

Angelo Cannata

Walking

Philosophy for life

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1. About this book

This book exposes my philosophy, inspired by Gianni Vattimo; unlike his “weak thought”, a greater importance is given here to the “becoming” of Heraclitus. The greatest philosophers are retraced here, highlighting their metaphysical or anti-metaphysical positions, in order to come to some final perspectives, that I hope will be a help for living, as in fact every philosophy is in itself.

Today I am no longer catholic, but throughout the book the background that has formed me will be noticed evident.

2. Philosophy

I start with this topic because I consider it an indispensable basis for dealing with the subsequent questions. From the following paragraph you can better deduce the reason why the argument is the first that is addressed.

This is not a complete treatise of philosophy; it is a selection of philosophers and subjects, mainly aimed at explaining the antimetaphysical point of view. Those who don't understand the meaning of this term should not be discouraged: the following chapters have just the aim to explain it. I had the pleasure of being told by some people that they finally figured out some things about philosophy, that they had already studied in the past, only now, after having read this book. Actually I think that the synthesis, that I am presenting here, will allow to understand some

concepts that the philosophical treatises do not explain, in my opinion, with sufficient clarity and simplicity.

2.1 What philosophy is

Philosophy can be defined as a way of thinking that seeks awareness about the primary elements of thought. Let's try to understand this definition by examining the things it says.

Philosophy is "a way of thinking". From the beginning of their existence, men have always tried to reflect; even in animals we can notice some rudimentary forms of reflection; let's consider, for example, the difference in behavior between a few weeks old doggy and an adult dog: the doggy tends to react to situations with a faster impulsiveness, which leads him to a number of failures; the adult dog, instead, is able to observe more slowly the habits of his prey and to adapt to them, in order to have more success in the attempt to capture it; of course, these are elements so difficult to verify, that we cannot say for sure if it is really and how far we can speak of "reflection"; however, our purpose here is not to study the behavior of animals, but to try to realize that reflection is not a mysterious and supernatural miracle that happens exclusively in the human mind, but a set of elementary electrical impulses, whose simplest forms can also be found in animals, or even, due to the fact of being precisely electrical impulses, in any nature's phenomenon and in inanimate objects: we may even think, as an example, to the switching on of a light bulb. In the history of the world's

various peoples, many ways of thinking have been developed and philosophy is one of them.

Then, the definition that I posed at the beginning says, “that seeks awareness”. “Awareness” means having compared an idea with other ideas; for example, if I compare the idea of flame with the memory of a burn that I suffered, I can gain the knowledge that the flame causes burns and is therefore dangerous; if I will never do this comparison, that is, if I will never put in contact the idea of flame with the memory of my being burnt, I will return every time to burn myself, never figuring out where the problem lies. How many times we humans fall back into the same problems as stupids, simply because we have not thought about it, we did not put in contact the ideas, the memories, and so we didn’t gain awareness! Consider, for example, for how many thousands of years many governors continued to deceive people, by promising to solve their problems, and people go back regularly to burn themselves, although they consider themselves intelligent people.

Finally, my definition ends by saying: “about the primary elements of thought”. Awareness, in fact, can be searched with regard to many things; one can also spend a lifetime trying to become increasingly aware of the best ways to earn more money; at some point, in him or in someone else, the following question could rise: is it worth to spend all life trying to find out just this? Are there other more important things, that would deserve more this spending of time and reflection, or all things are equally important? What might be the most important things? And what criteria will I use to determine this? And what faith

could I have in these criteria? How will I know that they guided me really to the most important things? This kind of questions can be found in the cultures of all peoples, but they had a systematic examination only starting from ancient Greece and then in the European culture; in other peoples they took quite the way of religious faith or of models of meditation; the difference between meditation and reflection can be found in the fact that the meditator focuses on a few ideas and lives them, tastes them, goes into them by a lifestyle; who reflects, on the contrary, works on a greater number of ideas and makes them interact with greater dynamism; both ways have advantages and disadvantages: the meditator discovers better the taste of a few ideas and pauses longer, even for millennia, over them, but covers a less amount of road; who reflects covers a lot more road, but deprives himself of the opportunity to deepen to the utmost the flavor, the beauty, the depth of every single thought, similar to those who run and cannot contemplate the beauty of the landscape.

2.2 Parmenides

In order to understand the Greek philosophers it is necessary to make a preliminary observation on their way of reasoning. Let's think for a moment about the attributes that each object has, for example the color. We can see that attributes never exist alone, but are always applied to some object. For example, there is no white color alone: there are only objects that have this color. However, the observation of the attributes, in this case of the colors, has the advantage

of allowing an advance knowledge of things. For example, with experience I can learn that white objects are seen in the dark better than black ones. What is interesting is that it will be possible to foresee this effect without having to know all the white and black objects of the world: it will be enough to learn that this is a typical characteristic of the white color. Therefore, the reflection on abstraction (abstracting means pulling out from an object its qualities) allows us to guess to a certain extent what we do not yet know and even the future; I can guess that, if an object is white, it will be more visible in the dark, even though I've never seen that object. This work of reflection on attributes gives a feeling of mastery over reality; the philosopher who learned this method is tempted to feel almost like one who has discovered the formula for dominating all the things of this world. The temptation is consequent: if so, then let's throw ourselves to reflect on the attributes and we will have conquered the world. This plunging headlong onto a very promising strategy makes us think to Americans, who make interesting discoveries and throw themselves blindly to their exploitation on a large scale, except then discover many times, often too late, that the new discovery creates more problems than it solves (Wile Coyote cartoons are nice about this).

At this point in the reflection, for the Greeks it became logical to ask what are the attributes on which it would be most fruitful to reflect. We have seen the example of the white color; another attribute that does not exist by itself is, for example, the number: we all know that if we learn a little bit about mathematics it will be possible to acquire a great

mastery of many aspects of the world and of life, for example of economy. The philosopher Pythagoras was interested in the numbers, but is there an attribute that is the most basic of all, whose reflection could allow us a basic cognitive mastery of the entire universe? According to the philosopher Parmenides and others, also of the present, this attribute exists and it is being. The white color, for example, is not a very useful attribute to think about, because it is not possessed by all objects, but being does: all the objects of this world “are”; the verb “they are” may possibly be accompanied by some other word, for example “they are here” or “they are there”, “they are white”, or even by no word, in the sense that “they exist”: if I say that four-legged horses “are”, but green horses “are not”, I am saying that four-legged horses “exist”, but green horses “do not exist”. In any case, with or without other words of accompaniment, it can be said that all things of this world “are”. Then Parmenides and many others after him devoted themselves to reflect on the “being” considered for itself, that is abstract from the single objects, in the same way as it is possible to abstractly reflect on numbers or on the white color, without taking into consideration the objects to which these qualities can be applied. This reflection on being was called and still today is called “ontology”, because in Greek “of being” was said “*ontos*”, while reflection, speech, was called “*logos*”. Thus from *ontos* + *logos* the term ontology was born. By reflecting on being, Parmenides thought he could identify as its essential characteristic what was then called the “principle of non-contradiction”: *being is, not being is not*. Even today, many people believe that this principle is the

essential basis of all those who want to use the mind to reflect. However, many years passed; with Parmenides and Pythagoras we are between the fifth and sixth centuries BC; many philosophers now believe that considering ourselves masters of every reflection, just because we know the principle of non-contradiction, is an unjustified claim. In fact, when we make a speech, who can guarantee that we have not fallen into any contradiction? Therefore, if today we want to continue doing ontology, we will have to understand being no longer as the abstract attribute understood by Parmenides, but rather as our human existence; moreover, if we really want to reflect, we must not limit ourselves to thinking about abstract attributes, but we must have the patience to take into consideration even individual particular objects. But these are only anticipations of today's philosophy; for the point where we are, we still have to continue on the path of the beginnings.

2.3 The sophists

For the “sophists”, who lived in Greece around the fifth century BC, speaking, and therefore also thinking, is only a game; it is not possible, according to them, to put into words the nature of things; they argued their skepticism by inventing problems that led to dead ends. A famous paradox had been formulated by Zeno of Elea, who lived about 490 BC: let's suppose that Achilles wants to measure himself at a speed race against a turtle and gives it a certain advantage; this distance of advantage can be decomposed from our thought into two halves first, then into four parts, and so on

endlessly; this means that it can be divided into an infinite number of parts and therefore consists of an infinite number of portions. Then Achilles will never reach the tortoise, because first he would have to overcome this infinite number of distances.

We will not let ourselves be discouraged by the difficulties shown by the sophists: we appreciate their awareness, but we believe that even if speaking, understanding and understanding each other are actions that imply difficulties, they are still activities whose results, despite everything, still succeed to be appreciated. The warning from these philosophers remains however useful: in fact we often immerse ourselves in so many discussions, forgetting that our ideas are only a small tool to understand something, a tool that can sometimes even jam, freeze or idle. This does not mean that we have to give up the study of any question too easily: we just have to do it with humility, looking critically at the tools we are using to know reality, and without losing sight of the positive possibilities they are able to offer; it is the criterion with which every scientist or scholar tries to proceed, even if it is not easy to moderate oneself to the right point or to know in advance how far we can arrive with the language we have available, since we are human beings with many limits.

There are other reflection games, paradoxes, which serve to show that our ideas often go haywire. For example: let's suppose there is, in front of his judges, somebody sentenced to death, with the possibility of choosing between being hanged or beheaded. The convicted makes a proposal; he tells the judges: "Now I will say a sentence; if it is true,

you will have my head cut off; if it is false, you will have me hanged”. The sentence is: “You will have me hanged”. Then the judges begin to reflect. Suppose we hanged him. But he said that if his statement is true, we must behead him; however, if we decapitate it, his statement becomes false, and in this case we must hang him... Finally they got tired of this endless circle and decided to free the condemned.

Other games of this kind are that of the barber, invented by Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), in which a barber who wants to shave all those who do not shave themselves cannot decide if he should also shave himself, and the similar one of the catalog that wants to contain the list of all the catalogs that do not contain themselves. In another one, one wonders if God is able to create a big stone, but so big and heavy that he cannot raise it himself. In another one, one says: “I lie” and it is impossible to establish whether by saying this he lies or tells the truth.

2.4 Heraclitus and becoming

Heraclitus lived in Ephesus approximately in the years 550 - 480 BC. He observed that everything flows: rivers flow, time flows, all the things that exist change and age; he explained, as an example, that it is not possible to bathe twice in the same river, since the second time the water, due to the current that makes it flow, is no longer the one in which one has bathed before. It would be easy to object to this philosopher that a river is always the same, always keeping the same geographical name, regardless of the flow of its waters; or we could tell him that his

observation is too obvious, like the discovery of Columbus' egg or reinventing the wheel. But if we try to generalize his philosophy, that is, to rethink all the things we have thought of so far, reconsidering them under the light of this continuous flow and change, we will realize that he actually has much to teach. It is a philosophy that can cause us a sense of insecurity, uncertainty, things that do not last, disorder; but it is also a very interesting philosophy, because one can see that, at the same time, it expresses an invitation to dynamism, movement, life, in opposition to a stagnant existence; moreover, it has certainly a value for its effort to say something that reflects, as faithfully as possible, the facts of the world as they actually are in reality.

A radical consequence of Heraclitus' way of thinking would be having to eliminate all names from the language to replace them with verbs: in fact, a chair is not continuously a chair, but it goes, even if very slowly, towards being a non-chair, that is worm-eaten wood, consumed, then dust and then who knows what else; for this reason we should say not that "it is a chair", but that "it becomes, it is transforming how a chair is transformed"; however, besides the fact that it would be impossible in practice to convert totally the language according to this criterion, we must also bear in mind that, in our human experience, there is the perception of a certain permanence of the identity of any object along time; only a very fine analysis allows us to notice that in reality every object changes without stopping; we can better understand this situation by thinking about what happens with the hands of the clock, or with the stars, the moon or the sun: at an

immediate glance they seem stable, steady, but to a just a little more accurate observation it is easy to prove that they are on the move. The fact that the hands of a watch are in constant motion does not prevent us from having time to say what time it is; but what happens jokingly, if we try to say what time it is now, also indicating the seconds, can help us to understand in what situation we are: any of us may have tried sometimes to joke by saying or hearing that “it is ten o’clock and twelve minutes and fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen ... seconds”. That is, if we want to indicate the seconds, we don’t have the time to do it because, at the same time as we say it, the flowing of time belies too soon what we have just said, so as to force us to update it immediately, without being ever possible coming to a definitive conclusion as to what time it is, with accuracy of seconds. This situation actually applies to all our statements; in most cases we have the possibility to speak because we limit ourselves to an approximate meaning of what we say, as well as when we say what time it is limiting ourselves to hour and minutes and ignoring the analytical and dispersive precision of seconds. Since our most immediate human experience is made up of unitive associations, rather than disintegrating analyses, our language, which in first place serves us to live humanly, rather than to analyze nature scientifically, reflects our need for life; so it peacefully contains many names, rather than just verbs indicative of movement, because this is how our most immediate human experience of reality is made. But we will have to be careful not to forget this approximation contained in the language, when we will want, by using the same language, to express

a more in-depth idea of what the world is: we will have not to forget that we will be using words, expressions, ideas, that actually were born to express reality in an approximate and not scientifically precise way.

2.5 Plato

In Plato's philosophy (427-347 BC) the world is conceived as if it had two floors: on the lower level there is the world of particular objects, with all the limitations and imperfections they contain; on the upper one there is the world of ideas, containing, as its name says, abstract, general, perfect ideas. So, for example, a horse that we see in the countryside is full of particular aspects that constitute its exclusive appearance, to the point of making it recognizable in comparison with all the other horses in the world. For this reason we do not say that that is "the horse", but that it is "a horse". "The horse", meant in a general sense, exists, according to Plato, in the world of ideas; "this horse" that we have in front of us is just a rough copy of the ideal horse. According to this way of thinking, the truth lies in the world of ideas: perfection, the true reality of things, lies there. Instead, in the world that falls before our eyes we find individual things to which we give a name to the extent that they correspond to an abstract and perfect idea of the world of ideas.

In fact, still today almost all of our ways of thinking are set according to this scheme. The words we use are an essential element of this. We distinguish in words a "signifier" and a "signified" (based on the theory of signs by

Ferdinand de Saussure, 1857-1913). The “signifier” is made up of the material component of the word: it can be the sound we make in pronouncing it or it can be the signs we make on paper when we write it; the “signified” is instead what one thinks by looking at those signs on the white paper or listening to those sounds. It is easy to recognize in this distinction a Platonic correspondence between the material world (the signifier) and the world of ideas (the signified). The same thing can be recognized when we speak of symbols, signs and interpretations, or of a discourse and its content; sometimes we even say that “that speech was poor in content”. Another context of ideas ascribable to Plato is that of the distinction between body and soul; here as well, the body, considered a rough copy of the most authentic essence, constituted by the soul, refers to the two worlds of Plato. The same could be said about the earthly world and the supernatural world or “the afterlife”.

