of meanings that can be attributed to it, our aim here is not to investigate reciprocity within the territo-

ry of economics, and thereby liken it to the notion of a 'contract' or a sort of 'clause'.

Reciprocity, necessary to every exchange, requires analysis at an ontological level, as it is the 'marker of contemporary being',³ namely one of the figures referring to humankind's being in the world and the ways we find ourselves relating with and differentiating from others. When we speak of exchange it is fundamental to deal with the topic of reciprocity, since the former is one of the main ways through which individuals define their identity, form relationships with other subjects, and establish differences, priorities and value systems.

In anthropology, the notion of 'reciprocity' has often been linked to the gift phenomenon, so much so that some authors, such as Polanyi,⁴ have upheld that reciprocity entails the presence of giving between relatives, kin and friends, and presupposes a small, symmetrically organized group. On the other hand, the mechanism supporting market transactions, which are exclusively economic, is different. So let us begin from the concept of exchange in order to analyse its different forms. An excursus into history and anthropology, and the resulting analysis, are useful to make some necessary distinctions and trace boundaries, and to understand what the gift is, what place it can occupy in present-day society and what definitions do not apply.

From symbolic space to metaphor

Money, barter, gift. There are numerous forms of exchange. And in each one the 'thing' and 'how' it is exchanged assume different characteristics. In any case, the initial precondition is that objects, coins and money are tools to mediate social re-

lations. Objects and physical spaces do not just speak of themselves: together they form a symbolic horizon through which humankind attributes sense and value to the world. All objects possess a precise communication plan, that is, they put across particular contents in a certain real space and in a certain real time.⁵ An aspect that, looking at the current consumer society, today should be seen as truer than ever. The reality of exchanging objects should be sought in terms of systems, unconscious even, forming the underlying component of social culture.

Objects and artefacts are also ideas, designs of the human mind that have taken shape and form. The objectual dimension must be considered in relation to games and social forces put into motion and devised by people in the most varied contexts. If used symbolically, objects transmit the necessary information so that individual behaviour is ordered into collective forms.⁶ Rather than exchanging simple physical objects, people exchange, give and receive symbols, namely tools to build relations and alliances. What does this imply in a context of exchange? To understand this, it is interesting to take into consideration the Greek origin of the term 'symbol': at the beginning, the *symbolon* was an earthenware object (most often a ring, the expression of that which binds) broken in two and carried by two separate people. Each fragment of the object could only join back up with its own original other half.

So, as suggested by Karl Jaspers' philosophical thinking,⁷ the symbol is a 'cipher', expression of transcendence in immanence, not just a broken fragment, but also the successive return to the relationship that had been initiated, a true 'reunion'. As such, exchange always has a symbolic value: it cannot simply be considered for what it objectively is, namely reduced to the mere

objects that it involves and that are exchanged, but it opens to a much more complex meaning and refers to the intersubjective pact. In its very essence, society is exchange, language, since it originates in a contract between parties, or more generally, in a relationship. Language itself is a form of exchange. It is telling that anthropological and philosophical literature has investigated the bond existing between money and language. The systems of which money and language are part are 'social systems', characterized by naturally unchangeable elements, but also by components which differ depending on the group and, above all, the culture they belong to. Money has the task of associating a value with a relationship between objects, in the same way as the task of language is to match sounds with a meaning. However, there is a difference: the reference system of language links one word to one thing, while money links the same sign to a very great variety of very different objects. As a result, in a certain sense money makes them synonymous and, as a consequence, lacking particular qualities that cannot be linked to their monetary values. Language, like money, is also a mode of behaviour: speech and linguistic expression are modes of action. Through language, individuals act on the world and therefore change it.

Money and language are both tools of human planning. Both work in that they 'act'. This propensity to action is fulfilled particularly in the future time dimension. And just as language can unite or separate people, even within the same cultural area, money behaves in a similar way too.⁸ But the word is also associated with the gift: a word given forms a building block of social reality, from wagers to promises, from wars to economic crises. All elements on which people's lives, happiness and unhappiness depend.

So: objects, symbols, words. Exchanged in a context that does not just assume an economic meaning, but concerns the whole sphere of social relations, to become, to Hans Blumenberg's words,⁹ a 'metaphor for existence'. The metaphor as something complementary and, at the same time, additional to the symbol: the latter has a meaning that pertains to both its own intrinsic value and what it refers to, while the metaphor tends to be self-referential, unbound from materiality and different from the concept. According to Blumenberg, the metaphor goes 'beyond the formulaic',¹⁰ so that we may understand that the basis of human knowledge lies in the ability to unite the heterogeneous. The metaphor represents the original orientation and attitude to addressing reality, which existed before rationality saw to build the world and humankind. This does not mean that it acts irrationally: on the contrary, it is the sum and tool of rationality itself.

It is precisely its self-referentiality that empowers the metaphor, so that it can become a true form of alternative knowledge to that of the concept. A metaphorical analysis proves important in order to understand the exchange phenomenon. Indeed, it is thanks to the metaphor that it is possible to come to an agreement when univocality cannot be achieved. Furthermore, the metaphorical along with the symbolic components cannot be disregarded, inasmuch as without them it would be difficult to explain the fact that the exchange not only refers to interaction, but also to identification and self-identification. Blumenberg comes to assert the link between money and life, both of which can be considered as 'universal': 'The relationship between the philosophy of money and the philosophy of life might consist in the fact that the expression "life" indicates a

further increase in the degree of abstraction, while at the same time also designating an actualization of the structure found in the theme of money.' And, upon referring to Simmel, he says: 'he talks about life and has already found the metaphor of money'.¹¹ Without doubt, one can agree with this consideration, but here we want to go beyond this and define what place the gift occupies in this context. Money and gift are means so that we can say 'who I am', symbolic builders of identity: but with what differences? Let us set a little more room aside for some historical notes, to try to understand this.

Devising, creating and planning. Money

The world of objects possesses the value of a logical tool able to attribute an order to world experience, to give it significance and make it communicable.

In the historical process leading to the emergence of the first forms of currency it is not by chance that in time some goods needed to fulfil functions linked to human survival were to lose their original function in order to become goods for exchange (such as the bronze spade money used in China between the fifth and sixth centuries BC). The same goes for goods that assumed an important role within a collective system, such as livestock (in Lapland reindeer are still used today as means of exchange), tobacco, rice (like in Myanmar, where, however, only those grains not used as food can become a means of payment), or salt. In the classic economy (in other words, the one that Smith speaks of in *The Wealth of Nations*), money possesses four functions, which have taken on various forms in different periods of history and different cultures: a) as the quantita-

tive measure of values, helping to understand the equivalence between different types of goods; b) as a means of circulation, insofar as it is an object that directly becomes an intermediary of exchange; c) as a means of payment: money is a more liquid form of wealth used to obtain another less liquid form of wealth which is paid for; d) as a deposit of wealth, insofar as it contains the capacity to make others work on the basis of a particular principle, namely monetary 'convenience'.¹²

While money and currency are commonly considered synonyms, in reality the two words label two aspects which, while obviously linked, need to be distinguished: the first is abstract, a concept, an idea. The second is a material sign, a promise (embodied by money) guaranteed by some authority that certifies its existence and seeks to ensure that it is maintained.

Since the 1970s, economic anthropology has upset what had thus far been the dominant position, by claiming that the concept of credit and the idea of money came about before bartering and economic exchange. Even in those forms of exchange where currency does not play the role of intermediary, the notion of measuring value is nevertheless implicit and a reference made to money as an idea and concept. If this basis of equivalence did not exist even implicitly, it would be impossible even to barter since it would prove extremely difficult to exchange a quantity of a good with a quantity of another good possessing the same value. As such, the idea of a unit of calculation preceded the development of money as a means of exchange.

Before the use of money was introduced, the nature of bartering had never been solely utilitarian, but it had always fulfilled a mainly social function. Individual and family survival was produced within the community hence utilitarian exchange

was not vitally necessary. Non-monetary bartering was instead indispensable from a social point of view. In different types of society and economy, currency itself gave rise to different types of use. And so this is where the difference between 'primitive' and 'modern' money comes from. 'Modern' currency and money are at the basis of the monetary circulation in existence in the present day in the industrialized areas of the world. And this money began to prevail right from the birth of the first monetary systems in the ancient civilizations of the classical world and south-west Asia, to reach its peak usage at the start of the modern era.

'Primitive currency' is labelled as such, not because it has disappeared in the present, but because it implies particular usages within societies and cultures in which the trade model and ideal of the Western *homo oeconomicus* have not yet become totally dominant. From the very first steps in the establishment of a monetary system, a good was able to become money insofar as its 'exchange value' became distinct from its 'use value': the lower an object's use value, the more able it is to become an intermediary of exchange. Connected to this is the fact that the monetary function and non-monetary use of the same good only exist side by side in the same object if separated. Moreover, the primitive coin does not measure the exchange value first of all, but mainly people's value: the worth of the units of money varies depending on the status of the individuals who possessed them previously.¹³ Connected to this is the fact that every exchange was considered sacred among primitive populations. As such, what function can objects have? What relationship ties them to the primitive currency? Very often the goods that performed the function of archaic money then assumed modern monetary

functions. However, some discontinuities cannot be ignored: a single primitive currency could never be replaced by a second one according to simple numerical relations.

But thus far we are still in the ambit of money, and the true nature of the gift cannot emerge. Without doubt it is true that money, traditionally associated with material wealth, is not a 'thing', but a pact established within a community. One of the tools which, better than others, has and still does represent humankind's capability to devise, create and plan. And it is undeniable that the mechanisms of contemporary society lead to a reduction in the distances between a 'object-good' approach and a 'object-symbol'-based logic. However, the fact remains that gift and money cannot be placed on the same level. The goal is to manage to grasp the gift for what it is, without references to heterogeneous spheres or classifications used to define other concepts and phenomena, so as to demonstrate that it precedes and provides the basis of the economy.

Beyond money

The concept of the gift has been spoken of since ancient times.¹⁴ The ancient Greeks had also given a precise definition of the ways in which exchanges had to take place within the aristocratic world and clarified and specified what hospitality was required of every good citizen towards foreigners. Furthermore, the gift was a practice considered worthy of a noble life, it acted as a factor of alliance and to establish relations among equals. As Charles Champetier states, we still have two precious testimonies of the Greeks' archaic practice of the gift: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.¹⁵

Beyond establishing relations of hospitality, the gift could take on another particular meaning: the exchange of presents between warriors symbolized mutual recognition of skill, courage and valour. A first gift theory had already been formulated by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹⁶ In his *Politics* too, the Greek philosopher underlines how the relationship with goods and money is not autonomous but connected to ethical and political rules, through which it is codified. Aristotle proposes two ideal types of relationship with money and goods: liberality and magnificence. Liberality contrasts its own excess, prodigality, and its defect, thrift, by becoming embodied in the gift. The liberal nature of a gift does not lie so much in its amount, as in the manner in which it is given. In Greek-Latin antiquity, there already existed a sort of 'gift-circuit': the pact formed in the flow between gifts and counter-gifts not only linked givers, but also heirs, who became part of the system of obligations put into motion by their forebears.

And the gift was – and still is – also a reaction to a form of fear towards alterity. *Hostis* indeed means 'foreigner', but also refers to hospitality. The term *hostia*, namely 'victim offered in compensation' confirms the above link. Originally, the *hostis* did not point to just any foreigner, but to those in the same juridical condition as any other Roman citizen, therefore one whose equal qualifications led to the emergence of a right of equality, which was ensured by the exchange of reciprocal gifts.

Fear of the unknown could be placated through the gift: indeed foreigners could not be given a status – in other words, as friend or enemy – until they had shown the inclination to be open and hospitable, generally in the form of gifts.¹⁷ The link between the ancient and the present-day world is evident: the gift

is the main symbol generating sociality and at the same time the engine of the material circulation of goods, reaction in the face of the unknown and strength at the basis of the development of alliances. Nevertheless, the primitive mentality incorporated components imbued with magical, ritual elements linked to the imagination, which seem easier to associate with the current consumer society or highly ritualized forms of gift (such as Christmas presents), giving and receiving apparently more in self-interest rather than a true gift.

Alain Caillé had already noted that the most emblematic symbol of the archaic gift was ‘the primitive “currency” [...] where everything is played out, with regard to primitive “monetary” symbolism, in a space marked by the contrast of life and death, alliance and conflict’.¹⁸

Then one just has to think of the above all social value currently deriving from the possession of particular goods (an overriding example being the latest technological ‘gadgets’) and how consumption is a tool through which it is possible to assert one’s self more strongly within society and in relation to the other, while at the same time maintaining a link with the demands of one’s own ‘ego’. But how long can this mechanism last without causing any lacerations? Light has already been cast on its fragility by the crisis that began in the United States in 2007 and then spread worldwide.

In this context is the gift simply an additional form of operation to the monetary economic transaction? Is giving a type of ‘backward’ exchange covering a secondary function?

The answer to these two questions is ‘no’. The dimension of the gift is commonly considered outside economic action and contrary to the desire to have. Instead, here we are saying the

opposite: it is the capability and the desire to give that are at the origin of exchange. We will try to explain the reasons, first of all by illustrating its ambivalent characteristics, to then understand which functions and meanings we here deem exclusively characteristic of the gift, distancing it from any other form of exchange.

How important are the ambivalences?

According to Jean Starobinski we 'need to distinguish between symmetrical exchange and asymmetrical exchange. Gifts can circulate on the basis of equality, but also on the basis of disparity, in which case they involve rich and poor, sovereign dispenser and humble beneficiary. Things can be given, but so can signs, words, missions, and duties. Gifts do not always pass from one hand to another... In truth, giving and receiving (in which a substance offered becomes mine) form the very fabric of every life.'¹⁹

The Swiss thinker maintains that the gift ratifies inequality, one person's superiority over another. This is the dark side that contradicts a morality, in itself hypocritical, which wanted to attribute the gift a forever positive meaning and ethical value which, in reality, are contradicted by day-to-day actions. Starobinski uses examples of the Roman practices of *sparsio* and *largitio* (with which an emperor, a consul, a benefactor or an euergetist threw a whole host of gifts, called *missilia*, to the crowd during feasts or popular gatherings) or the ceremonials at chivalrous feasts in the Middle Ages, in order to demonstrate how the gift unites violence with prodigality, the act of power with the ethical imperative. Once again, a word's etymon provides

some fundamental clues. A propos, the ambiguity of the gift, identified at the same time as a benefit and poison, is demonstrated by the language itself: the semantic dualism of the German *Gift*, for example, formerly designated both a 'gift' and 'poison'; in Greek, *dosis* indicates the act of giving, but also the dose of a deadly substance; and then the double meanings of words such as *phármakos* and *philtron*, refer to presents, benevolent magical filters, but, at the same time, fatal potions.

In most Indo-European languages, 'to give' is expressed by a verb with the root *dō* (Translator's note: For example 'donner' in French or 'dare' in Italian, as well as being found in the English words 'donor' and 'donation'): in the field of linguistic studies, numerous controversies have arisen since the 1970s when it was established that the Hittite verb *dā* does not mean 'to give', but 'to take'. On its own, *dō*, the root of the Italian noun 'dono' (gift) and many other terms referring to exchange, does not mean either 'to take' or 'to give', but one or the other according to the context.

From this perspective, the gift would appear to be a phenomenon that does not seek equivalence. Not only due to a more or less conscious desire to create inequality, but, first of all, because tracing the gift to an isolated act would be to put an end to a relationship. This is why Jacques Godbout maintains that were equilibrium attained, 'there would be no more gift system' or that 'the free gift does not exist – except insofar as it is a sign of asocial behaviour'.²⁰ Indeed, the French thinker uses the concept of debt to speak of the gift. Looking closely, to reason in this way is to remain in a closer sphere to the money logic. But the gift cannot be explained through economic or political logics. To think this would be to go back to basing ourselves on

Mauss' trilogy, which bases the gift on the sequence of 'giving-receiving-rendering'. A trilogy that does not seem to manage to grasp the essence of the gift. Nor would a circle based on 'giving-receiving-giving back more' succeed in this purpose, as it is too reductive to include the complexity of giving.

Instead we think that the category of 'gratuitousness' can be applied to the gift, in any case not necessarily meant as an absence or a situation of returning, but because it often escapes a rational logic and involves very different components from the trade logic. There may or may not be restitution: what is important for there to be a gift is that a form of recognition comes into play, a passage owing to which it becomes a fundamental form of cognition, recognition and 'being-recognized' in the Hegelian sense of the term. Is the gift therefore the opposite of objectivity? Not really. Georg Simmel was right when he clearly underlined that the gratuitousness of the gift had to do with the spontaneity it is attributed, the absence of calculation, passion, impulse, also a certain madness. Instead, what is less applicable to the current state of affairs is the distinction traced between gift and money, in this sense: Simmel claims that money, with its objectivity, seemingly totally distant from the subjectivity of the gift, is the means that permits humankind to free itself from a personal type of reciprocal dependency.

It is true that the moment, for example, a person goes to a shop and purchases a good, after it is paid for the relationship is closed, put to an end. But is it equally as true that money is wholly 'objective', above all in a time in history when it is used as the standard by which to judge a person's value, especially in a period of crisis and rife unemployment? And so, much more so in the present situation, money's presumed 'objectivity' is a

concept that needs to be demolished. Instead, the gift can come to be objective, in the sense of alien to those mechanisms that lead to the formation of hierarchies ranking subjects in terms of inferiority and superiority, whether on sociological, economic or political grounds.

The act of giving and a new concept of 'utility'

There is another aspect that can be grasped when taking into consideration primitive and archaic modes of thought as well as different cultural models from our own, and this is that things are nothing but extensions of the human soul and that people identify with the objects they possess and exchange. What gives an object value is the fact that it is desirable: in this connection it is possible to understand the reason why the good can never completely 'surrender itself' to the subject who possesses it. Objects have the power to subordinate individuals as well as to prevent particular desires or attempts at self-realization from taking shape. It is a powerful concept, but if we are to analyse it attentively, it is a good mirror of the contemporary situation. Moreover, it immediately leaps to our attention how it is true for those objects that can be defined as 'money-objects', insofar as the choices of how to manage the money we possess are a way of asserting our world vision. To go even further, we buy not only to conquer a status, but also to measure our identity. So consumer goods take on a much wider meaning than what economic rationality once wanted to attribute to them. And often it is the objects that 'decide' for us. This is also true for 'pseudo-gift' objects, the more they become status symbols, or the more the other is subordinated or made to feel inferior. Instead, in the

true 'gift-object', what can be defined as the object's 'power' takes on different connotations: what almost totally disappears is the very presence of the object, and in any case its own value in monetary and quantitative terms; leaving room for the power of the relationship, whose outcome cannot be determined beforehand, as well as room for freedom, which is an extraordinary opportunity to expand its sense. Freedom is what characterizes the gift more than any other social relationship. And the gift could help boost liberty in the contemporary world too, where it seems that the levels of freedom achieved are higher than previous eras, but, looking more closely, often this is not the case. And so the authentic freedom of the gift is that which releases it from need, eliminating the charitable dimension to instead create a pathway to mutual recognition. The gift does not create hierarchies but dismantles them. Or at least it enables the hierarchies to expand or to shrink. But these are not hierarchies in the common meaning of the word. Instead, they are choices to include or exclude someone from one's universe, to extend or reduce one's personal horizon. The gift therefore comes before the economy and the state. It does not have an ancillary function in their respect, but is at their basis, insofar as it is at once a personal and a collective fact. It even concerns the ways of relating to one part of the world with respect to the other.

Alain Caillé claims that the true question is 'knowing who to give to' and that 'in the framework of a small, symbolically solid society in which roles are clearly distributed [...] the issue is quite well resolved'. Nevertheless,

as soon as the identity of this small society crumbles, the issue of the possible recipients of the gift explodes, before

and after the established roles [...]. Little by little the people find men in the others, recognize them or recognize that they possess a common humanity. The issue raised is therefore the constitution of a new collective subject [...]. This issue is not moral, philosophical or religious first of all: it is the political issue par excellence.²¹

Let us take another step, beyond Caillé: to speak of the gift as building recognition is also to distance it from a moralistic dimension, avoiding its insertion in a 'generosity theory' or unconditional solidarity.

Having put aside all moralisms and all evaluations of those who give as being better than those who do not, the gift can constitute a tool for forming shared systems of convictions, constructs and values. Therefore, it appears central in the process of individual and collective identity-building, and intervenes in the definition that the subject gives of him or herself and of others. A phenomenon that therefore is out-of-time, not something that is only done on particular occasions, but that goes beyond time and the individual and can come to involve society as a whole.

The gift cannot be defined using economic categories, but Salvatore Natoli²² formulates a reflection that we deem correct: even if useful and gratuitous are not one and the same, what is gratuitous is without doubt a form of utility. Indeed, if the two concepts are separated, utility is distorted into egoism and gratuitousness becomes banal discretion, an arbitrary act typical of some forms of 'charitable capitalism', in which there is no space for freedom, but only for paternalism. On the contrary, if the gift is thought of as 'putting ourselves at each other's ser-

vice to obtain the maximum utility with the maximum contribution', then it becomes a collective good. Ultimately this is its goal and the dimensions of utility and gratuitousness? take on completely different characteristics, in which 'the maximum in utility is seeking justice' and 'it is the gift's humbleness that is useful', while 'giving presents is arrogant presumption'. If we are to take these claims to the extreme consequences, we can say that the gift implies the other's desire, the idea of being part of something bigger that partakes in a common knowledge in which we can each recognize the other.

Access to the 'Other' and the sturdiness of the bond

Attention to the phenomenon of giving in all its particular forms presupposes a renewed interest in the practical dimension of human existence and a new way of considering action and intersubjectivity, here deemed to be inseparably bound to the dimension of the gift. An intersubjectivity that suggests the reason for the other's constant presence, his or her 'always [being] there already',²³ and absolutely non-derived nature. If objects are symbols and information so that individual behaviour can be ordered into collective forms, even before the Other (with a capital 'O', as would be used in phenomenological terms), the thing is an 'interior' that is revealed to the outside. And so a fundamental point comes to the fore: the gift is a way of 'being-recognized', as Hegel puts it, and giving is itself an act of recognition which does not arise from nothing, but from a preformed base of relations, which can then expand or shrink. To give is to live the experience of interpersonal and also community belonging that extends but at the same time limits each

individual's personality and identity. The gift is the experience of the subject who puts his or her system of identity at stake, even with the risk of losing it or, more probably, seeing it transformed. First of all, because by giving I change my horizons, establish other relationships, and include or exclude someone from my world, whether it is a person with whom I have direct contact or not.

So long as it is not a 'ritual' or 'double-edged' gift, the gift can also satisfy the need for authenticity, namely the desire to define ourselves beyond the social roles we are allotted in everyday life. At the same time the gift is a mechanism giving identity and social externalization. Hence, it implies the issue of access to others. The other already exists, regardless of ourselves. The gift is a form of participation in what goes beyond the individual and is the factor that enables a relationship to be established, even based on absence and distance, invited to be filled, however, presupposing a relationship with joint foundations between me and you, me and us. This is why giving is risky, a leap in the dark. The gift is not prompted or driven by the expectation of definite restitution or the physical presence of the subject to whom the gift is addressed.

In Jean-Luc Marion's work,²⁴ the gift pattern gives shape to a new figure of subjectivity, namely the '*adonné*'. Translated as 'gifted', it refers to the figure of the individual who discovers he or she is constituted by the aspiration to the gift (taking the dative case, which is why *adonné* is rendered with *gifted*, to maintain some vicinity to the French original which speaks of an exit from solipsism). The subject becomes the person to whom the gift is destined and the intentionality of that person's life can be defined through the capacity to receive a gift.²⁵

Here we do not want to reduce the gift to a simple phenomenon. Giving includes the sturdiness of the bonds and their historical import: the memory of the gift is given by the memory of the social relationship and by the trace left by the previous gift, which has a bond with the past that is not external to people. Besides, also in the event of an exchange of money – which opens to the future dimension – it is not possible to totally eliminate past events: liquid money exists owing to people's indebtedness and therefore it is linked to a feeling and to a process of cognitive abstraction, which do indeed depend on expectations and on what will happen, but also on the representation of past time. However, there is the non-negligible difference that in the gift the social projection of consciousness and the concatenation of levels of relationships, together forming the best model of mental structure, have a more significant role to play.

1 Harold K. Schneider, *Economic Man: The Anthropology of Economics* (New York: Free Press, 1974): 154.

2 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls (1923-24; London: Routledge Classics, 2002).

3 Francesco Mora, *Principio Reciprocità. Filosofia e contemporaneità di Georg Simmel* (Venice: Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina Spa, 2005).

4 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Farrar & Rineheart, 1944) and George Dalton, ed., *Primitive, archaic, and modern economies: essays of Karl Polanyi* ([s.l.]: Beacon Pbk, 1971).

5 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (1945; London: Routledge Classics, 2002).

6 Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (1900; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

7 Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy*, trans. E. B. Ashton, vol. 3: *Metaphysics* (1932-1955; Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971).

8 Suffice it to think of the European question of the single currency: it is no coincidence that the designs on the front of the banknotes depict doors and windows, which symbolize the spirit of openness and collaboration which drives, or at least is supposed to drive (the current economic situation, as we shall see, poses various questions) the European Union.

9 Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (1979; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

10 *Ibid.*, 96.

11 Hans Blumenberg, 'Money or Life: Metaphors of Georg Simmel's Philosophy', *Theory, Culture & Society* 29 no. 7-8 (December 2012): 251, doi: 10.1177/0263276412455230.

12 Vittorio Mathieu, *Filosofia del denaro. Dopo il tramonto di Keynes* (Rome: Armando, 1985).

13 Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: essays in anthropology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

14 The Greeks had five types of gift, descriptions of which can mainly be found in the texts of Hesiod and Homer. They used five different words to label them: *dos* (), *dosis* (), *doron* (), *dorea* () and *dotinè* ().

15 Charles Champetier, *Homo consumans: archéologie du don et de la dépense* (Arpajon: Le Labyrinthe, 1994).

16 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. John L. Ackrill and Lindsay Judson, trans. Michael Pakaluk (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

17 Regardless of the different interpretations, it was Mauss and his 'total social fact' who brought the topic of the gift into the limelight. As is known, Mauss' study has been followed by others: for example Malinowski took into consideration the *kula* system present in the Trobriand islands, at the northernmost point of the Melanesian world. Even better known and very often cited is *potlatch*, the form of gift observed by the North American Tlingit, Kwakiutl and Haida tribes, but also by numerous populations in Peupasia, Melanesia and Polynesia, as well as the Eskimos.

18 Alain Caillé, 'Le tiers paradigme', introduction to *Anthropologie du don* (1997; Paris: Editions de la Découverte, 2007): 197, own translation.

19 Jean Starobinski, *Largesse*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (1994; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997): 2.

20 Introduction to Jacques T. Godbout and Alain Caillé, *The World of the Gift*, trans. Donald Winkler (1992; Montreal/Kingston, ON: McGill, Queen's University Press, 1998).

21 Alain Caillé, *Don, intérêt et désintéressement – Bourdieu, Mauss, Platon et quelques autres* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005): 282-3, own translation.

22 Salvatore Natoli, conference lecture (*Dialoghi sull'uomo*, Pistoia, 25-27 May 2012), own translation.

23 Luigi Ruggiu and Italo Testa, eds, *Hegel contemporaneo. La ricezione americana di Hegel a confronto con la tradizione europea* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2003): 173, own translation.

24 Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey Kosky (1997; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

2. GENEROSITY AND CREATIVITY

*Questa intenzione di beneficiare tutti gli esseri
è uno straordinario gioiello della mente.*

Shantideva

A vase for generosity

In the text by Shantideva, the *Bodhisattvacharyāvatāra*, the way to generating the loving mind of *bodhicitta*, which aspires towards enlightenment for the benefit of all beings, is set out along an itinerary that passes through the six transcendental perfections, or *pāramitā*. Alongside morality, patience, enthusiastic effort, concentration and wisdom, the first transcendental perfection, the one which precedes them all, and from which the journey begins, is generosity. Although no specific chapters are dedicated to generosity, we come across it various times in the text, almost as if it were an omnipresent virtue supporting all the others. In a certain sense, the journey towards enlightenment begins with generosity and never steers away from it. Therefore, in Shantideva's text we gain the impression that a transcendental status in the Kantian sense, as in the a priori principle enabling us to glimpse the possibility of other knowledge, belongs first and foremost to generosity. Hence, it becomes a virtue which conditions and opens up the whole

way towards practical but also intellectual enlightenment. Tellingly, in the *Bodhisattvacharyāvatāra* this virtue appears in the first two chapters on the benefits of the mind and the gift.

In its complex and profound bonds with the mind, generosity displays the same dynamic as cognition and learning. The vase of plenty must be filled, but also generously emptied. According to Geshe Yeshe Tobden's commentary on the *Bodhisattvacharyāvatāra*, three mistakes must be avoided in order to do this harmoniously: a) being like an upturned vase which does not retain the elements inside it; b) being like a broken vessel which loses all its riches; c) being like a dirty container which pollutes and mixes up its contents.