These distinctions are undoubtedly open to criticism and in what follows we will try to understand better why; here we need to keep it in mind and see that we cannot have too much faith in the distinction of “concept”, “signified”, “meaning”, “soul”, “spirit”, “truth”, “idea”. This criticism corresponds to the criticism of the abstractions that we have said about Parmenides. Today the problem is studied in depth by two important disciplines: “semantics” and “semiotics” (respectively “study of signified” and “study of signifiers”) and we could also say by physics and medicine, if we keep in mind that the “meaning” can also be understood simply as a set of neurons in our brain that are activated. The critical awareness of all this must help us

move better among of all other issues; it is not a question now of rejecting any useful distinction, but of using it with awareness of its being open to criticism and of the problems it carries with it.

Two other interesting elements of Plato's thought are:

- the myth of the cave: people look like prisoners inside a cave, who see in it the shadows cast from outside and think that those shadows are the reality; the philosopher leaves the cave, sees reality, wants to make it known by the prisoners and free them, but they refuse because, bothered by too much light, they believe that the philosopher is a fool;

- the myth of the charioteer: each of us is like one who drives a chariot with two horses, one white and one black; the driver represents reason, the philosopher; the white horse is obedient and represents the highest spiritual passions typical of the warrior: honor, friendship, courage; the black one is recalcitrant and represents the lowest and most material instincts, typical of farmers and artisans: eating, pleasures. According to Plato the charioteer must commit himself to driving trying to keep these two forces in harmony.

2.6 Aristotle

Aristotle, who lived in Greece in the years 384 - 322 before Christ, was, according to some, the greatest philosopher ever. If the sophists had shown the uncertainty of reasoning, he instead turned his thoughts to understand as clearly as possible how the objects of the world are made. He concluded that everything that exists is made of *matter*

and *form*. It is easy to admit, for example, that a table is nothing but wood (material) shaped according to a certain form; every other thing that exists on this world is made the same way. However, according to Aristotle, the difference in form is an indication of another difference that is not seen, namely the difference of *substance*.

The word substance derives from the Latin *sub*, which means “below”, plus the addition of the verb “to stay”: substance is “what stays below”, so what is there, but not seen, excepting in the difference that results in the visible form. Another word equivalent to “substance” is “hypostasis”: in Greek ‘υπό means “below”: so, hypo-stasis as well means “what stays below”. The substance can also be indicated by other similar terms: “essence” (as when we say “the true essence of a thing”), “nature” (“the true, intimate nature of a thing”). To give an example, the difference in form between a man and a horse, even if they are composed of same matter, that is, of flesh and bone, tells us that between the two there is also a difference of *substance*. Further proof of this hidden difference is given to us by differences in the abilities to behaviors. Aristotle spoke about these things in some books, which followed others in which he had dealt with the *physics* of things; therefore these subjects were later called “meta-physics”, since in Greek the word μετά means “after”: therefore “metaphysics” meant “the philosophical reflections written by Aristotle after those about physics”. Today the term can be considered with the meaning of “a philosophy based on the existence of essences that are not seen” (ie the famous “substance”, about which we have spoken); also with regard to Plato it is possible to speak of

“metaphysics”, since we have seen that he places the essence of things in a world that cannot be seen, that is, the world of ideas; but we must not forget, however, that this is our application of the term, because actually Plato never used the word “metaphysics”. Actually the meaning of metaphysics is more complex and varied, based on the different ways which different philosophers and even certain artists have considered it; we will limit ourselves here to keep in mind this meaning only: “metaphysics” = “a philosophy based on the existence of essences that are not seen, but which are recognized as the true nature of things”. In fact for Aristotle the true nature of man, compared to a horse, consists in this something that he called “humanity”, something that is not seen, but that proves to be real because it makes man behave differently from the horse; the nature of the horse, according to this reasoning, is called somewhat like “horsity”, and so on. Another important characteristic of metaphysics is trust in the existence of a world that is outside our mind and that is the source of the sensations we receive; as if to say: if we touch an object, we trust that it is not an illusion, a dream with open eyes, but an object that actually exists outside our body, outside our mind.

Aristotle's philosophy is fascinating because it gives an impression of great clarity and order, in opposition to that of Heraclitus and the Sophists; therefore, those who follow the philosophy of Aristotle can also experience a sense of security, of comfort, since everything is defined in its being, in the place it occupies amid the great mosaic, perfectly ordered, of the nature of the world. Everything resembles a large castle in which every brick is in its place, like an

arranged puzzle, in which no piece is missing; in this vision the world is ordered, complete, harmonious.

2.7 Saint Anselm of Canterbury (or of Aosta)

Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 AD) is known for having devised five “proofs” of the existence of God. The four ones said “a posteriori” deduce the existence of God from some essential qualities of things of the world; they are based on goodness (if there are many good things, there must be a supreme good from which they derive), greatness (if everything has some greatness, there must be a supreme greatness from which all others derive), being (if things have being, there must be a supreme being from which the being of everything derives), and perfection. These proofs can be compared to the one that many people sometimes refer to when they say that, if there is the world, there must be someone who did it.

The fifth proof is instead “a priori”, that is, it tries to reach God before having considered the world. It is based on the fact that man, including the atheist, is able to think “that thing about which nothing can be thought of greater”. The argument in practice is this: if you have been able to think of such a large, even infinite idea, then it means that this immense greatness must necessarily exist, otherwise you could not explain how you could succeed, with your own mind, in reaching such an idea, which is greater than your mind itself. The fifth proof had to be, in Anselm’s intentions, the strongest, clearest and most irresistible, but the monk Gaunilo, who also lived in the XI century, objected

to Anselm that being able to think of something is not the same as having demonstrated that it exists; Anselm replied to Gaunilo that his objection was valid for the most modest ideas, but not for infinite greatness. Actually, in the same discourse of Gaunilo there was already the counter-reply: in fact he had pointed out that those who say “God” do not necessarily have in their mind an idea that is really adequate to what they are saying.

There would be many other possible objections against Anselm:

- the existence of the world does not necessarily require that of a creator: the world can also be conceived as eternal, or we can keep in mind that the concepts of cause and effect, and also the concept of time, are human and therefore questionable concepts ;

- if the existence of God were demonstrable, it would not make sense to talk about faith, since everyone would be obliged to believe it;

- it can also be assumed that nothing in this world is demonstrable, since every demonstration is actually based on other concepts that in turn would need to be demonstrated, and so on endlessly;

- the effort to demonstrate the existence of God presupposes a mentality that takes for granted the distinction between subject and reality, which is to be proved;

- each demonstration is made up of words and ideas, adapted according to the structures of our brain; the existence of something cannot be considered demonstrated simply because it appears as required by the structures of our mind.

These objections allow us to affirm peacefully that so far no one has been able to demonstrate the existence of God with arguments able to resist any criticism. Actually this is the same reason why there is no answer to the problem of “theodicy” (“justice of God”), that is to the problem of the existence of evil (and therefore also of the cross). The radical nature of these criticisms allows us, even for the future, not to waste time searching for useless answers; any research in this regard will have to assume completely different physiognomies.

2.8 Saint Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD) took as his foundation the metaphysics of Aristotle to build a system of thought dependent on the Christian faith; according to him, if some divergence arose between philosophy and faith, we should undoubtedly consider philosophy wrong and faith right, since faith, depending more directly on God, can only be closer to truth. This is however imagined only as an exceptional case, since for him faith and reason harmonize perfectly; through reason it is possible to demonstrate the existence of God, with proofs similar to those seen in St. Anselm, while faith leads us to accept other particular truths, unattainable with the only demonstrative abilities of reason, such as the mystery of the Trinity. Recourse to reason makes it possible to identify universal truths, since anyone is naturally forced to admit what his own reason imposes on him; the use of reason makes it possible to realize the original human vocation of knowing and dominating the

world; it also makes it possible to identify the “natural law” which is part of God’s plan; civil laws must be founded on natural law; if are not based on it, they cannot be considered laws. Civil laws would not be themselves necessary, since anyone can know the natural law by himself by using reason; but since there are people who are diverted, spoiled, difficult to persuade, then it is necessary to force them with force, so that they leave the others in peace and are thereby led to want the good. According to Thomas the best type of government is the monarchy, which must submit to religious power, because only the latter is able to direct people to God, something that natural law is not able to do alone.

These notes on the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas allow, among other things, to realize how it lends itself to the exercise and defense of a constituted power: the philosopher Gianni Vattimo, which we will discuss later, tried often to point out that the forms of “strong thinking” have a close connection with power. Those in power can feel authorized by this philosophy to recognize themselves as endowed with the use of reason (by this reasoning: since everyone is endowed with reason, there are no grounds why I shouldn’t think being endowed with as well) and therefore justified in imposing on others the choices that are reasonable for him. This theory on the existence of a universal reason leads everyone to believe that the other as well should see things as he sees them; if the other sees them differently, it means that one of the two is not following the universal reason, the “natural law”. Between the two, he will have grounds to consider himself closer to the reason who has chosen to adopt precisely this philosophy of universal

reason; so it turns out that it is a vicious circle of self-affirmation, which however cannot be admitted as vicious by those who have chosen this philosophy, because it itself leads them to believe that theirs is not a philosophy like the others, but it is the universal reason, the natural law. St. Thomas Aquinas was so dazzled by the clarifying possibilities of his reasoning, that he did not subject it to self-criticism, something that other philosophers, such as the sophists, had already been able to do much before him; on the other hand, the philosophical age in which he lived was all imbued with Aristotelianism and therefore he was logically induced by his historical conditions to take this path.

We add a little curiosity: the Code of Canon Law, which is the current book of the laws of the Catholic Church, published in Rome on January 25, 1983, in canon 252, paragraph 3, when speaking about the instruction to be given to seminarians, recommends: “... *students are to learn to penetrate more intimately the mysteries of salvation, especially with St. Thomas as a teacher*”.

2.9 William of Ockham

William of Ockham (Ockham, about 20 km far from London, 1280 - Munich, 1349) was the first antimetaphysician, although in this he was slightly anticipated by Petrus Aureolus (1280-1322), who however remained a philosophical personality of minor importance. With William the “lay” spirit is born, that is a way of self-perceiving free from faith and from the Church. For him

faith and reason do not harmonize naturally, as Thomas Aquinas had believed; the truths of faith, unlike what we have seen in Saint Anselm and Saint Thomas, can in no way be the object of rational demonstration and therefore are not part of the knowledge, of the research fields in which philosophy is concerned. Similarly, in the political field Ockham denies that the power of the emperor must depend on that of the pope; but even within the Church the pope is to be considered for him a minister, rather than a ruler: the truths of faith must not be defined either by the pope, or by the council, but by the church, understood however as a free community of the faithful. Therefore many of William's theses were condemned by the pope and in 1328 he had to flee from Avignon (a city in the south of France), to take refuge with the emperor Louis the Bavarian, who was temporarily in Pisa, and then continue to follow him to Munich of Bavaria.

In 1852 Sir William Rowan Hamilton (1805-1865) invented the expression "Ockham's razor" to indicate the criterion defined by William of Ockham, according to which we must not multiply the entities if it is not necessary; that is, we must not work with the imagination, inventing the existence of entities of any kind, only because we need to find an explanation for something; the explanation of the phenomena must be sought striving to resort to the simplest and elementary hypotheses possible, rather than arbitrarily increasing the number of factors with the introduction of the real existence of abstract things; we can make a comparison, for example, with the way today some people try to explain UFOs, or other phenomena that seem a bit strange, easily

introducing the idea of the existence of unknown entities, such as Martians or ghosts; the additional factors invented do nothing but further complicate the issues, since they hypothesize the additional existence of other beings, who in turn will then need further explanations. If, for example, we want to explain how an object went from position A to position B, according to William of Ockham we should not invent a third being C, a third hypostasis, which is called movement; we can talk about movement, but remembering that it is not a being, a reality, but only a name that we give to our particular way of experiencing an object. Continuing with this way of thinking, William of Ockham also states that there is no reason to conceive the celestial world as having a different nature from the one trampled by our feet.

Its anti-metaphysics therefore means a refusal to attribute real consistency to universal categories; he denies Plato's world of ideas, as well as Aristotle's substances or essences; the abstract concepts should be treated instead as pure verbal instruments, as pure names (William is the first "nominalist"), indicative of a probable knowledge, and not as essences having an existence by themselves, distinct from particular objects; the latter, in their fragmentary, multiplicity, are the only thing that actually exists. Consequently, the logic, from Aristotelian as it was, that is, from reasoning about real things, is converted into the logic of names, of the functioning of parts of speech, thus anticipating the disciplines that today are called syntactic, semantic, semiotic analysis. The anti-metaphysics of William of Ockham can be considered "moderate": in fact he takes a step forward, criticizing the idea of the

autonomous existence of universal concepts, but recognizes reality to the single objects that fall under our senses and create our experience. Heidegger (1889-1976) will later make the definitive transition to an anti-metaphysics that completely puts aside the question of the attribution of reality even to objects, as it is unreachable, and will adopt the term “metaphysics” to designate rather the sense of human existence.

2.10 Niccolò Machiavelli

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) coined the expression “effective truth” to draw attention to the fact that often our thoughts are guided not by how things really are, but by how we got the idea that they should be. This distance from reality can only lead man to ruin.

For Machiavelli man, even if by nature he is neither good nor bad, in fact tends to be bad; for this reason, a prince who has to govern must know how to face reality and even how to be bad. The politician, if he wants to succeed in governing, must start from the worst presupposition, that is, that all men are evil and that they will show their malice as soon as the occasion arises; if he does not have this courage, he will do better to lead private life. The only limit to the heaviness of political choices is their real effectiveness: there is no need to be too tyrant if this proves to be an obstacle to maintaining an orderly and free state. To avoid the damage of envy and plots for power, wealth and a comfortable life, according to Machiavelli a solution is to maintain a certain degree of poverty among the citizens and

always keep war prepared. To follow effective truth, rather than dreaming, it is necessary to be a person who knows how to make concrete and radical decisions; never follow middle ways; better to be too good or too bad, rather than distancing oneself from human reality, in which the middle ways do not exist.

There is no moral outside politics, from which to be guided: the criterion to be inspired must be the political necessity itself. Once the prince has understood how to behave, the ideal that will guide him will have to be drawn from the historical investigation, which has as its principle precisely that of showing reality as it is. The historical investigation leads Machiavelli to consider, as an ideal political situation to be achieved, the free republic, as it was in the early days of Roman power. In summary, with Machiavelli, though through his particular ways of indicating the best behaviors, a criterion for thinking is born which is that of history (which is implicitly opposed to the idea that there are universal metaphysical values or principles): the mentality of the historian is not guided by abstract, theoretical principles, nor by moral values, but rather derives its criteria, from time to time, from the history itself that he studies.

In the world there is also the case, that is, what Machiavelli calls “luck”, but only for half of the things that happen; the other half depends on our ability to be strong, impetuous, fierce. Luck is a woman and she is more friendly to young people because they are more capable of audacity.

2.11 Martin Luther

Martin Luther (Eisleben, Germany, 1483-1546) took his inspiration from the philosophy of William of Ockham and later became the founder of those who today are called “Protestants”, or “Evangelicals”, or “Lutherans”. The name “Protestants” derives from the claim of religious freedom, which the German Lutheran princes presented in 1529, at the Diet (= Assembly) of Speyer, in Germany.

A fundamental principle of Luther was that salvation is obtained through faith and not through deeds; among the excluded deeds we must also consider the payment of masses and prayers for the dead, able to obtain “indulgences”. This dialectic between faith and works was actually present already in the Bible, but Luther took only what favored faith. The Church reacted to the Lutheran Reformation with the “Counter-Reformation”, represented by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The Council reaffirmed, in addition to the importance of deeds and the value of indulgences, also that the Magisterium of the Church is a source of Revelation, together with Sacred Scripture; the latter for Luther was instead to be considered as an exclusive source. An example of this are the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the Assumption (1950): according to Protestants they cannot be affirmed, because the Bible says nothing about them; the Catholic Church declared them because, according to her, the Magisterium, as a source of revelation, can also afford to establish truths not contained in the Bible.

The theology of salvation by faith is accompanied in Luther by the denial of free will: according to Luther there is no human freedom, since God is first of all, he alone possesses perfection in total measure, while man, being a slave of original sin, can only do evil and never good; to be slaves of sin implies necessarily absence of freedom of choice. Moreover, if God knows everything, he also knows our future and therefore our existence obeys to predestination. For this reason, according to Luther salvation is an absolute initiative of God, who gives man the way of faith; if man was able to do good, in any measure, even the smallest one, he would become, at least in part, a savior of himself, and this would affect the idea of God as the only savior.

Actually, in my opinion, these ideas, as well as that of “sola Scriptura”, are due to a metaphysical mentality, which, in our case, thinks to be able to precisely define the boundaries of Revelation and human possibilities; the Church’s response, if considered from a functional point of view, turns out to be less metaphysical, because it contains a relativization of Scripture and of the pervasive absoluteness of God; this anti-metaphysical evaluation cannot obviously be accepted by those Catholics who take metaphysics as universal rationality; in this sense the Catholic response was actually a metaphysical response as much as Luther’s theology.

2.12 Descartes

René Descartes (1596-1650) had the merit of making us approach total doubt with confidence, optimism, love for research, rather than wishing to abolish it for a preconceived fear of anarchy, of the total disorientation to which it can lead. Thus he also realized that there is no method for distinguishing between dream and reality; that we can also suspect our belief that two plus two make four; however, in his reflection path doubt leads to an indubitable certainty: “*cogito, ergo sum*”, that is “*I think, therefore I am*”. Descartes knows that this reasoning had already been done about 1200 years before by St. Augustine (354-430 AD), but the latter had not assumed it as the basis of a whole philosophy.

Once we appreciate the merit of Descartes, we must not hide, however, that his landing is actually further criticizable. It may be useful to realize some questions to which it does not respond: who said that in order to start a knowledge we must necessarily start from some fixed point? Why consider total doubt as something to overcome, an enemy to fight? Who authorizes us to pass from the datum of doubting to the datum of existence? Who tells us that the evidence of our existence cannot be a deception itself? What does it mean to exist? What does it mean to doubt?

Another important aspect of Descartes is mechanism: the material world (distinct from the supernatural, of which God and the soul are part, for example) is nothing but a gigantic machine, like a great clock created by God, and therefore explainable in all its phenomena through the

geometric laws of matter, which occupies a space, and of movement. However, Descartes does not deny the existence of free will.

We must not ignore that even mechanism is open to criticism: geometric ideas are human ideas, adaptations of phenomena to the comprehension abilities of our brain; therefore we must not forget that it is not the world that obeys the laws that we have discovered, but the laws, small tools of understanding created by our brain for its utility, to be in duty to continuously listen to the world, from which they were obtained.

The Cartesian rules of provisional morality are extraordinarily modern: 1) in the practical it is inevitable to have to act being content with truths that are not entirely evident, otherwise we would remain eternally undecided; 2) once a decision has been made, we must be resolute and not doubting endlessly; 3) rather than wanting to change the order of the world, it is better to try to improve our thoughts first.

2.13 Hobbes

In the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (Westport, Ireland, 1588 - Hardwick Hall, Great Britain, 1679) we find the coexistence of ideas in my opinion very mature, along with others that instead prove rather crude. Let's start by knowing those that show maturity.

First of all he is an anti-metaphysical; he wishes to specify that words are nothing more than human conventions, although he does not deny the possible

existence of a supernatural world, which however must not be exploited to enslave people. He then warns us that there is no ultimate goal in the present life: man never ceases to desire, even after having obtained what he wanted. The maximum of goods is progressing without impediment towards ever new ends. In an attempt to explain the structure of the world, he adopts the Cartesian rationalism; from here he deduces, however, that there is no free will. The problems and contradictions arise from the moment when he establishes that even political questions must be faced with mathematical or geometric criteria, such as those of addition and subtraction. And here we come to the crudest ideas.

His affirmation, taken up by Plautus (250-184 BC), *homo homini lupus*, which means that every man is a wolf towards the other man, remains famous; that is, man is fundamentally bad, selfish, led to make war against the other. Here Hobbes resembles Machiavelli. But this is due, according to Hobbes, not to a mischievousness of a responsible soul, but to the structure with which we are formed: it is therefore not something of which we can be blamed, but precisely our constitutive being. Starting from this conception, he states that the only way to make a state formed by wolves is to apply the most exaggerated absolutism; for example, according to Hobbes, the absolute monarch or emperor must not only have full powers, but must not be obliged to observe any law, to which citizens must instead submit; he must not be prosecutable; a thing will be good or bad not for how it can be evaluated, but simply based on how the sovereign has decided; having power over everything, he must also have power over the

Church and will also decide how we will have to interpret any word from the Bible. Thanks to this totality of powers, according to Hobbes all disputes, discords will be eliminated from the state and finally peace will reign. This is the “social pact” in Hobbes’ philosophy: it consists in the subjects’ decision to submit to the absolute sovereign, who however will be above that pact. Actually, Hobbes also lists 20 rules, which he calls “laws of nature”, which express common sense and a pursuit of respect; however, it is precisely for this reason that his thought is in many ways also contradictory.

2.14 Pascal

Blaise Pascal (Clermont, France, 1623 - Paris 1662) was a critic of reason, since it does not allow us to know what is most exquisitely human. The “geometric spirit” does not allow to obtain true, perfect demonstrations, since for each demonstration it would be necessary in turn to demonstrate the bases, the terms on which it is based, and so on endlessly. Geometric knowledge must therefore have a measure of modesty, of humility. This does not mean that reason and science have no value: they retain, in their fields of investigation, all their importance, but for those who want to know man in depth, another type of thought is needed: rather than the “geometrical spirit”, we need the *esprit de finesse*, the “spirit of finesse”, something similar to what we call “intuition”. This critique of reason allows Pascal to state that “mocking philosophy is truly philosophizing”.

Knowing man, the human, however, leads to becoming aware of our limitations and our miseries. *“We do not content ourselves with the life we have in ourselves and in our own being; we desire to live an imaginary life in the mind of others, and for this purpose we endeavour to shine. We labour unceasingly to adorn and preserve this imaginary existence, and neglect the real... We are so presumptuous that we would wish to be known by all the world, even by people who shall come after, when we shall be no more; and we are so vain that the esteem of five or six neighbors delights and contents us... We even lose our life with joy, provided people talk of it... We sail within a vast sphere, ever drifting in uncertainty, driven from end to end. When we think to attach ourselves to any point and to fasten to it, it wavers and leaves us; and if we follow it, it eludes our grasp, slips past us, and vanishes for ever. Nothing stays for us. This is our natural condition, and yet most contrary to our inclination; we burn with desire to find solid ground and an ultimate sure foundation whereon to build a tower reaching to the infinite. But our whole groundwork cracks, and the earth opens to abysses”*. Man must not believe that he is a beast, but not even an angel; for this *“if he exalt himself, I humble him; if he humble himself, I exalt him; and I always contradict him, till he understands that he is an incomprehensible monster...”* alone he will not be able to create values that are worth and to find a stable and true sense of existence; *“I can only approve of those who seek with lamentation”*; actually, it is easy to realize that values change according to places and ages. Faced with this awareness the philosopher will find meaning through the bet

of faith in Jesus Christ; the misery and contradictions of man “*seemed to distance me more from the knowledge of religion, but instead led me to the true religion sooner*”.

Instead superficial people prefer to change course following the *divertissement*, the fun, to be understood also in the etymological sense of the term, of change of direction, of way. The *divertissement* makes us avoid thinking of ourselves and falling into boredom. We always live busy or in fun for fear of staying with ourselves, of looking into ourselves, of discovering our own miseries. This is why men “*love noise and bustle so much*”, they look for play, superficial conversation, war, big offices: not to think of themselves.

2.15 Berkeley

George Berkeley (Kilkenny, Ireland, 1685 - Oxford, England, 1753) is an anti-metaphysical, but from a certain point of view he remains a metaphysical. He is an anti-metaphysical in that he denies the existence of objects outside our mind; what we call objects are actually only a bundle of sensations, which go to form the ideas of our mind. For Berkeley “*esse est percipi*”, “*being means being perceived*”. We have no element allowing us to establish that this bundle of sensations comes from an object, from which they should emanate. On the other hand, even about sensations we can’t establish that they come from outside our mind. In this way, for Berkeley nothing exists outside the mind. This is anti-metaphysics.

But where do sensations come from? For Berkeley both sensations and the ideas they produce come from the mind of God, who sends them directly to our mind to communicate with us; therefore the whole world is nothing but a language that flows directly from the mind of God to our mind, as if by telepathy, that is, by direct transmission of thought; what exists is only God and us, and between God and us this continuous transmission of thought and ideas takes place; outside of this there is nothing. It is as if we were in a permanent dream, whose contents are given to us by God directly into the mind. In this sense, however, Berkeley is a metaphysical, since he identifies a place external to us, in which ideas are found and from which they flow towards us, that is God, or his mind. From here it follows that what is not thought by anyone does not exist. And then, if at any given time there is no one in the world who thinks, for example, of a library, does that library not exist for the duration of that moment, and then will it return to exist as soon as someone thinks of it? No, says Berkeley, since there is always some spirit that thinks everything, at least God. According to Berkeley, however, it makes no sense to think that objects exist independently of our thinking, since, at the very moment in which we try to use this idea, we think of those objects, and therefore they are no longer objects not thought of by anyone: it is not humanly possible to imagine objects not thought of by anyone, since as soon as we imagine them there is already someone who is thinking about them, that is us.

The vision of Berkeley, as we can see, is a religious vision, and it is also interesting to consider his thesis that we

must believe in miracles, since their comprehensibility is no less obscure than the foundations of the sciences: if we go back to look for the basic ideas of any science, we will discover that they are as unknown and obscure as the idea of any miracle.

2.16 Hume

Along the same line of Pascal and Berkeley, David Hume (Edinburgh, United Kingdom 1711 - 1776) believes that the interest of philosophy should be directed towards human nature, compared to the previous philosophy, which instead sought to understand the world. Like Berkeley, he states that what we perceive is only a bundle of sensations that nothing authorizes us to lead back to objects that would be the source. Our mind does nothing but associate, aggregate, look for similarities, and so imagine the existence of an objective world, creating to itself ideas of particular objects . When we return to observe an object after a certain time, our imagination provides to fill the observation gap, assuming that that object has continued to have its own existence even when we did not look at it.

The universal concepts are nothing but the fruit of our memory, of our habit of noticing certain similarities between some similar objects; actually no human being is able to think of purely universal ideas: the moment he believes he is doing it, he does nothing but remember many particular similar ideas that he thought during his existence. The same criticism also applies to the concepts of cause and effect: we

think we understand its meaning because we have become accustomed, over time, to associate certain consecutive phenomena, which occur one after the other, but actually nothing authorizes us to think that the phenomenon that occurs first is really the cause of what occurs immediately afterwards.

Hume also extends these concepts to the perception of the I: we too are nothing but bundles of impressions that our mind associates, aggregates, deciding to bring them back to a single “I”, which would be at their base. We, that is the I, are instead something like a theater, where impressions and ideas continually pass and repass; this theater, however, is to be conceived not as a stable building, but simply as the passing and repassing of impressions itself. We have no proof, actually, of the existence of such theater. We can consider this conception as a strong criticism against Descartes: he had said “I think, therefore I exist”; Hume would say “I think, therefore my thoughts exist”; but nothing allows me to conclude that behind these thoughts there is an “I” that hosts them; it is only our imagination, which we have no chance of demonstrating. In relation to this way of thinking, according to Hume there is no freedom: it is a meaningless concept.

2.17 Kant

Immanuel Kant (Königsberg = Kaliningrad, a little more to the north of Poland, 1724 - 1804) was what today we would call an “anti-metaphysical”: according to him we

have no possibility of establishing what is outside our mind; he calls this unknown world “*noumenon*” (which means “*thought thing*”), as opposed to “*phenomenon*” (meaning “*appeared thing*”, and therefore perceived). Kant therefore directs his efforts to investigate how our mind knows. Our mind knows because it frames feelings in some patterns it possesses by constitution; these patterns are essentially space and time. Therefore space and time are not to be considered as qualities possessed by objects; they are rather the coordinates with which nature has equipped our mind, so that it can have a knowledge of things. Space and time can be considered universal, however not in the sense that they are part of the whole external world, but in the sense that they are found in the minds of all people of the world, as references within which to frame every knowledge. The same is true for the unities that we are able to identify in the world: every unity we understand is not to refer to objects, but to the structure of our mind, which tends to conceive it as unitary. For example, we perceive a car as a unitary object, rather than as a close set of various pieces each on its own, because our mind tends to unify, to gather. Even the perception of ourselves as “I” (which Kant calls “*I think*”) is nothing but a tool with which nature decided to equip us, to live in this world in a human way; it is not a singular, exclusive self, but a structure with which the reason of every human being is organized and which induces it to represent to itself an idea of itself as “I”.

Since our categories will never be adequate to fully know the reality (or *noumenon*), and yet they continually push us to go further, since we don’t know their limits, we

are inevitably condemned to a continuous mistaking, which consists in the claim to know more than our mind is able to; in order to repair this error, which by nature will always accompany us, a continuous work of self-criticism is necessary, which Kant calls “transcendental dialectic”: “dialectic” indicates a reasoning work that never stops; “transcendental” indicates that this work refers to the activity of our mind, when it abuses the transcendent categories, that is, present in our mind beyond the sensible experience. The mistake we are talking about is the temptation of reason to move away from perceptions and go ahead on its own, by pure reasoning, with the pretense of advancing in knowledge on its own, by pure theories. For this reason the work of transcendental dialectic was entitled by Kant “*Critique of Pure Reason*”. The errors to be corrected consist essentially of three ideas. The first idea to criticize is that of the I: it cannot be understood or treated as a metaphysical object, since it is nothing but a subjective effect of the unity of knowing. The second idea to criticize is that of the world: it as well cannot be thought of as a metaphysical object; if we treat it as a metaphysical object, four problems without solution arise: 1) does the world have a beginning or does it not? That is, is it finished or infinite? 2) Is it better to take into consideration global objects (the car) or the single parts (so many mechanical pieces each on its own, that have been assembled together)? 3) Is there freedom or a mechanistic vision is more real? 4) Is there a primordial cause at the origin of everything, or not? These four questions make no sense according to Kant: they arise from the error of considering the world as a metaphysical

object, distinct from our mind. The third idea that is wrong to think metaphysically is that of God. These three ideas cease to be errors if, instead of thinking them metaphysically, we use them as categories that can sometimes become useful, convenient to frame unitarily our knowledge of the world.