The above three mental configurations are detailed as follows: the impenetrable mind, which makes relational exchange lifeless and anorexic, preventing its nourishment by any gift; the leaking mind, which empties every gift of its meaning by spreading a host of shallow and fleeting relations; lastly, the polluted mind, which maintains relations but in a relationship so poisoned as to make every gift a dangerous object.

Rejecting material gifts and those contents of the mind deemed ill-assorted and contemptible, debasing and dismissing them, consciously or unconsciously polluting them, makes both authentic giving and deep understanding impossible. The negative effect of non-generosity may be seen in its action on one of the subtlest and highest faculties of the mind, creativity. And it may be supposed that the effects of non-generosity appear first and foremost in the individual's imaginative capabilities and aptitude for symbolic elaboration.

Envy, generosity and the creative mind

In psychological terms, Karl Abraham describes generosity as an oral act. And Melanie Klein starts from the same point in her examination of the dynamics underlying jealousy, greed and above all envy. In particular, distinctively imperative and insatiable, beyond the subject's needs and what he or she wants and is able to give, greed is the diametrically opposite sentiment to generosity. The aim of greed is to appropriate everything, assimilate, absorb and bulimically suck up every resource.

Nevertheless, the most destructive feeling is envy and not greed. Unlike greed, not only does it seek to steal what is considered good in the object of its desire, but it also puts the bad elements of the Self into the desired object, by projecting them so as to damage and destroy it. Upon its first appearance in children, this destructive aspect of projective identification present in envy leads to the destruction of creativity. For our purposes, it is significant that Melanie Klein clearly identified the connections, already close upon their first emerging, between the constitution of an internal object capable of consolidating attitudes and the cognitive skills linked to patience and creativity: 'We find in the analysis of our patients that the breast in its good aspect is the prototype of maternal goodness, inexhaustible patience and generosity, as well as of creativeness'.¹

Therefore, not only can a generous attitude come about and take shape within a protected and benevolent atmosphere, but subsequent positive attitudes towards assimilating novelty and creativity can only develop profitably within positive dynamics characterized by generosity. The 'welcoming' aura that surrounds a newborn baby is not unlike the emotional aura of curiosity and interested apprehension needed in groups of adults

with an inclination towards creativity. Gratitude, generosity, the modulation of anxieties and mitigation of envy and greed are the factors determining not just the construction of a non-suffering child's mind but also the flourishing of an adult mind. So we should suppose that those adult environments which know how to form their own social emotions around curiosity, a 'welcoming' aura towards contributions both from within and without, as well as a sense of gratitude towards ideas and people are also the more productive ones. It is precisely in these correlations, formed in the very first months of life, that Klein identifies the seed of an adult's future creative well-being. 'One major derivative of the capacity for love is the feeling of gratitude. Gratitude is essential in building up the relation to the good object and underlies also the appreciation of goodness in others and in oneself.'²

So we come to grasp another important characteristic of the gift, which is not just the element of disinterested exchange, alternative to bartering and money, but the fact that, from its psychological genesis, it becomes the tool fostering the growth of the individual's cognition and sublimation within the social group. We cannot do without generosity. Not because it represents a pleasant form of common living, nor because it is the natural outcome of managing the surplus in affluent societies, or because it is a humanized form of exchange within reified relations at this point bled white by utilitarian logic. More radically, the generosity expressed in the act of giving is one of the founding elements of the human capacity for cognition and creativity itself, without which it would not just be difficult to build serious social relations, but it would also be impossible to progress in individual symbolic imagination and social creativi-

ty. In underlining generosity's close connection with creativity and cognitive growth, our intent is to conduct this analysis outside a moral type of context. In other words, we do not want to base generosity on preconditions that justify it in an acritical manner, and make its validity dependent on a normativity written in moral codes received on the basis of wisdom, tradition, or, worse, religious diktats. Generosity can rather be analysed as a paradigm that goes beyond morals, sects, religions, faiths, nations and race. If generosity is a quality that lies beyond the moral field, it is nevertheless and by all rights a manifestation of *ethos*. There is a link between *ethos* and *dwelling place*: every action that structures the dwelling place and adapts it for its inhabitants' good is backed by an ethical meaning. As a solidaristic strategy of recognizing and including the other, generosity acts on the dwelling place for collective inhabitation and sharing a common good. When we state that the background to generosity is ethical and political, what we want to say is that it acts in that sphere of relations where humankind builds its sociality and comes together to identify and build a common good.

'I am Orestes'

Dante also sketched a negative relationship between envy on the one hand and generosity and intellect on the other. He depicts the sinners in the second circle of *Purgatory*, dedicated to the envious, in grey and spectral hues. The rampart that hosts the envious has the same sullen colour as the souls that make their evanescent presence felt, although initially they do not openly make themselves seen (*Purgatory*, XIII, vv.7-9):

Shadow nor image there is seen; all smooth
The rampart and the path, reflecting nought
But the rock's sullen hue.

Other famous declarations from Dante's verses follow: 'I am Orestes', the words with which Pylades attempted to pose as Orestes to endure his penalty in his stead, when Orestes has been found out and captured after the assassination of Aegisthus. This is followed by the famous sentence 'Love ye those have wrong'd you', the words of Jesus in the speech on the mountain. Both of these examples are affirmations of extreme and the utmost disinterested generosity, paradigms of caring and boundless dedication, in contrast to the grave condition of the envious. Indeed, they roam around the circle with their eyes sewn with wire thread, frowning like a sparrow hawk in captivity unable to fight.

In Dante's significant symbolic and interpretative view, he links envy to a lack of light and blinded vision. Likening the envious to animals, he reduces them to quarrelling, imprisoned sparrow hawks. Clear comprehension, charitable concern, attentive imagination and *rêverie* are profound characteristics of a mindset fuelled by dispositions towards gratitude, a mindset which has consolidated the good object as a part of itself to such an extent that it can now be used generously in exchanges with external society. In contrast to envy, creativity can develop favourably in a situation in which attention and generosity strengthen each other, intellectually and symbolically manifesting itself in the form of generous ideas and ease in sharing and dealing with those who are different. Thus far we have seen how generosity contains some meanings that have rarely been hi-

ghlighted. In reality, here, outside a psychological or moralistic approach, we are not interested in highlighting how generosity is better than tightfistedness or envy. Instead, what we are interested in here is discovering the underlying bonds between generosity and mind-building.

To state that it is much better to frequent a generous person than an envious one is obvious to say the least, and needs no demonstrations. But it is to go further to say that generosity is a fundamental aspect in the mind's development, that it is an enzyme for cognitive and creative bonds, because an absence or lack of generosity not only leads the majority of us to be disagreeable but it prevents our very mental growth. From the previous examples we have seen how in many cultures and from varied angles, very different authors have connected generosity with the value of light and seeing, theoretical sight, the development of gratitude and creativity, and the growth of capacities for understanding the world.

Generosity is deeply connected with the very possibility of an enlarged and flexible cognition of the world around us. The channel that connects generosity with creativity passes through caring comprehension and, above all, through the imagination. In mythology, generosity is often represented by images of plenty, the donation of gifts, wealth, preciousness and luxuriance. This idea, albeit effective, can be misleading because once again when we speak of generosity the attention is placed on the material fact, the object, the gift, instead of the process generating it. So the origin of generosity and its true value is obscured. To be generous is to relate to others as generating subjects. And here it is not so much the stress on the value of what is given that is important as the fact that the very origin of the value lies in

the generating subject and his or her productive capacity. The root of the term itself indicates the generative and productive, namely the creative, meaning of generosity.

The generous mind and the creative mind

The fact that generosity has mainly been dealt with by religions and morals is perhaps almost as reductive as the fact that it has become the subject of guides to good manners. On the one hand, these spheres immediately understood and anticipated that which social reflection, psychology and philosophy have since gone on to investigate further. On the other hand, owing to this pre-eminence, when we speak of generosity today the moral interpretation of the term cloaks almost any other meaning. As a result, generosity is confined and understood to be a virtuous deed of the moral subject, and the truer it is, the rarer it is, and it is justified in being so. In a certain sense it is morally valued, but also socially marginalized: true generosity belongs to the virtuous. In middle-class living rooms it has become the ornament or pleasant trait of the well-mannered, almost a practice from a nauseating guide to etiquette.

If not, generosity is used to flaunt high social standing by exploiting all those symbolic implications connected to a status gift: willingness to waste, gratuitousness, wealth, the donor showing off, etc.. If we ask ourselves what generosity has in common with creativity, we discover that they are linked by many aspects. In sum, we can say that there exist at least seven characteristics that are mirrored in both of them.

The first characteristic of the generous mind concerns its capacity not to be split, that is, to work through integration and

inclusion. Since the generous mind does not project the object outwards in the form of a threatening or enemy danger, it is also capable of welcoming diversity and transforming it into the subject of its care. To use Klein or Bion's words, we would say that the generous mind has overcome the paranoid-schizoid (P_s) phase and is able to assume a depressive position (P_D) that also rebuilds bonds. No mind can become generous if it remains in a paranoid position. It is only by overcoming the schizoid-paranoid phase that it really becomes possible to include difference and diversity in attentive care.

The second characteristic that the generous mind shares with the creative mind is gratuitousness, that is, lack of calculation and its relative containment. Lack of calculation implies that it is not necessary to designate the give and take for every action and idea, or to always set some advantage. Indeed, generosity's sums do not have to satisfy the requirement of economic return. The gift, the tangible expression of generosity, has no books to balance.

The third characteristic that unites generosity and creativity concerns the giver and the creative person's capacities to wait. Both work in a sphere which, to a certain extent, is separate from time. The dialectic of generosity, which takes place in the absence of calculation and splitting, brings together subjects marked by the capacity to wait. The generous mind is also a mind that can wait. The time logic is upset in generosity too. Hence, we are dealing with a mind that follows an illogical logic, an irrational *ratio* that goes beyond the axiom of identity and the compulsion of time and is hard to trace back to types of universal logic other than pure play.

Indeed, the fourth characteristic concerns the playful and

joyous dimension of both creativity and generosity. Social relations lacking paranoid splitting and developed without calculation link generous minds with the capacity to wait in a playful relationship. Going back to the cognitive side of generosity, we have to highlight that the capacity to wait without being compulsively driven to come to a conclusion within a set time is a characteristic of playful and creative minds.

The fifth characteristic that unites creative and generous minds is their toleration of emptiness. I no longer possess a gift, I have given it away, I have given it up and as yet I have nothing in return. I do not even know if my gift will be liked. The same happens for creativity. It is quite evident that, in order to be so, the creative mind has to come up with solutions that have not been tried out and to cross boundaries that conceal a great deal of unknown factors. Uncertainty and risk must in a certain sense be tolerated. Creative minds deal with this both by using the playful capacity to wait highlighted above, and their ability to tolerate. Analysis of the emotional microstructure and insurgence of thought itself implies that the mind acknowledges a void that has to be thought and tolerated.

The need for thought becomes evident through the experience of void and absence.³ It is the exposure to absence and void that prompts the thought of a thing, which is imagined even in its absence. It is the mother's absence in the cycle that reinforces presence and absence, appearing and disappearing to then reappear again, that exposes the imagination to emptiness and fills it with ideas. The void is there to indicate the germinal position of thought and to say that it is necessary and possible. Nevertheless, productive and flexible thought only emerges in a favourable setting, marked by tolerance of doubt

and non-persecutory psychological positions.

Generous play, like thought, takes place within a context of uncertainty and risk, given that the future outcomes of the game are never known. The gift is like a line cast into the dark, we do not know where it will fall and if it will fall the right way. Despite having no expectations of return, generosity establishes relations. Since relations require time to appear, the generous person is always forced to act in partial ignorance of what will happen. Despite this, generous play develops greatly among the subjects involved.

The sixth characteristic that unites generosity and creativity is perhaps the most evident: that they produce plenty. To be generous, in the same way as being creative, is to be immensely productive. Regardless of the intrinsic value of what is created and what is given, the subject has an approach to the world that we could define as 'heedless of waste', an approach oriented towards abundance. Nothing is more deleterious than a miserly gift or unproductive creativity.

What is given may effectively be worth little in terms of market value. Nevertheless, what counts here is the attitude, that is, the relationship towards the third parties. Generous people, just like creative people, move as if they were heedless of waste. Not everything hits the mark. On the other hand, a calculating mentality slows down and inhibits productivity. Only a small percentage of creative mental work achieves satisfying results that are recognized by others. Nevertheless, the creative mind would not be able to produce even the small percentage of successes effectively generated if there were not a broad production front, or production team or network within which a truly innovative idea finds its breeding ground.

In the same way, the generous mind acts without particularly calculating the return and knows perfectly well that in reality a lot of its generosity may not be followed up or recognized. Waste, that is the abundance of resources made available, is therefore the salient characteristic of these two mental positions.

Last, the seventh, one might say holistic characteristic is the fact that the six characteristics listed above all reinforce each other. They act in synergy with each other. The capacity to wait without paranoia or splitting, as well as to integrate and include gratuitousness, joyous and playful relationships, tolerance of uncertainty and doubt, and openness to waste make up a virtuous circle that fosters both creative approaches towards unresolved problems and generous approaches in relation to people.

The word and the social mesh: I dream you are well

Many have highlighted the fact that dialogue itself takes place within a context of gratuitousness. Godbout⁴ himself has underlined how in first place what the human subject produces and exchanges with others are words, sentences and arguments. In effect, when we speak to someone and talk, we do not expect to be in some way compensated. Perhaps with the sole exception of consultants and magicians, verbal exchange is free. In the same way as the gift, dialogue also establishes bonds. The sequence of questions and answers initiated in a dialogue goes to and fro, in a set of meanings that the community of dialoguers build and expand together. It is words continually bouncing back and forth that take the discourse forward. If one of the parties is excessively passive and does not respond to the game, the dialogue transforms into a monologue and breaks off. In the same way, if one of the participants refuses to carry on

the questions and answers, this gives a very strong signal of hostility and rejection of the dialogue. Those expressing a dialectic disagreement keep the dialogue alive, while those who keep quiet, despite disagreeing, express a radical dissent, not towards the arguments put forth but towards the actual dialogue set-up itself. Furthermore, the dialogue is like a stream, the discourse flows and branches out, it opens up to new perspectives and considerations at every turn. The speakers are thus held together in a free rather than a mercantilist relationship, through a verbal and symbolic exchange, with which common meanings are built and recognized.

Openness, dynamicity, gratuitousness, the dispersion of symbols, the emergence of bonds and relations: these are all characteristics that we also find in generosity and giving. This structure, typical of both the gift and dialogue, suggests that we try to understand giving as a deed and generosity as an attitude at the basis of the mesh pattern. What is built, modified and developed by generosity is in reality a mesh [*reticolo*] of connected parts within a signifying network [*rete*] of deeds and symbols. It would be reductive to see this mesh as just a series of social bonds or as a simple interpersonal relationship. We have to imagine the mesh as a network formed of nuclei tied to each other by connector rods. Where a new connection is formed, unforeseen possibilities of assimilation arise. Where a connection is broken, the bonds with parts of the mesh itself are cut off. The connection and breakage of bonds, in their constant dynamicity, therefore contribute to generating the overall form of the mesh itself, its extension and manners of connection. Seen in these terms, the mesh can be useful to represent the ideational network connecting ideas to one another and genera-

ting new configurations through creative connections. I have an idea, this image refers to another, and to another still. Some ideas can find unexpected or unusual, radically innovative connections. In effect, no idea exists on its own, they are always connected to a network that constructs and validates their meaning. The mesh can expand into areas and in directions that had not been imagined. So it is misleading and limiting to consider generosity from a simply moral viewpoint, because it would limit its meaning and capacity. And, it is also limiting to consider the gift within the positive aura of a non-economic exchange. What should be done is to ask what form of mesh the gift is creating and to assess how good the gift is at producing connective results in terms of the social network it generates.

In the case of the positive, liberatory and inclusive gift, an essential thing happens: the gift is sustained by an imagination which means 'I dream that you are well'. In other words, the giver's mesh of imagination includes the addressee in its horizon of wellbeing and happiness. I know what you'll like and I'll give it to you. I imagine your wellbeing and I'll make it real with a gift. The gift is therefore a socializing, creative deed that is situated in the other person's imagined well-being. The bond between generosity and creativity is evident here. Through the imagination, the giver establishes a relationship that includes the other within a common good. Giving essentially means two things: imagining the good of others and including them in one's own caring relationship.

Generation of freedom and forms of social stupidity

In addition to his more or less radical relativistic theories,

apt to arouse many polemics, Nelson Goodman put forward a hypothesis worthy of careful consideration. He states that worlds are as much made as found and, in the same way, that knowing is also as much remaking as reporting. 'Discovering laws involves drafting them. Recognizing patterns is very much a matter of inventing and imposing them. Comprehension and creation go on together.'⁵

This cognitivist system, which also traces understanding back to a creative act, has radical consequences. In every act of interpreting tradition and every act of knowing the reality around us, in both the spiritual and natural sciences, we achieve knowledge through an approach which also has an imaginative root. Hence, creativity is an indispensable element in order to develop knowledge. All that the reduction of allocated spaces for creativity and the limitation of its area of influence or of the possibilities of new bonds within the mesh of ideas do is limit the birth of creative ideas. Also, at the same time, the ability both to know the past and history, and the natural world in which we all live is wasted.

The social and creative meshes and the tight network of relational exchanges based on gratuitousness, whether they take place through gifts or through dialogue, are intimately interconnected. In the long term, damaging or reducing one of these networks also jeopardizes the balanced identity of the socially active person. Some practical examples can give us a better understanding. In the long term, educational systems that do not encourage generosity can be very dangerous for the health of the social fabric. Social systems that emphasize selfish approaches and fail to foster generous behaviour lead to social and individual suffering which are difficult to compensate for

with material well-being. On the other hand, aggregation and the facilitation of social and ideational networks really do boost production. We find the same pattern of conditions in creative groups in many contexts, whether they be work teams, partnerships between people interested in artistic and cultural production in the field of music and the theatre, or expedition teams.

At this point, we just have to draw some conclusions. The first is that, since generosity has profound connections with the social and cognitive mesh, its modulation does not have an impact at an individual level only. Generosity has social dimensions and the consequences of its modulation among single subjects can only be interpreted at the level of the whole social and cognitive mesh. Envy, or, on the contrary, generosity between single people, results in the formation of more or less broad, more or less comprehensive meshes, which influence each other. The looseness of the mesh, whether it is open or closed, is determined by the generous or not so generous behaviour of the subjects that make it up, and at the same time the mesh itself also acts on single subjects, favouring the inclination towards one type of behaviour or another.

The second consequence is that, given the close bond between generosity, creativity and understanding, social networks characterized by not very generous or envious behaviour are able to create forms of social stupidity. In effect, within societies that make little use of generosity we can see many signs of social stupidity, that is the reduction of the horizon of creative and cognitive potentials. The symptoms of this both cognitive and emotive anaemia are quite evident: intrusiveness of the logics and values of personal advantage to the point of compromising general well-being; limitation of people's affective li-

ves within mercantilist or pure duty/right relations; emphasis in work groups on efficiency and not on creativity; perception of having to raise the level of control to the total detriment of people's requests for imagination; development of visions that are easier to control and measure in the short term; maintenance of ideational capacities at starvation levels; depletion of people's entrepreneurial capacities in favour of their inclinations towards passive execution; hypostatization of restricted roles; fragmentation of processes and responsibilities; obsessive repetition of errors and waste in spite of the evidence. It is quite clear how the mercantilist, capitalist and manufacturing culture of the twentieth century, from Taylor onwards, often developed in parallel to a depletion in generosity and creativity, for a long time not deemed essential in the workplace, and a growth in organizational structures oriented towards obedience and passive execution. These days, those social and educational enclaves which are the workplace, and multinationals in particular, have given themselves hierarchical structures similar to those of the army. The space for generosity has become very much restricted and awareness of it totally marginalized, even though it has never totally disappeared. Perhaps it is one of the reasons why the logic of give-and-take and credit-debit has prevailed massively over the culture of widespread generosity. Nevertheless, we assert that the possibility really does exist of making societies that are creative, efficient and profitable, and at the same time based on explicit relations of unbounded generosity. This is why today we consider it important to see generosity as an individual and institutional attitude which creates a social mesh through behavioural paradigms such as tolerance, patience, integration and openness to emptiness and doubt,

while at the same time activating the mesh of the creative imagination. Hence, generosity needs to be seen and judged within the social relations that create freedom. If freedom increases, this determines the value of both generosity and gifts, which can be seen as vehicles for the imagination that creates society.

Not all gifts are the same

If generosity is the terrain on which freedoms are modulated, then the generous gift is that which opens up and empowers rather than closes freedoms. Therefore, we are able to distinguish the capacity and meaning of different types of gift. In effect, there are some gifts that are poisoned apples, or at least ineffective in generating freedoms. Others are productive and expand the horizon of relations. A non-exhaustive list of types of gifts could include the propitiatory gift, the reparatory gift, the beneficial gift, the ritual gift, the unmotivated and unexpected gift, etc..

The propitiatory gift, for example, made in religious or magical rituals in order to be ingratiated with a divinity, always expects a concrete return. In reality, it takes place within exclusive and imbalanced, pre-set relations, which it cannot change or extend. Throughout the world altars are crowded with pictures of saints, images, medals, radiant or bleeding hearts, crowns, candles for the dead, etc.. However, their purpose is a quid pro quo: divine grace. Here the exchange paradigm is evident.

The gift that a servant makes to a master must also be judged in the same way. Both the believer towards the divinity and the servant towards the master live within codified relations of exchange, knowing and recognizing each other in a situation

that is always asymmetric a priori. The aim of the gift is to mollify the pre-eminent subject and render it benevolent under the impact of fear. In it we see little generosity, while the exchange aspect is great. Since the gift is intimately intertwined with freedom, it presupposes that there is equality and justice in the relationship.

The reparatory gift also contains a low level of generosity. To make up for a shortcoming or an offence an offer or compensatory action must be made, which is the true motivation for the act. A bunch of flowers given to say sorry, or a present to make up for a faux pas, are examples of reparatory behaviour implemented by the need to restore a situation of balance in the relationship and have little to do with generosity.

Then there exist gifts that represent acts of social removal, or discharging gifts. They are dictated by the need to give, but without the tiniest intention to change the existent social relations. Through the gift, the problem that the subject encounters is removed or discharged from his or her horizon so that the balance upset by the appearance of the turbulence can tranquilly be re-established.

Remaining equally as frozen are those situations of charity-giving to help out in cases of starvation or poverty, without intervening on the structure of power relations or levels of freedom. In effect, we must distinguish money that is given as a gift but restricts and creates dependence from money that promotes freedom. A social or cultural initiative that receives free subsidies, but which through giving never achieves self-sustainability, develops dependence on its benefactors. It is only by putting together actions aimed at self-sustainability that we can say that subsidizing is able to create freedom. According to our

interpretative paradigm, only this second form of gift, which creates freedom, is highly generous.

Next there are ritual gifts, made on occasion of birthdays and Christmas. Within families or between people with affective bonds the meaning of these gifts is to strengthen relations.

Then there are unmotivated and unexpected gifts, both between people who already have bonds as well as between people who hardly know each other. Whether they are gifts of gratification or to aid an identified need, they are extremely significant and pleasant. The happiness that they generate is prompted not so much by the value of the object, but above all by the relational, social, cognitive and creative significance that the gift transmits. The person receiving the gift has become the object of recognition by third parties. The recognition activates an inclusive relationship, in which the addressee perceives the ability to enter a network of solidarity and comprehension where this freedom can expand and find wider expression. Unmotivated giving is thus a powerful factor in creativity and freedom. Gifts received for solidaristic reasons should be considered in the same way as they presuppose that the giver has understood the state of neediness and that he or she is dealing with it through this aid.

Generosity in the era of gadgets

Now we can start to draw some conclusions and take a step back. First of all, we have rejected the moralist dimension of generosity. We have avoided considering it as a virtue for the few or a psychological characteristic that can be traced back to an unfathomable altruism. This has enabled us to better under-

stand the relations between generosity and creativity. Our own capacity of understanding, or, inversely, our degree of social stupidity depends on generosity. In exchanging ideas, culturally creative communities are also characterized by a certain degree of generosity. Not only are social relations involved in these dynamics, but also cognitive dynamics. We give to those we also manage to understand. We understand those we manage to give to. So generosity becomes one of the aspects modulating closedness or openness, identification or differentiation at the social level and at the level of understanding and including the people around us.

In second place, the 'give, receive, reciprocate' sequence highlighted by some important authors,⁶ seems to be excessively restrictive, since it only casts light on some types of exchange, that is, those with a tangible return of the gift. Indeed, in some cases there may be no restitution. And this is the case above all in those gestures of the loftiest and most disinterested generosity. It is quite improbable that a Pylades who wants to pass himself off as Orestes in his condemnation to death expects restitution. Instead, it seems that generosity implies a gratuitous and free gesture, without self-interest and without expectations of restitution. Nonetheless, a return does exist, but it occurs at the symbolic level, namely at the level of reciprocal recognition. What is prompted is recognition, that is, reciprocal and inclusive recognition within a community that shares an idea of common good.

Albeit provisional and partial, these specifications allow us to trace a clear distinction between the ritual and self-interested gift and the gift generated by generosity. The 'give-receive-reciprocate' sequence should be replaced by the more complex

and intricate circular and evolutive chain of 'recognizing-giving-including' as we will see later on. Generosity, which sees its inclination towards the other implemented in the gift, is a vehicle that establishes a social and semantic field and initiates a belonging to the reciprocal relationship. In its most authentic meaning, the gift tangibly modulates the idea of the good desired for the recipient. And generosity is naught but the capacity to modulate the horizon of the field within which we are able to imagine other people's good and to desire that the recipient is included in it.

What has happened to generosity and the gift in contemporary Western societies with their orientation towards gadgets? The immense proliferation of technologies, the expansion of well-being and the commercial effort to expand in order for the business to grow, the needs for even marginal forms of utility, have produced consumer cultures based on gadgets, that is, on forms of consumption of not strictly essential objects, or accessories that are often superfluous or collateral to primary needs. Status symbols, consumer technologies, accessories, ornaments, variations and extensions to objects, and souvenirs, all of these are the expressions of a market that has become parcelled out, hyperdefined and segmented, promoting the gadget culture. Parallel to the material expansion of gadgets, cultural habits and approaches oriented towards the hedonistic consumption of objects have become fixed. Gadgets are fun, they entertain you, they have a highly playful component, they are recreational. Furthermore, since they are shown off and have social connotations, gadgets can constitute a consumer sociality. Consumers of gadgets recognize each other as belonging to the same circle, they share tastes and experiences, they are im-

plied in the same community of use. They form interest groups joined by brands, for example Harley Davidson owners, BMW drivers, I-phone users, etc.. Nevertheless, the gadget-object is not able to overcome cultural or social barriers. Quite the opposite, they tend to ratify and announce them. The use of gadgets is nevertheless consumption in isolation, solitary owing to the strong sense of belonging and possession at play in their consumption. Furthermore, the marked image-building connected to some superfluous gadgets means that the narcissism connected to this type of object-use is often evident. It is a consumption characterized by group narcissism, which reflects not only the single person and his or her solitary consumption, but also the group of users, reinforced in their belonging to the same act of consumption, which unites them and therefore reflects each one.

If we compare the gadget-object to the gift-object, we again encounter great differences. While gadgets reinforce differences and are exclusive, gift culture is inclusive and arises from the understanding of other people's needs. The action of gadgets is brought about and concluded within a hedonistic and narcissistic sphere. On the contrary, the gift arises from modulating the other's desire and from designing his or her sphere of well-being. Gadgets are rational, consumerist, depersonalizing and have economic value. On the contrary, the gift is irrational, single, without return, and evolutive. A lot of investment goes into advertising and promoting gadgets, and, given their ostentatious nature, they easily capture an immensely wide public. The gift is specific and relegated to those subjective acts motivated by singular generosity. This is why the gift is so invisible, or finds difficulty in proclaiming itself in a public and

evident manner. One might say that the gift resides in the secret interstices of the great, proclaimed, all-pervading network of utilitarian relations, almost as if it were a secret and intimate, albeit very present, form of society. If we then consider that these same gadgets often become gift- objects, we understand how it is necessary to be able to distinguish between the values of one and the other, on the basis of their potential to open up the circle of inclusion and creativity. And, we might add, on the basis of generosity as the capacity to modulate the knowledge and desire for other people's good. In the following chapters we will see how this is a radical difference from any other type of social relationship.

1 See Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude. A study of unconscious sources* (London: Routledge, 2001): 5-6.

2 *Ibid.*, 17.

3 Wilfred R. Bion, *Learning from Experience* (London: William Heinemann, 1962): 35.

4 Jacques T. Godbout and Alain Caillé, *The World of the Gift*, trans. Donald Winkler (1992; Montreal/Kingston, ON: McGill, Queen's University Press, 1998): 12.

5 Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis (IN): Hackett Publishing Company, 1978) : 22.

6 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls (1923-24; London: Routledge Classics, 2002).

3. THE GIFT AND FIRST SOCIETY

Meaning comes from the gift alone.

Alain Caillé

Gift: solidaristic relationship of self-consciousness

The social sciences' interest in the gift was stimulated by the fundamental study by Marcel Mauss from 1923-24, *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*. This study has been brought out on several occasions and quoted as a point of reference. The group who fully grasped Mauss' legacy were the sociologists united around the MAUSS project (*Mouvement anti-utilitariste dans les sciences sociales*), and among them it was above all Alain Caillé and Jacques Godbout who developed the most complex and convincing gift theory. And it is this thesis that is also the densest in both theoretical and practical consequences.