Unlike reason, practice instead, in order to function well, must be guided by exactly opposite criteria: it must find something that is within us and establish it as a universal law. This something cannot be constituted by a particular element, because otherwise it would automatically become relative, that is valid only for me. Therefore, if I want to find a guide to life, a criterion of universal practice, I must necessarily disregard any content. We are in the "*Critique of Practical Reason*". But if we remove the contents, what's left? The form remains. The contents indicate what to do, the form how to do it. The "how to do" corresponds in Kant to the type of will, to the intention. What can become universal must then be a rule concerning the will, regardless of anything to do or not to do. Kant identifies the universal, categorical imperative, in carrying forward in ourselves a kind of will that we believe would also work as a universal law, that is, a way of wanting (not a "what to want") that we think would be good if it were adopted by everyone. Kant's proposal, for his reference to the universal, eventually becomes another way of expressing the saying "don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you". Kant then notes that a person who obeys the categorical imperative stirs in others an inevitable feeling of respect, regardless of whether these others then accept this feeling in themselves

or prefer to hide it from others or from themselves. In this context, for Kant freedom exists: it is not thinkable in a metaphysical sense (compare point 3 above), but it exists as a necessary criterion that allows us to ask ourselves about our own behavior; it is a criterion that does not derive from reasoning, but is present in our mind as a postulate, an intuition, a noumenon that can and must guide practice, moral behavior.

2.18 Fichte

Johann Gottlieb Fichte (Rammenau, Germany, 1762 - Berlin 1814) brought Kant's anti-metaphysics to an even greater degree. Kant had said that behind the sensations lies a noumenon that produces them. Fichte tells Kant that it is contradictory to say that there is the noumenon and then to affirm that of this noumenon nothing can be known: then it means that the noumenon does not actually exist, it is our invention; what exists is only the sensations. But then where do the sensations come from? Fichte says that it is the I that produces sensations, they are not objects. Kant had said that we frame the things known in our mental categories; Fichte says that we don't just frame the known things, but actually we create them completely; the I creates not only the sensations, but also the object that produces them. To realize Fichte's way of thinking it can be useful to observe that he interprets our relationship with the world in the likeness of a dream. We can therefore translate his three fundamental statements into the comparison with dreaming.

1) Thesis: the I posits itself. As if to say: at the origin of our interpretation of how things are, we must say that there is an activity that we call "I": it is an activity, not a metaphysical object. As if to say: at the start there is the dreaming of someone (who does not prove the existence of this someone: we only know that there is this dreaming).

2) Antithesis: the I opposes a non-I to itself. In other words: a person who dreams introduces certain contents into the dream; she invents a reality and puts it into the dream; she invents a world, an environment, other people and makes them exist within the dream. In fact, according to Fichte, the non-I that the I creates is created within itself, within the I.

3) Synthesis: the I opposes to the divisible I a divisible non-I. In the language of Fichte divisible means limited; limited means that receives resistance. To understand this concept we can consider some objections that could be made to the hypothesis of dreaming.

One could say: sometimes it can happen, for example, that I insert the keys in another person's car that is identical to mine; then I realize that it is not mine and I go back to my car; so I was convinced that this was my car, and then reality forced me to admit that it wasn't true. This shows that reality is not my invention, so much so that it often behaves differently from my expectations. Answer: even in dreams it happens that we meet realities that oppose our expectations, yet nobody doubts that those realities are nonetheless an invention of the one who is dreaming. This is the meaning of point 3: the I invents a non-I able to resist

him, to oppose him; but it is anyway an invention of the I, as it happens in dreams.

Another similar objection could be that of the interest: if it is true that it is the I that invented reality, what interest could the I have in inventing a reality that so often for him is suffering, illness, difficulty? Answer: even in dreams it happens that we experience situations of malaise, situations from which we would like to go out, nightmares; what interest could our mind have in inventing a dream that makes us feel bad, a nightmare? And yet it happens.

We could even make a counter-objection: just like so many people deceive themselves, by believing that in dreams there is an external intervention, for example a dead person who dictates the numbers to bet or predicts the future, in the same way we can deceive ourselves by thinking that the reality that we have in front of us derives from something external, whereas instead, in the likeness of the dead person who gives us the numbers to bet, it is not an external fact, but we are inventing it on our own.

Once we understand this mechanism, we can understand that even the fact that the sensations of other people correspond to ours does not succeed in dismantling the dream hypothesis: we can just note that there is still the possibility that we are the ones representing other people having sensations in agreement or in disagreement with us; we can even dream of asking another: what are you seeing? Do you see what I see? But the fact remains that, both the other, as well as his answer, can continue to be an invention of us who are dreaming: I invent the other and also his answers.

In summary: it is not possible to prove that real life is not a dream. Indeed, for Fichte this is the best, most suitable way to understand it.

2.19 Schelling

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (Leonberg, Germany, 1775 - Bad Ragaz, Switzerland 1854) highlighted an aspect that was already implicit in Fichte's philosophy, but was not developed. Fichte had said that it is the I that does everything, that creates everything. Schelling deduces that, if this is the case, it can be said that the non-I is not different from the I, but has the same nature, it is intelligence all the same.

To understand this thought it may be useful to start from another completely different assumption, but one that will guide us well to understanding.

Let's start with one that says that everything is matter, everything is mechanism; one that says that we ourselves are nothing but small computers; except that computers are a bit simpler, they have another architecture, while our brain and our body are a bit more complicated; computers are made of metals, wires and plastic, whereas we are made of proteins, vitamins, tissues; but many operations respond to the same logic: the brain moves muscles by sending electrical impulses through the nervous system, in the same way as a computer puts in motion the printer, connected to it through a cable; the brain reasons by creating electrical connections within itself, making them interact with one another; a

computer also processes by making certain electrical connections react. The activity of a computer can be displayed on a screen; that of the brain can also be visualized and interpreted on an electroencephalogram; today it is already possible to send some commands to a computer directly by the thought, through electrodes applied to the head.

At this point an important question arises: what then is intelligence and the I? In this way of thinking intelligence is nothing but the action of the electrical impulses that interact in our brain; consequently, a computer or animal should not be said having no intelligence, but only that they have less, or that they have it structured with different architectures. Naturally, if we begin to descend from man, to the animal and the computer, we arrive down to the stone: even a stone then has its own intelligence, because even within it there are electromagnetic forces that interact the one with the other, only excepting that they have different operating structures. So the whole universe is nothing but a mass of matter, which, since it contains in itself the interaction of electromagnetic forces, can be considered as a cluster of intelligent matter, only excepting that intelligence is distributed in very different ways among one object and another, for example among a man and a stone.

Now let's take the step that will allow us to return to Schelling and understand it. We have said that the whole universe can be considered made of intelligent matter because it contains electricity; but now let us remember that actually we don't know what matter is: Kant called it noumenon, saying that we cannot know anything about the

noumenon. So, if the universe is intelligent matter, but we don't know what matter is, and even if it really exists, the only thing that remains is that the whole universe is intelligence. Here is the thought of Schelling. With Schelling we no longer have the "I" that produces the non-I within itself, as Fichte had said; we have instead that everything is I; the objects are a natural extension, a prolongation of the I, in the same way as our arms or a portion of our brain are; this is true whether it is my particular I, or the I that is the whole world: all is I.

2.20 Hegel

The philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (Stuttgart, Germany, 1770 - Berlin 1831) is a synthesis and development of the previous ones of Fichte and Schelling. In Fichte the I produces in itself its dream world, in Schelling this world is nothing but the I itself; Hegel addressed to Schelling a criticism that became famous: this vision, in which everything is I, is like "*the night in which all the cows are black*". In Hegel the I realizes itself rather in the form of history. History means the political history of the whole world, as well as the small personal histories of every single person; it means dialectic of struggle and overcoming, therefore continuous progress, even war if necessary, ever greater realization of an absolute spirit that is the universal I. In this perspective every negative event is nothing but a passage to reach a higher stage, in which the universal reason continues to realize its absoluteness ever

better; if to get to this somebody will be killed, let's be patient; what's important is the infinite I, represented, for example, by the State, to which the individual "Is" (meant as a plural of I) who are part of it must possibly be sacrificed. This is why Hegel's philosophy was suitable to be exploited in the service of dictatorships, even if the intention, at least in the beginning, of its author was not this.

An important aspect of Hegel's philosophy is the awareness of the world and of existence as history, as a development, a series of overcoming, which must be read, interpreted, in such a way as to exploit their orientation towards the best progress. This way of thinking would lead us to look this way at nature as well, which for example goes on according to its own laws, according to the law of the strongest, ruthlessly sacrificing the weakest beings. About this instead Hegel diverges: for him, nature is not part of the history of the I, but is only a negative moment to be overcome. Hegel's optimism regarding the history of the I does not apply to the nature itself; the history of the I is for Hegel political history, or the events of the single person, but nature was seen by him as something dead, which has not an I; he expressly stated that he felt no interest, for example, when he saw a beautiful landscape: looking at snowy mountains he felt only a sense of boredom.

Within the awareness of history as a development of the I, its interpretation of the relationship between servant and master is interesting. When a person has the courage not to fear death, to risk, to invest, then he becomes master; the coward who has not courage, but only knows how to put himself in the employ of someone, is destined to become a

servant, a slave; but, once these respective positions are reached, it happens that the master does not know how to use the objects of work and fails to see in the servant a conscious conscience able to stimulate him to a development; then the master, in the absence of further prospects, gets losing his I, while instead the servant finds himself in the ideal condition to be motivated to fight for self-awareness; here then the servant realizes himself as I, while the master decays. The key to this development is the ability of the work to function as an engine of realization of the I. This philosophy prepares that of Marx.

2.21 Marx

Hegel said that the I develops in the form of history; Karl Heinrich Marx (Trier, Germany 1818 - London 1883) criticizes Hegel saying that it is not the I that makes history; things are exactly the opposite: it is the economic structure, that is the course of history and the economy, that confers on the ego its ideological superstructure, that is, its mental physiognomy, its conscience; this reversal operated by Marx is the “*historical materialism*”. According to this thought, it is necessary to study not how the I is made or works, but how history, material things are made and work, since they are the ones that form the I; the dialectic of Hegel’s I must be transformed into “*dialectical materialism*”. History is dialectical history of opposition of the social classes, which at the time of Marx are identified as bourgeoisie, equivalent to capitalists, that is, owners of the means of production and the capital, as opposed to the proletariat (literally: those who

have only the offspring, that is the children, as the only wealth), who are the propertyless, who have as their sole resource to sell only their workforce. The worker poses, alienates his life in the object he produces; the capitalist takes possession of it, paying this work less than it is worth, and this way takes possession of the life of the worker. In fact the worker in six hours produces with his labor force a value sufficient to make him live, equivalent to the pay he receives; in the remaining hours of work he produces a plus-value, that is an added value, which actually is not paid to him. Another way in which unpaid surplus value is formed is when several workers work in collaboration, because this way they produce more than they would produce by working on their own, and yet the pay they receive continues to be like the one they would receive for working individually; to this the advantage of using machinery can be added. All this produces an ever-increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of an increasingly restricted number of people, opposed to an increasingly numerous and poor mass of proletarians, until the mechanism no longer holds up, the proletarians inevitably become aware of themselves and make the revolution to take possession of the means of production. The Marxist phrase has become famous: "*Proletarians of the whole world, unite!*". This way a society without private property, without social classes, without division of labor, without alienation, without a State is destined to form: that is, the communist society, as opposed to the previous capitalist society. These political theories would later have to materialize in the intentions of communist Russia and China, whose political and economic

history has shown the difference from how things go in reality. One of the limits of Marxist theory is the fact of limiting the value of objects to the amount of work that was necessary to achieve them, thus neglecting other factors, such as the influence of market laws, the relationship between supply and demand, etc.

Religion was defined by Marx, with an expression that became famous, “*opium of the peoples*”; in it man finds himself distracted from the concrete political struggle and instead invents an imaginary world, in which to project his desires, his frustrations, a world in which to see resolved the conflicts and the contradictions that afflict him in the real world; to combat this projection, alienation, we must fight not it directly, but the historical conditions that determined it.

2.22 Nietzsche

The thought of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (Röcken, Germany 1844 - Weimar, Germany, 1900) can be interpreted as a romantic and enthusiastic faith in nature, accompanied by a critique that strives to be perceived radical as much as possible. A characteristic of romanticism was the idea that the infinite lies in the finite; Nietzsche does not believe that nature is inhabited by some God, but he has the certainty that it is able to lead beyond itself, to let it experience a continuous self-overcoming, without thereby needing to become something different; on the contrary, it is precisely because it is always the same, in its eternal return, that it succeeds in preserving and transmitting its

unrestrained force, capable of making us experience life as the maximum liberation of instincts, joy, the pleasure of a continuous exceeding, of making us feel “over-men”. On the other hand, he turns his heaviest criticisms towards every element of the world that is rather in search of a measure, balance, moderation, prudence, traditional schemes within which to close itself.

One of these enemy components is God himself: according to Nietzsche we must become aware that God died because we killed him; the meaning of this statement is clear: our critical ability has now reached such a degree that it has become impossible for Christianity to still be able to fool us with the proposal to believe in a God; the time of religious fables is over; today it is no longer possible to believe in God: we have become of age. There may also be nostalgia for past innocence, but the fact remains that it is now impossible to return to the previous state. The over-man has understood that his desire for the infinite finds its maximum realization in the material, human, earthly world, in nature; the reference to God, to the existence of a supernatural world, despite appearances of openness to different perspectives, is instead a cage, which oppresses man’s ability to go beyond himself. Jesus Christ, however, receives appreciation from Nietzsche because he has taught us to throw ourselves with courage into death, which is part of nature. Pilate is to be appreciated as well, because he has hinted that the word “truth” indicates something that does not exist and never existed.

Disinterestedness, love of neighbor, compassion for the poor are nothing but a petty revenge that some men

exercise, due to the fact that life denied them the chance to live unbridled and satiated joy, health, strength, sexual love, enjoyment, the highest culture, art, domination, the will to power. The morality of doing good and not doing evil is nothing but a mentality of slaves, of weak people who harbor resentment against life, because it has been lacking in joy with them; it is the attempt to do something that appears meaningful, valid, but it is only because they did not succeed in obtaining what is truly superior and infinite, that is full, natural, happy life; so, the best things in life are declared sinful, out of envy against those who enjoy them happily.

The philosophy of Nietzsche is nihilism, from the Latin word “*nihil*”, which means “nothing”. That is, there is no longer anything within which to continue to be caged, there are no principles, no values (they do not exist because actually they never existed, except as deceptions), methods and criteria of reasoning to which to remain bound; finally, people who accept Nietzsche’s philosophy have the possibility of living fully.