Caillé,¹ above all, is the figure we have to thank for clarifying the gift as the third paradigm, in contrast to and in completion of holism on one hand and individualism on the other. The individualistic paradigm puts social phenomena exclusively down to individuals' decisions. In this view, social balance and its evolution are simply the effect of putting together the single in-

terests of the myriad of subjects making up society, who, following their personal egoism, determine the destiny of society at the collective level. The individualistic paradigm, which deems society to be formed by the mosaic of single people's interests, is reductive, atomistic and utilitarian.

In contrast, the holistic paradigm explains all actions, whether individual or collective, by analysing them as if they were the same manifestations of the social totality's influence on individuals. This paradigm starts from the social totality existing prior to the individual and sees details as its moment of specification. Its approach is functionalist, institutionalist and structuralist.

In Caillé's pattern of thought, the gift forms the third, horizontal and pervasive paradigm, in contrast to the top-down verticality of holism and the bottom-up trend of individualism. But, beyond separating academic paradigms and contrasting points of view, Caillé's great merit lies in his clarifying that the element upholding society is indeed the gift: 'The gift paradigm is based on the wager that the gift is the creator of alliances par excellence. It is what seals them, symbolizes them, guarantees them and makes them real. (...) It is by giving that we really declare ourselves ready to play the game of association and alliance'.²

Nevertheless, the gift does not come out of nowhere: the giver is always initially conscious of the recipient, the reason for the gift and the type of object that is suitable to give. The gift therefore always emerges from a network of relations, however fleeting and incomplete they may be, which form the original consciousness prompting the dialectic of mutual recognition. On this basis, the gift is to all effects a leap in the dark, an enticement, a bridge, whose evolution is uncertain and never

established beforehand. Hence, Mauss' sequence of 'giving-receiving-reciprocating' should be replaced by the more complex sequence of 'consciousness-giving-receiving-recognizing-self-consciousness'. In Hegel's terms of the development of self-consciousness, we should say that consciousness is naturally oriented towards a nexus of relations in which the person giving (objects or ideas) receives in exchange (objects, ideas or gratitude) and thus recognizes the other by means of that gratitude and includes that person in his or her horizon: this process implies that consciousness gives rise to its own self-consciousness in the relationship with the other. The road that leads to self-consciousness invariably passes through a relationship of exchange.

The theory that we hold is that the gratuitous exchange of giving and recognition is original, primary in the first phases of life (and of every gesture or relationship), denser in meanings and producing deeper bonds than any other type of reciprocal exchange, whether it be economic or political. Giving as a gratuitous and generous gesture comes about from a basic awareness, consciousness of the other, even if indistinct and vague, or knowledge of alterity, towards whom the gift builds a symbolic and at the same time real bridge. Therefore, according to this hypothesis, the gift is simply the creative move of a knowledge that is becoming solidaristic and extending its range of action through gratuitousness and gratitude. It is the move with which consciousness opens up to the solidaristic bond of knowing the other through knowledge and recognition, reflected by way of the exchanged gift. Consciousness evolves into self-consciousness through the solidarity of a gratuitous gift that evolves into a relationship. This is why we cannot do without giving.

The inclusive spiral

While there may be no objectual recompense, what never fails to be returned is a grateful or ungrateful consciousness, that is, a subject who can confirm or deny the recognition. Hence, the gift can be seen as the objective manifestation of a dialectic social relationship of recognition, aimed at building and developing self-consciousness in people, that interacts on the basis of generosity and solidarity.

Relations of gratitude and recognition remain intact even in the presence of uneven values, incommensurable forms and unpunctual times or deadlines. The gift is often returned in an intangible manner and at a higher level. There may or may not be objectual recompense. What definitely occurs is the formation of a self-consciousness through exchange and reciprocal recognition. This takes place in as many endless forms as humankind can imagine. Furthermore, the chain of recognition events which lead to self-consciousness do not take place in the solipsism of a single relationship between two people, but extend to the cultural mesh of the multiple relations that form society. The gift ceases to be private right from the start. By initiating a chain of mutually recognizing self-consciousnesses a process is begun to expand social inclusion. While its outcome is imponderable, it is a great builder of the social structure.

The dialectic chain of 'consciousness (giving & receiving & recognizing) and self-consciousness' does not close in on itself but instead tends to evolve. It is not a circle but a spiral.

It is thanks to the spiral dialectic chain that the other comes to be truly included in my horizon. If I make a gift to my foreign neighbours, I am sending them a message of inclusion and acceptance, in spite of the fact they are different. If I give part of

my salary or my time to a soup kitchen, I am also including people in hardship in my world and I think that my sights should expand to include them. If I send a gift to a person whom I have just met and I like, I am trying to include him or her in my affective and social horizon. The gift dynamic is profoundly interwoven with that of inclusion.

To give is to include, to incorporate in one's sphere of affections and relations, to shift a boundary. It is to make a move that forms the very world which we relate to. In this sense, it is a political move. This is why often one of the first kinds of rejection takes on the form of tightfistedness and not giving, reducing material exchanges to the obligatory minimum. What is worst about tightfistedness is not so much the attachment to things and money, but the social exclusion it causes, the walls it erects against people it would like to see excluded from goods and affections.

Beyond obligation and self-interest

While the gift sequence is an open, in a certain sense dialectic and evolutive spiral, on the other hand, there is so little obligation in its phases as to almost disappear altogether. In the gift there is no obligation, it has nothing to measure up against. Rules of etiquette, which would like to harness the gift into accepted social standards, are not what is needed in this case. At times the gift is expressed in such explosive and macroscopic ways that it is difficult to frame within closed scientific paradigms or set social standards. Above all, explanations borrowed from the field of the economy or social politics do not seem to fit the description of the gift phenomenon.

Some scholars have wanted to see an ineliminable basis of self-interest in the free gift, considering a completely disinterested gift impossible. In this regard, Derrida's position is paradigmatic,³ and equally as exemplary is Caillé's attempt to oppose the theory that the disinterested gift is not possible. The category of self-interest is often used by some authors to explain certain dynamics of generosity. Nevertheless, on one hand they then come to clash with the reductive dimension of this economic category, or, on the other hand, they hypostasize the category of self-interest as being the underlying, deep reason for social phenomena.

The reasons for this confusion may have derived from two historical analytical approaches:

a) on one hand some reflections from the late twentieth century came in the wake of the philosophies of 'foundations' or energetics. They move within the frame outlined by Nietzsche and Freud, according to which the subject and its symbolic production are determined by extra-cognitive motives which escape conscious reason, like libidinous instincts or the will to power that guides the superman's heroic action. These lines of philosophical thought, in which phenomena give way to interpretations alone, place subjectivity and its prejudices in the foreground in an anti-Enlightenment and at times anti-positivist key, and re-evaluate the hidden basis of prejudice concealed behind the apparent rationality of behaviour.

b) The second line of philosophical thought thematizes self-interest as a category constitutive of action, knowledge itself and superstructural symbolic formations in general. Along this line, Marx interpreted the clash between work and capital as economic interest, in the same way as he saw the constitution of

the superstructural formations of culture and religion in terms of an interest in profit. Legitimate and scientifically correct, these approaches are motivated by the underlying assumption that it is necessary to search for underlying acting causes. At times the gift has also been analysed following the thread of the search for an underlying reason, under the assumption that below the surface of generosity there must be an unrevealed motivation for an apparently contradictory and irrational action. Furthermore, the frequent comparison of the gift with its counterpart, economic exchange, even just to outline the differences, from time to time has ended up relying excessively on the category of self-interest to define the profile of giving.

We believe that it is not at all true that a good action in itself should necessarily be justified on the basis of the utility that it produces. Self-interest, a category derived from the economy, appears too compromised and limiting to be used fruitfully to interpret and understand the gift. This way we would risk compressing our knowledge of the gift into paradigms that continually refer back to the economic sphere and base the disinterested exchange of generosity on the egoism of commercial exchange.

It would be better to leave the category of self-interest to economic exchange and grant the gift its own autonomous and original category, which totally sets it apart from any form of self-interested exchange that can be measured by money.

Real objects of ethical freedom

We may be trying anxiously trying to find the foundation of the gift, but in reality it involves a certain form of unconditionality. This fact could lead some to liken the gift to something like religiosity, the elective phenomenon of imponderability.

While the spontaneous nature of the gift may be convincing, we are sceptical as to its assimilation, or proximity at least, to religious phenomena. Indeed, many forms of religious donation exist the world round, which materialize into the countless offerings that are made to all types of divinities. Nevertheless, to base the gift on religious sentiment seems misleading, false even. The gift also finds expression among atheists, who give nothing to the gods and are no less generous because of this. Therefore, the foundations of the gift must rest on something much more general and universal than the simple, peculiar sentiment of specific cultures or creeds. In order to understand the gift, we must go to the very root of humankind's possibility of solidaristic relationships which we find operating in generosity, and a positive projection towards others, something which appears in the earliest periods of life and, in particular, in the newborn's relationship with its mother and in their reciprocal recognitional generosity.

Hence it seems to us that if a foundation of being together has to be sought, it can be traced back to human generosity as a fact of ultimate spontaneity and freedom, an objective primary fact of human existence. This ultimate basis makes it unnecessary to look for an additional normative foundation elsewhere, it is an act of spontaneous curiosity towards the other, an ego-genetic act, not in the egotistical sense but in the sense of forming and generating the ego. The gift is naught but the objectual expression founded on generosity as free expressive conduct, its underlying reason hard to find in a source, whether it be religious, sociological or psychological. It seems more opportune to note how, in this respect, generosity is in itself an unconditional expression of human freedom that belongs to the

field of ethicity, that Hegelian social idea of *Sittlichkeit* in which the consciousness achieves self-consciousness through the relationship of recognizing the other.

What culture historically hands down to us is the systematic cancellation of generosity in all institutional, political, economic, managerial, administrative and working forms and its confinement to the intimist and jaded sphere of the personal, all-too-personal relationship. Thus, imprisoned in the stifling space of sentimental and often selfish relations, generosity loses its value and capacity. On the other hand, the public spheres of social interrelationships then become characterized by ethical values based on competitive performance and the defence of power, to then penetrate the subjective moral fabric through sets of values oriented towards defending one's ground, developing capacities to hoard resources, and making single interests prevail over the social *ratio*. In contrast, to assert that the gift occurs by exercising freedom is to make it part of the phenomenology of ethicity which, in order for it to fully unfold, requires the formation of free individuals on one hand and on the other the inclusion of those who are different, amicably made to participate in a solidaristic society that recognizes all men and women as beings with the same right to happiness.

To assert that the gift is stably based on the ethical freedom of mutually inclusive consciousnesses is to free the analysis from those attempts at rationalization through a deconstructivist approach that works through references to a range of spheres, which in turn would need a basis.

Subsequently we will see how the outcome of the dialectic between generosity and rights, individualization and inclusion, single people and institutionalized reason, is a long way from

reaching a satisfactory balance within the social models that we know today. Forgetting the gift and excluding generosity from the basic elements of society is a symptom and at the same time a cause of the unease of contemporary self-consciousness, which is incapable both of finding forms of rational dialogue that include cultural diversities, and of recognizing them.

Ethical bonds in the freedom of imagination

Now we are in the position to attempt to make some provisional systematic considerations. We have asserted that the gift rests firmly on the foundation of generosity and that the latter is fundamental since it is an objective and unavoidable social phenomenon. We are also perfectly able to distinguish generous behaviour from that which is not. In other words, the generosity that takes shape in the gift is not a subjective, relative or intimist fact. Rather it is a social given, which can take on different manifestations and measures, but is perfectly recognizable in the relations between human beings. Even though the gift arises from subjective generous intentionality, whose basis is difficult to explore, in itself the gift is an objective intentionality, a true social object that establishes and reinforces bonds. It is not only concrete thanks to the tangible existence of a gift such as a flower, a piece of jewellery, a book or a tie. It is concrete and real owing to the very social relationship that it creates, something that cannot be ignored, in the same way that it is impossible to ignore a language, music, a peace treaty, or a no entry sign.

We could assert that it is more the qualitative aspect that makes the gift real and objective, rather than its tangible embodiment of a measurable object. Compared to its qualitative dimension, the quantitative dimension of generosity in a certain sense fades into the background.

Nevertheless, at the same time there is no generosity if it is not expressed in concrete terms. Therefore, the theory we are asserting is that generosity is a subjective fact which can be defined as an inclination, tendency, predictable trait of behaviour, an original element that is a grounds in itself and that takes on an objective value when it is tangible in the gift. We can understand how generous a person is by how much he or she gives. The label of 'generous' is the upshot of a defining act which we apply to a subject to indicate his or her inclination to the gift, which can be seen tangibly in the repetition of social and objective acts that we call gifts. In the same way that we cannot call a person a criminal if we do not see the actual criminal act, it is only through the gift that the inclination becomes an active propensity.

In terms of its genesis, our experience of acts of giving appears very early on and generosity is a primary inclination, providing the basis for the human being to model and sustain relational exchanges with society. It is only after a process of maturation and at an older age that children learn to relate to each other through calculation, economic interest, or comparison of consciously rational positions.

All of this leads us to uphold once again that, in both the positive and negative sense, the social relationship, which is actively present before interpersonal relations based on economic advantage or the civil rights of citizens belonging to the same state arise, is modelled primarily upon generosity. Indeed, it can be supposed that these relations and rights develop and specialize from the original experience of recognitional generosity. In the line of thought developed from Mauss onwards, and particularly by Godbout and Caillé, the gift is at the basis of

the social system.

At this point, we cannot but agree with the thinking of Habermas⁴ when he affirms that the balance between the principal media of societal integration is in jeopardy because markets and their administrative power are displacing social solidarity, that is, the coordination of action through values, norms and language use oriented to reaching understanding, from ever more domains of social life. 'Thus,' Habermas states, 'it is also in the interest of the constitutional state to conserve all cultural sources that nurture citizens' solidarity and their normative awareness.'⁵ This is all the more valid nowadays when it seems that the state does not see the solidarity of communitarian and private welfare as a civil and human asset so much as prevalently the most convenient form of substituting its own redistributive duties.

Both individual and institutionalized forms of generosity should be promoted and supported by schools, public institutions and companies, because they represent the glue of civil society.

The imaginative policy of the gift

Why is generosity at the basis of the social system? First of all, we would say because it is the primary inclination with which children establish their first human relations, as every mother knows all too well. Because, if we are to look closely, it is everywhere in relational exchanges between adults, even in those not mediated through the classic and gratuitous gift but consisting of mutual aid and the disinterested exchange of commitment and ideas, as every player in a football team or member

of a work team experiences. Because even the cognitive activity prompted by curiosity and the desire to know is underpinned by generosity, in the same way as it is visible in those who work in a research team or simply dialogue to find some solution of mutual interest. Because it is present within political and economic relations, as those who have to debate and negotiate for the satisfactory management of common goods are aware.

In its most abstract form, the recognitional relationship makes the symbolic exchange between the actors involved real by creating a common area, devoted to giving and receiving, so as to foster mutual symbolic exchange. It is in this area, which has its own logics and distinct forms of agglomerating diversities, that generosity has its field of action and builds sociality.

What happens in this 'common area' opened by generosity? What characteristics does this 'symbolic social space' have? First of all, as we did before, let us point out that exercising generosity must be understood within the paradigm of imagining. In giving, it is the imagination that is put into motion, since the generous mind finds itself in the condition to imagine what others might like. I give because I imagine what you desire. I give because I am able to imagine what is good for you. I give because I am a being who is able to imagine. I would never give what I imagine may hurt you, as apprehensive parents who refuse to give their teenage children a scooter well know. Not, of course, because it may not be desired, but because the imagination does not include that object as a good within its horizon. In this sense, the gift has a powerful educational role, as can be seen in the cases of those who use the gift to educate their children, or to spoil them. The idea of common good plays a determining role in the paradigm of the creative imagination. It is

precisely for this reason that something much greater than the simple gift is at stake here. Since the image of good is structured through the gift, the reciprocal relationship formed in generosity very much creates a 'socially desirable future'. And this is the second essential characteristic of the 'social symbolic space' of the gift. It is the common horizon of meanings linked to the desirable future that bonds people through the gift and includes them in the same imaginative activity.

The given object always incorporates the symbolic value of a reality that the giver thinks is the benchmark of the recipient's desires. With the gift I can extend, remodel, diversify and express the space of the desirable worlds.

If the gift is the beginning or confirmation of a social relationship that takes place through exercising reciprocal freedom and that, in this reciprocity, imagines and recognizes a good which can be shared and recognized in the other's desire, then we are wholly in the field of ethicity, to be precise in the *Sittlichkeit* that Hegel describes in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.⁶ The meaning of the gift therefore has to slot between the paradigms of the creative imagination and ethics, as the expression of an idea of freedom that creates a common good and recognitional reciprocity within a social system. This is the third characteristic of the space opened up by the gift. It is an ethical space, which can take on the political meaning of the word should its participatory form take on the institutional shape of solidarity and philanthropy within civil society. The gift is an ethical act of political building which takes place within civil society united by the same imagination of a common good. To advance the issue of the gift is to raise a political question.

From this point of view, Caillé's observation seems very

much justified when he says: 'The true issue is not that of the immaculate gift or pure love. It is knowing who to give to. (...) The question raised is therefore that of building a new collective subject that now needs to be built on the ruins of the old one, to which we were used to sacrificing ourselves. This question is not in the first place a moral, philosophical or religious one: it is the political question par excellence.'⁷

Areas of the relationship's development after Hegel

Hegel outlines the components structuring the ethical dimension: family, civil society and state. According to this vision, the family is the immediate substantiality that feels it is love, the first step in ethicity. Following more or less the same path, in the dispute with Nancy Fraser in *Umverteilung oder Anerkennung?*⁸ from 2003, Axel Honneth identifies three spheres in which the social relationship is created through the other's recognition: love, law and achievement.

'In order to allow for the socialization of progeny, the estate-based order of premodern society must already have rudimentarily developed the attitudes of care and love – without which children's personalities cannot develop at all – as a separate form of recognition.'⁸ This, cited by Honneth, is the area of love in Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*. Naturally, other processes of recognition developed and led to the birth of the fundamental institutions of capitalist society. According to Honneth, not only in feudalism but also in premodern societies, the individual's juridical recognition, that is, being recognized as a member of a society protected by certain rights, 'was directly connected to the social esteem he or she enjoyed by reason of origin, age, or fun-

ction'.⁹ This is the area of law.

Lastly, with the gradual development of new social models advanced by the middle classes against the nobility, a third form of recognition took a foothold: the one no longer based on the principle of honour or belonging to a status, but what Honneth somewhat ambiguously calls 'individual achievement within the structure of the industrially organized division of labor'. This is the area of work and economic production.

In its simplifying clarity, the mould, as can be seen, is clearly Hegelian, along with all the limits which this system entails. Love, state and achievement in work are the three spheres of the individual's social recognition and they form the structure of what are respectively called intimate relationships, legal relations, and the vaguely defined 'loose-knit social relations'. However, we cannot agree with the vision of a dialectic evolution of history, which would happily explain the evolution of society. Furthermore, not only do the three spheres not follow on from each other, but they interact with each other and are closely linked. The sphere of love cannot be restricted to the family, instead it endures in and relates to the economy and politics. The system appears much more dynamic and complex, albeit neither hierarchical nor historically predictable, and it is more liable to veer off the tracks than can be represented in the neo-Hegelian system.

His concentration on the formal aspects of the social process of mutual recognition makes Honneth lose sight of the points in which this mechanism of modern moral evolution trips up. He states: 'On the one hand, we see here a process of individualization, i.e., the increase of opportunities to legitimately articulate parts of one's personality; on the other hand, we see a pro-

cess of social inclusion, i.e., the expanding inclusion of subjects into the circle of full members of society.’¹⁰ The book, written during a debate with Nancy Fraser on the dispute between recognition and redistribution as elements of social inclusion, took place at the beginning of the 2000s, when one of the pressing topics at an international level related to the recognition of rights for ethnic minorities, excluded segments of society, homosexuals and women. Today not only have these problems not been resolved, but the great financial crisis, triggered in 2007 and still ongoing, has caused their main focus and outlooks to change radically. After the great financial crisis, whether the so-called moral superiority of modernity has effectively led to an increase in the opportunities to ‘legitimately articulate parts of one’s personality’ can be put into even more serious doubt. To find out, it would suffice to interview some unemployed graduate in Italy, Spain or Greece. In the western world, it seems that, little by little, the opportunities to develop one’s personality have diminished at the same rate as salaries for young people in their first job have gone down or youth unemployment has risen. In the eastern world and developing countries, it is difficult to believe that there is any evolution in opportunities for achievement in the numerous sweatshops that provide precarious, low-paid employment to workers totally stripped of trade union rights. Western consumption, compulsively affluent and technological, is fuelled by exploitative manufacturing conditions in other places on the planet, where the profits obviously do not remain but are made to flow towards the western headquarters. Perhaps Honneth’s development of the personality only concerns the richest one per cent of the world population.

Honneth continues: *‘It is not clear, however, whether this*

(double) criterion of progress can find any application in the new, tripartite recognition order brought about by modern capitalist society' (own italics).¹¹ On the contrary, it seems extremely clear to us how the tripartite system – of a set of relations modelled through love, of relations modelled by law, and of cooperative relations where the principle of merit is at work – shows all the internal contradictions and conflicts of the three logics and that Hegelian objective reason is far from having reached the three formulations of ethical reconciliation. Above all, today it is evident how the separation of the three spheres – state, economy and disinterested recognition in civil society – where each person follows his or her own specific interests and inner laws, gives disastrous results from the ethical and social point of view. Perhaps only the reciprocal coordination of state, economy and the sphere of generosity will be able to give sufficient guarantees for harmonious development.

It is for these reasons that, despite the rational breadth and depth of neo-Hegelian systems such as that of Honneth, Nancy Fraser's philosophical disagreement is pertinent and some questions still remain unanswered. For the moment we will delay deciding whether the moral progress of self-consciousnesses should hinge around the posit of recognition in its ethical forms, as Honneth sees it, or if it should instead be seen under the paradigm of social justice in the redistribution of resources, as Fraser would have it. Deciding whether to start to recognize others in order to distribute fairly or to begin to distribute with justice in order to recognize is the same as deciding whether the chicken or the egg came first. To us the crux of the question seems to lie elsewhere. It concerns the fact that the mixture of subjective expectations of recognition and historically institu-

tionalized principles of recognition presents wide incidences of failure. In other words: it is the subsumption of individual motions for recognition within an institutionalized and objective reason that fails. What is in crisis is not so much the notion of the tripartite system of ethics as that of the cunning of reason.

The human growth experience takes us through very different spheres – school, family, work, citizenship – each marked by weak boundaries, overlapping in part. Some fundamental experiences take place in these spheres, which at times can obstruct and contradict each other. The education to be generous, as well as learning a positive attitude towards the other, which occur in the sphere of love, can be solemnly denied and negated by the spheres of economic achievement, or in the field of citizenship, or in cases of social exclusion, segregation, exploitation or deprivation of rights, or humiliation. And since no one can be ethical in their own solitary little soul or in their own small bedroom, it is enough for just one of the ethical areas – love, law, achievement – not to live up to expectations for the whole system to fail and ethiciness to be destroyed.

The gift as a social 'gluon'

If we wonder in which spheres subjects can build relationships of recognition with others we can identify a great many, and can effectively isolate at least three areas that demonstrate a certain degree of universality. The first is the one that we saw already comes into being in the newborn and takes shape in the relationship of generosity. It is also the area of solidarity and the relationship of disinterested recognition or that which is projected positively towards knowledge and recogni-

tion. It is the Hegelian area of love, which we previously saw taken up again in the reflection of Honneth. However, here we want to avoid considering the intimacy of the good heart as the only space where this generosity and affective bond exist. This seems to us a great error of intimist culture. The so-called 'noble' sentiments have been limited, set aside, segregated and circumscribed to the faint light of the close family, left aside and considered useless or harmful in the world of the state and justice, in the world of the division of belongings, in sector politics and in the economy. The result is an alienated society with schizophrenic values and split possibilities of expression, forced to play out different roles by separating behaviours and unconvincingly adopt fictitious endorsement strategies. The price to pay for these vertical splits crossing through the ethical spheres, which derive from isolating generosity in the area of love, is the suffering of consciousnesses reduced to expressing themselves creatively in the subjective and isolated sphere alone. At the same time, they are forced to fit into a gallery of emotionless, fictitious adaptations, depending on the types of relations of recognition they find themselves in. By passing this chameleonic constriction off for flexibility, in reality contemporary society is reducing so-called possibilities of expression and achievement. It is becoming a society in which inclusion takes place by way of emotionless, conformist behaviour, and personal achievement is degraded to a hobby. Instead, it seems to us that a lot of phenomena that go beyond the family fit into the recognitional and disinterested relationship, including generosity and the gift in all their forms, such as expressions of solidarity outside the family, actions of mutual help and aid, forms of individual or collective philanthropy, forms of voluntary sup-

port for culture and needs neglected by the public sector. Furthermore, at the individual level, it seems obvious that we can give our neighbour a gift without being in a loving relationship with him or her. And if at the bottom of every gift there is a recognitional and imaginative loving instinct, this does not mean that every gift has to result in the intention to form a family. On the contrary, if we want this sphere to remain characterized by love, then by this term we should mean something much broader and vaster, and at the same time very profound, something similar to an original and fertile instinct that is able to point people to recognize others out of disinterest, curiosity, and the capacity to see similarity in what is different.

In recognition mediated by generosity, the gift is a powerful social gluon, to adopt the term, deriving from the word 'glue', used in atomic physics for the particles that keep the nucleus compact. With the gift, what we are seeing is the establishment and consolidation of a network of social relations, thanks to which people feel they belong to a single community and feel linked to it. The gift is the most powerful means to demonstrate the relationship and ratify it, much more than comparison between different cultures or engagement in extenuating economic negotiations. Engaging in business with peoples of different cultures has a high probability of success if it is preceded by a gift and a disinterested relationship of 'grateful love', even though no one would dream of marrying economic partners at every turn. The gift comes before economics. And we can imagine that following his caravan heading east Marco Polo will have had many gifts to deliver which could open the doors to hearts and recognition.

Welfare is not a gift: it is the state's ethical mission

The second sphere of social relations is the one that is outlined in the state and by way of its laws. Here people relate to each other in a relationship based on rights, and the principle of equality should mould the order of the social structure under a state of law. In the sphere of recognitional relations, the state is structured like a field where people can relate to each other through bonds based on equal rights and can be constituted as 'citizens'. The management of laws and justice, plus the fair distribution of common goods, become the cornerstones of state action which fosters the constitution of bonds of citizenship. The guarantee of the same access to goods, social justice, fair treatment and equal recognition despite their differences, enable people to be something broader than simply single elements, to be considered to all effects an integral part of the state. The redistribution of common goods is an essential part of the state's action and, indeed, it is one of the ways of recognizing each single self-consciousness by respecting its rights. Justice, law and redistribution are the glue (gluons) in the sphere of recognitional relations within the state. They keep the citizens united and make them feel equal in terms of their rights and duties.

By redistributing well-being through welfare systems, the state has the opportunity to make sure that the logic of simple merit owing to caste, status or wealth is mitigated, and it is able to fairly balance each person's growth opportunities. Hence, public social welfare is not to be considered a gratuitous activity of giving: it is not a gift. In public welfare the state does not give or behave as a philanthropic entity. Welfare is simply managing the redistribution of resources gathered through the tax system

and is an essential and constitutive part of the ethical and inescapable tasks of the state. By this means, states prevent groups of citizens from being progressively marginalized and left alone with no access to what are considered common goods, as could happen to destitute young people, the elderly, the ill or anyone in need. Without the redistribution of common goods such as education, health and protection of economic stability in old age, and without care services and the support of public welfare, a state would condemn its citizens to being unequal subjects and would abandon them to the laws of recognition that instead characterize the search for profit and labour dynamics, which operate through hierarchies and selection. This would happen at a very high price in terms of human suffering and in the certainty that a large percentage of the population would be bound to suffer disrespect and humiliation. Inauspicious results can be observed in societies lacking welfare, or with a meagre welfare system, which leave citizens' primary needs untended and at the mercy of market forces.

Economic achievement through competition

The third sphere in which recognitional relations develop is what Honneth calls 'achievement', which we have made correspond to the area of the economy and work. Honneth describes it as the sphere of collaborative relations, where the merit principle is at play.

In reality, the spheres of the economy, work, and today finance are characterized by the quest for individual and social well-being, for profit. We could call the subject that takes shape there the *homo oeconomicus*, who entertains recognitio-

nal relations based on legitimate selfish interest and productive exchange. The relations in this context are not always collaborative, unless the field of investigation is restricted to a small, like group of people. And the competitive relations existing towards the outside are often transferred inside it. Thus, it seems to us that it is more the dynamics of competitive rather than collaborative recognition that are at work in this sphere. The forces at play in the field of the economy are those which strive for competitive advantage, the maximization of profit and the extension of market share.