Luther, according to Nietzsche, called the papacy to flee from corruption, and instead just that dissolute and corrupt papacy testified to love for life, pleasures, enjoyment; Luther brought the church back just in a period when the pleasure of living and enjoying the earthly joys was finally establishing in its hierarchies.

A merit that we can recognize in Nietzsche is that of having indicated the path of the human as a direction in which to search for the most enriching aspects of existence, trying to avoid the recourse to phantom supernatural

horizons, understood metaphysically, which actually are only impoverished visions of reality.

2.23 A philosophical story

I created this summary of the philosophy in the form of a story, from the beginnings to Nietzsche, to break up a little the monotonous seriousness of the speech and help to have a synthesis.

The beginnings: abstract reflection

Once upon a time there were some philosophers who started arguing. First a certain Parmenides spoke:

- Guys, this philosophy is a great thing: with one word you can understand everything; and do you know which word? “Being”: we can just say “being” and everything has been said.

But another group of these friends, nicknamed “sophists”, and a certain Zenon as well, disagreed. They told Parmenides:

- Parmenides, you’re really naive; you don’t realize that when you talk you are playing with words; and words are of no use: they are toys that you use as you like, but that don’t guarantee you any truth.

At this point, another who was called Heraclitus could no longer restrain himself and he also wanted to say his idea:

- Don’t be offended if I tell you that you have understood nothing. The word “being” says nothing; and moreover it is useless getting lost in wordplays: this way you

don't go anywhere. Instead look at the world. What do you see? Don't you realize that everything moves, everything flows? The world is movement. Here is the key to understand everything.

However, Plato felt himself more intelligent and educated than Heraclitus and told him:

- And the words, the words, where do you put them? And ideas? What is the use of saying that the world is a mixture that moves? It serves no purpose. I tell you instead what you have to think: you have to distinguish that there is the visible world and then there is another world that cannot be seen, but it is the most important one. It's the world where ideas are.

Metaphysics

Aristotle thought: "At last an intelligent person spoke. But not as much as me, of course. I know better what's what". And he said:

- Forget the fantasies of the world of ideas. Look at the world with your eyes. What do you see? Think about it for a moment: the world is made of objects; and all objects are simply made up of two things: matter and form.

Anselm of Aosta approved this speech and said:

- Finally one who speaks seriously and with some wisdom. Well done, Aristotle. You are a capable mind. And I will tell you more: to all this we must add a clarification on God. You will say: but who tells us that God exists? And I say to you: it's simple: God must necessarily exist, otherwise we would not explain who made the world.

Thomas Aquinas was delighted:

- Friends, Aristotle, Anselmo, you really are geniuses. What happiness, to see how the knowledge of the world brings us to the knowledge of God, all in full harmony.

Practical thinking

William of Ockham, faced with this enthusiasm, couldn't restrain himself anymore:

- What stupid harmony? You invent a lot of fantasies and say it's harmony. Be serious! Philosophy is not done by fantasies. If we want to know the world, we must look at concrete objects, one by one, not matter and form: we must not build castles in the air and say that these castles are the world and they are harmony.

Machiavelli applauded:

- What Ockham said is true: what matters is concrete things. And tell me what is more concrete than politics! And I also tell you what politics is: it means being without scruples, without fear; when it's needed it's needed; when wickedness is needed we must also use wickedness. This is life!

Luther agreed:

- Machiavelli, you really understood how the world goes. And do you know who the worst and most unscrupulous ones are in this dirty policy? I tell you. It is the Pope, who collects money from morning to night by selling tickets for places in paradise.

Descartes felt the need to put some peace:

- Stop! We are close to going to war. Calm down! Don't you see that if you let yourself be taken by practical things, then you don't understand anything about the bigger ones? Who we are, where we come from, if we exist; Luther, are you sure you exist? And who tells you that? You see? I can tell you instead: you exist, as I exist; you exist because you think; I exist because I think; here is the basis of what we are.

Hobbes turned red and punched Descartes in the face:

- Don't be ridiculous! I think! What do you think? This we are rather: we are punches in the face, we are all wolves, ready to tear each other to pieces; this is reality.

Pascal, seeing Hobbes' punch, was moved and said in his tears:

- How can one be so rude? You don't realize that you behave like barbarians, without any finesse, without spirit, without the love of Jesus Christ! You are like the boys of discos and stadium, who leave to have fun and then end up giving themselves punches and blows.

Idealism

Berkeley patted Pascal on the shoulder and said:

- Thank you, friend Pascal! Luckily you intervened, otherwise it was really bad here. Let's try to be humble, modest. Don't you see that the only thing we know is not the world, but only our own mind? We don't even know the world out there; on the contrary, I tell you: it is not at all there, it is God who makes us dream about it. This life of ours is a daydream.

Hume smiled with satisfaction at these words:

- Berkeley has figured out what we should think about: if we want to understand things, we have to think of ourselves, of the I, of our imaginations; this way only we can understand the world.

Kant as well, happy, wanted to express his solidarity:

- Friend Hume, you took the words out of my mouth. I was just about to say this: let's be careful about ourselves, our brains. Don't you see that we are the ones who make our own ideas, who adapt everything basing on how we think, basing on our mentality?

Fichte had held himself timidly aside and did not want to talk, but after this speech he took courage:

- This is what I wanted to say too. It is we who make everything: we make our ideas, we make thoughts about the world, we make the world; the world is inside our head, not outside.

Schelling's eyes shone:

- I will tell you even more. The world is neither outside nor inside our heads: I am the world, you are the world; I am everything, you are everything.

There was an amused laugh from a corner: it was Hegel:

- My dear Schelling, don't take it badly if I tell you it, but your philosophy is all silliness: if you say that everything is me, it's like darkness, like night, in which all the cows are black. Yes, the I is fine, but the I is not an equal dough: the I is life, it is development, it is struggle, it is history: the I is society, it is the State, it is politics. Long live the State! Long live the Emperor!

Radical criticism

Marx trembled with emotion and finally gave vent to his nervousness:

- Friend Hegel, notice that things are exactly the opposite: it is not the I or the State that makes history, but it is history that makes people: it made these ones poor, those others rich; for this reason we must move and act in history, if we want to change people: we must destroy power, we must make equality against the exploiters and against the Church, which puts people to sleep; workers all over the world: you must unite! Come on, let's fight!

Nietzsche was sad; they asked him:

- What's wrong with you?

He answered:

- You confused me; you're driving me crazy; I don't understand anything here anymore; don't you see that we aren't able to understand anything? Just nothing. We are in freefall, and we don't even know where we are falling towards. We fly. Moreover, I tell you more: we must fly. This is being men: beyond being men; beyond, over, towards the infinite, towards life and towards death, towards art and towards poetry, towards all, towards nothing!

2.24 Sigmund Freud

Freud (1856-1939) was not really a philosopher, but the founder of psychoanalysis, that is the work that the psychologist does on the patient to understand his problems, and of modern psychology, that is the discipline that studies the human mind, according to the criteria identified by Freud. His research, however, had obvious consequences also on the philosophical conception of man, of existence, of our thinking. In treating his thought we must not let ourselves be deceived by the interest that it can arouse: we should not forget that, in fact, we are talking about how he thought and not how psychology is structured today, even though there may be correspondence in something.

His fundamental discovery was that of the presence in each of us of two essential basic components, which then go on to globally constitute our self: the *Es*, also called *Id*, and the *Super-Ego*, also called *Super-I*.

Es in German (in Latin *id*) is the pronoun of third person of neutral gender, that is neither masculine nor feminine, used to refer it to things or animals: it corresponds to the English *it*; Freud's choice indicates the intention to express with this term the instinctive, animal part which is in each of us; the *Es* is, according to Freud, that part of our ego where *libido* is based, that is the desire for pleasure, which includes every kind of pleasure, but whose essential background is sexual; this accentuation of sexuality in Freud is a merit and a defect of him: on the one hand it has laid bare the sexual origin of many of our behaviors, on the other hand it has instead been criticized, among other things,

precisely because of the claim of bringing almost everything back to sexuality. A child, according to Freud, is born as *Es* and his *libido* begins to go through some phases. His sexual pleasure, in the first eighteen months, is in an *oral* phase, that is, he finds pleasure in using the mouth, for example sucking milk; between eighteen and thirty-six months he passes to an *anal* phase, that is, he finds interest and pleasure in the production of feces and can even consider them a gift made to his mother; between the ages of three and six he passes to the *phallic* phase, during which he falls in love with his mother and considers his father a rival, who could castrate him because of this (in the event that this feeling stops and he does not pass to successive phases, Freud speaks of *castration complex*). In this situation one can develop a sense of guilt, also called *the Oedipus complex*, from the ancient Greek story in which Oedipus marries, without knowing it, his mother. The same vicissitudes are attributed by Freud symmetrically to girls, for whom he speaks of *the Electra complex*; he says that in this case a penis envy and a rage towards the mother, held responsible for this lack in them, also develops in girls. According to Freud, this envy offers an explanation of many female behaviors and, in general, of the unconscious tendency of many women to consider themselves inferior to men. Subsequently, in the adult woman the child takes the place of the penis. In a second moment of the phallic phase, the male child learns to earn the love of the mother, trying to look as much as possible like the father, and likewise, symmetrically, the female child. At the phallic stage, a *phase of latency* follows, between the age of six and puberty, so

called because in this period, according to Freud, the *libido* is latent, that is, hidden, dormant; in this phase the child develops his friendship with individuals of the same sex and focuses attention on his physical development (with the pleasure of experimenting, for example, school and athletics). Finally, from puberty to the rest of life, we live in the *genital phase*, because in it the libido concentrates again on the genital organs; it is characterized by an ever greater harmony and balance between all the psychological components, including a generative ability, able to not limit itself to physical functions only, but which becomes an ability to love with all one's being and to engage in work; in this last phase the individual must resolve the conflicts and the fixations deriving from the previous phases because otherwise he will not have a balanced development. It may be the case, for example, when a person, due to some problem in his childhood, does not adequately develop these steps and remains in some respects still tied to the oral phase, that is too tied to pleasures that involve the mouth, such as eating, sucking, smoking, drinking alcohol, but also, more indirectly, being a victim, always wanting to talk or wanting to always make pungent jokes, be spoiled. Fixation in the anal phase can occur in the child who defecates in inappropriate places, or immediately before or after being placed on the potty; in the adult we will find a stubborn personality, loath to any authority. Fixation in the phallic phase can create adults unable to develop a relationship of authentic love with other people.

Freud's theories are primarily masculine oriented and this has led to criticism from feminists. Freud had difficulty

incorporating the desires of females into his theories and this led him to state that “*psychology is unable to solve the enigma of femininity*”.

From the moment the child comes into the world, he begins to build above the *Es* a whole set of rules, censures, prohibitions, commands, forbiddances, which come to form a second self superimposed on the *Es*, which Freud calls the *Super-Ego*, and which constitutes the seat of the moral sense, of values, of guilt, of authority, etc. Because of this mechanism, the original impulses of the *Es* are gradually set aside, hidden, removed from consciousness, and go on to form an accumulation over time, which is one with the *Es*, and which Freud calls *unconscious*. The unconscious, that each of us has, no matter how hard we try to know it, is never attainable, because that I, who should be in charge of reaching it, actually at the same time never fails to filter and censor it; even by trying to eliminate from our minds for a moment all censorships and prohibitions, by trying to see which impulses emerge from our unconscious, actually we can just reach the *subconscious*, that is a part of the self that is halfway, but at a very superficial level, just hidden from the *Super-Ego*; in other words, we can only know the first few centimeters that lie beneath this sea of our self, deep, by comparison, a some hundred kilometers.

The unconscious emerges partly in dreams, because in sleep the surveillance of the *Super-Ego* is loosened, even if never completely; in this situation of semi-surveillance, the unconscious finds a way to express itself in the form of symbols, which form the contents of our dreams that we sometimes tell others; keeping in mind this fact, we can

realize that we always dream, for the simple fact that our brain never stops expressing itself, thinking, in any way; when we believe we have not dreamed anything, it is only because upon awakening, for any reason, the *Super-Ego*, with all its rules and schemes, has intervened to set aside the dream before its residues could reach our consciousness; vice versa, we remember the dream if for some reason, at the moment of awakening, the *Super-Ego* has had some delay in putting its control into operation and therefore something has managed to pass up to the level of consciousness.

Another way in which our unconscious expresses itself through symbols is certain casual, involuntary behaviors, such as small errors, tics, forgetfulness, distractions, short casual gestures; to indicate these phenomena the expression *Freudian slip*, that is Freudian error, has become famous; for example, if one, who should say “six”, accidentally errs and instead says “sex”, according to Freud very probably did not mistake casually, but the error is a symptom of the repressed, censored unconscious that occasionally seeks to come to light and to express itself. To take other examples, keeping hands behind one’s back can be a symbol indicating that that person feels she has some thoughts or feelings to hide from others; the rearing that boys do with their mopeds or bicycles can express the sexual symbol of mounting or of domain, and so on.

A second component of the *Es* drives, identified by Freud, in addition to sexuality, is *aggressiveness*. It is a reserve of reactive energy, designed to guarantee survival; think, for example, of lions, which without their aggressiveness could not face the harsh conditions of the

natural environment in which they live; but aggressiveness can also be triggered in inappropriate ways, for example due to disproportions between its size and the possibilities of unloading, or between the entity and elements that increase it and make it disproportionate, or, on the contrary, undersized. It could be said that, according to Freud, a behavior, if it is not determined by sexuality, is then provoked by the need to give space to aggressiveness; even a daily and very simple gesture, like for example opening or closing a door, or tapping with the accelerator, can contain the satisfaction of winning the small resistance of the door, or of the road uphill, and therefore give a small vent to our aggressiveness. Two other components of our instincts, which oppose each other, are the instinct to life, to love (said by Freud *eros*, which in Greek means sexual love), which generates behaviors targeted, for example, at the joy of living, at esteem, and the instinct to death and destruction (called by Freud *thanatos*, which in Greek means death), which generates behaviors such as war, the pleasure of destroying and killing. In this view it is clear that for Freud man is never a harmonized being, but, on the contrary, he always has some imbalance, some conflict, which he expresses in various behaviors, including artistic productions and professional activities; they often fulfill the function of allowing the person a bit of balance, because they allow her a space in which to release her impulses. About this, Freud speaks of *sublimation*, that is, the camouflage of an instinct in the form of a more noble, constructive, socially accepted activity. This does not mean, of course, that through sublimation we can completely

compensate for the psychological imbalances, by using simple substitutions.

One of the psychologist's skills consists in interpreting the contents of a dream or a behavior, trying to understand what the *unconscious* is trying to manifest. A method sometimes practiced to achieve this goal can be that of hypnosis, through which one can try to make the patient relive a forgotten moment of his past, which may be at the origin of his psychological problem. In the patient's relationship with the psychologist, the *transference* mechanism may occur. It consists in the transfer, the unconscious projecting of certain roles on the psychologist, by the patient, based on his inner conflicts that he needs to solve; the psychologist could also initially accept this attribution, since it could serve the patient as a tool for a path of liberation.