Even though competition is the supreme law of profit, the economic sphere acts as an area of aggregation and recognition, in the same way as generosity and the state do. In this case the social glue is need and self-interest, hence subjects are forced to acknowledge the others' right to take part in the economic game, in which they can exchange values, money, technology, innovations and workforces. In this context, whether they be individuals or companies, the subjects are recognized as holders of interest and producers of profit. Economic value underlies the dynamic of recognition, insofar as the recognized subjects are either producers of added value or the workforce available for others' profit. Value is therefore always what mediates recognition in the subjects that enter the economic relationship. The area of economic achievement is hence not sufficient, as we will see better later on, to guarantee the balanced development of subjects who recognize that they each have the same right to happiness and the common good.

The fraudulent cunning of reason

The international debate on rights to inclusion and civil participation has frequently highlighted the necessity of recognizing the other as the basis for the development of a democratic civil society. The dialectic of recognition within the three forms of objective reason has been developed in particular by neo-Hegelian philosophers, such as Habermas, Honneth and Taylor. These lines of thought have in part taken on Hegel's tripartite division of objective reason, adapting it each time to the needs of the contemporary focus. In part they have adopted the category of recognition as the dialectic movement to build self-consciousness. It is the ability to recognize the other within a dialogue that accepts the right to different points of view from the start, that establishes a dialectic and democratic rationality. For example, in *Between Naturalism and Religion* Habermas states that '[...]nterlocutors can achieve mutual understanding across the divides separating lifeworlds because, in presupposing a shared objective world, they orient themselves toward the claim to truth, that is, to the unconditional validity they claim when they make a statement.'¹² The movement for social inclusion would trip up owing to the subjects' lack of or incomplete recognition dynamic.

However, there is another critical point in the unfolding of self-consciousnesses, and it is situated after recognition. The single dialoguing subjects do not only mutually recognize each other, but are also included in higher objective systems, which they can only change to the tiniest extent. In the case of the economy, not only are we immersed in an intersubjective network of recognition, but we are also within an objective system mediated by money, evaluations and customs, rules, set values,

working relationships and pay. In other words, we lie within the objective reason of the economic system, whose language we speak and in turn we are spoken to, like subjective elements of a binding superstructure. Owing to its historical configuration in the figure of the economy and in current power relations, objective reason therefore acts as a transcendental aspiration of the dialoguing subject.

The same happens with the state. As citizens, we are not only within a network of recognitional relations, in which we recognize the other as having the same fundamental rights as ourselves. At the same time, we are within a system that transcends us and has the same tangibility and objective strength possessed by the economy in the previous example. It is the system of an objective reason, which we call state, and which through laws, customs, sentences, praxis, procedures and specific culture, guides how subjects interact.

What can and effectively does happen in societies today is that single individualization and the rational objectivity which should include it break down and clash, as do the subject and institution, and the binding transcendental structure and subject expressing his or her freedom of expression. Today, in the babel-like inequality of cultures and variety of conflicting interests, not only do individuals encounter difficulties in blending into the recognitional dialogue, but they also experience a contrast between objective reason and determined singularity. There not only exists a difficulty in recognition, but a misalignment with constituted reason also emerges. The difficulty in communicating and being recognized is matched and mirrored by the increasingly frequent impossibility of a 'gaze on a common objective world', not just because it has become inca-

pable of being common, but also because after repeated and recurrent political and economic crises its objectivity has become less and less rational and its transcendental scope must now be tightened.

The first to speak of the cunning of reason was indeed Hegel, to indicate the capacity of objective reason to use for its own ends the effort and dedication of subjects who autonomously pursue a specific end. Cunning means the ability to behave skillfully to achieve an end, but also the capacity to assimilate a range of efforts and to make them converge towards its own purposes. The cunning of reason could be the manifesto and root of all neo-liberalism, according to which single subjects are able to compose a common good while pursuing their personal interest, as their selfish interests are absorbed and recomposed within a higher objective reason. In the case of neo-liberalism, nevertheless, we must speak of a cunning in which the single people are convinced that they can make the course of objective rationality correspond with their own selfish interest, and that the former can also be 'reasonable' for others. Fatally, neo-liberalism thus results in the delirium of omnipotence, and selfish interests are projected as the ideal image of reference for an excluded collectivity. In light of these specifications, we can say that it is not only a form of disrespect which causes subjects to fail to integrate. Quite rightly the forms of humiliation, deprivation of the weaker brackets of the population's rights, repression of problems and social exclusion and the slowing down or prevention of economic emancipation largely present in contemporary societies must be traced back to this sphere too.

To these forms we must add others relating to conflict in terms of assimilating a particular subjectivity into the objective

and general rationality. Alongside the incapacity for horizontal dialogue we must place the fracture that single subjects experience when they are vertically assimilated into the higher reasons of the system in which they live.

We have to liken the crisis of a reason that has become fraudulently cunning to the unease of individuals who, used for higher, supra-subjective ends, witness the dissipation of their resources, see their capabilities trampled on, their sphere of action limited, their possibilities of expression reduced, their potentials confined within restricted and at times humiliating roles, their opportunities for evolution and learning wasted, and their possibilities to contribute to general improvement reduced. Since this unease belongs to the spheres of the objective rationality of both state and economy, we have to highlight how it transforms respectively into a lowering of the level of democracy and rights on one hand, and on the other into a deprivation of the personal potentials of the subjects absorbed in depressing roles and working environments. We by no means want to maintain that the subject is one hundred per cent right. On the contrary, the subject is by no means exempt from selfish narrow-mindedness in an era of individualistic fragmentation and the overlapping of desires and needs. However, we want to underline that it is in the friction between self-consciousness and objective reason that social pathologies appear more frequently, diminishing the ethical meanings of the image of common good and developing subjective morals linked to opportunism, defending power and splitting roles and behaviour.

Hence, the social disease affects the metabolism of reason. On one hand it reduces it to the process with which subjective individualities are absorbed and transformed into an objecti-

ve reason, which in turn becomes a binding and transcendental element of the expressions themselves. On the other hand, it breaks up and loses any objective reason in this era of the hypertrophy of the self. The symptoms are of poisoning. On one hand the spaces of harmonious interaction between diversities are reduced and no longer able to build higher schemes of aggregation, and on the other, reason, unable to evolve at the same rate as its subjects, crumbles. In other words: self-enclosed social and cultural nuclei are created and objective reason, incapable of understanding the new emerging aspirations, becomes sclerotic.

Tellingly, this is happening at the same time as the ethical dimension being played out in every human interrelation, in every economic and political deed, is being obscured. What is more, it is also happening just as generosity as the basis underlying every form of sociality and intelligence is being hidden.

1 Alain Caillé, 'Le tiers paradigme', introduction to *Anthropologie du don* (1997; Paris: Editions de la Découverte, 2007).

2 Ibid., 19, own translation.

3 See Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills. (1992; Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and *Given Time. 1, Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (1991; Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

4 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: philosophical essays*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (2005; Cambridge: Polity, c2008) : III.

5 Ibid.

6 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W.

Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (1820; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

7 Alain Caillé, *Don, intérêt et désintéressement – Bourdieu, Mauss, Platon et quelques autres* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005): 282-3, own translation.

8 Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?: a political-philosophical exchange*, trans. Joel Golb, James Ingram and Christiane Wilke (London: Verso, 2003): 138.

9 *Ibid.*, 139.

10 *Ibid.*, 184-5.

11 *Ibid.*, 186.

12 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 36.

4. THE CHEQUERED PATH OF IDENTITY

The city, formerly pleasure-loving, seemed to have shrunk into a mood of frigid ostensible morality, in which no one any longer trusted anyone else, although everyone, as best he might, went on doing what he had always done in the past; with many more precautions though, and amid greater difficulties.

Vassalli 1990, 26

Filming current reality

Let us imagine we have a video camera and, like a journalist engaged in investigative work, we are going round the streets of a city, entering offices, public places and shops, and little villages too, in order to gather information and sniff out details and particulars on some aspects of contemporary reality.

And there is an aspect that permeates our existences more than others, or rather, is at its basis. It is talked about a lot, but only in appearance, because the substance of the matter often remains hidden and not understood: though we do not realize it, because of the frenetic pace of our lives, out of habit, but maybe also out of fear, the more or less conscious will not to think, to let things go. We are talking about identity, that complex concept which refers to awareness of the self as an individual, but which cannot be separated from the relationship with the other. As Ruggiu writes, ‘the relationship between identity and difference is an absolutely central issue to the lives of pe-

oples and individuals [...]. Without identity, there is no union; but without differences, identity appears mute'.¹

What we are interested in here is to trace a sort of phenomenology of identity today, so as to understand not only how it is formed in itself, but above all the way it is constituted in relation to other identities, while grasping those dynamics new to the contemporary age.

An age in which the great financial crisis that exploded in 2007 has evidently highlighted mechanisms making subjects increasingly disoriented in the present state of things, to use Recalcati's words 'adrift, empty, without any ideal reference points, trapped in conformist identities, prisoners of their practices of pleasure where the Other is absent; [in] liquid bonds, shattered by the idolatrous power of the object of pleasure'.²

'Shrivelled', split identities, in a context where the economy is based on ostentation, possession, success, where a person's value is established on the basis of his or her earnings. While, on the other hand, unemployment is rife. Let us think of those young people who have finished secondary school or university and cannot find a job, however hard they try: how can they build their identity, especially in relation to those in employment? How much of themselves do they have to renounce to get a job? Let us think of all those who are exploited and underpaid: in a society in which identity is based on power, on the segregation of roles rather than on participation, how many boundaries and spaces of exclusion is it possible to create?

An accurate description of contemporary identity is drawn by Massimo De Carolis, who pinpoints the 'anthropological paradox' as the cause of many contemporary psychic pathologies. He describes it as 'a mix of two antithetical and yet inseparable

drives: to expose ourselves to the endless contingency that our biological condition gives us access to [...]; and, vice versa, to protect ourselves from the uncertainty and danger connected to this unlimited contingency, by carving out a defined sphere of norms and symbolic values'.³

In this context, the contemporary trait that explains a lot of the disorders widespread in today's society is the 'tendency to isolate and separate the virtually conflictual moments of the psychic experience from one another, so as to give rise to what Freud defined as a *Spaltung*, a split that crosses the whole psyche from top to bottom'.⁴

Identity based on an individualism taken to excess, on a meritocracy taken from the American model, but then distorted, can no longer work. And the financial crisis is showing quite how impossible it is. We need new forms of identity-building. People are looking for something more. But, in order to understand what these new forms can consist of, first of all it is useful to examine the main differences between what can be defined as the 'modern' identity and the identity that started to be constituted in the second half of the twentieth century.

Identity in crisis

Modern culture is the offspring of a society radically transformed by new technologies which are taking over. Humanism and the Renaissance tried to interpret the changes in social and political structure philosophically, asserting a new image of man more in line with the demands of a life that had become active and industrious, in the quest for gain.

The idea that emerged in the modern era of happiness as the

harmonious and complete accomplishment of human possibilities led to full recognition of the value of money, considered an indispensable element for life. 'Does postmodernism,' Harvey wonders, 'signal a reinterpretation or reinforcement of the role of money as *the* proper object of desire? [...] Postmodern concerns for the signifier rather than the signified, the medium (money) rather than the message (social labour), the emphasis on fiction rather than function, on signs rather than things, on aesthetics rather than ethics, suggest a reinforcement rather than a transformation of the role of money'.⁵ And indeed the latter is one of the factors which, in the current circumstances, most influences the building of personal identity, but also personal identity in relation to other identities.

Some of the tensions described by David Harvey as typical of modernity and of an identity 'between internationalism and nationalism, between globalism and parochialist ethnocentrism, between universalism and class privileges'⁶ have not been resolved today and continue to present dilemmas of no little concern. The current situation, which Harvey calls postmodernist, 'is dominated by fiction, fantasy, the immaterial (particularly of money), fictitious capital, images, ephemerality, chance, and flexibility in production techniques, labour markets and consumption niches; yet it also embodies strong commitments to Being and place, a penchant for charismatic politics, concerns for ontology, and the stable institutions favoured by neo-conservatism.'⁷ This in a context in which differences and identity, now much more frequently than the first half of the last century, are multiplying irreversibly and at different levels.

Suffice it to think of the two main and hitherto never so contrasting traits that characterize the human condition: what De

Carolis defines as the 'drive to open' and the 'drive to protect', 'two basic, correlated and antithetical drives', the first 'which strives to explore and experience every possible worldly dimension', the second 'to carve out a world in the world, to experience a niche'.⁸ Looking at the day-to-day life around ourselves, we can already find some examples of this split: let us think of a working environment, where on one hand they try to encourage teamwork to achieve the goals, but on the other hand individualism and competition lead us to try to get to the top even to the detriment of others. And at the basis a contradiction that desires the presence of the Other, but at the same time rejects it, in which the frenetic consumption of goods and objects takes on the appearance, as Recalcati well puts it, of an 'imperative requirement to obtain an enjoyment without passing through the Other'.⁹

The modern era did not fail to highlight contradictions but it was still possible to 'pigeonhole' things in some kind of general theory. And if, to take up Massimo De Carolis' discourse, conflicts were 'horizontal', that is, they saw a separation between 'One against the many, the Self against the drives of partial instincts', in the contemporary world the space left to vertical splits, 'which isolate and separate a plurality of circumscribed spaces [...] has led to a parallel existence' within a 'world of niches', of 'micro-worlds'¹⁰ which often close in on themselves, seeing the outside as a threat expressed towards identity itself. It is not just the identity of the current world that is in crisis, but the wholly contemporary tendency to clearly separate individual psychic experience and the social environment. A tendency that, moreover, materializes as a push to separate individual identity from others' identities. This division is proving not

to work and is lacking in grounds. Generosity, the gift and imagination could somehow balance out the psychotic mechanisms so that they do not become so, by structuring a new sense and relationship which were not there before.

In the beginning there were Two. Identity in otherness

'Identity' means many things: feelings of self-esteem and familiarity, delimitation with respect to others and against outsiders, involvement in one's own and in the obvious. For us 'identity' means a common ground on which our thinking, feeling and acting are oriented, and for each one of us a measurement within which our credibility and reliability can be developed and presented. Lastly, symbolic worlds are also part of 'identity': worlds of images and language, actions and perceptions, in which we grow and live and in which, equally importantly, we can also die.¹¹

This reflection by Schwemmer, in an analysis that attempts to give a definition of identity, is enlightening. To speak of identity is also to refer to concepts such as closedness, harmony, conclusion and coherence. As seen previously, while the first of these concepts is still applicable to contemporary identity, the others are instead seeing their general importance diminish, not just from the viewpoint of forming the individual's core identity, but also in relation to other identities.

A lot also depends on the culture one belongs to, which, however, must not be thought of as a rigid system that envelops individuals and makes them act in an undifferentiated way. Indeed, to a large extent it is made up of aspects carried out rather than spoken, practices that often cannot be formalized, ways of

doing things that may not even be conscious. It is in this context of interrelation that social identity takes shape, 'linked to processes of social categorization, of representing the environment according to groupings of objects, people and events. These notions respond to the subject's need to single out differences and similarities [...]. Social identity is inherent in the individual's awareness of belonging to specific groups, thanks to which he assumes some traits that contribute to his self-representation'.¹²

Identity is a way of drawing boundaries and 'securing' differences. Indeed, identity also inevitably means difference: between my own and others' being, and the world around me; between the group I belong to and social groupings I am not part of. It is no coincidence that all cultures in different eras have formulated a definition of 'alien', 'different': 'Each person, individual, community, social body, or state identity is constituted by its differing from others. Hence, in theory and practice, they have to renounce their own presumed self-sufficiency, their assumption of being the paradigm of every difference: the Greek with regard to the barbarian, the European with regard to the inhabitant of other continents, the Western Christian with regard to other cultures and religious experiences'.¹³

Giving, inasmuch as it is a manner of recognition, works in this sense too and is testimony to these processes. Subjects' choice to give to is somehow, one might even say, politics: in effect we are not generous with everyone and we do not give to everyone.

Exchanges always take place between different entities and thus establish what can be defined as 'the alterity of the self'. Difference makes alterity emerge, but maintains individuality.

This principle had been identified by Simmel when he based his philosophy on a duality made from two terms: *Wechselwirkung*, composed of '*Wirkung*' ('effect') and '*Wechsel*' ('change'), leading to the translation 'interaction' or reciprocity, and *Vergesellschaftung*, which can be translated as 'sociation' or 'socialization'. But the key point lies precisely in the concept of '*Wechsel*', which gives the sense of alternation, of a thought no longer conceived of as single, but dual, because it is relational. In the beginning, therefore, there were 'Two', which supposes not just Individuality but also Otherness.¹⁴

Thus far everything seems apparently simple. However, this does not explain the great conflicts that have characterized and continue to characterize human relations. Indeed, if we are to think of difference, we become aware both that the Self, who is the same as ourselves, whom we thought we could see in the other, may even be a projection of our own selves, and therefore a sort of appropriation and subjugation. By building ourselves we are also distancing ourselves from the other, placing a boundary which, even if dynamic and changeable, nevertheless creates separation and closedness. The complexity lies in finding a balance, understanding how and how much to govern conflicts and tensions so as not to overstep certain thresholds, both in terms of losing one's identity and completely excluding the presence of others.

Today it is harder than ever to maintain this balance, so much so that it is becoming increasingly complex to unambiguously distinguish 'friend' from 'enemy', what we want to let into our horizon and what we prefer to leave outside. By reinforcing the identical, identity is emptied and transformed into paranoia. But in a society with countless, at times even too many

different stimuli, to remain sane we may come to consciously separate our personal identity from the identity on display to the outside. Bottani even goes so far as to claim that while the Western concept of mental health states that ‘it is desirable that there is congruence between your self-consciousness and your natural being’, in some cases that same sanity ‘is prompted by consciously separating these two things’.

Therefore, it is a recital of identity. ‘We all perform a series of roles, which we come to represent more or less well in the short or long recital which is our lives. [...]. But, with every person we happen to know, we often perform the widest array of roles in completely different ways. All of these roles are linked to a moment of pretence.’¹⁵

The following questions arise: is it inevitable ‘to lose ourselves’? And is the only solution in order not to do so to divide our existence into watertight compartments? Is it this division that is creating the identity crisis? Is there another way out? Could there be a new way of building identity that is more reliable and somehow more democratic? Let us look at how the two spheres of objective rationality – economy and state – the two spheres that come to people’s conscious attention day in, day out, ‘behave’.

The gap between identity and freedom in the economy and the market

The market and relationships of power and economic exchange are some of the contexts that most influence identity-building. At the present moment, we are practically immersed in these contexts. And money is one of the elements that best

represents some of the strife affecting identity that has intensified between modernity and the contemporary era. According to Simmel, while forms of exchange such as giving bring about subordination and personal dependency, money enables these to dissolve, allowing subjects' autonomy to emerge in the face of tying bonds. The bond forged by a personal service is dissolved by a pure relationship of exchange: in place of the position that we should have occupied by birth, money provides a free position within the social hierarchy. The subordination is no longer personal, workers limit themselves to providing a particular, precise service that is established through a money equivalent. Nevertheless, in contrast, owing to the pervasive nature of monetary dynamics, individuals are deprived of the communities which previously united social, religious, cultural and political aspects of their lives.

Money is the symbol of modernity, since it covers two functions: it represents the relationships between exterior phenomena relating to economic action, and expresses the deepest meanings at the basis of individual and collective action. But, according to the German thinker, money is also the cause of the growing depersonalization of the emotional, social, relational and sentimental value of objects and it represents the triumph of impersonality in the modern age. Nevertheless, it is instead extraneous to true antagonism and objective as it lies beyond opposing lines while at the same time being at the service of both.

Owing to the omnipresence of monetary mechanisms, according to Simmel modern man becomes '*blasé*', namely disenchanted, disillusioned and uninspired, since he reduces qualitative to quantitative distinctions, stripping objects of their

individuality and colours. Hence all values are debased, evened out, not just axiologically but also ontologically, in an attitude of absolute indifference towards differences. The excessive stimulation that individuals living in modern metropolises are subject to leads them to lose the capacity to distinguish, to discern. The consequence of this attitude is the 'desire for stimuli for their own sake'.¹⁶

The great financial crisis has nevertheless cast light on a process that is getting worse and worse, that is, the gap between the wealthy, who are becoming more and more so, and the poor who are getting poorer and poorer. A gap that not only concerns the area of economic possession, but also identity. Without wanting to go to extremes, it would not be wholly incorrect to say that the history of the ways and forms of money management is also the history of the relationship between the dominators and the dominated.¹⁷ To use Bruno Accarino's words, the novelty offered by money is that it 'radicalizes the principle of indetermination. To those who possess money, the community ensures the possession not just of money, but of many things [...] given the nature of money, they are therefore guaranteed the possibility of appropriating themselves of anything'.¹⁸ The power of money lies in the oscillation between 'powers' and 'possibilities', between the origin of power relations and the capacity to obtain everything.

Then there is another issue to deal with: in modernity, one of the effects produced by the monetary economy consisted of making being and having, the underlying and the acquisitive identity, independent from each other. Today this is no longer true as can be seen in those very practices of consumer society in which 'it is the object that shows what the subject is missing

and not what the subject is lacking that guides the subject towards the object, in the way of the metonymy of desire.¹⁹ And today, money's role within personal relations is less able than ever to take on an exclusively objective nature, so much so that money in itself, as shown by the world of finance, assumes value regardless of the things that are bought with it.

Simmel had already understood this: money transforms from 'substance' into 'function' and from 'means' into 'end', acquiring value and meaning for its own sake. These dynamics are highlighted by the dematerialization of exchange, whose value seems to be exhausted in the transaction in itself. There has been a progressive route to 'dematerialization': at the start there was bartering and primitive currencies; then the first coins; a further passage was towards paper money and banknotes, which then evolved into even more modern systems like cash cards. Instead, the present era is that of financialized money, in other words money that operates on itself and buys other money. As Jean Baudrillard would say, the revolution that put an end to the classical theory of value has been prompted by the disjointedness between use value and exchange value, which means that 'referential value is annihilated, giving the structural play of value the upper hand'.²⁰ This means that the signs weave relations with each other without encountering anything real. The term 'simulacrum' indicates precisely these games between signs.

This is without doubt true if we consider the world of finance. Instead, the same cannot be said if we look at everyday reality: were the nature of the monetary exchange wholly self-referential, this would not explain why objects assume the importance that they do today. An importance so great that 'the object

of pleasure casts its shadow on desire. The objectivity of things imposes itself wordlessly on man, transforming the world into a great container of things that can be assigned a *value*.²¹

The consequences for identity-building are grave: in the contemporary age the much praised and desired subjective freedom obtained in the modern era – at the same time also a freedom of identity and being able to decide our own ‘destiny’ – has turned into the contrary. Thanks to monetary mechanisms, the ambition for greater personal freedom has also been disappearing: the fact that money continues to be the metaphor for existence, power and competition makes it understandable how, in the broad mentality, those who possess more objects and more money are worth and can obtain more. Obtain not just from a material point of view, but also in terms of social consideration, esteem, respect and even affection.

Indeed, despite being increasingly dematerialized, money is what conveys the system of personal and collective values, it exists in a relationship in which it attests to an identity, to self-identification.

In contemporary society, possessing money is strongly connected to feelings of security, trust and self-esteem. The possibility of obtaining friendships, prestige and power through money is seen in a negative light. Nevertheless, it is a frequent practice and having money is very commonly thought of as a source and synonym of success, above all in relation to social bonds and belonging. Seen from this perspective, possessing money helps to obtain greater consideration within a community and enables people to assert themselves over others. In terms of the dynamics of social identity-building, money is the symbol of that which unites people, but a lot more often it is

what divides them and creates conflicts and splits.

Therefore, it is undeniable that, owing to its essence, economic exchange, albeit a 'simulacrum' as defined by Baudrillard, cannot exclude social relations, or forms of social power. Furthermore, instead of dynamics of equivalence, it is increasingly linked to mechanisms of commutation. If exchange were completely self-referential, it would not be possible to explain the unconscious, emotional, affective and irrational effects of human behaviour, in the same way as it would not be comprehensible to state that money has become a constitutive element of personal and social identity. It is a metaphor, analogy, it does not refer to anything else, or rather, it refers to struggle, to power itself, but this is exactly why it refers to the social relationship. However, to what type of relationship remains to be understood.

Today Simmel's assertion that 'money is the expression and the agent of the relationship that makes the satisfaction of one person always mutually dependent upon another person'²² is not valid at all, or at least only to a small extent. Today people have increasingly become solitary consumers, whose aim is to satisfy personal needs. The recession, which has brought the less well-off to their knees and is making the middle class disappear, also shows how it is becoming more and more difficult to satisfy even primary needs. Economic difficulties, but above all a widespread mentality based on monetary mechanisms, leave little room for a generous form of identity, outside calculating profit and interest, and inside the boundaries of freedom, which, as we have seen, in the economic logic only appears to exist.

An identity broken but 'useful' for the state

The expansion of the capitalist economy first of all, and then of finance, has completely changed lifestyles, little by little deconstructing the fabrics of traditions and habits which used to dominate and helped to create inclusion and fix the boundaries of each local culture.

Progressively, the context of the public dimension has also been changing. Or rather, disintegrating. The retreat into the individual and subjective sphere has much wider consequences and hides another side of the coin. Indeed, 'insofar as the retreat of the public sphere may appear as a private and subjective choice, this set of examples allows us to see how far the dissociative attitude, once widespread, is set to become the target of social mechanisms expressly aimed at exploiting its commercial, cultural and political potential in the most disparate forms.'²³ Economic organizations, institutions, but also administration and state end up permeating local relations, likening them to those spheres of objective rationality that today are based on and push towards extreme individualism, the compulsive satisfaction of consumer needs, the realization of personal inspirations and ambitions to the detriment of the Other, and competition.

An inclusive and generous identity is therefore relegated to the sphere of the affections and closest relationships. The challenging step we have to make in the current age is to guarantee a balance, so that subjects can make their contribution without this leading to the destruction of social existence and its ethical basis. A challenge that surely concerns not just the contemporary world but has always existed. The difference is that today the increase in complexity, interdependence and divisions makes achieving this balance a more urgent need. What point is

the current state organization at, in Italy and elsewhere, in this regard? The presence of distributive injustices (asymmetrical welfare, ignored brackets of the population and social needs) and injustices of a recognitional kind (segregation, exclusion, non-recognition of rights) – which, moreover, we have testified to here with real facts – show that there is still a long way to go, that the state has in part failed in fulfilling its tasks, and that a leap needs to be made beyond the logics producing and at the basis of the inequalities.

This leap consists of ‘safeguarding both the autonomy of every single cultural niche as well as their reciprocal transitivity; ensuring each segment the same dignity and, at the same time, the right for individuals to potentially dissociate themselves from any collective belonging: at this point, not only does the coherence of the pluralist project but the future of politics in general depend on the possibility of making these ambitions co-exist without removing their internal tension.’ De Carolis also wonders if the conditions might appear ‘for a different public sphere, in which a fluid and creative network of distinctions and differences to a large extent takes on the burden of political decision-making [...]. If it is in these terms that the humankind of the present is driven to measure up to the anthropological paradox, it can be presumed that only a psychic identity that has learnt to live with its possible split forms can offer a valuable contribution to this challenge.’²⁴

But we have to go further and consider some additional factors: first of all, the fact that the current state is profoundly informed by increasingly pervasive financial dynamics. The state machinery continues to work even on the basis of deficits, and the state creates money ‘from nothing’ by increasing priva-

te profits through financialization and no longer by sharing social wealth, forgetting what is instead the state's primary task, namely the redistribution of resources.

To change the current situation, psychic identities that can live with the split are not enough. What would be needed is a cultural revolution and a change in power relations that affect all the spheres of existence, in the field of local relations, but even more at the collective level, up to the state structures. No small change, seeing that it would have to happen in a context in which, as Luciano Gallino states, 'the austerity policies introduced by the EU governments, including in Italy, are increasingly taking on the appearance of a class struggle led by the economic and political forces in power against those who are excluded from power'. But also because 'the paradox lies in the fact that on one hand we have the crisis in state finances, with the increase [...] in public debt; on the other [...] the European countries [...] have come to the conclusion that the best way to cure its finances consists of cutting spending on the various components of the social state.'²⁵

The consequence of a mentality oriented exclusively towards enhancing economic and political power is on one hand that it highlights market-oriented and political forms of institutionalized social relations to the detriment of generosity and, on the other hand, the formation of repressed, unsatisfied 'half' identities, incapable of including the Other.

Generous identities and openness to novelty

In social psychology, generosity and altruism are traced back to various factors, the first of which is internalizing norms

or collective standards through social learning. These same norms 'can combine according to different individual situations, to constitute personal norms giving the subjective perception of the sense of obligation to act in a prosocial manner'.²⁶

The reason for these reflections does not spring from a desire to make a moral evaluation of altruistic and generous behaviour or from a utopian desire to achieve an altruistic and solidaristic society. Instead, it stems from an attempt to understand the origin of a type of generous identity, and from the firm awareness, accentuated by the economic crisis which began in 2007, that individualism can no longer hold up or work. We have got to the point where, if we separate any further, we will all 'die' and 'drown'.