A problem caused by this set of things is that at first glance they are suggestive, fascinating, attractive and can even seem quite easy to understand and practice, with the result that anyone who has read a few psychology books could be tempted to improvise as a psychologist and decide how to interpret the symbols of dreams or behaviors, his and others. The result is equivalent to that of those who improvise a doctor, thinking of knowing how to interpret the symptoms of certain diseases; the damage caused by these presumptions can be incalculable, even irreparable, especially on people who have a fragile, vulnerable, easy to suggest character. Today Freud, after having been the father of psychology and having inspired its starting points, is in many ways overcome, precisely because of the excessive

simplicity of his conceptions. Psychology today is inspired by a multitude of schools and theories and above all it strives to rely on elements as objective as possible (measurements, analyses, statistics), rather than on interpretative keys containing the claim to make everything understood starting from a few and simplistic criteria.

A philosophical consequence of Freud's studies is that more and more the human being comes to appear as a determined being; as for Marx man was determined by economy, with Freud we add to be determined by the mechanisms of the psyche, by the oppositions of conscious and unconscious that inhabit and act in each of us. This is quite the opposite, therefore, to when we said that it is the I that puts itself, that creates his history and his becoming. We come to find ourselves thus, gradually, in a new context of ideas called *structuralism*: man is determined by the structures that are around him and within him, among which we will consider later also those of language. As, according to Nietzsche, God had died, for structuralism man died, understood as I, as subject, who is thus shattered, dispersed, in the midst of economic and psychological analyses. However, structuralists themselves are accused of idealizing structures, as if they were, metaphysically, the ultimate being of reality.

2.25 Bultmann and myth

Rudolf Bultmann (Germany, 1884-1976) was a professor of theology, of Protestant religion. He therefore believed in God, but not in a metaphysical sense; on the

contrary, in his thinking, this is precisely the error from which it is necessary to purify the faith. Believers have attributed physical characteristics to contents of faith that must instead be understood and lived in an *existential* sense. According to Bultmann, when believers describe the contents of faith within worldly coordinates, that is, belonging to the physical world, then they create *myth*. For example, if the transcendence, that is the superiority of God that goes beyond everything, is expressed in terms of height or spatial distance (we can think, for example, of the of the prayer that, if literally translated from Greek, is “*Our Father who are in the skies*”), then it happens that a faith content is clothed in a mythical, or mythological, form. So, according to Bultmann, if we want to grasp, for example, the truth of the messages present in the New Testament stories, we must first free them from the mythical covering in which they were incorporated, that is, strip them from their references to physical reality (one can think, for example, at the resurrection of Jesus imagined as a physical exit from the tomb), in one word demitize them, so as to bring out the meaning of those stories that can enrich the existence of man in this world with meaning, authenticity and perspectives (Bultmann takes the concepts of “existential” and “authenticity” from Heidegger, which we will consider shortly). At this point it is easy to understand that Bultmann’s thought was usually rejected by the Catholic sphere, as seen as bringing about an emptying of the contents of the Christian faith and the Bible from any reference to concrete reality.

If, from an anti-metaphysical point of view, Bultmann's thought can be appreciated today, it must be added that over time the positive value of the mythological tale has gradually recovered. If for Bultmann the mythological contents were like a bark from which to free the existential sense present in the stories, now, after we have learned from Freud the importance of the symbolic languages with which the unconscious expresses itself in dreams, it will be easy to understand that the myth, rather than a peel to be thrown away, should be considered as a precious tool to grasp the sensitivity and many profound characteristics of the human soul. Just as the bizarre and colorful course of a dream can allow the individual to better know who and what he is, in the same way many ancient mythological tales allow us to touch certain characteristics that dwell in the heart of men of all the world and of all times. We can think, for example, of the story of the serpent with Adam and Eve, or that of the universal flood, stories that are not exclusive to the Bible, but, on the contrary, are found with great similarities in the ancient cultures of the whole planet. So the myth, if is appreciated as a language that expresses the depth of the human soul, is an irreplaceable tool to better know who we are, both as individuals and as a whole humanity, in the same way that certain fantasies, phrases, behaviors or drawings made by children, which may seem strange to us, incomprehensible or meaningless at first sight, actually can represent an irreplaceable door of access to understand their soul and to establish with them a more conscious and rich dialogue.

2.26 Einstein

Albert Einstein (Germany 1879 - United States 1955) was a great physicist; though he was not a philosopher, his discoveries in the field of physics were so great that they had profound consequences in philosophy. He is considered by many people the greatest physicist, or even the most intelligent man ever existed. His equation $E = mc^2$ is very famous, meaning “Energy = mass (which has a meaning almost equal to “matter ”), multiplied by c^2 , ie the speed of light squared”. Along with this equation, he developed his famous “theory of relativity”; some consequences of this theory help to get a general idea about it:

- matter can be transformed into energy, developing an enormous quantity of it, and vice versa; this means that, basing on physics research, we no longer know what the matter actually is, contrary to the clarity that came from Aristotle; we are used to thinking of energy as a characteristic possessed by objects: a table that is falling from a window has a certain amount of energy, which is easy to notice; according to Einstein’s theory, we can take part of the matter, suppose a table leg, and transform it into energy, for example transforming it into an increase in table speed; but, according to the same theory, it is also possible to do the opposite: take some energy and transform it into matter, as if to say: remove a bit of speed from the falling table and transform it into wood, to lengthen, for example, the table legs. All this may seem pure fantasy, but the construction of the atomic bomb is based precisely on this possibility of transforming part of the matter into pure energy. This

phenomenon must not be confused with the energy that develops by burning the table or by exploding gunpowder: in the latter case, in fact, the quantity of matter (and therefore also of weight) always remains the same, although it is chemically transformed; even if the ashes added to the smoke produced by the burned table would give the impression that there has been a decrease in the quantity of matter, actually in that transformation the quantity of matter and the quantity of energy present in the world have always remained the same: if we could measure the weight of the world before and after the table was burned, we would notice that there would be no change; instead, after the explosion of an atomic bomb, there is a little less matter in the world, the whole world has become a little lighter, while the amount of energy present has increased in it.

- another consequence of the theory of relativity: time does not always flow with the same speed. As we move faster, it slows down, compared to those standing still, the closer we get to the speed of light; to illustrate this fact, the example of twin children has been devised: let's suppose that one of two twins is placed in a spaceship, making a journey through space at the speed of light, that is 300,000 km per second. Let's suppose that about 70 years pass on earth: the brother who has remained on earth has become old now; the spaceship returns and - surprise! - the child in the spaceship instead remained a child: that is, by traveling at the speed of light, time has stopped for him. There are still discussions about the precise reality of this phenomenon, but we are interested in the philosophical consequences of this physical phenomenon, that is the questions we are forced to

ask ourselves: what is time? Is it an absolute thing, or is it conditioned by the set of matter and energy referred to? And what meaning do the words past, future, present have?

- finally, let's consider even another consequence of the theory of relativity: the weight of an object also depends on the speed with which it moves: it increases proportionally, as its speed approaches that of light. The child on the star would not only see time stop, but would also see his weight become infinite.

After what has been said on the theory of relativity, we come to have a confirmation of what Nietzsche claimed: even the discoveries of physics force us to admit that, if we wanted to say what the world is and how it is made, with the clarity that Aristotle thought he had reached, we would no longer know what to say precisely, because we no longer understand what objects, energy, time, but also, therefore, man, life, existence are exactly.

2.27 Heisenberg

Werner Heisenberg (Würzburg 1901 - Munich 1976) was a physicist and demonstrated that in science it is impossible to observe any phenomenon without at the same time modifying it. We could take the example of a photographic film: it is impossible to see what it looks like, what color it has before it "burns" once it is exposed to light, because in order to see it we must necessarily expose it to light and then "burn it". Things can become more dramatic

if we extend this Heisenberg uncertainty principle also to ideas and everything else: it is impossible to think of any idea with our brain without automatically changing it through our own brain: it follows that for each of us it is impossible to know how any idea is before it is altered by our brain. This question can be traced back to relativity, in the sense of relativism: there are no ideas that are not conditioned by the relation with the person who thinks or thought about them. In other words, it is not possible to talk about objective ideas or facts, to say “this thing is this way”: we can only say “this thing is this way for me”, or for you or for others, but not “it is this way in itself, by itself”: everything is relative, subjective. From this it also follows that it is not possible to talk about determinism, that is about a world that functions mechanically, like a clock, with every phenomenon reduced to being the pure result of the factors that preceded it and therefore caused, determined, provoked it: we cannot talk about this because this conception is part of a claim to speak objectively, that is to say: the world itself is like this, it works like this. Instead, it is not that it works like this, but it is our brain that at a certain point believes that it can frame its course within this conception; but this conception is nothing but a pure instrument invented by our brain for its needs for understanding, not a description of reality that could claim to be objective. In other words, it is as if a farmer said that cows exist to be milked and drink milk: it is an idea of convenience; in the same way, all our ideas are always ideas of convenience, created by our brain for its advantage, for its convenience. From this, however, the opposite cannot be deduced, namely that freedom,

creation exists: even the idea of freedom can be accused of having been invented by our brain for its needs to be able to successfully navigate in the midst of events of the world. In conclusion: we cannot expect to know reality, things as they are, the “being”; we can only move in the midst of this world, but without ever claiming to have understood anything definitively.

At this point, it becomes necessary to distinguish between contexts of analytical, technical and precise ideas and contexts of generic, synthetic and humanistic ideas. In an analytical context, of in-depth study, we say that everything is questionable; but in a context of daily life, or of art, or of literature, this kind of ideas is not useful, they would be capable of being only negative, destructive, paralyzing criticism, they would have the sole function of hindering, blocking life, existence. Moreover, there are conceptions, thoughts, ideas, experiences, which are completely unattainable starting from a type of analytical thought, or at least they come out infinitely impoverished or voided, whereas instead, if considered from a humanistic point of view, they become more easily understandable, enjoyable, place of creativity, in their richness of various aspects. Humanistic thinking obviously has the opposite limits: it risks being instinctive, emotional, not very critical, unaware of the many mechanisms that condition it. In life it is necessary to manage these two types of thought contexts: the context of in-depth, analytical, technical, critical investigations, which protects us from illusions and fanaticisms, and the context of humanistic, synthetic, literary, or everyday life, which allows us to free the best of

ourselves without having to wait to have understood its functioning before.

2.28 Karl Barth

Karl Barth (Basel, Switzerland, 1886-1968) was a Protestant theologian. One of his famous ideas was that of God understood as “totally other”. In this expression “other” means different, separate, distant, unattainable. For this reason it is also possible to say “other than me”; God is different from me, from us: that is, God is different from us, separate from us, distant. On the basis of this conception, he states that we human beings, despite all the efforts we can make, will never be able to think of God, because he belongs to a totally different dimension, foreign to the one to which we belong. All our thoughts, as ours, are and will always be exclusively human thoughts, and therefore they will never be able to reach the divine.

Given this starting point, Barth goes on to state that our human thinking can only make us know our limits, our misery, our unsurpassable state of sin. According to him, however, this path of thought, which we could consider depressing, is not to be avoided, but rather is fruitful. Man plays his part by moving forward along this line, becoming ever more aware of his own misery and, just when, because of this, he reaches the limit of despair, then it happens that God takes the initiative to break his separation, his being totally other, to meet us. In the experience of this meeting, however, God always remains above our capacity for

understanding; this is why Barth means the act of faith made by man as a leap into the dark, into the unknown.

This way of thinking of Barth poses to us today the problem of how to understand this diversity, this difference of God compared to us. In practice, Barth seems to assume that there are two extremely different and non-communicating worlds (except by God's initiative); this way of thinking cannot but appear to us metaphysical, in the likeness of how Plato spoke of the existence of the world of ideas. But Barth is not so naive as to fall into a metaphysical way of thinking. Then we can try to understand Barth on an existential, experiential way; that is, Barth wants to tell us not how the world is made, separated into two planes, but rather to describe to us what the experience of faith is; according to him the experience of faith consists in becoming aware of our own misery and then experience of seeing us rescued by God who takes the initiative. However, this way of framing Barth's thought can give the impression of betraying him, because it frames everything in a perception of the experience on the part of man, while he instead maintains that man by himself is not able to come to think God. But we could tell Barth that, although he speaks of the unattainability of God, actually he describes the action of God; he may then say he arrived by faith, by revelation, and not by reflection.

The substance of this problem can be considered in the interweaving of perspectives, of points of view: each perspective is able to frame all the others, but in turn can be framed by the others. Since there are no privileged perspectives, the best thing is to make them talk on equal

terms. Then, as Christians we can live our faith in a dialogue, within ourselves, between human perspectives and perspectives that appeal to experiences that come from outside the human, even if we do not know exactly what this “from of outside” is. Appealing to sources of thought different from the reason makes possible perspectives that, even if not proven, are able to describe and even guide our experience. In other words, a Christian could also say this: I do not know if there is another world, but equally I decide to refer to it, because this provides me with other mental tools to understand and live my faith, tools that prove to be able to make themselves being appreciated with seriousness and to talk openly with reason. This awareness can help us to understand that we can also accept talking about miracles, hell and heaven, angels and devils, even if we do not want to refer to them metaphysically. In other words: the reference to the supernatural can be appreciated as a language, which succeeds in expressing aspects of our experience of faith that rational or simply humanistic languages fail to grasp. A bit like when we use dialectal expressions, because we perceive that certain things are impossible to express in all their richness through the tools that the official language makes available to us. We will then be careful to ensure that our use of these tools becomes a reason for enriching rather than impoverishing ideas.

2.29 Karl Jaspers

The philosophy of Karl Jaspers (Oldenburg, Germany, 1883 - Basel, Switzerland, 1969) highlights above

all the fact that each of us is a particular, unique, unrepeatable existence. Besides this there is also reason, which guides us to think that there are also equal truths for everyone. Now, if each of us is closed within his unique being, how is it possible to identify universal truths? In other words, Jaspers addresses the problem of the relationship between subjectivism and objectivism. Both seem to lead to dead-ends: subjectivism leads to relativism, that is, leads to say that everything is relative and there are no truths able to impose themselves on the whole world; objectivism establishes that there are universal truths, but the presumption of having understood, identified, leads to oppression, to dictatorship. According to Jaspers there is a way to connect these two perspectives, and it is communication, intended as communicating, that is action that does not stop, never ends; when it stops, the destructiveness of subjectivism or the dictatorship of objectivism would immediately take over. For this reason, communication, in order to make it never stop, must correspond to an experience of failure of the communication itself. In other words, when a person thinks she has understood what the other person has said, she will stop listening, and then the closure, the end of the dialogue, will automatically take over; communication can be kept alive only if we continuously perceive it as unfinished, failed, even impossible. This experience of failure can only be sustained, according to Jaspers, by faith; if communication is necessary, and yet it is also necessary to always keep in mind that communication is in itself impossible, never exhaustive, man comes to discover that his being, as well as

consist in communicating, consists in having faith: we can find the strength to communicate only by believing that something of what is said will come to the other; but this cannot be demonstrated, it can only be believed with an act of faith in a possibility of communicating that goes beyond our possibilities of control. From the necessity of this act of faith, Jaspers deduces who God is: God is truth, but truth understood as a continuous becoming; this truth is such to the extent that it is continually achieved as communication. In other words: God is truth because he always communicates; the truth, which is God himself, is to communicate without interruption.