Generosity is quite void of contents. When it becomes concrete, it makes a choice and hence an identity too. The central issue is to understand how a generous identity can guarantee openness to novelty and if it also has greater possibilities of guaranteeing a more mature democracy.

Unlike what happens in economic exchange, in social exchange and interpersonal relations it is difficult to evaluate precisely what is or will be the subject of interaction. Furthermore, what commitment every individual will make within the relationship cannot be stipulated beforehand and there exists no manner of formal recourse against potential exploiters. This is where not only the unknown elements of the gift and the fact that it is 'a leap in the dark' originate from, but also its openness to freedom and creativity. Let us remember: to speak of gratuitousness in the gift does not necessarily mean a lack of restitution, but rather underlines the fact that, in this case, what circulates does not correspond to the rules of mercantile equi-

valence. By introducing the concept of 'generous identity' we can highlight that the forms which make generosity part of their institutional aspects are also democratic.

According to David Harvey 'ideological and political hegemony in any society depends on an ability to control the material context of personal and social experience. For this reason, the materializations and meanings given to money, time, and space have more than a little significance for the maintenance of political power.'²⁷ It is certainly no coincidence that the increasing importance of money in social relations has transformed the quality of time and space. One of the causes of the passage to contemporary society was the increased compression of space and time, which, beginning in the modern era, was taken to its extreme consequences with the materialization of a 'throw-away' society.

It is owing to the increasing complexity at all levels that the interruption of the time dimension, that is, the crisis of the idea that the time of existence is oriented and directed towards a mission to be fulfilled, is reflected in personal lives. This growing fragmentation also exercises its influence on the individual lives of each subject, on everyday life, and on the perception that every individual acquires of his or her own personal and social identity.

In a context like this, in terms of visibility, a generous identity without doubt ends up in the background. Nevertheless, even when the instantaneous, simultaneous and contingent dimensions, and the eternal timelessness and emptiness of the present prevail, individuals can perceive the contraction of space and time as a possibility, as a subjective and interpersonal dimension implying what can really be achieved. Doubtless, this is a signal

that enables the need to emerge for different forms of identity to those created within an economic and political space.

It cannot be asserted that contemporary reality has completely wiped out the memory of the past: rather than forgetting it or seeing it as a homogeneous and necessary course, today we can perceive it as a terrain full of potential. The 'time of life' which is separated into 'rhythm' and real and proper 'time' (in the sense of speed) is constituted by the 'quality', 'quantity' and 'heterogeneity' of impressions.²⁸ Money can alter the time of social life by acting on these three aspects. Time appears quicker to us as we are receiving a greater number of more differentiated, more influential impressions, in one particular unit of time compared to another. As far as the spatial dimension is concerned, 'owing to the abstractness of its form, money has no definite relationship to space: it can exercise its effects upon the most remote areas [...]; on the other hand, it also enables the largest amounts of value to be condensed into the most minute form.'²⁹ This means that money has the capacity to give rise to two contrary processes, a 'centripetal process of concentration', like in the case of the Stock Exchange, and a 'centrifugal process of spatial expansion',³⁰ thanks to which social networks and bonds are created between previously isolated subjects. But the resulting identity is acquisitive. This is also shown by finance, which, however, always lets the contrary aspect emerge: the greater the quantity transferred to a particular point, the more the value.

Godbout underlines that to give is to understand the thickness of the bonds and their historic import. If this is true, the generous identity could therefore be different thanks to remembering the social relationship and the trace left by the pre-

vious gift. As a result, generosity could be reappraised, not as a simple value to moralistically insert among the virtues, but also as openness to intersubjectivity which does not exclude ‘the very activation of operations which temporalize by detemporalizing: they replace the transitory thing with the lasting name, transient craving with the desire embodied in the eternal, insignificant instability of the isolated self with the stable risk of nothing.’³¹

The conflict between subject and object was already present in modernity and it has not been resolved in the contemporary age. Instead it is starting to be accompanied by more accentuated forms of conflict between subjects. So, unresolved tensions are becoming more complex, with the involvement of an increasing number of correlated dynamics. At the same time, the growing importance of symbolization implies that the different degrees of socialization within which alliance and competition mechanisms are fulfilled are more and more interdependent and linked to the socio-symbolic totality that they make up and of which they are part. What new horizons can open up?

1 Luigi Ruggiu and Francesco Mora, eds, *Identità differenze conflitti* (Milan: Mimesis La scala e l’album, 2007): 14, own translation.

2 Massimo Recalcati, *L’uomo senza inconscio. Figure della nuova clinica psicoanalitica* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 2010): x-xi, own translation.

3 Massimo De Carolis, *Il paradosso antropologico. Nicchie, micromondi e dissociazione psichica* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2008): 8, own translation.

4 Ibid., 13.

5 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (1990; Oxford: Blackwell, repr. 2008): 101-2.

6 Ibid., 24-5.

7 Ibid., 339.

8 De Carolis, *Il paradosso antropologico*, 28, own translation.

9 Recalcati, *L'uomo senza inconscio*, xi, own translation.

10 De Carolis, *Il paradosso antropologico*, 52-3, own translation.

11 Oswald Schwemmer, 'Il proprio e l'estraneo. Sul rafforzamento culturale di identità e differenza', in Ruggiu and Mora, *Identità, differenze, conflitti*, pp. 341-2, own translation.

12 Adriano Zamperini and Ines Testoni, *Psicologia sociale* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002): 147, own translation.

13 Mario Ruggenini, 'La verità in questione. Identità differenza conflitti', in Ruggiu and Mora, *Identità, differenza, conflitti*, 28, own translation.

14 Francesco Mora, *Principio Reciprocità. Filosofia e contemporaneità di Georg Simmel* (Venice: Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina Spa, 2005).

15 Livio Bottani, 'La recita dell'identità', in Ruggiu and Mora, *Identità, differenze conflitti*, 381, own translation.

16 Ibid., 372, own translation.

17 The power to make oneself obeyed is at the origin of the monetary sign too. An authority is transmitted (*credita*) to those subordinated to it, who are then able to make themselves obeyed in turn.

18 Bruno Accarino, *La democrazia insicura. Etica e politica in Georg Simmel* (Naples: Guida Editori, 1982): 64, own translation.

19 Recalcati, *L'uomo senza inconscio*, 283, own translation.

20 Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (1976; London: Sage, 1993): 6.

21 Recalcati, *L'uomo senza inconscio*, 325, own translation, own italics.

22 Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (1900; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978): 156.

23 De Carolis, *Il paradosso antropologico*, PAGINA, own translation.

24 Ibid., 178-9, own translation.

25 Luciano Gallino, *La lotta di classe dopo la lotta di classe*, interview by Paola Borgna (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2012): 129, own translation.

26 Zamperini and Testoni, *Psicologia sociale*, own translation.

27 Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 226-7.

28 Birgitta Nedelmann, 'Accelerazione della vita moderna ed Erleben', *aut aut* 257 (September-October 1993): 120-8.

29 Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, 504.

30 Nedelmann, 'Accelerazione della vita moderna ed Erleben'.

31 Luigi Ruggiu and Italo Testa, eds, *Hegel contemporaneo. La ricezione americana di Hegel a confronto con la tradizione europea* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2003): 596, own translation.

5. PRIVATE SUFFERING OR SOCIAL STUPIDITY?

*... I judge and believe that many sufferings
could have been avoided with sharper intelligence,
a firmer will, loftier disinterest,
greater social spirit and fewer ivory towers.*

Carlo Emilio Gadda

The eclipse of generosity

What has become of generosity today? It seems to have disappeared off the public and media radar and from the list of values deemed essential for success. If the newspapers happen to write about generosity, they only do so in connection to the usual star turns, publicizing the philanthropic action of the latest US billionaire, or in the columns reserved for good initiatives. Instead, in Italy the numerous actions and important social and cultural projects march ahead in silence. It is enough for the charitable action to come from some VIP or other to make for a good show and philanthropy. The system only works when there is a juicy story to tell or a good-looking star. And so philanthropy, which is neither juicy nor good-looking, ends up vanishing. Unless there is some big figure from the world of finance speaking about it, or some hapless footballer who has revealed his generous streak, within this gadget-oriented culture, philanthropy is mainly seen as something more, a precious ornament of the rich, an embellishment of successful conscien-

ces who want to feel good, a 'new age' behaviour. Instead, the meanings of philanthropy, the gift as social glue, generosity as the foundation of society, are submerged, receding before the media violence of the prevailing political, economic and financial paradigms. In the public debate hardly any importance is given to the real actions of philanthropy and its evolution and progress. So why is the dimension of individual and organized generosity disappearing?

If we observe the present world carefully, generosity has not disappeared, and the gift is anything but a rare phenomenon. Rather we could say that it provides the foundation for society and human relations at all levels more than mainstream narration would account for. We can assert that the gift has not disappeared, but mainly pervades the subjective area of human relations. At the institutionalized level, it involves what is all in all still a neglected area, namely organized philanthropy, donations, crowdfunding and fundraising, volunteering and non-profit activities, while at the individual level it is omnipresent in the multiple human relations of recognition and gratitude that take shape each day.

A first and main cause of generosity's lack of visibility can be put down to the strong prevalence of institutionalized forms of social relations, which can be traced back to those areas of politics and the economy that predominate over the area of generosity. At the cultural, educational and mediatic level, it is precisely the topics of state, economy and finance that come to conscious attention, much more than generosity does. State and economy are therefore the two spheres in which an ethos unfolds in a widespread and pervasive manner, in an objective and tangible form, in debates, talk shows, examples and ac-

tions. Even though the expressions of all three spheres – generosity, state and economy – can be defined as tangible, there is a fundamental difference between them. While state and economy make up the spheres of objective rationality, the area of the gift belongs more to the sphere of subjective, interpersonal relations. In a certain sense, state and economy are those dimensions into which subjects are absorbed and used in their relations with the law, utility and interest. State and economy symbolize the field of cunning with which objective social reason draws the single person's interest to itself and uses it for its own ends, while the gift is situated on the side of the subject first of all, outside the calculation of profit and self-interest and in the sphere of freedom. Since the gift is often single, secret, personal and complex, it is difficult to put a finger on. Even though it is omnipresent, it is also free and to a certain extent irrational, not very suited to institutionalization.

A second cause of its lack of visibility is linked to the dominant cultural path that has been followed from Hegel to the present day. The Hegelian movement of recognizing the other is symptomatically prompted by a dispute or fight, however. It is a snarling and inimical recognition. It is a life and death struggle. The incipit of all solidaristic feeling, the initiation and consolidation of what should be a society of self-consciousnesses that recognize each other, takes place in conflict and opposition. The solidarity, cohesion and inclusion of consciousnesses, the flowing of consciousnesses into a common good happens thanks to the conflict and dissent that places them against each other. Naturally, the philosophical move is not without practical consequences.

So, as Plautus said (*Asinaria*, II, 4, vv. 495-96), *lupus est homo*

hominis, and it is definitely not generosity that founds the society of civil living as expressed in the Hegelian scheme inherited by a large part of the successive cultural thought. If competition, antithesis, conflict, polemic and war generate self-consciousnesses, this is true above all for the winning, dominating, violent or domineering ones: nevertheless, it remains incomprehensible how a self-consciousness can come to develop through fear and submission.

The engine of self-consciousness cannot be made out in the Hegelian system. What is more, the dialectic movement has something mechanical and forced about it: its reason and propulsive drive to evolve cannot be understood, but the clanking of coercive and inhuman power can be heard. Within this interpretive scheme, it comes as no surprise that subjective interest prevails over the generous instinct. A large number of the cultural approaches of the twentieth century have been marked by the overvaluation of an objective reason outside the subject, above the single person's needs, an abstract, all-inclusive, omnipotent reason ultimately behind every decision affecting the single person.

Academically speaking, none of this might even have any consequences, were it not that when we speak of self-consciousness we have to mean something that touches us from very close by: us, in the flesh and blood, as subjects interacting in the ethical spheres of the state, economy and love, where we take the shape of self-consciousnesses that mutually recognize each other. Furthermore, the cultural scheme defining self-consciousness on the basis of struggle and submission gives rise to a paradigm that sees submitting to the forms of constituted rationality as the only way of evolving, to the disparagement of

generosity and creativity. In reality, as already shown, the intent is fraudulent, the aim to stabilize the status quo and legitimize the existent forms of rationality and power. The dialectic of self-consciousness thus develops by absorbing the subject's vital energies into an extraneous and transcendental reason. This way of seeing things formed the basis of the philosophies of sacrifice as well as those which subject the single person's interest to the collective good, whether it be religious or political, right-wing or left-wing.

The institutionalized figures of *Sittlichkeit* – love, state, economy and civil society as a whole – should place a lot of attention on making sure that institutionalized reason is sufficiently flexible and inclusive to allow subjects to freely contribute with creativity and generosity to building the common good and to promote changes in objective reason without destroying the ethical basis of social existence.

Naturally, it is a question of the difficult balance between constructive and destructive options within society and at the same time the closedness or openness of reason. Since we deem generosity to assume its objective rational substance in the form of philanthropy – in its general meaning of a positive disposition towards humankind – and to take shape in the various volunteer, charity and non-profit institutions, we must consider its institutionalized forms on a level with the forms of state and economy, and compare them. Hence, it will be useful to see how these three areas – state, economy and philanthropy – are made up, support themselves and compare as autonomous and self-coherent spheres.

Bubbles of sense

The person who has most clearly and thoroughly observed the criticalities of contemporary reason in those points of contact and contrast between social phenomena and dynamics of the subject is Massimo De Carolis. The so-to-speak hot point sparking friction between the zone of reason and the multi-form zone of self-consciousness seems to lie in those very elements of contact between the 'social' and the 'subjective'. The point where subject and society graft together creates not just the greatest tensions but also the most promising opportunities for evolution to emerge. The subject is the bearer of desires, instinctual drives, specific interests, original peculiarities, deviations and critical dynamics. Society is the bearer of rationality, social organization, control requirements, universality, power and objectivity. It is in the confrontation between social and subjective that the main dynamics of adaptation, friction, criticism, assimilation and suffering take place.

And naturally under accusation once again is that cunningness of reason which seemed to resolve matters for Hegel. It is here that the upheavals take place in culture, values and society, and it is here that the most painful friction arises. While examining the cyclical spread of mental illnesses throughout history, De Carolis comes up with the hypothesis that the insurgence of these anomalies 'suggests a direct bond between the diffusion of the pathology and a particular network of social and communicative contingencies'.¹

In examining the characteristic traits of modern civilization, De Carolis underlines how on one hand there is the idea of a hierarchical relationship of subordination and conflict between the symbolic and the instinctual levels; and on the other how

the *law* is the primary hinge between the subjective and the social dimensions. On one hand, individual subjects find themselves living and working within social structures, economic rules, market laws and employment contracts that appear binding and insurmountable. On the other hand, in the last decades of the twentieth century, lines of thought emerged that gave cognitive primacy to the subject's desire and capacity to interpret the world. Objective reason is thus moulded into the transcendental and constrictive structure of the horizon of sense permitted to self-consciousnesses, although in actual fact it is simply the product of their formation and interaction. As a result, social systems have a capacity for self-production as well as their very own logic, 'with respect to which, the fact that their reproduction is entrusted to the words and actions of human beings, the bearers of a particular psychology, is a marginal if not wholly irrelevant detail'.²

Societies, cultures, and even everyday and peripheral, administrative and habitual praxes tend to create coherent and closed paradigms and to encourage standardization with them. That is, particular architectures of sense are formed, reasonable constellations that support themselves and assimilate the particular subjects to whom they grant sense, bubbles within which individuals reason, act, build relations and structure consolidated habits. We can call them 'bubbles' to all effects, both owing to the closed circular shape that they tend to form and the fragility and transience of the symbolic material they are made of. And all of this even though these bubbles of sense force common sense and compel single consciousnesses, since the objective reason that develops in them is made up by symbolic elements but also by relations of force and power.

If we delve further into the actual metabolism of cunning and into how reason absorbs self-consciousnesses and assimilates them into its law, we can make out some of the bubbles of sense's distinctive characteristics:

a) first of all the bubble shape tends to be closed. The bubble expands, stabilizes and can collapse or burst, but it always shows a definite tendency to close. This closedness is obtained by splitting and segregating the internal from the external reality, and through the process of creating rational internal coherences.

b) The quest for internal coherence means that the bubble is more likely to include what is homogeneous and exclude what is not and could threaten its survival. The bubble of sense continually needs to create coherence and bonds among its internal subjects and is more likely to seek its own kind. In a certain sense the bubble creates its own internal coherence by standardizing its internal rationale.

c) The bubble feeds itself. In effect, every closed and coherent system continuously needs to confirm its validity by assimilating phenomena from outside itself, which it manages to include and assimilate into its *ratio*. The more the bubble is able to apply internal paradigms to assorted phenomena, the more its coherence and strength grow. In economic systems, this phenomenon is very evident and can be seen at work through the adoption of speculative and competitive behaviours, which have to be imitated even though they may lose in the mid and long-term, thus excluding the generosity logic *a priori*.

d) The bubble tends to produce recursive cognitive and emotional bonds. In the process of creating coherence, the bubble repeatedly confirms the paths trodden by praxes and man-

ners of reasoning, hence institutionalizing winning practices, confirming unconscious basic assumptions, diffusing rules, fostering the imitation of inclusive behaviours, which are no longer questioned. It is a behaviour dictated by the principle of economy, according to which some basic assumptions are simply adopted and not subjected to radical criticism.

e) With respect to its contents, the bubble transcends itself. Institutionalized behaviours become rules. By transcending we mean that those paradigms and assumptions become the very condition for the phenomena, rules and laws in themselves, the circular conditions for their existence, to appear.

These are some aspects that represent different forms of a basic phenomenon: for the bubble to be formed and work it is essential for it to be coherently closed in a rational – albeit not necessarily reasonable – identity. The elements must be able to draw sense from it and at the same time it must not be so closed as to prevent the absorption of new elements from the outside and their integration into its system.

Nevertheless, in building their systematic coherence, interactions can require all the elements to sacrifice some of their subjective aspects. It is here that the hidden side of cunning is at work, when it uses individuals for a higher motive, but at the cost of sacrifice and pain, which may also be very great if they affect the most noble parts of those people. So a sensible and coherent bubble is obtained, but with subjects who have been asked to sacrifice their highest potential. Looming over these aspects like a deadweight is the question of what type of civilization is being built today and how much it costs single subjects in terms of wounded humanity and imagination.

In the contemporary world many phenomena can be seen

in bubble form, such as the social anti-immigration groups, or forms of associationism or defence of group interests. The construction of paradigms of thought or interpretive schemes, faith communities, procedural and control systems, and groups formed around common ideas or passions should be likened to the rational bubble phenomenon. It is no coincidence that in the world of the economy, those profit-seeking speculative and homogenizing behaviours which, when taken too far end up, producing disastrous failures, are known as bubbles.

The pockets of economic and social inequality around the planet are often neglected by the reason reigning within the conscious horizon of the bubble, since they are outside its field of experience or even considered functional to it since they can provide extremely low-cost labour to strengthen the competitive advantage of those players inside the bubble. What happens in this case is designification and a decline in perception, that is, what is outside the bubble and cannot rationally be functional to it is devalued. It is surprising that, according to this way of reasoning, the most evident recognized and coherent rationality-building processes can be likened to those vertical splitting processes highlighted in studies on psychoses. While horizontal splitting would permit the segmentation of different levels of consciousness and unconscious, vertical splitting would isolate tiny, self-consistent and opposing worlds, enabling them to be present, albeit conflictually, at the same time. The objective and social reason which we appeal to in conflicts, work, courts and group sharing would make immense use of vertical splitting to produce self-enclosed worlds and involve psychotic approaches which form vertical separations, limiting the field and making a rational universe of experience. In this connection, let us

make use of the enlightening description by De Carolis: 'Here I hypothesize that in the contemporary world this horizontal caesura tends to make way for a network of vertical splits which isolate and separate a plurality of circumscribed spaces – pseudo-environments, micro worlds and, indeed, niches – scattered without any hierarchical order and made to conduct a parallel existence, to the point of ignoring or being intransitive to each other, rather than openly entering into conflict'.³

Closedness within rational paradigms tending to emphasize local interest to the detriment of the global vision can often be seen in the political and economic field too. The misunderstanding consists of the fact that the outcome is generally rational, albeit unreasonable. In his comment on Hobbes in *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, John Rawls⁴ illustrates how, while the rational presupposes an idea of the good or advantage of each person who cooperates, the reasonable presupposes fair terms of cooperation. This is why totalitarian regimes may in themselves appear extremely rational, while at the same time inhuman and unreasonable. If we think that the contemporary political crisis in Europe and the fragility of the euro derive in part from the senseless management of sovereign debts and in part from the difficulty in passing from an image of national objective reason to supranational reason, it is also clear to us how in this situation the single bubbles of national reason tend to contrast and fight between themselves to defend their integrity and locally acquired advantages.

The behaviour of the actors at play is not irrational at all: if anything it is unreasonable. Quite simply, objective reason has split reality vertically, withdrawing into an ethic of 'local good', with all the contradictions and philosophical vestments,

and the appeal to symbolic, political and moral codes that this oxymoron permits. In a dynamic of this kind, the culture of generosity also tends to be excluded or marginalized.

Social stupidity or private suffering?

In this sphere, what will become of generosity? Where and how will the single consciousnesses end up? How can we continue to weave relations of mutual recognition? How will they survive? If they bring openness and expanded recognition, how will they integrate in a bubble that transcendently dictates the rules and limits the legitimacy of solidaristic action?

Only two routes are open to single consciousnesses: the first is adaptation and submission to the transcendental power of the split and self-enclosed reason. All the subject can do is assimilate the rules of the game dictated socially by an ethic that, however partial and limited, absurd or frustrating it may be, is nevertheless an ethic of living together that dictates its own law, establishes the field of legality and of the thinkable, and defines the limits of the imagination. The subject thus fully achieves that cunningness of reason that incorporates and assimilates him or her. The task is facilitated and made painless by all forms of culturalization and instruction, plus, at the local and minute level, all forms of media communication, the construction of what are depicted as winning prototypes, the marketing of prevailing lifestyles, the exhibition of conduct that is considered virtuous, and the development of unconscious underlying assumptions that help to convince the sceptics and the rebels.

Individuals are therefore forced to live within paradigms that nevertheless produce a certain number of social stupidi-

ties, namely mental forms and behaviours which, if analysed from a distance, are incongruent and irrational. Nevertheless, social stupidity is so prevalent and good at cutting off practical sense that it often becomes invisible and is not perceived from the inside. Since we are all swimming in the same social soup, it is practically impossible to limit social stupidity and contagion is inevitable. We absorb the prevailing social paradigms, we fit to the rules of the game, we adopt the dominant models of thought, we confine our imagination to the limits of what is considered useful and convenient within objective reason. Naturally, this is a lose-lose game: on one hand a stupid society negatively influences the single subjects who adapt to it, and on the other hand, the people's widespread stupidity muffles and frustrates all possibilities of the ethical social mode expanding and evolving.

The other path is that of suffering, and often of the marginalization of generosity into the private sphere. For those who do not accept to slot into the pattern of the dominating reason inside the bubble, the remaining path is of an existence in which the civic dimension is not completely expressed and therefore suffers.

As a result, in the contemporary world and in societies that are not able to limit divergences, to accept or give a voice to critical alternatives, or to lessen the degree of social iniquity, the subjects are destined to oscillate between the two positions of collective stupidity infected by reasons enclosed in niches, and of inner and generous vitality, while paying the price of subjective suffering. The state as the regulator of social recognitional relations, and economy, as the area of individuals' enhancement, should be extremely careful both to keep the bubbles of

sense that they produce open to criticism, and to guarantee maximum enhancement of individuals in all their variations. These tasks are substantially identical to guaranteeing the vital space for real democracy. It is evident that the latter can only take place by fighting against iniquities of class, gender, race and status. So now we have come face to face with the responsibilities of that Hegelian objective reason that takes the shapes of the state, economy and love. Whereas the areas of state and economy have their own recognized institutional status, the social area of love finds expression in many forms. Here we are examining the form of generosity alone, not so much in its individual expression of the gift from a single person, but in its institutionalized and socially visible expression of philanthropy. Let us give this term an unconventional and generic meaning, designating the set of non-profit organizations in the so-called third sector – social and cultural enterprises, operating and grantmaking foundations, NGOs, and organizations that work in subsidiary welfare and to improve the social fabric – which distinguish themselves from state and economy as they do not have either prevalently political or urgent profit goals. So we have to see how the three relational areas behave, how they interact, how they contribute to the ethicality of the social structure and how they deal with their responsibilities.

1 Massimo De Carolis, *Il paradosso antropologico. Nicchie, micromondi e dissociazione psichica* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2008), own translation.

2 *Ibid.*, 50, own translation.

3 *Ibid.*, 53, own translation.

4 John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge (MA); London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

6. PRIVATE ECONOMY AND STATE IN THE ETHOS OF INEQUALITY

Whoever could believe that in our times it has been dared to affirm, dictated by ignoble politics, that the people should in no way live in comfort so that they may be industrious and obedient? If these presumed politicians, these wondrous geniuses full of humanity were to travel somewhat, they would see that in no place is industry so active as those nations where the common folk live in comfort, and that in no other place does every kind of production achieve such levels of perfection.

Diderot and D'Alembert

The impossible promises of the affluent society

At the start of the second half of the twentieth century, John Kenneth Galbraith proclaimed the advent of the *Affluent Society*.¹ He was followed by a chorus of optimistic experts who approved his thesis. The United States – they claimed – would soon get to the point where poverty could be cancelled out simply with the stroke of a pen. Like in all overtly positive prognostics, the opposite of the prophecy came true. Neither the United States nor the world economy has managed to eliminate poverty; indeed these days – on the contrary – globally large swathes of the population are excluded not just from wealth, but from basic dignified subsistence; levels of social iniquity and economic inequality have increased in those very nations whe-

re we would have expected a greater degree of equality; the economy has sneaked in a practically unbroken sequence of speculative bubbles, which have proven to be disastrous for many economic players; markets have gone firmly in the direction of deregulation which – as the term says – means ‘free for all’, so finance has been able to act by shifting masses of money at a planetary level from stock exchanges like the City or Wall Street in the almost total absence of rules.

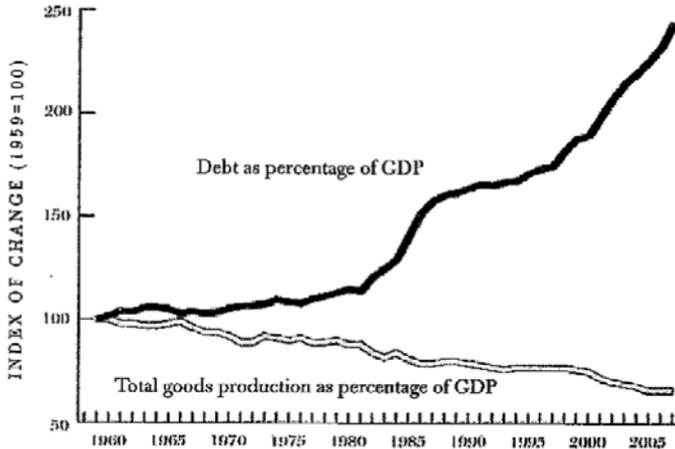
Not only have the economy and finance not spread well-being, but they have made the rich even richer and the poor even poorer. The Great Financial Crisis, triggered at the end of 2007 by the subprime mortgage crisis, and in its wake the public debt crisis in Europe and the political crisis of the euro, all of which are ongoing, cause us to see the need for a radical change in paradigms and mental models as well as social behaviour in order to exit the tunnel that the West has entered. It is also difficult for the economy and finance to be able to take the plunge alone and prompt virtuous behaviour, without the help of a visionary policy and evolved philanthropy. But let’s take one step at a time, and look at the characteristics of an absurd sequence of historical reasons one by one. We will just cite them, and give references to the literature on the subject for further information. Among the many phenomena that could illustrate the evolution of recent capitalism, at least six seem significant to us: *a)* the repeated production of speculative bubbles followed by economic crises; *b)* the disproportionate growth of both private and public debt in some nations; *c)* the development of multinationals and the streamlining of costs and market shares through mergers and acquisitions; *d)* the continuing state of quasi-deregulation of international financial practices; *e)* the delocali-

zation of production and many industrial plants; *f*) the growth in class inequality within some nations and between different areas of the planet. The first characteristic of the evolution concerns precisely capitalism's inborn tendency to produce speculative bubbles to keep market development or yield rates active. There is a very close link between economic overproduction, stagnation and speculation, which results in the system of investment and profit-seeking having to be kept constantly active through the creation of expanding speculative bubbles. The excessive capacity of machinery, technology and plants generates a surplus that rapidly saturates markets which are no longer able to absorb products through normal consumption. These periods of the creation of speculative bubbles are constantly followed by their bursting. To cite just the most recent crises, we have experienced the US stock market crash in 1987, the Japanese financial crisis in the 1990s, the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, the dot.com technological bubble and the consequent crisis of 2000. And, lastly, today we are in the midst of the greatest financial crisis since 1929, with the ongoing political crisis of the euro and sovereign debt.

The market, and the investments available there, are highly dependent on the creation of new profit opportunities, whether these be a new wave of technological innovation, a demographic expansion, an invasion of hitherto undiscovered markets, a growth in military expenses for a new war, or speculative, deregulated and undertaxed finance. Globalization itself, namely the expansion of markets to planetary level and the distribution of goods to all countries, responds to the necessity to keep the bubble under expansion and activates the distribution chain. Then, when the speculative bubble has burst, we count

the victims. As Hyman Minsky declared, 'capitalism is a flawed system in that, if its development is not constrained, it will lead to periodic deep depressions and the perpetuation of poverty'.² The second characteristic we may hint at, however briefly, is the disproportionate growth in debt, both in the public and private spheres. As John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff lucidly declare, 'the expansion of debt and speculation that characterized the U.S. economy (and advanced capitalism as a whole) since the late 1960s represented the main means by which the system managed to avoid sinking into a deep slump'.³ The spread of credit card payments has enabled purchases to be made before the cash becomes available. It is calculated that the debt of an average American family accumulated on a credit card account has come to exceed 4,900 dollars. The same authors report how the incidence of consumer debt on disposable family income went from 62 per cent in 1975 to 127 per cent in 2005. The same phenomenon can be observed with mortgages on homes, generating the devastating subprime phenomenon that sparked the 2007 crisis. In America, as reported by the *Household Financial Conditions, Q4 2005* report, in the period from October to December 2005 the volume of mortgages for home ownership rose by 1,110 billion dollars, reaching the incredible level of \$ 8,660 bn, a quantity equivalent to 69.4 per cent of the United States' gross domestic product. Debt also exploded on the public front, in many European states too. Here we must specify that the drug of private debt fuelled consumption in the same way as public debt fuelled industry, both way over the GDP growth rate and the manufacturing investment rate, as clearly shown in the *Economic Report of the President, 2008* and the following diagram by Foster and Magdoff.

*Change in Debt vs. Goods Production as Percentages of GDP
(1959=100)*



Sources: Federal Reserve, Flow of Funds Accounts of the United States, "Credit Market Debt Outstanding", Table L-1; Economic Report of the President, 2008, "Gross Domestic Product, 1959-2007", Table B-1 and "Gross Domestic Product by major type of product, 1959-2007", Table B-8. From Foster and Magdoff.

The frightening increase in debt, and, parallel to that, the struggle of capital to find highly profitable forms of industrial investment, are at the basis of the third characteristic of advanced capitalism, the financialization of the economy. To put it simply: today it is much easier to make profits through investments in the stock exchange, bonds, financial speculations and the countless instruments that finance has creatively invented, than through industrial investments in machinery, technologies, production plants and factories. Financial investments are quick, you can invest and withdraw in the briefest of time-spans, they do not involve any hard work, they require the as-

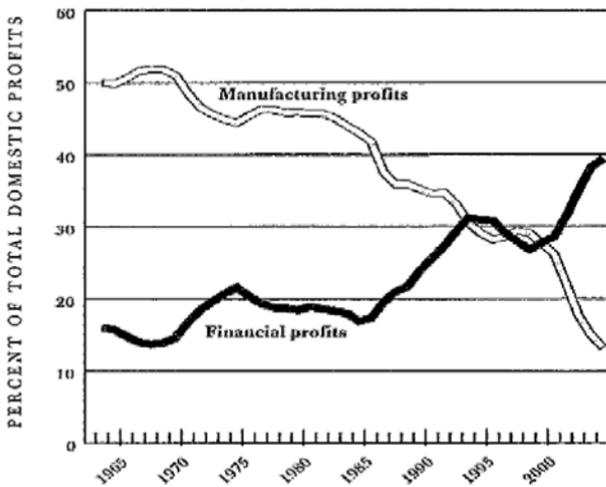
sistance of a few, incredibly highly paid experts, you do not get your hands dirty on a production chain, you do not have to employ a workforce, you have nothing to do with trade unions. Otherwise, if one is to follow the route of industrial investment, long waiting times are needed before the business produces any results, you have to be an expert in technology and marketing, you are moving on competitive terrain, notable leadership and entrepreneurial skills are required, the investments made cannot be uprooted from one day to the next, a workforce needs to be employed and the trade unions to be negotiated with for pay.

So, instead of making profit through the manufacture of goods and commodities, the enormous mass of capital in circulation in the world, deriving from pension funds or surplus liquidity and perennially in search of quick, high-yield opportunities, has veered towards making profit through financial investments. Once again the United States has led the way. It is calculated that in the 1960s, profits deriving from financial activities accounted for around 15 per cent of the total profits within the United States, while in 2005 they had reached almost 40 per cent. In the same period, industrial profits went from 50 to less than 15 per cent. Italy is no exception. Shame that the financial sector employs a small number of workers and that deindustrialization rapidly leads to underemployment and to the unemployment of great swathes of the population.

Suffice it to look at the figures highlighted by Foster and Magdoff to get an idea of the growth of the financial products on offer: 'The notional amounts of over-the-counter derivatives (the sum of the nominal absolute value of all deals concluded and still open) at the end of June 2006 was \$283 trillion—more than six times all the goods and services produced in the

world during a year's time. To give some idea of the continuing pace of derivative activity, during the first half of 2006 "the global market in credit derivatives grew 25 percent, to \$26 trillion." This market has grown at a pace of over 100 percent a year during the last four years.⁴ Obviously, risky derivatives mean the possibility of high earnings. The final result is a net increase in financial profits and their overtaking profits from manufacturing, as Foster and Magdoff point out.⁵ The work by Foster and Magdoff clearly demonstrates how it was the year 2000 that marked the threshold of when financial profits took over.

Five-year Running Average of Manufacturing and Financial Sectors as a Percent of Domestic Profits



Source: Economic Report of the President, 2006, Table B-91. From Foster and Magdoff.

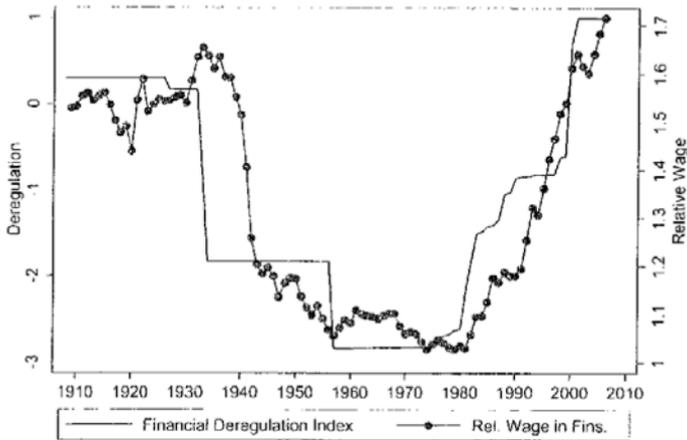
To the phenomenon of financialization of the economy we have to add the explosion of cases of mergers and acquisitions.

In the spasmodic quest for economies of scale, companies have been subjected to mergers with competitors, invariably followed by reorganization and the dismissal of staff, a trend that has increased the numbers of unemployed, thus burdening the state welfare system with costs. The phenomenon has not always led to greater efficiency of the system as a whole, also because it is often accompanied by a mad rush to delocalize factories to countries in the Far East and the sale of companies and brands to foreign partners.

Instead of developing winning business strategies, second- or third-generation entrepreneurs have preferred to sell their companies to third parties, often to investment funds, which have astronomical remuneration targets and invest their capital for the short term: three to five years at most. The companies are usually bought using a financial debt instrument, at times anything but small, which can even account for over 50 per cent of the value of the operation, and is booked in the company accounts (not the buyer's of course). So the company, founded by the father or grandfather, finds financial partners among the shareholders who know little about the business and technologies, with a short-term strategic outlook, and the goal of gaining a profit that is a two-figure multiple of the EBITDA (*earnings before interest tax depreciation and amortization*). Burdened by enormous debts to repay and the need not just to get rid of the deadwood, but at times also the branches they are sitting on, they have to carry out painful and often savage reorganizations, as the founder's grandchildren or children do not intend to carry on the business but to pocket a pretty sum, which they then use to boost the ranks of financial investors in search of profitable allocations. All of which confirms the vicious circle of the

financialization of the economy. The fourth characteristic of start-of-the-millennium capitalism consists of the scarce regulation of financial transactions. An all but negligible fact is that, still today, even after the Wall Street scandals of 2007-8, financial practices on the international stock exchanges are widely deregulated. Indeed, in his speech to the ‘Giordano dell’Amore’ Observatory conference on ‘Economic and Social Inequalities: causes, implications and remedies’ (2011), Jacob Hacker⁶ compared the average salary levels in the financial sector with the level of deregulation and found a significant correlation: from the 1930s to 1960s the trend was for greater financial regulation; at the same time, the average relative salary level fell.

Relative wage in the financial sector and financial deregulation



From Jacob Hacker. The wages are calculated by the United States *Industry Accounts*, by Kuznets (1941) and by Martin (1939). The relative wage is the ratio between financial sector and private sector pay.

The parallel trend between deregulation and average wage increases in the financial sector has been ongoing since the 1980s. The correlation suggests that there is a great interest among operators to work in an almost total vacuum of rules.

The fifth characteristic of advanced capitalism in the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium concerns the delocalization of production. The quest for profit and the necessity to supply the mass market with products at increasingly low prices – a demand also driven by increasingly poor consumers with rising debts, growing unemployment and stagnating wages – have led many manufacturing companies to delocalize their production plants to China or Eastern Europe, where the labour force costs one tenth of what it does in Italy. This has not always been positive, also because this competitive gain has often been imitated by rivals almost straight away. Furthermore, Italy itself has been emptied of its active workforce and has filled up with people who are unemployed, have been made redundant, or are on welfare, that is, people with low levels of consumption. ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) data for 2011 declared that five million Italian families are living in poverty. Fifty per cent of no-income families are under the relative poverty threshold, but so are 15 per cent of families of blue-collar workers, 14 per cent of couples with two children and 27 per cent of couples with three or more children.

Another aspect to underline is that, against this background, the notion of social responsibility that businesses had immediately after the Second World War, when entrepreneurs like Olivetti were fully aware of the ethical role that the company played in the local area, has completely fallen away. Not only has this

been lost at the local level, but at the international level we now have the emergence of companies who do not hesitate to employ underpaid staff, with no trade union protection, at times in breach of human rights, working in sweatshops in conditions of exploitation.

Now some may object that on the whole the impoverishment of the West is acceptable and that the lamentations of societies that are already rich could be handled if the flows of wealth went to support poor areas of the world, thus creating a general picture of balanced well-being. But this is not the case. The picture that emerges from national and international statistics instead tells us that, in the last thirty years, inequality in the economy and assets has grown not only in Western countries, but also worldwide, making some areas of the planet even poorer. Hence, the last systematic characteristic to highlight in our brief and necessarily superficial excursus concerns precisely this creation of inequality, both at the local and world level. The degree of economic inequality within a society is usually calculated using the Gini coefficient. The indicator is a measurement of the degree to which income is distributed unequally within a population, divided into quintiles or deciles. In other words, the Gini coefficient indicates the inequality between the slices of the income pie. If one decile obtains all the income for itself, letting the remaining nine deciles go hungry, this indicates maximum inequality and a coefficient of one. If the pie is perfectly distributed among the parts, the coefficient is zero.

Gini coefficients⁷ tell us that the United States went from 0.31 in 1974 to 0.372 in 2004. From 0.267, the United Kingdom reached levels of 0.345. A similar drop can be seen in Canada, Austria and Australia. Italy got worse too, passing from 0.306 in

1986 to 0.338 in 2004. Michael Yates has pointed out that ‘[i]n 2010, according to U.S. Census data, the richest 20 percent of all households received 50.2 percent of total household income. The poorest 20 percent got 3.3 percent. A mere three decades ago, in 1980, at the outset of the so-called Reagan Revolution, these shares were 44.1 and 4.2 percent, respectively.’⁸ Again Yates points out that income inequality also occurs within the richest decile of the population. In 2007 in the United States, it was estimated that the five best-paid hedge fund managers earned more than all the chief executive officers of all of the *Fortune 500* companies put together. Furthermore, income inequality is not just a phenomenon within nations: the whole planet is affected. Suffice it to think that if the world population is divided into five levels, the bottom tier of the pyramid counts over four billion people who live off less than two dollars a day. Economy and finance’s rash promise to make the whole world an affluent market has failed miserably. The picture is rather one of a system marked by the continual need for speculation in order to keep up the rate of profit development needed to feed the top of the pyramid, a system subject to recurring crises, stagnation and instability. Both at the local and global levels, despite the great growth of the economy and finance, levels of economic inequality and social iniquity have increased in the last thirty years, and greatly so during the periods of international crises.

In his speech entitled *Instability Implications of Increasing Inequality: What can be learned from North America*, given in 2011 at the ‘XXIV International Conference on Economic and Social Inequalities: causes, implications and remedies’, Lars Osberg, professor of economics at Dalhousie University in Halifax, states that two morals can be drawn from this recent his-

torical experience: 'First is the lesson that increasing economic inequality, i.e. unbalanced income growth, creates multiple interacting ripples of financial, economic and political instability. There is no convincing evidence that these instabilities are automatically self-correcting. Second is the lesson that politics matters.'⁹ At the same conference, Jacob Hacker, professor of political science at Yale University, observed how '[w]e had a 30-year war in which those who wished to make our society less equal pushed consistently, through administration after administration, on policy issue after policy issue, to change the rules of the game in a way that tilted the playing field toward those at the top. [...] ultimately, the story we're telling is that domestic politics does matter. Political choices matter. Organisation matters.'¹⁰ The impression we get from analysing national and world data on the economy, finance, repeated crises, inequalities in income and well-being, social iniquity and economic injustice is that something fundamental has to be rethought and discussed anew in the 'ethical' economic system of being together, and that a radical rethink of our exchanges of interest can only be made by stepping away from the old logics that have produced the inequalities.

It seems to us that the global economic system is totally reproducing the same characteristics as those bubbles of sense listed previously, condemning it to repeated crises and a certain dose of social stupidity and individual suffering: with a self-enclosed system; strong internal coherence that only awards those who take part in the game; affluence fuelled by taking advantage of those very same people excluded from the game; the recurrence of rules and behaviours which are reinforced in the short term and at the local level, even though at the systemic le-

vel and in the long term they lose; and transcendental winning practices which turn into fixed and unchangeable rules for all. Since the mitigation of income inequalities and elimination of social iniquity are the fundamental objectives that the state exists for, now we must examine the area of the state as the sphere where that social ethic has to be built in order to imagine, realize and administrate the common good.

The destiny of the welfare state

The state's management, whether it be political or administrative, produces actions, laws, regulations, procedures, values and strategies which, defined through citizen representation, in turn determine the ways in which the citizens interact. Politics and administration, acting at the supra-individual level of public cohesion, dictate its laws. This topic would deserve a lot more room, but, owing to space restrictions, here we can only hint at it. We will not hesitate to make some simplifications in order to be clear, thus losing out on some depth, but at least attempting to give a general picture to start from. After the traumatic experiences of the twentieth century when the state became a bureaucratic machine at the service of the powers that be, in one case with a representative of the supreme race at the helm, and in the other the revolutionary spirit of the masses, after the Second World War the need was felt to limit central power and reassess the subjects' importance, their freedom and their rights. A vision of sovereignty dialoguing with the different aspirations of civil society, freed from the paradigms of absoluteness and careful to maintain unity while enhancing differences and variety, is increasingly topical. We are talking about

the conception of a social state whose main goals are to lessen economic differences and social iniquity among citizens, to set value by differences, to guarantee all people the expression of individual freedoms, to create the optimum redistribution of resources, to manage justice in a neutral way and to promote solidarity among citizens. This idea of state can provide the basis for the possibility of a meaningful relationship in dialogue with the gift, generosity and solidarity, expressed in recognitional relations between subjects at the local and microscopic level of civil society, and in the world of organized philanthropy at the institutional level.

The sovereign debt crisis is challenging the survival of the welfare state in many European nations and what we are seeing is the danger that it will be progressively dismantled. However – it must be repeated – economic difficulties in maintaining widespread social aid are one thing, but it is another to call the social state into question or to expect to replace it in part or in full with private forms of subsidiary or replacement welfare. There is no way the welfare state can be replaced, since it derives from a political and social notion establishing the priorities and goals that the state has to have. To call it into question is to make the very foundations of the political structure, based on the values of equality and solidarity, collapse. It is another thing to need to make the books balance and to act in order to make the welfare state sustainable. When the social state distributes pensions, help for the ill, education and subsistence for the weakest parts of the population, it is not making a gift or giving charity: it is simply, as its mandate dictates, redistributing public resources.

State crisis, between predators and weak politics

While the world economy has failed in its promises to integrate the world into the sphere of well-being, the single states – some more, some less – have betrayed the mission to lessen the social and economic inequalities and asset imbalances within them. The growth of the Gini coefficient bears witness in many nations to an increase in economic and class inequality. The state has the tools to modulate and mitigate social differences. It can use tax policy, by taxing the better-off in proportion and not taxing the less well-off classes; it can manage economic policy so as to foster the development of the more promising and more profitable industrial sectors and defend the country's industries; lastly, it can manage the distribution of welfare, supporting education, culture, health, pensions and allowances in order to reduce inequalities.

Now it seems that the behaviour of many states where we observe an increase in inequality is to adopt tax policies that are not really in favour of the less well-off. The United States excels at this. Jacob Hacker states that 'in the United States, the most important [tax policies] have been tax cuts for the very, very rich. The United States has seen a massive decline in taxes on the top 1%, but that's not even the big story. The big story is the decline in effective tax rates paid by the top 1/10th of 1% or the top 1/100th of 1%. This has gotten to the point where Warren Buffett says he pays a lower tax rate than the people who work for him. The top 400 taxpayers in 2007 paid an average effective federal income tax rate of 16.5%. In 1995 they paid about 30%. That difference between 30% in 1995 and 16.5% in 2007 is about \$46 million—for every taxpayer in the top 400. That is not a trivial change.'¹¹

In the field of fiscal policy, Italy has not reached these extremes, and has maintained more balanced taxation. However, it has failed to make a determined fight against evasion, which – as we know – pertains to the better-off categories and not salaried employees on a fixed wage whose tax is paid at source. Walter Korpi,¹² from the Swedish Institute for Social Research at Stockholm University, has conducted a study on class and gender inequality models in different types of welfare state.

The United States, the United Kingdom and Ireland, which have adopted a basic welfare model, found themselves with the highest levels of class inequality at the end of the 1980s. But this comes as no surprise, given the weakness of the redistributive system and the fiscal inequalities. Among the nations that have adopted a corporatist state model, we find Italy with strangely high inequality, unlike Germany and Belgium. Instead, it comes as no surprise that the group of Norway, Sweden and Finland have the lowest Gini coefficient in the whole sample, oscillating between 0.201 and 0.222 on a scale that goes from zero – for absolute equality – to one – for maximum inequality. We can draw the following conclusions from Korpi's study: the Nordic welfare systems have proven to be more effective in fighting economic inequalities among citizens, and Italy shows a certain lack of efficacy in applying its model, unlike Germany. Naturally, other factors may also have had a great influence in the emergence of inequalities. To quote just a few, the weakness or in some cases serious shortcomings of competitive economic and industrial policies have – in the case of Italy – failed to point the country's production resources towards the technologically most innovative and profitable segments.

The state can fail to obtain social equality not only if it ad-

ministrates the redistribution system badly, but also if it permits tax injustice and if, with scant farsightedness, it fails to foster a stimulating environment for economic research and development in those sectors which will be important in the future. For example, investments in research, innovation, education and culture at first sight do not seem to be very correlated with the fight against inequality, but if we consider the context of international competition, we can see how they determine balanced growth and also prevent citizens finding themselves living in macroeconomic contexts marked by scarce opportunities. Gar Alperovitz¹⁹ has stated that almost 90 per cent of economic growth in the United States is due to the technological innovations developed in the previous ninety years. We survive thanks to the extraordinary scientific, technological, artistic and cultural heritage that previous generations produced. The only consequence of short-term political vision, the stranglehold on state investment in research and development, the deterioration and impoverishment of the educational and cultural system, and a lack of innovative visions and best practices in the field of human capital management in state administration and the economy, can be to impoverish the nation and increase social and class inequalities.

While in the past the administration allowed the sovereign – or political decision-maker – to govern in safety and to use his or her power in governing the state, in the end today it is the very same state administrative machine that finds itself governing the political actor, imposing new, financial knowledge on it. So just like between the end of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and then in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the new strategic discourses of commerce, industry and

finance have occupied the space left empty by the political decision-maker in the race towards deregulation.

In the United States, the quest for a minimal state in the name of the single subject's freedom and individual well-being has led to a form of plutocracy, the rule of the rich. In Italy, the ubiquity of parties and an administration without long-term strategies have made the nation more vulnerable to financial speculations. While John Kenneth Galbraith had declared the advent of the affluent society in 1958, fifty years on his son James Kenneth Galbraith corrected the aim to denounce the triumph of the predator state:¹⁴ a whole different story, painted by a no means far left-wing, and if anything moderate, political economist. How has it been possible that the race towards rebuilding and well-being transformed first of all into a merry little march, then into an unbridled race towards consumption, then into a global sprint to assault the empire, and finally into a ferocious, messy war without rules, where the winner takes all?

According to James Galbraith's theory, America has fallen victim to a predatory class that controls the government: "Today, the signature of modern American capitalism is neither benign competition, nor class struggle, nor an inclusive middle-class utopia. Instead, predation has become the dominant feature—a system wherein the rich have come to feast on decaying systems built for the middle class. The predatory class is not all of the wealthy; it may be opposed by many others of similar wealth. But it is the defining feature, the leading force. And its agents are in full control of the government under which we live."¹⁵

In confirmation of these theories, the financialization of the economy and politics, and the parallel decrease in solidarity

and the marginalization of generosity, let us relay the brunt and brutal diagnosis that Galbraith junior once again gives of the American evolution, which can also go for European societies and can be very instructive for Italy as a whole. '[A]fter 1980,' asserts Galbraith, 'economic booms and rising inequality go hand in hand. So what's going on? In 1980, we really went through a fundamental transformation. We stopped being a wage-led economy with a growing public sector that was providing new services. [...] Instead, we became a credit-driven economy. What the evidence in the U.S. shows is that the rise in inequality is associated with credit booms, which are often periods of sometimes great prosperity. [...] But this is also a sign of instability – the crash that follows is very ugly business. If we're going to go forward with growth on a more sustainable basis, then controlling inequality and controlling instability are the same issue. One is an expression of the other.'¹⁶

Not only have the state's tasks changed since the last century, but at the same time they have become clearer and more dramatic. Statesmen are faced by few, but complex responsibilities: to manage the economy and finance, reduce economic inequality and social iniquity, enable stable development and promote more solidarity in society. All this has raised the bar for the skills and competences required of the state administrators. These are skills to a large extent missing today because for a long time they failed to be cultivated.

What ethos is emerging?

Is something changing in our way of being together and building a society? In our way of interacting? Of course it is. The

social and cultural impact of the Great Financial Crisis is not hesitating to make itself felt. Apart from the threat of dismantling the welfare state, under the pressure of a deficient public administrative management, it seems to us that the state's system of values is changing. Between the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, the idea of nation gradually became consolidated around sets of values and cultural notions prompted by ideas of ethnicity, people, race, class and nation. This evolution, or involution, led to the affirmation and consolidation of nationalism and nationalist regimes in many European states, strengthening closed national identities, justifying them, and impeding comparison between cultures and visions.

The post-WW2 period reopened national boundaries, thanks above all to the rebuilding and development of consumption on an international scale, beginning in the late 1960s. Today, economy and finance have supranational horizons, they promote transnational cultures, they have chosen the planet as their market, they are entrusted to managers who can speak different languages and are able to dialogue with very different cultures and peoples. On the other hand, financialization of the world, recurring crises of capitalism, globalization of markets but also unbridled competition, deregulation of business and financial practices, growth in inequalities, the activation of predatory behaviours, advent of terrorist phenomena, sparking of extenuating and unresolved cold wars, and accentuation of differences between North and South, West and East, have led to a notable closing of horizons and the strengthening of national boundaries, a Calvinist ethos punitive towards the weaker areas of the planet, and a general decrease in solidarity. Here it is

worth quoting the distinction that Foucault makes between the 'wild' person and the 'barbarian'. According to Foucault, a 'wild' person is an uncivilized subject who is open to exchanging goods and renouncing something of his or her own to interact with others, and hence, in the exchange, accepts to become civil within an elementary social relationship. The 'barbarian' is the contrary, namely a person who relates in a predatory way to a civilization which he or she is outside. 'The barbarian cannot exist,' Foucault asserts, 'without the civilization he is trying to destroy and appropriate. The barbarian is always the man who stalks the frontiers of States, the man who stumbles into the city walls. [...] He does not make his entrance into history by founding a society, but by penetrating a civilization, setting it ablaze, destroying it.'¹⁷

The impression is that today there are as many barbarians within the city walls as there are outside them. We would like to be called wild and not barbarians. Nevertheless, the repeated crises and the breakdown of the European project have shown that the social forces and ethos at work are much more typical of those who loot and dominate than those who act out of solidarity and philanthropy.

1 John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958).

2 Philip Arestis and Malcolm Sawyer, eds, 'Hyman P. Minsky (1919-1996)', in *A Biographical Dictionary of Dissenting Economists* (1992; Aldershot: Edward Elgar, repr. 1994): 357.

3 John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff, *The Great Financial Crisis. Causes and Consequences* (New York (NY): Monthly Review Press, 2009): 19.

4 *Ibid.*, 58.

5 Ibid., 55.

6 Speech by Jacob Hacker at the Giordano dell'Amore Observatory XXIV *International Conference on Economic and Social Inequalities: causes, implications and remedies*, Centro Congressi Cariplo, Milan, 27-28 October 2011.

7 See the 'Luxembourg Income Study' from June 2011, <http://www.lisdatacenter.org>.

8 Michael D. Yates, 'The Great Inequality', *Monthly Review* 63, no.10 (March 2012): 2.

9 Lars Osberg, 'Instability Implications of Increasing Inequality: What can be learned from North America' (revision of speech at the Giordano dell'Amore Observatory XXIV *International Conference on Economic and Social Inequalities: causes, implications and remedies*, Centro Congressi Cariplo, Milan, 27-28 October 2011): 29, <http://www.cnpsd.it/documenti/f5b34a25ca48806bee4ec0ef85fbebda.pdf>.

10 Hacker, speech at the XXIV *International Conference on Economic and Social Inequalities*.

11 Ibid.

12 Walter Korpi, 'Faces of Inequality: Gender, Class and Patterns of Inequalities in Different Types of Welfare States' (Luxembourg Income Study Working Paper no. 224, LIS, 2000).

13 Gar Alperovitz, *America beyond Capitalism. Reclaiming our Wealth, our Liberty and our Democracy* (Boston (MA): Democracy Collaborative Press, 2011): 237.

14 James K. Galbraith, *The Predator State* (New York: Free Press, 2008). See also by the same author *Inequality and Instability* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

15 Mother Jones online; 'The Predator State. Enron, Tyco, WorldCom ...and the U.S. Government?', blog entry by James K. Galbraith, May/June 2006, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2006/05/predator-state>.

16 James K. Galbraith, 'How economists have misunderstood inequality: An interview with James Galbraith', by Brad Plumer, *The Washington Post*, 5 May 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/how-economists-have-misunderstood-inequality/2012/05/03/gIAOZf5yT_blog.html.

17 Michel Foucault, *'Society must be defended': lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (London: Allen Lane, 2003): 195.

7. PHILANTHROPY

[T]o bring aid to everyone in need far surpasses the powers and advantage of a private person. [...] the capacity of one man is too limited for him to be able to unite all men to him in friendship. So the case of the poor falls upon society as a whole, and concerns only the general advantage.

Spinoza

Philanthropy, the area of generosity

Philanthropy constitutes the third ethical area, after state and economy, and – as we saw previously – it is the space in which gratuitous social bonds are created and evolve between the individuals and single identities that make up society. While state is the area of resource distribution, participation in the common good, and justice, and while economy is the area of reciprocal interest, monetary exchange and achievement, philanthropy is the area of generosity. We define philanthropy as the area of institutionalized and organized generosity, which hence goes beyond the simply psychological and moral meaning of the generous subject. Philanthropy includes the various phenomena of donations, volunteer work, mutual aid projects or gratuitous support for weak parts of the population. As such,

philanthropy embraces a series of subjects, amongst which we find volunteer associations, operating foundations, grantmaking foundations, social enterprises, and non-profit organizations in general.

Seen in this light, we can set out three essential characteristics of philanthropy: *a)* it is the expression of man's original instinct for generosity to make, without any other interest except for inclusion, all others of his kind take part in common happiness; *b)* it does not arise either from the state or the economy, but primarily in civil society, which is the union of all men in a free and democratic association of thought and identity; *c)* in the modern sense, philanthropy emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century, with the establishment of civil rights, the declaration of men's equality and the emancipation of public opinion and civil society.