2.30 Martin Heidegger

When we happen to ask ourselves about the meaning of existence, we are doing nothing but trying to use a research tool, which actually is a precise philosophy, in the hope that perhaps this instrument will help us to orient ourselves in the world; we ask ourselves questions, hoping that they are the most effective questions, the most able to get us to the core of the issues. The philosophy that questions itself on the meaning of existence is called *existentialism* and its main representative was Heidegger (Meßkirch, Germany, 1889 - Freiburg 1976); naturally he was not the first to ask himself what sense living has, but he was the first who made this question a method of systematic research, an organized philosophy. His thinking starts from a critique of previous philosophies: they have questioned themselves

about the world and the I; at first they tried to understand how the world is made and how it works; then they set out to understand the world as a creation or part of the I. Heidegger highlights that things are the opposite: it is not the world that is part of the I, but it is the I that is one of the many objects in the world. A similar reversal had been made by Marx, when he said that it is not the I that makes the world, but the economic world that makes the I, but the thought of Marx had then taken the way of an attempt at economic redemption of the I. Heidegger instead takes the way of accepting all the limitations of the I. Therefore, in Heidegger the I is nothing but an object *thrown in the world*, among the many other objects that are there; but there is a difference: among all these objects, this I is ourselves who are reflecting on these things. The world is *being*, but we are *being there*. This has consequences. For example, even a mouse wonders, in its own way, about the world that surrounds him in order to survive in it, but the fact is that what involves us is not the way of questioning that mice have, but the way of questioning of the I, that we ourselves are; we are not interested in the questioning of other beings. Therefore, when we try to understand the world, we cannot help but include ourselves in this understanding. This makes meaningless any traditional *metaphysics* trying to talk about the world or the I as if they were objects other than ourselves who are talking. Instead of metaphysics, a particular attention to *language* becomes essential, especially poetic language, becomes essential, to be understood as an instrument modeled according to the physiognomy of this I,

which seeks to understand the being, that is, the world that also includes ourselves.

The moment we include ourselves in the discourse, a fact emerges that reveals itself as the main fact: the world is what it is, we are what we are, we are trying to understand, but we cannot help but keep in mind that this action of understanding may at any moment end existing, that is, at any moment we can die. At this point we must correct this last sentence: dying means not that the work of understanding that we have begun will end, but that it will simply enter into another way of being realized, which we do not know how it will be; speaking of an end would be claiming to be able to establish exactly what will happen with death; instead we have to talk about it referring to what is significant for our point of view, that is the I. What, according to Heidegger, is significant for the I is the reference to the concepts of *possibility* and *impossibility*. That is, our human understanding spontaneously means existence as a set of possibilities: some are realized, and they constitute the past, others are aimed to the future; therefore the most suitable, most significant way for us to understand death is not as an end, but as an impossibility. Where is the difference? It consists in the fact that the concept of the end is a concept that we refer to the future, to something that one day will happen; instead the concept of impossibility invests us already in the present; in other words, death is not an end that will seize us in the future, but a condition of impossibility that already conditions our present. Without our realizing it, actually all our thoughts and actions are conditioned by the idea that we are not in this world forever.

We exist toward death: this is the meaning of our life. *Being toward death*, however, does not mean living in depression and propensity to commit suicide; rather it means living an *authentic* existence, in which the prospect of death is not marginalized, but rather is assumed as an element that gives a particular physiognomy to everything we do. Heidegger is therefore not a pessimist, but one who wishes to show the truth. He also speaks of *anguish* as a sign of authentic existence, but even in this case anguish does not mean wanting at any moment to kill ourselves, but rather to include the awareness of the destiny of death in all our projects, thoughts, actions. The *inauthentic* existence is instead that of those who think they can discard the thought of death, believing that they can think of the objects of the world without including themselves among these objects: among them there are the metaphysicians. Heidegger, with his philosophy, has been the culmination of anti-metaphysics. The anti-metaphysics of Vattimo will then start from him.

2.31 Bloch, Moltmann and others

Heidegger had argued that an existence is *authentic* when it is marked by the awareness of its condition of *possibility* and *impossibility*, especially the possibility of *death*, understood as the possibility that anything suddenly becomes impossible; we sometimes use to say that “*anything can happen*”.

According to Ernst Bloch (Germany, 1885-1977) we must not however neglect the condition of *possibility* understood in a positive sense, that is the fact that at any moment prospects of life, of improvement, can arise, even unexpectedly. We all need something to wait for, which keeps alive our desire to live. An important fact is that *hope* can open up especially thanks to our action in the world. For this reason, philosophy and theology of hope have found their congenial terrain in Marxism: it placed great trust in the possibilities that are opened up by concrete human commitment. Bloch also appreciated the hope of a religious nature, but refused to identify it in precise figures, therefore not accepting faith in a God; the flaw of religion is, according to him, to have crystallized this feeling in the relationship with a God who is too precise, determined.

According to the Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann (Germany, 1926 - living), in Christ is, compared to the vagueness of Bloch's hope, a concrete answer to the problem of death. The resurrection of Jesus allows the real possibility of further future events, worthy of being lived as hope. Furthermore, it also has the ability to face with destructions of hope caused by human sin. An interesting symbol of the need for hope that dwells in man is the game: in it we invent hopes and determine the ways by which to experiment our ability to realize them. Moltmann's logic overturns the Marxist idea of religion as opium of people: according to Moltmann, if God would not exist, we could resign ourselves to the *status quo*, to injustice and violence; but since God exists and is right, we cannot be resign

ourselves, but we must live in the effective hope that leads to action.

The Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz (Germany, 1928 - living) introduced the concept of political theology, arguing that today theology cannot limit itself to establishing definitions, but must engage in the concrete problems of the world and become involved in the daily search for solutions. The theology of Giuseppe Ruggieri (Pozzallo, 1940) also has been oriented, in various aspects, on a line comparable to that of Metz. In the 1970s the "liberation theology" was born in Latin America; it proposed to be embodied in the life situations of poor people and to identify, by sharing their problems, the concrete answers with which to react to situations of injustice.

On all this set of ideas the Catholic Church has reacted by criticizing the politicization and the Marxist (and therefore atheist) background that hide behind these intentions of struggle in favor of the poor; for their part, instead, the theologians of hope and liberation have accused the Church of crystallizing in a way of institutional existence, which lacks concrete commitment and openness to a true hope that is not relegated to the afterlife.

2.32 Erich Fromm

An interesting field of study, which was studied in depth by Fromm (Frankfurt, Germany, 1900 - Locarno, Switzerland, 1980) and by Max Horkheimer (Stuttgart, 14 February 1895 - Nuremberg, 1973), was that of mutual influence between authoritarian state structures and

authoritarian family structures. The authoritarian structures of the family take the function of making the child internalize a certain perception of who has unquestionable authority, at a time of his age in which he is not able to react, because he does not yet possess the mental instruments of criticism that for this purpose would be needed. As a consequence, the child who became a man will unconsciously find, in the authoritarian social context embodied by the State, a set of structures that he has now internalized and which is therefore prepared to accept uncritically. In this context it is possible to observe how the authoritarian social structures of all kinds (dictatorships, systems of political power, of religious or moral power), aware of this function of family as a fundamental place capable of inculcating submission to authority, have always sought to strengthen it as a conservative institution, defending the most suitable characteristics for this purpose: prohibition of extra-marital relationships, propaganda for procreation, education of children in an authoritarian manner and relegation of women to the domestic hearth. Consequently, as Horkheimer pointed out, a real change in the authoritarian structures of politics will not be possible without a parallel work of change in the life of family, which would otherwise only continue to continually recreate the mentality of submission and authority that we would try to correct on a political-social level.

On the positive side, Fromm has developed the concepts of existence to be understood as being, as opposed to having, and as loving, to be understood as art. Existence, understood as being, aims to make people become aware

that an authentic way of living must become aware of the importance of the subject and its positive abilities, while instead the world that surrounds it leads it, erroneously, to identify its being with his having. In other words, Fromm tells the man: become aware that you are and must be what you are and not what you have. On this line Fromm specifies his concept of love: it is to be understood as the development of the subject's best abilities, which are acquired as one acquires an art, that is, with a long and patient work of self-formation. The sick society, as it tends to convince that man is what he has, also tends to convince him that love means possession and sexual enjoyment; according to Fromm, this is precisely the reason why in today's society it is so difficult to meet truly mature people in their capacity to be and to love. The fact that it is art also means that, similar to what happens to arts, it is not possible to obtain these qualities through synthetic definitions, but only with a long work of training. As models of this existence Fromm quotes Buddha, Jesus and master Eckhart, the latter a German theologian, philosopher and mystic, who lived between 1260 and 1328 A. D.

2.33 Jean Paul Sartre

An interesting aspect of Sartre's philosophy (Paris, 1905 - 1980) is that which focuses attention on the other's point of view towards me. Sartre notes that when another person stands in front of me, that other person is not experienced simply as any object, but as one who in turn sees me, considers me, evaluates me, assigns me a position

at the inside of his horizons and his look. In other words, I can consider that there are so many objects around me, but, when I consider that there is also another person, I cannot help but notice that I, in turn, am for that person an object, I am “objectified”. Consequently, from that moment I am forced to acknowledge that my being is no longer only what I think of myself, but is conditioned by what the other decides to think of myself. To this we must add that all men tend to enslave the world around them, including other people. Consequently, I, who fall under the look of the other, cannot help but perceive this tendency to the enslavement that comes to me from that look: the other, whether he wants it or not, while he looks at me, tends automatically to enslave me and I cannot avoid feeling it. In this context of ideas we understand the expression of Sartre: *hell is other people*. We can also understand how in Sartre’s thought the I is not in consciousness, but it is an object like many others, which is outside of ourselves, there, in the midst of the other objects that are seen, among which there are also the “Is” (meant as plural of I) of other people. Because of this strong limitation of our own perspective, the I, placed in the midst of other objects, loses all its meaning and its motive to exist, in the same way that people had the feeling that the world lost its sense of existence when Copernicus (1473-1543) discovered that it was the earth that revolved around the sun and not vice versa; this absolute lack of motives turns even into feeling not wanted in the world, in short, like a guest who has not been invited, given that the I makes no sense, nor does receive it from objects or other Is. This feeling of disharmony with the world and others is called by Sartre,

with a term now become famous, *nausea*; that is to say that the I is nothing, but obviously others as well, both people and objects, don't have for the I any reason to be received, appreciated, to receive interest.

In this context of non-sense, for Sartre we are totally free beings, but of such a vast freedom that we cannot find any reason to do one thing rather than another; therefore, according to Sartre, our freedom is like a clash with the void, we are condemned to be free.

Also the character of Sartre was consistent with this form of nihilism: he could not fit into any system, any order, any framed lifestyle; he could be defined as an anarchist without goals, if anything to enjoy life, a rebel who, however, knowingly refused to have alternatives to propose. This evidently has similarities with Nietzsche and also with Heidegger, whose *anguish* and *being toward death* are concepts close to Sartre's *nausea*.

2.34 Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault (Poitiers, France 1926 - Paris 1984, not to be confused with Jean Bernard Léon Foucault 1819 - 1868, inventor of the famous pendulum designed to prove that the earth turns) studied in depth an idea that sometimes could rise in our mind: how do we divide mad people from doctors who instead should cure them? However, he did not stop in a simple relativism, but tried to analyze how, in the various epochs, the mentalities of the time established not only which the madmen were, but also the diseases to be considered more serious, and therefore more urgent to be

cured; in other words, every age has tried to establish which were the incarnations of the evil of its time and this allows us to evaluate the way of thinking of that era; these epochal mentalities were actually one of the ways to establish who should command and who should obey. From this point of view Foucault also accuses Freud, who, without realizing it, establishes power relations when he determines who in the clinic must be the psychologist, and therefore must command, and who must be the patient and therefore must obey. Foucault, however, does this analysis not for superficially anarchist purposes, but in the effort to identify the coordinates of thought in which each historical epoch is situated.

Another interesting analysis carried out by Foucault was the attention to sex as an instrument of power, exercised not by someone who commands, but by the idea itself, which imposed itself and gave rise to convictions. From this point of view, according to Foucault, the Christian tradition of repression of sex and the subsequent tradition of liberalization are actually the same thing, parts of a single mechanism that has imposed a marked attention to sex and has led to believe, in both parts, that a certain attitude towards sex constituted a human liberation; in the Christian side it was believed that authentic human liberation consisted in the moralization of sex, in the secular side it was believed that liberation was a way of living sex that tried to free itself from any prohibition. Actually, in both cases it has always been the only idea of attention to sex to impose itself on human minds and to make them believe that in that attention there was a crucial point to achieve a liberation of

man; actually this liberation did not occur either with Christian moralization or with secular anarchy, because the whole was nothing more than a mechanism of power that the idea of sex managed to trigger in human minds. In fact, according to Foucault, it is not people who manage ideas, power, language, but it is language that makes its way into man and manages him, determines his behavior. We human beings are managed by language and by many other mechanisms that make their way in us. For this reason, according to Foucault, after the time of God's death, the age of man's death came: the subject does not exist, but there are only mechanisms that determine it; it is structuralism: man is an element like many others, determined by the structures of which he is a part; what we can do is try to notice these structures, not so much to bring man back to life, but simply to become aware of how things are going.

2.35 Friedrich August von Hayek

The fundamental idea of Hayek (Vienna, Austria 1899 - Freiburg, Germany 1992) has been that no theory can ever fully take into account all the factors that determine the evolution of a society, since these factors are too numerous and can be considered only from many points of view, impossible to include in a single theory; furthermore, he considers, optimistically, that in most cases the spontaneous development of a society, the result of the innumerable and never masterable forces that act in it, has produced evolutionary results undoubtedly better than those that the human mind would ever have been able to design.

From here it follows that any theoretical system, which wants to predict the progress of a society, is nothing but a falsehood, aimed at exercising a dominion over that society; such was, for example, Marxism, because it claimed to have understood the course of the world from an economic point of view, while in fact it then turned into a dictatorship. So Hayek also criticizes “constructivism”, that is, the conviction that man has determined, with his projects, a certain type of society and therefore, as he has determined it, is also authorized to alter it and bend it to his purposes; but since, according to Hayek, it is not true that man creates a society, but rather they are an infinity of factors that escape his control and his awareness, then man cannot even consider himself authorized to design changes according to his beliefs; this does not mean that according to Hayek, man must just stand by and watch: he can intervene, but always bearing in mind that the real actors of change are factors that are outside his comprehension; man must therefore intervene with the intention of favoring an environment that allows the action of the many mechanisms that act by themselves and not with the idea of planning everything and mastering the world as much as possible.