In itself philanthropy naturally has very deep roots. In ancient Rome there are many examples of philanthropy, above all in support of art and literature. The Renaissance also had its philanthropists and many enlightened princes. Nevertheless, in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance philanthropy was still extended under the strong cultural impact of Christianity, and was meant as charity for the poor and needy, above all in the sphere of and thanks to the church. Instead, it is only since the eighteenth century that philanthropy has obtained its own lay and secular dimension as social intervention, alongside the parallel development of the concept of civil society. Nevertheless, the structural core of modern philanthropic thought needs to be sought in an even earlier stage. Indeed, we need to start from the positions of Spinoza, who in the seventeenth century was already asserting that our meaning as men could not be under-

stood separately from other men, and that we are a part of nature, which, by itself, without other individuals, cannot be conceived of adequately.¹ In Chapter IX of the Appendix to his *Ethics*, Spinoza states that nothing is more useful for the preservation of man's being and his enjoyment of a rational life than being guided by reason.

The ideas of humanity and free association of people guided by reason and the common ideal of equality proposed by Spinoza ended up inspiring eighteenth-century political movements and thought. Freed from all theological claims, their aim was to create a new civilization with great social sensitivity, putting man at the centre of attention. All this helped to form modern civil society, emancipated from the powers of the ancien regime, free to express itself and owning a critical public opinion. This significant enlightened humanism gave rise to a passionate critical and creative drive all over Europe, advocated freedom of thought, fostered man's natural right to seek happiness and promoted religious tolerance. To all effects, it provided the breeding ground for those ideals that are still being debated and pursued today. In extreme synthesis, it was 'the laboratory of modernity'.²

Modern philanthropy was spawned by those movements of thought and the difficult path that civil society has followed to become, not only a rational but also a reasonable, cosmopolitan and free subject, operating in autonomy and on the basis of common reason. A subject independent from state and political mechanisms and the logics of economy and finance, that unites regardless of religious creeds and party memberships, that aims to put man at the forefront, and acts with generosity to demonstrate every person's equal right to common happi-

ness. Civil society thus asserts itself as an autonomous subject and claims the capacity for its own opinions, by exploiting the diffusion of ideas, freedom of the press and opinion, the diffusion of books and the rise of the culture industry. As of the century of enlightened humanism, it would no longer be possible to manage political and economic power without accounting for this new subject and its opinion. Democracy had a strong ally for its full affirmation. Tellingly, forms of totalitarianism, exploitation, violence against man and nature, when they were still possible, were widely and criminally practised by muzzling public opinion, confining critical culture, seducing civil society through the media, namely annihilating its independence.

Once again tellingly, we can note that the most evolved forms of democracy in the contemporary Western world have developed and become consolidated in parallel to the growth of civil society. The latter, in its essence, cannot be confused with the sum of citizens governed by state laws nor the sum of economic subjects, as it is independent from and superior to them. Civil society is simply the intangible communion of men and women who live under the principles of freedom and free thought, whose goal is to build and develop a common civilization, made of laws, rights, duties, culture, behaviours, well-being, justice, critical thought, solidarity and generosity. Hence civil society, the first arena where organized solidarity is expressed, is the superior ethical aspiration to which the state and economy have to pay account. Those states that have tangibly allowed the free circulation of ideas, promoted culture in the peripheries and among the lowest classes, defended the media's independence against political and economic powers, encouraged education, supported research, built a favourable environment for the cul-

ture industry and extended free civil debate, are also those nations that today can boast a more stable and evolved democracy.

Philanthropy and enlightened humanism

Over the last two hundred and fifty years, the radical and moderate versions of the ideals of enlightened humanism, the profile of civil society, and the establishment of organized philanthropy have undergone various vicissitudes and highs and lows linked to the events in the history of European civilization. Nevertheless, once initiated, philanthropy never disappeared from the scene, but perhaps became less visible or less evident. In order to understand its growing importance, suffice it to remember those special funds for the poor, the so-called pawnbroker's shops, or the solidaristic and humanitarian societies set up in the course of the nineteenth century. The twentieth century, whose legacy we bear, was marked by some crucial and particularly painful dates. Some of these, and the cruel facts associated with them, remain in the memory of those who lived through those events in person. From the social, cultural and political point of view, these crucial facts have led to consequences that are still ongoing today, conditioning the formation of our identity. Hence, that they also influence the contemporary ethos, our way of being together by forming a society, or our experience of generosity is under no doubt. So now we have to see how recent historical experience is being processed in the present day and how more import can be given to the dimension of generosity organized within society.

If we are to sum up the stages of the twentieth century – in brief, given the small amount of space available – we can assert

that the last century passed through the First World War, as devastating as it was dense in consequences in redrawing national balances, the Russian Revolution, and the successive sparking of the even more destructive Second World War, as well as the establishment and break-up of colonial empires. For decades, the Communist and Nazi regimes, two systems of oppressive, antidemocratic totalitarianism which suffocated civil consciences and individual rights, oppressed Europe's social fabric. The reconstruction in the aftermath of the destruction saw the emergence of capitalism and its evolution, a rampant industrialization guided by innovation in all fields and in all disciplines. The fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of the Communist bloc, civil society's pressing need for a *perestroika* in the political management of Russia, and the attempt to get beyond opposing blocs which had been frozen in their Cold War mould for years. With the collapse of the Communist bloc, its political model also crumbled, leaving the way open for Western capitalism as the sole, apparently winning cultural benchmark. At first sight dynamic and reigning supreme, in the last decades of the last century capitalism nevertheless began to hit one crisis after another. Economic and financial crashes became par for the course, mixed in with far-reaching political crises, reviving memories of the failures of 1929. Then in the 2000s, the West encountered a series of doubts as to the sustainability, ethicality, validity and democratic nature of its model of development. At the same time, the Bush administration was pompously declaring that, together with wars and capitalism, it wanted to export the model of American democracy too. Almost as if it wanted to prove him wrong, the new millennium commenced with an unexpected crisis. Although the conditions for this crisis

were already there in America in the last decades of the last century, they were to become fully evident towards the end of 2007, to an unexpected degree. International terrorism, which became tragically manifest with the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York, exacerbated the opposition between East and West and increased the danger of wars and reprisals throughout the world. In such a tempestuous and in many aspects dramatic century, it should come as no surprise if we see the subject oscillate between assimilation, whether voluntary or forced, into the inhuman totality of all-inclusive systems and a transgressive and critical position leading to violence; between top-down imposition of the truth and the negation of the very possibility of truth; between truth as an imposed monocultural system to subscribe to without criticism and the truth as the unmasked will to power; between the project for a rational holocaust of the inferior being and the justification of massacres as a means of political criticism; between the quest for totally unquestioning approaches and equally as absolute forms of scepticism; between the fanatical claims of a banner faith and the smug declaration of the death of God.

Long periods of the last century saw the success of currents of thought that contributed to weakening the bond with the ideas of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, Filangeri, Pagano, Parini, Diderot, d'Holbach, Alfieri, Beccaria, Verri, D'Alambert and Condorcet, almost to the point of severing the critical and rational inheritance of the *Aufklärung*. While imperialisms and totalitarianisms prevailed on the historical and political front, on the cultural front attitudes demonizing science became widespread. Prevalent in Heidegger, for example, was the rigid and sterile separation between the fields of the *Geisteswissen-*

schaften and *Naturwissenschaften*, the exaltation of language as the only point for understanding man, the revaluation of rhetoric to the detriment of ethics and the signifier at the expense of the signified.

While the twentieth century successfully made deeper social and cultural analyses, on the other hand there were no few attacks on reason, no longer considered the sure means for investigating reality. So, in spite of the progress of quantum mechanics and relativity – theories moreover incomprehensible for the monocultural philosophers – science was seen as a fallacious and misleading metaphysics. In 1961 – after his stint as minister of being and flirting with Nazism – Heidegger published a text on Nietzsche, in which he finds the way to unbind philosophical reflection from any rational and scientific verification. On science he writes: ‘The evidentiary procedure for the doctrine of return is therefore in no case subject to the jurisdiction of natural science, even if the “facts” of natural science should run counter to the outcome of that procedure. What are the “facts” of natural science and of all science, if not particular appearances interpreted according to explicit, tacit, or utterly unknown metaphysical principles, principles that reflect a doctrine concerning beings as a whole?’³

Having dethroned science, facts were also rejected. What counted at this point was language and the will to power. The possibilities of reinstating a democratic tribunal such as reason disintegrated, it was forgotten that while reason is the natural heritage of all men, the will to power only belongs to a few. Nihilism and postmodernism, quickly taken up by both the right and left, in reality failed to establish themselves as poles critical of oppression and human degradation, and failed to

fight ignorance and credulity as the main enemies of democracy, equality, freedom and emancipation. ‘Decanonization’, as Ihab Hassan writes in *Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective* in 1986, becomes the main route to a mass ‘delegitimation’ of society’s codes. ‘Thus, from the “death of god” to the “death of the author” and “death of the father”, from the derision of authority to revision of the curriculum, we decanonize culture, demystify knowledge, deconstruct the languages of power, desire, deceit. Derision and revision are versions of subversion.’⁴

Beyond the great contributions that postmodernism has given to reappraising the minimum, the fragment, the indeterminate and critical pluralism, it is evident how this criticism, which becomes a compulsive paradigm of decanonization, ends up exercising its action on everything, on the good and the bad, the saints and the damned, the perversion of power and the request for justice, leaving nothing untouched by its pervasive critical irony. If driven by a borderless ‘methodological perspectivism’, not only are these theoretical bases and guiding ideas of no help in allowing reason to play a fundamental role in influencing social change, but they do not enable the establishment on solid theoretical bases of philanthropy or of any project built on generosity, or any claim to redistributive justice either.

It is no surprise that Jonathan Israel, in *A Revolution of the Mind* in 2009, commented on the most recent cultural trends as follows: ‘More recently, among the foremost challenges to Radical Enlightenment principles, and one particularly threatening to modern society, was the modish multiculturalism infused with postmodernism that swept Western universities and local government in the 1980s and 1990s. For this briefly potent

new form of intellectual orthodoxy deemed all traditions and sets of values more or less equally valid, categorically denying the idea of a universal system of higher values self-evident in reason and equity, or entitled to claim superiority over other values.⁵

In effect, we have to observe that forms of violence against defenceless populations; the failure to acknowledge women's or minorities' rights; the maintenance of wide swathes of the population in ignorance, inactivity and marginalization; the continuing tolerance of economic and political systems that produce and consent great inequalities in income and social iniquity; and racial and religious discriminations are crimes against reason. Some universal values are inescapable and cannot be relativized, and they are those concerning the universal right of all men and women to happiness and its construction on the basis of reason.

The new philanthropy

Modern philanthropy has not led wars, stirred up imperialisms, created social inequalities, separated cultures or hindered education, nor depressed the economy. Quite the opposite. Instead, modern philanthropy follows on from those values and ideas which have gone from the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, through nineteenth-century philanthropic institutions, to arrive, amidst alternating and dramatic events, at the present day. The thesis we put forward is therefore one of a substantial continuity in inspiration, in terms of topics and underlying ideals, between the formation of a modern identity and the establishment of organized and institutionalized philanthropic ex-

periences. After passing through dark times in the first half of the twentieth century, philanthropy resumed its path during the period of post-war reconstruction and above all with the increase of well-being in the West, starting from the United States. It is in America that the first post-war philanthropic experiences were played out, with the emergence of independent foundations, large and small, whose financial assets substantially derived from the donations of big businessmen. This was the start of capitalist-inspired freedom philanthropy, often linked to the entrepreneur's unquestionable wishes, counterposed and complementary to quasi-public philanthropy, which is more linked to practices leading to democratic alignment and transparency. Europe was to follow, as we will see further, with the development of a significant, in some ways striking, number of foundations.

Almost all reflect the leading ideas present in the theory of the most famous authors from the period of the birth of modernity and in the practice of the most enlightened citizens: the use of culture and education as the springboard for social emancipation, the powerful new revival of religious and civil tolerance, the quest for intercultural dialogue, the new trust in the scientific and disenchanting observation of experience, the search for independence of thought and action from politics, the critical and unscrupulous examination of men and society's customs and institutions in every corner of the world, the promotion of the inclusion of the most disadvantaged categories in society, the reformulation of the political and social bond based on the idea of man's natural freedom, and action according to a definition of every man's universal right to happiness. It is in such an 'enlightening' and stimulating context that we can see the vast

significance that generosity has for ethical values in general and that its capacity to go way beyond the meaning of the single act of subjective giving can be understood.

In very recent years, throughout Europe the most important philanthropic organizations embarked on a programme to focus their strategies, increase transparency and improve their approaches to social innovation, with ever greater recourse to scientific methods based on the experimentation, verification and critical validation of results. It cannot help but leap to our attention that these new currents of philanthropic action are very close to and have inherited from the positions of enlightened humanism. The new critical positions on which European philanthropy is building its vision seem to need new paradigms and a profound transformation in thinking the basic principles of politics, economy, and society in general, with regard to how they were handed down to us in the last century. Above all the positions towards power – or the ‘big powers’ as some have called them – seem to have changed radically. In the view of modern European philanthropy the positions towards power seem to be hopelessly outdated: those of Marxism, which claimed that the social situation could only be changed if the proletariat appropriated itself of the means of production; the nihilism of Nietzsche, who upheld that only the superman’s will to power was worthy of survival; and the positions of postmodernism which upheld the relativity of every language, ironic incredulity towards metanarrations, and that power only asserts itself through linguistic and rhetorical games.

Today, instead, philanthropy seems to start from completely different assumptions. It draws fully from some ideas deemed rightly or wrongly to belong to modernity, such as trust in hu-

man and historical rationality as means to overcome dogmatism, universalism and cosmopolitanism, and the search for scientific, experimental and verifiable approaches to making social innovations. On the other hand, the myth of never-ending progress and the project for scientific-technological domination over nature have been totally abandoned, conscious as we are of the complexity of the natural and social world. Awareness is emerging of the necessity of new paradigms of complexity which, more than seeking a self-contained and definitive totality, pursue a holistic vision of reality, starting from phenomena that cannot be boiled down to the dominating *ratio* but contain strong elements of innovation. It is these lines of thought, present in a large part of the European philanthropic entities, that caused Rien van Gendt, member of the European Cultural Foundation board of directors, to assert that today, in the face of the present social complexities, we need a new Humanism. Nor can it surprise us that Pieter Stemerding, head of the Adessium Foundation, a private Dutch foundation, defines its philanthropic mission in terms that go beyond the political, economic and social qualifications of the twentieth century: 'Adessium Foundation aspires to a world in which people live in harmony with each other and with their environments. The Foundation is working to create a balanced society characterized by integrity, justice, and a balance between people and nature'.

Starting from these new positions, a rethink is needed of some theories under the headings of equality, the economy, the state's role and philanthropy. We express some reserve as to the thesis of Simon Kuznets, presented in 1955 in an article entitled 'Economic Growth and Income Inequality'⁶ and recently defended by James Galbraith,⁷ according to which there exists

an inverse relationship between income inequality and economic growth within a nation. It is clear that in galloping economies income opportunities grow, as presumably the average unit value of salaries does at the same time. Nevertheless, a global scenario of long-term, strong growth economies is unrealistic: not only are periods of growing opportunities limited in time, but they are also always restricted to some dominating nations. Hence, social income inequality is a reality that is also felt first-hand in wealthy nations, not to mention the inequality in developing countries and among different areas of the planet. The thesis that development makes inequality decrease therefore needs to be placed within critical bounds.

Not just that: a different social iniquity exists to income inequality. While the latter concerns the amount of money earned, this iniquity concerns more the consequences on culture, society and integration caused by deficient laws and the same income inequality. It is bad that there are marked economic inequalities between different brackets of the population, but what is even more intolerable is that they translate into an absence of access to education, health or social participation, also because of welfare systems that are lacking or gravely deficient and discriminative.

The upshot is that the whole economic and financial sphere cannot, with the sole force of its utopian idea of the promised land of inclusive development, guarantee the realization of a fair society. From our point of view, the thesis according to which the sum of single selfish interests, left free to act and pursue their own ends, would produce a harmonious social structure, is in no way credible. America itself shows quite clearly how entrusting the majority of guarantees of equity to the ca-

pitalistic system only produces a plutocracy, or in the best of cases, an informal oligarchy based on money. On the other hand, it is the state's task to redistribute wealth through efficient welfare and to create a fair social environment, in which all are guaranteed the minimum indispensable conditions to achieve their own happiness. A better legal order or prescriptive laws is not the only way of achieving this condition. More effectively still, it can be pursued through a change in thinking and action that prompts cooperation by state and economy for the purpose of equality and social innovation. This new movement does not generally come about either inside the state or in the arena of economic exchanges but within civil society as a whole. It is not the people in their role as citizens passively subject to the law who are able to act effectively in this direction, nor economic subjects inside relations of achievement and self-interest. Rather it is the people as they ultimately lay their claim to civilization, when they are ethically bound to the same civil evolution towards common happiness. Hence, it comes as no surprise that indeed philanthropy – the ethical experience of civil society based on generosity – is where the current of thought is nurtured and where those practices of independent social innovation that are the test ground for a happiness of equal rights take place, a happiness built from the bottom and lacking both totalizing and astute rationalities and nihilistic rebellions.

Now we can understand more clearly not only the profound and vital bond that philanthropy weaves with the evolution of democracy, but also the need to reply to the thesis that sees philanthropy as an exclusively private affair, closed in the subjectivity of 'good souls'; or, at its extreme opposite, and even worse, as an activity consisting of cronyism and opaque political

powers. In reality, as it is asserting itself all over Europe and in Italy, and despite its imperfections and inevitable worst practices, philanthropy is a civil movement in the ethical sense of the term.

Inasmuch, the thesis that purports philanthropy to be the servant of the status quo and the stopgap in a deficient social system also needs to be rejected. Only called into question when there is social suffering to be remedied, only taken into consideration when it gives out aid to the needy, only called upon when money is lacking, appreciated when the number of the poor and marginalized grows beyond tolerable limits, it is often confused with charity. It cannot be considered either as the rescue team to call into action when the stink of iniquity gets to the noses of the well-off classes, nor as the reserve account for a struggling state welfare system, nor as the outlandish impulse of altruistic psychologies. What philanthropy all over Europe has initiated is a formidable set of strategic experiments and attempts at cultural and social innovation in favour of civil society. Regardless of the reach of the outcomes and the size of the budgets used, it has done so in the growing awareness of its strategic role in this game, while energetically racking its brains to use objectively verifiable methods of intervention. What in substance unites all the experiences in Europe and America, and indeed – we could say – in all parts of the world, is the philanthropists' and those who work in philanthropy's agreement on some basic ideas: the idea that their actions and strategies constitute an autonomous and independent sector from the state and economy; that these two can draw great benefit from being guided by philanthropic principles and competences; that it is necessary to work on testing new cultures and new ways of looking at

old problems; that the complexity of the social and cultural problems requires interdisciplinary approaches; that alone the state and economy are often incapable of generating the creative impulse to test new ways of ethical living; that democracy draws great benefit from, and is held up by, a fair and free civil society; and that philanthropic civil action must be creative, secularized, based on solidarity and generosity, tolerant and intercultural, work for justice and social equity, and be interested in every person's, as well as the environment and nature's, right to well-being and happiness.

The postulates of the new philanthropy

Now we can sum up the salient points, that is, the fundamental principles which in substance guide all the philanthropic experiences in the world.

1. Philanthropy is justified by the principle of every person's universal right to happiness. As a result of this principle, it is necessary to work to improve living conditions for all, and set goals, for example, to aid the weak, dialogue between different cultures, fight poverty and class inequality, to diffuse culture and provide universal access to education, defend nature, promote self-sustainability, and boost empowerment.

2. Philanthropy comes about and develops as people freely decide to unite visions, professional capabilities, skills and financial resources to sustain projects for civil improvement. In this sense, these organizations are the free expression of civil society.

3. Philanthropy is the expression of human generosity, which, through strategic and organized action, also expresses

the meaning of social and ethical entrepreneurship.

4. Contrary to the state, which redistributes common resources, and the for-profit sector, which works to produce profit, philanthropy works prevalently in a regime of gratuitousness. When it chooses to make loans that do not require repayment, it acts with the intent to prompt local entrepreneurship and the self-sustainability of projects over time. (In the case of social enterprises, for example, a distinction must always be made between those enterprises whose primary aims are social and those whose main aim is profit, using the label of 'social' for exclusively promotional ends. In the same way, corporate foundations must also be excluded when their advertising budgets far outstrip the actual philanthropic activity that is advertised).

5. Even if philanthropy derives its resources from for-profit activities – such as in the case of corporate or bank foundations – and even if it offers social and economic projects that have an impact on the political fabric, both its strategies and in operations must be independent from state and political organizations and from economic and financial organizations.

6. Since philanthropy is the expression of autonomous subjects and civil society, it is also a champion of democracy and one of its important prerequisites.

7. The goal of philanthropic subjects is the common good and, despite being independent from the state and economy, their actions often have a significant ethical, political, social, cultural and economic impact. As well as being champions of democracy they also facilitate and test social cohesion in the broad sense and promote the economic and civil development of local communities.

8. Following on from what has been said in the previous points, philanthropic organizations act, both in projects that they have initiated and those they fund, in a manner that does not discriminate on the basis of skin colour, sex or religion, and independently from politics and political parties. (Hence all those foundations constituted by think-tanks to support specific parties, or with a political leaning, present both in Europe and the United States, are to be excluded, even if they finance studies or research for free).

9. Given its lay and at times pioneering approach, and its rational position with regard to problems, philanthropy is strongly oriented towards using scientific methods of investigation and experimentation to try to understand the causes of the ills afflicting society and resolve them. The use of analyses, hypotheses, models, experiments, validation and diffusion is seen by almost all foundations as the priority method of operating.

10. Since the problems dealt with are complex, philanthropy favours interdisciplinary approaches. Also, as it operates in a non-competitive regime, it is able to freely divulge its projects, thus contributing to the circulation of ideas, the comparison of experiences and the diffusion of knowledge.

So we can understand the close relationship, but also the reciprocal independence of state, economy and philanthropy. Given the great capacity of philanthropy to take on the risks of experimentation and to channel resources and knowledge for the purpose of the common good, we can sense how it is convenient for any democratic government to support and facilitate the development of free philanthropy within the civil community. The future is going right in this direction. Instead of ignoring philanthropic action or trying to use it for its own ends, by hijacking

cking its resources for its own benefit, sensible and farsighted political management has in some sporadic and avant-garde cases begun to dialogue with philanthropic subjects to deal with the complexity of social and economic problems from different points of view.

Some examples of collaborative policies

In this connection, some emblematic cases can be seen in which, as a pillar of its policy, public management has initiated a process to promote philanthropy and social innovation within the civil community. A first example is the Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation (SICP), established by the White House as part of the Domestic Policy Council (www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/sicp).

The goal of the SICP is to involve individuals, non-profit organizations, the private sector and government to support innovation and work together. The office focuses on a different way of acting, promoting the service as a way to develop community leadership. Its goal is to increase investment in those innovative solutions that can demonstrate their results in hard facts, and to develop new partnership models. The general principles that the SICP has given itself are: *a)* to focus on results, *b)* to seek bottom-up solutions rather than solutions imposed from the top or centre, *c)* to achieve widespread community participation with a renewed sense of social responsibility, *d)* to prompt a sense of extended responsibility that rallies all sectors (philanthropy, public, private) for the benefit of society. The SICP is an extremely significant example, because it indicates an active approach on the part of the public government-

tal body towards social issues which combines all the forces at play. Even though the idea is not very distant from the creation of a public-private partnership, the novelty lies in the fact that it is the public subject which takes the initiative in a programme specifically devoted to enhancing the social actions and role of foundations. Furthermore, declaring that they want to increase investments in those innovative solutions which 'demonstrate their results in hard facts' means asking philanthropic investors to proceed quickly, more quickly than in the past, towards assessing the outcomes and impacts of what is tried out, that is, towards a scientific approach that makes critical use of both qualitative and quantitative assessment.

Another example is given by a very much smaller European state, whose government is adopting a particularly innovative policy of reassessing and promoting philanthropy. This is the case in Liechtenstein, where prime minister Klaus Tschüscher's vision for the 2020 work agenda is to enhance philanthropy. The agenda states that: *a)* Liechtenstein wants to be seen in Europe as a place where the quality of philanthropy is boosted, *b)* wants to establish proactive bonds and collaboration between finance and philanthropy, and *c)* wants to try out new formulas of modern philanthropy. It is evident that we are once again dealing with programmes that make the most of local financial wealth for philanthropic ends, foster the institutionalization and organization of philanthropy in the work of foundations, and promote scientific approaches to social innovation.

All of these public and private actors are inclined to relate to social problems in a new way, by substantially appealing to the innovative initiatives that the community itself is able to deve-

lop from the bottom. This approach consciously aims to increase the role of civil society as an independent, free and decisive actor in the search for solutions. Hence, civil society becomes to all effects the place where ideas and responsibilities emerge and also the ideal partner for social growth in general.

In this context, it comes as no surprise that Agenda 2020 – put together through a democratic process of citizen participation – made those very three sectors (or ethical areas) that we have outlined thus far, namely state, economy and civil society, *Wertefundamente für die strategischen Ziele*, or fundamental values for the strategic goals. It is even more astonishing to find that among the persistent programmed values uniting these three areas is the notion of *Humanismus*, whose roots we have traced back to the eighteenth century and which today we find alive and kicking in the most advanced European culture. Said *Humanismus* is explicitly traced back to the ideas of human dignity, tolerance, freedom of conscience and equal rights: ‘A policy that is guided by humanistic considerations is distinguished by the fact that mankind is the start and end point as well as the middle point of the political order. The aim of such a policy is to create the conditions for a just society. In these times of quick and complex changes humanism offers a reference point for effective, multi-faceted reforms. In the knowledge that “Humanism” is a pillar of Liechtenstein’s values, implications arise with relation to state, economy and society.’⁸ Lastly, we do not want to fail to underline once again how, while acquiring autonomy and spontaneity, in these examples civil society also appears in its most congenial role as a support and condition for participatory democracy. In line with this, all the actions aimed at increasing the maturity and freedom of civil

society pass through the more or less direct involvement of philanthropy, its vehicle and facilitator. The most avant-garde initiatives regarding social innovation today greatly involve local communities, therefore they are in line with the idea of participatory democracy, widespread philanthropy and civil responsibility. In their *Libro bianco sulla innovazione sociale*⁹ (White Paper on Social Innovation), Robin Murray, Julie Caulier Grieco and Geoff Mulgan, together with Alex Giordano and Adam Arvidsson, assert that social innovation is a promising candidate for the necessary reorganization of production and social relations. In it they also highlight the bottom-up dynamic of the whole process: 'It is unlikely that the new ideas that can guide us in this undertaking will come from the top, from the politicians, the intellectuals, the parties, the Church... Social innovation shows us another route based on a multitude of bottom-up initiatives and day-to-day experiments.'

We seem to be seeing that the most interesting and promising initiatives today are those which contrast an obsolete and retrograde idea of class society and elitist culture and that – by mobilizing resources from the bottom – in collaboration with politics and economy, can critically and freely deal with the institutions. Civil society, and the philanthropy in it, can play a role that involves both social entrepreneurship and criticism of the status quo. A mention must go to the now numerous examples of consortia and networks working in social innovation, all featuring a bottom-up approach, internationality, a lack of geographical and political barriers, interdisciplinarity, and scalable solutions. In this connection, see the cases of Socialeconomy (www.socialeconomy.eu.org) and the engagement of The Young Foundation in the field of social enterprise.

An evolving map

Foundations are the entities that, in this setting, are displaying the most interesting dynamics, both in terms of numbers and the continually improving quality of their interventions. There are a good number of foundations in all the countries of Europe, some of which operating, others exclusively grant-making, and others still of a mixed kind. The very great majority of them share the ideas expressed previously and have topics on their agendas that are particularly close to their hearts, such as: how to increase transparency, how to manage heritage in an ethical manner, how to effectively manage complex projects, how to make internal human resources grow, how to promote development of the third sector, how to measure the impacts of funded projects, how to assess their outcomes, how to make themselves heard by the institutions, how to improve strategies, and how to produce significant improvements in the chosen sphere of action. Numerically speaking, the phenomenon of foundations is significant. Suffice it to think that Finland counts more than 2,600 foundations of public utility, Sweden has over 12,700, Ireland has 25 grantmaking foundations, and Britain 8,800. In these countries, some foundations are examples of excellence both owing to the practices adopted and the impacts of their actions on civil society. Think of the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, established in 1962 thanks to a sizeable donation from the Swedish Central Bank and today operating as an independent foundation that upholds research in the human and social sciences. Another excellent example is the case of the independent Wellcome Trust in London, which mainly dedicates its activities to scientific research with an annual budget of over 500 million euros. Also worthy of mention is the great

work performed by some foundations in Northern Ireland in favour of reconciliation, peace and intercultural dialogue among different sectors of the population, as is the case of Atlantic Philanthropies, or the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, with its significant experience in the fields of peace, poverty and the elderly.

Holland deserves particular attention: it counts around 27,000 foundations of public utility, of which around 8,000 are charitable foundations. A mention must be made of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, operating at a global level in favour of the young brackets of the population to improve the quality of education, reduce violence and ameliorate health conditions for children. Let us remember that the European Cultural Foundation, an independent Dutch foundation operating for almost sixty years in the sector of European culture, was also the inventor of and test ground for the Erasmus Programme for student exchanges in Europe, then adopted by the European Community and extended to all European countries.

Germany does not possess a law that gives a clear-cut definition of foundations as legal subjects, and the German Civil Code (BGB) does not have a legal definition for these organizations. Therefore, the total numbers need to be siphoned off in order to consider only those foundations that are in line with other nations. In any case, it is estimated that in Germany there are over 18,100 foundations, of which 94% are of public utility. In Portugal there are around 800 foundations, while Spain counts more than 9,000 foundations at work in the country, amongst which La Caixa Foundation, a private foundation and offshoot of the Banca La Caixa, operating in the cultural, social and scientific research sectors, annually providing around 500 million euros to support third-sector organizations throughout Spain and

specific projects conducted by the foundation itself. In Portugal, a mention needs to go to the great work done by the Calouste Gulbenkian foundation in favour of culture, art and scientific research. It should also be remembered that the foundation, fruit of the legacy left by the magnate Gulbenkian, provided a strong reference point for democratic culture and intellectuals in Portugal during the dark years of the dictatorship. France counts around 2,264 foundations. On the other hand, Italy comes in at over 4,720 foundations of public utility, standing out among which are 88 originating from banks present almost the length and breadth of the country, with contributions in favour of the third sector of just under 1,400 million euros per annum.¹⁰ Of these, it would be truly impossible to list the most significant projects, many of which are in the field of social welfare, culture and scientific research. Furthermore, a large part of the bank foundations have begun to initiate projects by uniting forces and forming partnerships, instead of acting alone. Among these, some are among the top exponents in the new trend for international coordination at a European level too.

Despite the picture painted above, not everything is perfect. Some foundations are slower at heading in the direction of objectivity, transparency and scientific method. Some are more self-referential than others, comforting themselves in the conviction that – by giving money – there is no need to justify what they do. Some more than others are subject to the political influence of local institutions. In particular, criticisms were recently raised in Italy against bank foundations, accused of opaque governance, excessive links with the original banks and invasive political ties. In Germany, similar accusations have been levelled against the Bertelsmann Stiftung, criticized for

exercising too much political influence on the government.

There is no doubt that effective philanthropy can only be performed in absolute independence from political institutions and in the absence of links with for-profit institutions, which limit their actions or, worse, compromise their future. Obviously, this is not just true for bank foundations but also, and at times above all, for corporate foundations. However, it also needs to be observed that from particular cases of aberrant practices some critics have claimed to have come to the universal conclusion that there needs to be an all-round 'elimination' of foundations. This catastrophic criticism is directed prevalently at their governance and not at their actions, is centred on finance and not on philanthropy. It almost seems to be oriented towards depriving the third sector of essential support and making the foundations' 'tidy packet' – the true object of desire – flow towards a much more 'public', namely even more 'political' management, in the hands of a state which in recent decades has proven to be highly ineffective and governed by a conflicting political class at times responsible for unlawful behaviours. An outcome whose lawfulness and usefulness we would doubt somewhat.

Instead, on the management front there is no doubt that Italian and foreign foundations are evolving thanks to continuing improvements in strategies, better philanthropic actions thanks to measurements and assessments, empowered human resources, growing managerial skills at all levels, bolstered efficiency, a deeper understanding of the third sector's needs, transparency, and changerounds in the governance bodies according to personal qualifications. This seems to be the way to transform these entities from subjects passively distributing

resources to social innovators. There is equally no doubt that the new movement underway in Europe and Italy is heading in these directions, also thanks to some avant-garde currents and enlightened actors that are leading the way.

Despite the resources made available to the third sector by philanthropists, banks, private subjects, etc., the solutions tried out, especially if they are innovative, are nevertheless always local. To become national, or even supranational, the innovations and best practices require massive sums of money and a political commitment that goes beyond the horizon of each single foundation. This is when philanthropy becomes the arena for experimentation and avant-garde thinking, which the actors in the public area, or, in some cases the economic area, must then take it upon themselves to spread. State, economy and philanthropy are, therefore, called upon to work together if they want to make sure that some of the social problems under debate are resolved. Philanthropy is thus becoming the concrete voice of civil society and local communities which, with new ideas and innovative experiments, can put forward their 'request for civilization'.

Some initiatives are also coming into being in the economic field with the aim of promoting enterprise philanthropy and involving economic actors in initiatives with social impact. In Italy this is the case of Sodalitas for example, which coordinates enterprises, enterprise foundations, private foundations and public institutions each year in a common process to assess and select the best projects in the third sector.

With more economic involvement, one can mention the emerging international social enterprise movement, and, more in general, venture philanthropy. This calls for some distin-

ctions. Venture philanthropy is but the philanthropic version of venture capital. Instead of acting to freely promote social innovation, it intervenes economically in social enterprises through money loans or capitalization. Venture philanthropy hence expects remuneration for its investments and does not act gratuitously. Despite this, the movement of capital, and, in some cases, the capacity-building caused, make the phenomenon interesting. The social enterprises and development projects can benefit from the availability of capital and thus have to reason in terms of business and sustainability. The critical side of venture philanthropy consists of the fact that to date no explicit and shared parameter has been devised as a watershed between action responding to the logics of profit and action following social and philanthropic logics. Should it not clearly express the values and ethical principles of its action, venture philanthropy risks remaining a two-headed beast: on one hand, heir of the for-profit culture typical of capital investors, and on the other tending to be characterized by its resulting social added value. It is a difficult compromise, which can only be made when there are clear rules and transparency. In an unclear arena, such as the present, is a world populated by hybrid animals: companies that say they are 'social' simply because they serve those slightly marginal segments neglected by the large multinationals, capital enterprises whose 'social' strategy is only to invest in large capitals with safe returns, and, finally, enterprises that use the capital remuneration as a tool to guarantee the future sustainability of the social innovations actually produced.

Therefore, we need to carefully distinguish between the true social enterprise with ethical intents and the enterprise that in effect acts to skim income off the incredibly vast mar-

ket of poverty or, as it has been called, the bottom of the pyramid. A bottom of the pyramid which, albeit infinitely poorer per person with respect to the planet's rich elite, is numerically much vaster and hence constitutes a pool to drain, as some predatory capitalists have now realized. Furthermore, the delicate relationship that there will have to be between venture philanthropy and the welfare state remains to be clarified. In some cases, we see the former as substitutes for a welfare-giving state that can no longer manage to guarantee its social services. We have already clarified that welfare is not an indifferent option in a state's mission. As a consequence, venture philanthropy, which still has to find shared philanthropic standards at an international level, cannot be seen as a substitute for the welfare state. More dangerously, in this case the idea could reveal the surreptitious desire to reintroduce neo-liberal logics whose problems have been widely demonstrated. Based on the numbers highlighted above and also considering the many years of concrete experience, we can nevertheless say that, thanks to philanthropy, in Europe there currently exists a movement based on social generosity that is attentive to communities' cultural, civil and economic progress. This movement, consisting of different actors and intervening in a vast variety of ways, is organizing itself, debating, improving and developing its competences. In other words, we are seeing the creation of a heritage of widespread knowledge, even though at times it may still be coarse, informal and implicit. This knowledge, thanks to the contribution and vision of the European foundations, is transforming from implicit to explicit, from subjective to shared, also fostered by the increase in partnership projects. The nations that have understood this movement in time and have

enlightened people within their state organizations and politics have also created all the organizational and institutional mechanisms so that the knowledge and experiences can be put to work. They have enabled philanthropy and taken it upon themselves to promote it widely as a fundamental asset of political values, while avoiding turning to it as a last-minute escape route or monetary reserve. State and economy can but draw benefit from close collaboration with philanthropy, and can thus avoid the disastrous outcomes of the past, or greatly limit the widespread negative oscillations on civil society. In effect, the harmonious growth of civil society must be a fundamental value both for the state and the economy, and it is precisely this that unites both with the area – which we have defined ethical – of social generosity, that is, philanthropy.

Let us end with a quote, once again taken from that inspirer of equality and natural rights movements, namely the barely thirty-year-old Spinoza. In his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* of 1670, he disputed the Jewish's people theological prerogative that they are the only people chosen by God and set out that happiness cannot be the exclusive privilege of the few or a single people. At the same time, he established a universal principle still very much valid in the present day: 'Every man's true happiness and blessedness consist solely in the enjoyment of what is good, not in the pride that he alone is enjoying it, to the exclusion of others. He who thinks himself the more blessed because he is enjoying benefits which others are not, or because he is more blessed or more fortunate than his fellows, is ignorant of true happiness and blessedness, and the joy which he feels is either childish or envious and malicious.'¹¹

- 1 Baruch Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. by Edwin Curley, vol. 1 (1632-77; Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 1985): 588-9. Initial quote from Appendix to the *Ethics*, II 271, 590-1.
- 2 Vincenzo Ferrone, *The Enlightenment. History of an Idea*, trans. Elisabetta Tarantino (2010; Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015): xi.
- 3 Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David Farrell Krell, vol. 2: *The Eternal Recurrence of the Same* (1961; San Francisco; London: Harper & Row, 1984): 114.
- 4 Ihab Hassan, 'Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective', in *Exploring Postmodernism*, ed. Matei Calinescu and Douwe Fokkema (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1987): 19.
- 5 Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the intellectual origins of modern democracy* (Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, c2010): xiii-xiv.
- 6 Simon Kuznets, 'Economic Growth and Income Inequality', in *The American Economic Review*, vol. XLV, no. 1, March 1955.
- 7 James K. Galbraith, 'How Economists Have Misunderstood Inequality: An Interview with James Galbraith', by Brad Plumer, *The Washington Post*, 5 May 2012: 73.
- 8 Regierung des Fürstentums Liechtenstein, *Agenda 2020 für das Fürstentum Liechtenstein*, 10, own translation <http://www.pslf.li/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Agenda-2020.pdf>.
- 9 Societing, *Libro bianco sulla innovazione sociale*, <http://www.societing.org/2011/06/il-libro-bianco-dellinnovazione-sociale-feel-the-innovation/>.
- 10 ACRI, 'Sedicesimo rapporto sulle fondazioni di origine bancaria', 2010: 88-9. <https://www.acri.it/Article/PublicArticle/337/538/sedicesimo-rapporto-sulle-fondazioni-di-origine-bancaria--anno-2010>.
- 11 Baruch Spinoza, *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes, vol. 1: *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670; London: George Routledge and Sons Limited, 1891): 43.

8. CONCLUSIONS. A NEW SOCIAL AGENDA FOR STATE, MARKET AND PHILANTHROPY

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The sleep of reason produces monsters.

Francisco Goya

‘Development was a great paternalistic enterprise that characterized the “thirty glory years” (namely the years between 1945 and 1975). During these years of vigorous growth, in the West we lived in the “well-being” of consumer society. And the crumbs of the rich fed the new middle classes of the “independent” states and their expanded customer bases. This ensured a national cohesion. It was the glorious era of the welfare state. This model has not collapsed. What has collapsed are the barriers that protected the lower classes.’¹

We saw it in the previous chapters, and Serge Latouche also explains it in the lines set out above: the economy and market have failed in their set mission, that is, to guarantee well-being

for all, to build an affluent society, to ensure progress. And the state has slipped up in its main task too. The great financial crisis has made this glaringly evident: inequalities in social and economic terms and in possessions have been increasing instead of decreasing.

‘Democratic, secular, and egalitarian ideas dismally failed to be accepted or officially sponsored in very many new countries emerging in the 1950s and 1960s through decolonization, desegregation, and the spread of anticolonialism. [...] even in the West, these values, being very recent as publicly and officially endorsed principles, remain only weakly embedded in education, the media, and in many people’s minds.’²

Step after step, we have noticed that signs that something is not working are coming from different spheres: from the individual sphere to the sphere of interpersonal relations, through the market and political and institutional relations.

Reactions to the incongruences have been many and varied. To remain in the twentieth century, we went through the years of recession, wars, rebuilding and revolution. On the cultural front, the century just ended was also the era of postmodernism and critical deconstruction. But now the need to build is emerging. A necessity that is urgent even. What remains is perhaps the most difficult step: to understand how and in what terms this building can take place. And if it can start from existent presuppositions or if it has to rest on new bases. The crisis has made a now evident outcome emerge: state, market and philanthropy have failed to follow the route to equality, in some cases owing to strategies which have proven to be wrong, in others owing to insufficient efforts or contradictory actions. Today, state, market and philanthropy find themselves within

three paradoxes: of incompleteness, of generosity and of a local well-being passed off as universal.

The *paradox of incompleteness*: the three sectors have acted in a discordant way in relation to each other to say the least, with no common vision of social ethics or common project of a desirable society. And none of them have realized that, taken singly, they cannot make even the smallest contribution to resolving the social problems that have emerged with the crisis. There is an African tale about three brothers that are a long way from their father, who had given them each a magical object. He gave one a mirror to see things that happen far away. He gave the second some sandals which enabled him to cover many miles in just one step. He gave the third a little bag of magic herbs which heal illnesses. Now, the father had fallen seriously ill and was dying. Which of the three distant brothers could help his father? The answer is: none of them, alone. Because it is only by joining the three magic objects that they could go and help him. State, market and philanthropy are in the same boat: not one of them has sufficient prerogatives if it is not united with the other forces.

The second is the *paradox of tainted generosity*: philanthropy finds itself in a vicious circle, since it is maintained by taking money from the economic and financial sectors which are to a large extent responsible for the crisis causing inequality and social problems. Insofar as it is the expression of organized generosity, philanthropy finds itself in a particularly critical situation. Reduced to intervening in a marginal and often tardy manner which is not sufficient to modify the iniquitous make-up of society, it acts by making investments and financing projects with money deriving from the same arenas that

have created the inequalities or injustices, that is, mainly from the market. So we have the paradoxical situation in which philanthropists on one hand are subjects who work for the public good and to cure social inequalities, but on the other they draw their resources from the very same system where these inequalities originate.

The third is the *paradox of failed universality*. The three sectors of state, market and philanthropy are only able to resolve the serious social problems resulting from structural inequality if they assume a universal point of view. Instead, in reality, state and market are local by constitution, since one acts within a field confined by citizenship and precise boundaries, and the other is by nature oriented towards making profit only for the restricted number of people who belong to its sphere. State and market are likely to orient themselves towards local convenience and utility. Instead, philanthropy taps into some social problems which are often planetary and universal in size. All the same, it suffers from a lack of power, since it is not big enough to even attempt to heal the problems it deals with at global level. And so philanthropy is confined to a marginal and subsidiary role, while the market deludes itself that it can achieve a universal dimension thanks to the idea, winning as it is false, of the trickle-down economy, namely, an economy in which the richest on the planet become wealthier and wealthier, causing, sooner or later, even the poorest to become richer too in the end. In reality, what everyone can see is that the richest on the planet have become that way precisely thanks to the existence of the poorest, who act as a pool supplying low-cost labour for a privileged mass economy.

Beyond the technical, economic, financial and political so-

lutions that may act to resolve the crisis, in reality it seems to us that a totally new social culture is needed to that of the latter half of the 1990s. In other words, a set of values, ideas and behaviours that allow different interventions on the current situation to the past. Hence, we will attempt to outline some ways out and some existent urgent necessities. We do not claim, however, to give an exhaustive picture of the whole array of possible routes which certainly do exist but are beyond the limited action strategies that the cultural and economic checkmate has forced us into today.

Hence we will list the cultural assumptions that hitherto have been confounded or impoverished, hindered even, and which are emerging today as new social requests: a) the necessity for a new reason, or rather, for dialoguing, inclusive and generous reasons; b) the necessity to question the paradigms inherited from the twentieth century and, in particular, to deal with a new idea of 'universality'; c) the emergence of a new demand for ethicality, which can also be realized by breaking out of the idea of local good; d) the need to assert inclusive generosity against exclusive sophism; e) the urgency to place social equity at the forefront of the joint agenda for state, market and philanthropy.

a) Necessity for new inclusive reasons. 'The sleep of reason produces monsters', says the title of an engraving by Spanish artist Francisco Goya. Knowing that we are not saying anything new, but of the opinion that it is useful to repeat it, we may add that the sleep of reason produces inequality and immobility, and the incapacity to change the current state of things. This stalemate is exactly the opposite of the humanist approach, or

to be more precise an 'enlightened humanism' which could instead help us to exit the crisis and see problems from a more global viewpoint.

The historical and cultural reference is very precise, harking back to the current of thought, philosophical above all, that was widespread between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Better still, the true relation can be found in that which Jonathan Israel defines 'Radical Enlightenment', '[a]n originally clandestine movement of ideas, almost entirely hidden from public view during its earliest phase (the late seventeenth century), and maturing in opposition to the moderate mainstream Enlightenment dominant in Europe and America in the eighteenth century, radical thought burst into the open in the 1770s, 1780s, and 1790s.'³ Today it is seen as the current of thought that played the main role in casting the moulds for the values and egalitarian and democratic ideals of the modern world.

At the basis of this Enlightenment are ideals such as 'democracy; racial and sexual equality; individual liberty of lifestyle; full freedom of thought, expression, and the press; eradication of religious authority from the legislative process and education; and full separation of church and state'. Ideals which, if we are to take a closer look, do not seem to have been fully realized to date. Even the much sought-after 'individual liberty of lifestyle'⁴ has become something different and distorted, oscillating between two opposites, that is, acritical standardization to the dominating and stereotyped models of economic elites on one hand and on the other individual transgression of common rules seen as the expression of the desire for success and power.

Nevertheless, it is not a matter of recovering old paradigms of thought. Reason, singular, has shattered into a range of rea-

sons and points of view. Much more complex and variegated approaches have emerged, such as perspectivism and relativism. As a consequence, now both those attitudes aimed at an unambiguous expression of monolithic and universal reason, and approaches guided by radical relativism that leaves all positions unresolved and eternally conflictual, seem equally as ineffective to us. Neither does the ultimate truth that should put an end to the discussions nor the eternal conflict of local truths seem to be of any use. The preliminary work proves to be much more interesting, that is, guaranteeing that conflictual positions have suitable representation and voice, while avoiding self-referentiality and enclosure in vicious circles, cultural bubbles or social elites. This way could be all the more interesting the more we note that even in science – a discipline by definition devoted to seeking the truth – an unambiguous outcome marks the death of thought. Here we repeat the opinion of Paul Feyerabend who affirmed that ‘science is an essentially anarchic enterprise: theoretical anarchism is more humanitarian and more likely to encourage progress than its law-and-order alternatives’.⁵

Today, as yesterday (today perhaps more so), it is necessary to rethink the way of being together from the foundations, in order to give more space and more voice to private or public expressions of inclusive generosity and equality as an indispensable condition of democracy. Education plays a fundamental, also political role in this context. In this connection we ask if some people’s idea – that cutting investments in the cultural sector and education is a strategy adopted by those who are in power to keep control over those who have none – is quite so unfounded.

b) *Crisis of the paradigms of the past and new ideas of universality.* One of the greatest conquests of so-called postmodernism is that it pushed a dusty and static fin-de-siècle culture towards a critical pluralism. Ihab Hassan asserts that critical pluralism is very much included in the cultural field of postmodernism. And a limited critical pluralism is to some extent a reaction against radical relativism and the ironic indeterminacy of the postmodern condition, and an attempt to limit them.⁶

In its route towards critical pluralism, postmodernism has given rise to various cultural expressions, highlighted by Hassan and Mikhail Bakhtin, amongst which: indeterminacy and ambiguity; fragmentation and disconnection, with the consequent enhancement of the fragment and the incomplete; the delegitimation of historic codes and abandonment of metanarrations in favour of the heterogeneity of linguistic games; an absence of profundity and loss of Self, in the wake of Nietzsche, who in *Der Wille zur Macht* declared that the subject is a 'fiction'; the preference for irony which, in the absence of a cardinal principle or single paradigm, becomes the preferred style of demystification; the supremacy of the signifier even to the detriment of the signified, driving the discourse towards the meanderings of sophism; the carnevalization of contents, namely polyphony and the centrifugal power of language; and the immanence of laughter.

In particular, Hassan declares: "The postmodernist only disconnects; fragments are all he pretends to trust. His ultimate opprobrium is "totalization," any synthesis whatever, social, epistemic, even poetic."⁷ Today some of the cultural values of the second half of the twentieth century seem to be under strain. In particular, while on one hand it is confirmed that the idea of to-

tality is an epistemic category that is as harmful as it is surpassed, nevertheless it may now be necessary to work to define a new idea of universality, which takes the inclusion of the particular fragments and drifts of the global system into account. We need a global gaze, and this emerges clearly in the most evolved tendencies of the economy, ecology, politics, education, culture, and in all those spheres where systemic approaches to complex problems are indispensable. The impression is that today we are faced with problems that we are unable to process at present and that require new cultural and political instruments. For example, problems relating to managing the planet's demographics fall into the category of problems with universality. Other issues relate to the imbalance in the relationship with nature and primary resources and their safeguard, or concern the management of inequalities, or work. They are spheres whose problems need to be faced up to in a cultural dimension, which implicate universal views and interdisciplinary relations. Thus far neither market nor state has demonstrated that alone it can possess the cultural instruments to deal with these problems. Philanthropy takes a transversal and intersectoral viewpoint and could well work as a catalyst to indicate best practices that could be extended. But to do this, it must be enabled to play a strategic role in drawing up a common social agenda.

c) The new demand for ethicality and to exit from the local good. The great financial, economic and social crisis which blew up in 2007 and the explosion of inequality are calling into question our way of understanding and seeing reality, in addition to the certainties – moreover already few – on which collective living was based. It is not difficult to find examples of this diso-

rientation, which is hitting the new generations very hard. Bearing witness to this is the identity split that we spoke of at length. A split that involves everyone. The way of identifying ourselves is changing, and so is the object of the identification, which can no longer consist of models of local economic well-being, constantly growing to the detriment of the excluded swathes of the population; local success strategies; or an ethic of 'local good'.

The way out seems to head in the direction of radically calling into question all the paradigms and dogmas built in the last part of the last century, starting from ineffective and inefficient redistribution policies, which have not lessened inequalities but increased them. In the same way it is necessary to question the role of philanthropy and a third sector moved by high ideals but limited in scope by local boundaries, and limited in size by being viewed as extras, dependent on those same public redistribution policies which in part have contributed to increasing the present inequalities. There is no way out except through a critical ethical, cultural, political in the broad sense, and educational turn. In this regard, John Dewey is farsighted: 'The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated.'⁸ The basic goal of education should be to deliver the tools that permit the passage from selfish management to global democracy, in other words the capacity to 'be inside' forms that integrate inclusive generosity and give a response to an increasingly pressing question for ethicality. The question is very clear: are we interested in growth of the public good or of personal good alone? Do we want to concentrate exclusively on the single person or instead aim our attention to-

wards the collective good?

Starting from the concept of 'collective good', in addition to hypothesizing the existence of a 'third way' between state and market, Nobel prize winner Elinor Ostrom⁹ formulated a theory on the management of the global commons, therein including the climate, oceans, the atmosphere, pastures and mountain forests. Nevertheless, the collective good is not just this. We would simply like to point out that human resources are also a collective good and that it is from here that we should start. And yet it cannot be said that any progress has been made in real terms in setting value by the human figure in the professional context, at least not in Italy. Instead, if the basic assumptions were to be overturned by placing the social and cultural emancipation of the people at the centre of the strategic programme, this could give rise to a virtuous circle. The fact that people come to be the focus of the political and economic action could lead towards the diffusion of a generous identity and a decrease in inequalities. And, vice versa, encouraging generosity could enable any 'strategic hierarchy' to be rewritten. Two concurrent passages towards a practical transformation of the present situation, starting from a different way of considering the concepts of culture, power, relations and exchange, to give rise to an ethos aimed at the good of all. While bearing in mind that a generous identity is not an identity that incorporates differences or considers everything as 'good' and acceptable. Yet, generosity can give rise to a public ethos that 'could reflect and somehow recompose all citizens' different life experiences in a common ethos. A common ethos is not synonymous with the homologation of values, but the co-existence of different values, different ethos. As such the public ethic is the extension of

the sense of citizenship. It is the willingness to lay down the rules of living together, together'.¹⁰

d) Inclusive generosity versus exclusive sophism. The last thirty years of the last century saw the triumph of the conviction that all social and cultural reality can ultimately be completely manipulated and assimilated to the linguistic and lastly rhetorical game, regardless of the actual facts. This 'elasticity' of the objective truth was established alongside the parallel triumph of the culture of the image and the mass media, and the awareness of the power of rhetoric and marketing, communication and the signifier. All to the detriment of ethics, objectivity and the irrefutable concreteness of reality. A tendency that was everywhere in the end-of-the-century debate, both among the ranks of the dogmatists and the critics. This way of seeing things began with Nietzsche, who in *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* asserted: 'What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished'.¹¹ This is pointed out by Carlo Ginzburg, who quotes him meticulously. We owe to Ginzburg a sharp critical comment on this intellectual root of sceptical relativism, in which an idea of rhetoric is not only extraneous, but even opposed to the proof of fact.¹² If, as Nietzsche asserts, everything is an interpretation, then the quest for the truth (or truths?) moves into the background and the linguistic game of rhetoric is the weapon that the constituted power has to assert itself in spite of objectivity. If the latter is surpassed by the capacity of language to model and continually create the truth according to our pleasure and our will to power, then what ultimately counts is the capacity to master language in its social and

political determinants. So what ends up counting is rhetoric, above all that which is exercised at the level of mass media and constituted power. Nevertheless, through its deforming power, rhetoric can disregard the object. Indeed, it blends object and subject, creates idols or pardons crimes, dissolves the proof of fact, builds its innocence while failing to address the proof of fact, and neglecting the historic memory within continually flowing and manipulated historical data. There exists a dichotomy between rhetoric and generosity. Detachment from the paradigms of postmodernism and turn-of-the-century dogmas, which often avoided generosity, would allow a better understanding of how in reality the triumph of rhetoric and the media word has only made the will to power of the strongest win, to the disadvantage of the weakest. Through the rhetorical game, the reason of the single will to power is able to prevail over objective reason, which is circumvented appealing to gut feelings, typical of a media and populist audience.

A possible way out is to cut down rhetorical approaches to instead fully foster the more tiring route of carefully inspecting, critically analysing and measuring the social outcomes. It is the way of an objective reason, understandable and falsifiable by all, that makes it possible to overcome a current of thought which, from Hegel onward, considered civil society subordinate to the state and to economic dynamics. It is shown by an economy and politics that are increasingly linked to finance, escape any mechanism to verify their social outcomes and have marginalized generosity.

e) A common agenda for state, market and philanthropy.

To overcome these intrinsic contradictions, a philanthropy

needs to be devised that does not act exclusively as a tactical 'first aid unit', but as a strategic option, together with the state and market. To exit the three paradoxes cited at the beginning it is necessary to make politics (in the highest sense of the term), economy (in the evolutive sense of the term) and philanthropy (in the strategic sense of the term) converge. This means modifying both the relations between the three entities, and the scale of the social priorities. As correctly identified in the white paper on '*Social Innovation nell'agenda delle Istituzioni*': 'Social innovation can be identified not only in the achievement of objectives that provide an innovative response to social necessities, but also in the use of processes that involve social interactions between the three components concerned, policy makers, market actors and civil society'.¹³ This is the only way for generosity to be dealt with in a less subsidiary manner and to put an issue to the forefront that, despite being plain for all to see, risks dropping into the background, or even disappearing: if the interests that we continue to serve remain those of individuals or privileged groups alone, are we perhaps not destined to sink into a mean-spirited, selfish world with no internal connections or productive relations? Either philanthropy, state and market come together to make ethical and common actions, or in the end everyone will fall into their own closed, self-referential logics, into paradigms which reproduce themselves despite the failures, and into horizons limited to the individual well-being of the privileged few. As Ferrarotti writes in the preface to the Italian version of Simmel's *Über soziale Differenzierung*: 'It is time that Italian culture accepted the contribution that it can give to clarifying the difficult relationship between group and individual, and in particular to making it understood

that the individual's problems are not a purely individual fact'.¹⁴
This, too, seems to be the basis of democracy.

1 Serge Latouche, *Il pensiero creativo contro l'economia dell'assurdo*, interview by Roberto Bosio (Bologna: EMI, 2002): 31, own translation.

2 Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the intellectual origins of modern democracy*. (Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, c2010): xi-xii.

3 Ibid., vii.

4 Ibid., pp. vii-viii.

5 Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchist Theory of Knowledge* (1975; Verso: London, 1993): 9.

6 Ihab Hassan, 'Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective' in *Exploring Postmodernism*, ed. Matei Calinescu and Douwe Fokkema (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1987): 23.

7 Ibid., 19.

8 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: an introduction to the philosophy of education* (1916; New York: Free Press, 1966): 87.

9 See Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

10 Luigi Ruggiu and Francesco Mora, eds, *Identità differenze conflitti* (Milan: Mimesis La scala e l'album, 2007): 80.

11 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873; Aristeus Books, 2012): 10.

12 Carlo Ginzburg, 'History, Rhetoric, and Proof', *The Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1999): 9.

13 MIUR, 'Social Innovation Agenda', March 2013, own translation. http://www.ponrec.it/media/181349/progetto_sia.pdf.

14 Georg Simmel, *La differenziazione sociale*, ed. Bruno Accarino (1982; Editori Laterza, Rome-Bari, 1998): x.

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