A practical criterion to keep in mind, based on what has been said, is that the excessive centralization of a government is deadly, due to the fact that it is impossible for those who govern to know the different points of view present in its territory and therefore, if it will tend to centralize, it will only impose its particular point of view which, for having inevitably neglected the other points of view, cannot but prove oppressive and destructive. Instead,

freedom is based on the recognition of one's own ignorance, as each of us sees only what we can see from his point of view. This admission must lead to the search for the collaboration of all. Those who govern must not be able to issue any law they please, with the excuse of representing the majority, but, on the contrary, must be restrained, limited by other laws created specifically to limit their legislative possibilities: in fact the majority is only a part of the society and even if a government enjoyed the full support of the nation, in itself it would still constitute a limited point of view and therefore to be restrained in its claims. Therefore, a law will be good when it is generic, it will not represent a program that invades the free initiative of people, it will not serve a particular interest, it will have as its purpose not itself, but the freest expression of the forces present in the country.

From an economic point of view, Hayek is therefore favorable to the mechanisms of competition, since they realize the interaction of different points of view present in a given society. The State must not be able to have excessive control over the economy of a country, because this would limit the free possibility of action coming from the various factors present in that society. Private property is an indispensable tool for the existence of this freedom of action of the pluralities that are present in a State.

According to Hayek, a concept to be radically criticized is that of "social justice"; no one has ever been able to give a clear definition of it, not automatically conditioned by a particularistic point of view; and in fact, in the name of "social justice", nothing has been done other

than defending private interests, satisfying the requests of those who managed to make themselves heard or to influence more, financing projects and activities based on arbitrary choices made by who was in power, with the excuse of equitably distributing economic goods. The unions were born, in theory, to defend the interests of the workers, but, in reality, they had as their goal, since their birth, the defense of the particular interests of the group of people they represented.

In summary, Hayek admits that the State is in charge of help tasks and actions that are impossible to delegate to the private, but the basic criterion must be that the State must be continuously braked and not exalted as a central body that goes to solve problems anywhere they arise; it is wrong to want a strong state: in the first place must be free, private and collaborative initiative. For this reason, Hayek wrote in 1979, “*giving the government the monopoly of television broadcasting, as happens in some countries, is one of the most dangerous political decisions in recent years*”; moreover “*the thesis that the government must finance at least the compulsory education does not imply that this must be managed by the government and even less that the government should have the monopoly*”. He also negatively considers the monetary and postal monopoly: “*the exclusive right to coin money and to ensure the postal service were not established to better serve the public, but only to increase the powers of the government*”.

2.36 Hans Georg Gadamer

Gadamer's philosophy (Marburg, 1900 - Heidelberg 2002) focuses on hermeneutics. This word comes from the Greek and means "interpretation", meant both as action of interpreting and as meaning that can be seen in a text. For example, a passage from the Gospel can be read in a political key, and then we can say that a political hermeneutics is applied. The hermeneutics can therefore be compared to a pair of colored glasses that each of us wears: they alter the perception of colors, but they also allow us to highlight elements that would be completely invisible to the naked eye or by using perfectly transparent glasses. Actually, there are no people wearing completely neutral glasses: each of us has in his mind, already as soon as is born, his preconceptions, the pre-understanding and predispositions that lead him to pay more attention to certain things and to neglect others. Since it is impossible to take off our glasses, the best thing is, rather than trying in vain to take off them, trying to become aware of them, as far as possible, taking advantage of the comparison with others, and exploit them to the fullest.

Another concept that Gadamer highlighted was that of a "hermeneutic circle". It means that when we read a text, we are not the only one to interpret it, but it is also the text that interprets us, in the sense that it imposes itself to some extent on our mind, contrasts some of our ideas, provokes us; then we go back to reconsidering the text, and here comes an endless circle of us interpreting the text and the text interpreting us.

A third important concept is that of the independence of the text from the author: it does not make much sense to ask whether the author has thought of the meaning we are seeing in a text (or a work of art, for example); in fact it is impossible to enter his mind, even if he were present before us and we could talk to him. Therefore a text must be interpreted for what it is and not for the intentions that the author could have, which could also be unconscious, therefore unknown even to himself. So it is also possible to study the history of the effects that a text has produced in the various epochs, up to see the effects it produces in us today. Everything can also be compared with the traits of the author's personality, which we can know in other ways, but it will still be a different work, even if an interesting one.

All these things assume a more general importance if we think that, in addition to a text, we can try to interpret life, the world, ourselves; in this sense Gadamer goes so far as to say that our whole existence is a continuous understanding and self understanding, a continuous interpretation, it is all hermeneutics; every human being is himself a hermeneutics, a way of interpreting life. Seeking the meaning of life is nothing other than trying to apply some hermeneutics to life.

I add a personal note here: we can connect the term "interpret" to the meaning it has in music; in music it means not simply understanding, finding meaning, but playing, playing a song. And then even in life we can witness to the world choices, interpretations, when we execute them. Who does some action in life is like one who "plays life" as a musical instrument is played and so lets others see and hear

it as he understands it, without even having to add words of explanation.

Today the alternative to Gadamer's thought is seen in structuralism: hermeneutics identifies syntheses, structuralism instead analyzes. The study of language, of the structures that make it work, of grammar, is analysis. Making sense of a sentence by expressing it with other similar words is instead making synthesis, interpreting, hermeneutics. Analysis does an orderly, systematic job; hermeneutics does a more rapid, transversal, almost at a glance job, being quickly able to see connections that analysis would identify in dozens of centuries, or even ever. The sense of "transversal" can be evident when referring to the game of "word search", in which, by examining a table filled with apparently meaningless letters, we have to identify here and there sequences, in any direction, that form words with a meaning.

2.37 Gianni Vattimo

Gianni Vattimo (Turin, 1936) has developed his philosophy in opposition to those who think they can say "how things stand". Whoever thinks this will sooner or later become a dictator, because he will tend to impose his idea on others; he is one who has an interest in mastering ideas first, and then, even unwittingly, men. At this point, however, Vattimo found himself in a difficulty: to oppose those who want to say "how things stand", we must propose an alternative; but the alternative may in turn be accused of wanting to establish "how things stand", albeit proposing a

different view. How to get out of this situation? He gets out of it by calling his thought “weak”, which is equivalent to “relative”; it is a thought that is not stable, certain and sure, but instead it recognizes itself dependent on the past, the present, the complex of situations in which we find ourselves living today. In this sense his philosophy is above all negative, that is to say demolishing and therefore similar to that of Nietzsche; Vattimo, however, unlike Nietzsche, recognizes that it is not possible to propose alternatives without relying, in some way, on what we want to oppose; as to say that it is not possible to show that a castle has fallen without using the stones that kept it standing; it is not possible to create a left party without exploiting tools provided by the right; it is not possible to oppose any enemy without exploiting, at least minimally, something that he himself gives us; we cannot fight evil without using tools provided precisely by evil and therefore, by themselves, at the outset created for evil; it is not possible to study the past without exploiting words and ideas provided by it; we can’t live in this world without getting dirty; what we can do is only trying to calibrate the inevitable compromises and trying to direct them towards goals that seem better to us.

Vattimo’s thought, as he himself states, is a hermeneutics, that is, a way of interpreting the world; indeed he, on the lines of Heidegger and Gadamer, maintains that it is not possible to know what the world is, neither if it exists nor what to exist means; what we are able to do is only handling our interpretations, trafficking them, comparing them.

Umberto Eco (1932 - 2016) argued in practice that however, this way, a lot of serious work done by serious people is questioned; to put it simply: it makes no sense to say that the work of a doctor is worthless because we don't know if the patient exists. Therefore, according to Eco, we need to maintain a value to the sense of being, of existence, so that our work and thinking retains its value; Eco would say to Vattimo: if nothing exists, what is the value of thinking, albeit in a "weak" way? Vattimo would answer that we can think the same, just being humble. This is what every scientist does: he humbly studies what he thinks he can study, without pretending to be the last person to establish how certain things are.

Developing the line of Vattimo, I personally think that being is weak because it is becoming, it is a being that "walks" and therefore does not have the power to preserve a strong identity, as the words with which we indicate things would suggest us to think, so deceiving us. This idea of dynamism of things corresponds to that which we first encountered in Heraclitus and which more recently is found in Whitehead (1861-1947). From this point of view, the humility of the scientist is due to the awareness that both he and his object of study are part of the same world that is becoming. Then, if we don't want to fall into the trap of turning ourselves into dictators, when we are tempted to say "how things stand", it is enough to learn to think that things do not "stand", but "become" and therefore the only thing we can try to say is how they transform, how they are progressing, how they are going, and not "how they are" or "what they are". Here, however, Vattimo's warning is

important: it is impossible to eliminate the verb “to be” from our language (and so many other words having a “static” meaning), and therefore we must have the patience to use it anyway, as we are forced to use the stones of the fallen castle, because there are no other ones. Our thinking must then be a provisional synthesis, which needs to be updated day by day, collects the past and the present, makes every effort to welcome confrontation, self-criticism and seeks to move towards a future that we currently consider better. Therefore, it will also be first a self-formative thinking, an organization of projects that must always be reviewed, with the subsequent courage to assume human responsibility to make choices in the present and translate them into concrete behaviors, that should be able to say something to the world and to nature, as they appear us today.

3. A synthesis in five points

What follows is a synthesis that does not mean summary; rather, it means trying to review the whole history of philosophy from an interpretative point of view, that is trying to understand where we are going; therefore it is not about repeating the above in a shorter way, but about reconsidering everything with different eyes; this means that the attempt of synthesis can still make us discover things that in the more detailed treatment could have been so implicit and hidden as to be completely invisible.

3.1 Criticism

A good starting point to realize the purpose of philosophy can be this one: taking note that everything can be criticized. There are no statements on which it is not possible to find arguments to validly support the contrary. But criticism is not just demolition; we can think, for example, of the art critic: his work does not consist in saying that every painting is worth nothing because of this or that defect, but, on the contrary, in helping others to realize first of all the merits contained in a work.

Destructive criticism cannot weaken truth: if something is true, there is no criticism able to destroy it; rather, it guides us to understand the meaning to be attributed to the word “truth”; criticism is a necessary criterion, vital for protecting ourselves from superficiality, illusions, fanaticism; it is not an enemy, it must not frighten us because of its destructive force; rather, it is a tool that, like all other tools, we need to learn to use, otherwise it serves only to do damage.

Among all possible criticisms, philosophers in the past have identified one that at least turns out to be among the most fruitful: it is not possible to prove that life is not a dream. Similarly, we can also observe that it is not possible to prove that while producing an argument the mind has not suffered distractions or deceit, that is, it has not dreamed a little; we can think, for example, of when we wonder about we having closed the door, or of when we count a large number of objects: if there is the doubt that we could have

been distracted (and therefore deluded) during the counting of a thousand card pack, nothing prevents us from thinking that we can have been distracted even in a very short count and, going down to the minimum, also in any thought that appears to our mind as immediate, evident.

Another critical awareness with which we should become familiar is that any reasoning that mediates two elements would in turn require further mediations and so on endlessly. Likewise, each demonstration is based on elements that in turn need to be demonstrated. Finally, we note that any criticism that wants to be really serious and radical must necessarily be able to take into consideration and also face criticism of itself; it needs to be able to do self-criticism as well.

3.2 Metaphysics

Another way of indicating the most fruitful criticism is this one: all our statements are filtered by our brain. It is not possible to control what is outside our brain. The meaning of the words “being” and “reality” depends on the brain of the speaker. We can orient ourselves in this question by distinguishing three ways of thinking: metaphysical, anti-metaphysical or “weak thought” and practical thought. Metaphysical thought is the one that chooses to believe that there is an independent reality outside our brain; the anti-metaphysical one chooses to take into account the doubt, since it is never possible to know if brain is deceiving us; the practical thought chooses to go beyond these issues, considering that they don’t lead to concrete outlets, and

directs attention to what can be done in practice, while taking into account the whole of the preceding critical journey. To understand the three lines more clearly, it may also be useful to highlight their limits. Some faults of metaphysics consist in the fact that it refuses to take into consideration dependence on brain and on becoming; it refuses to do self-criticism; it favors the arbitrary exercise of power, because who speaks believes he is saying the absolute truth, which therefore must be followed by everyone. On the other hand, anti-metaphysics has no foundation, because it rejects the idea itself of foundation; it is anarchist, believing that everyone can do what he likes; it is self-destructive, because it is self-critical. Practical thought, for its part, may be tempted to forget or devalue all previous research, thus falling into an uncritical way of life.

Practical talking seeks immediate experience, living here and now. This type of thinking has its own particular capacity to resist criticism, because it wants to be interpreted as a fact to be experienced immediately and not as a content to be analyzed philosophically. Let's take two easy examples of ways of speaking that happen not to be analyzed, but to react in a practical way: the supermarket cashier and the girlfriend who says "I love you". Let's imagine if a supermarket customer, in front of the cashier who tells him the total to pay, begins to say that we need to see if money exists, if life is a dream, and so on. The cashier would naturally react by telling him that he has no time to waste and that the only thing to consider right away is that he has to pay what he put in the cart. Where is the mistake? The mistake consists in the fact that that customer lost sight

of the immediate, practice intention of the cashier and, rather than questioning what he wanted, remained closed in the abstract questions of her mind. Likewise it would happen if a boy, answering the girl who says “I love you”, replies that they need to see what that phrase means, they have to do the grammatical analysis of the verb to love, and so on. Here too, the error is that of not having taken into consideration the practical intentions of the other person who is speaking: the other person wanted only to know if he also loved her. At this point, beyond the grotesque side of these two examples, we must not miss the fact that the intention, both of the cashier and of the girlfriend, is not a rejection of philosophy, but rather another philosophy: it is a philosophy that we can call “practical thought” and that seems to be the most recent trend of our days. This does not mean that the thought of the previous philosophers is to be thrown out for having been too theoretical: practical thought is directed towards practice, but continuing to build over all the previous philosophical research.

To better understand the three types of thought described, that is metaphysical, anti-metaphysical and practical, it will be useful to note the respective language, that is, some more frequent words around which each of them moves, which can also be compared horizontally:

METAPHYSICS	ANTIMETAPHYSICS	PRACTICAL
objective	subjective	practice
metaphysics	analysis	synthesis
reality	brain	humanity
being / existing	becoming	growing

natural law	agreement	experience
realism	relativism	immediate
certainty	doubt	commitment
foundation	imperfect	provisional
conclusion	dialoguing	being involved
strength		life
morality		collecting
truth		dialoguing

In other words: facing a table, metaphysics states what it is; the weak thought says we don't know if it exists; practical thinking tries to see what to do with that table; in the third way of thinking the questions of the two previous ways are not scorned, but are considered instruments, on which, however, we must not stop, they are considered aids that must lead to practical choices.

3.3 Perspectives

In addition to the examples of the cashier and the girlfriend, we can also recall that of the novel: also a novel is written with a practical purpose; its author does not write it so that the grammatical analysis is done on it, or so that the reader wonders if that novel exists or not; the author wrote it to produce in the reader's intelligence an experience of reading, aimed at involving him in a global manner, thus also affecting his feelings, his emotions. Cashier, girlfriend and novel belong to the same third language, because all three of them aim directly at the experience, rather than at formulating definitions or criticisms.

The three languages I referred to, metaphysical, anti-metaphysical and practical, are three perspectives, three points of view on reality, three ways of dealing with reflection or life itself; within them they can further subdivide into other perspectives, for example into perspectives of believers and perspectives of non-believers or atheists.

We can notice that practical language can also be expressed in terms identical to metaphysics, with the sole difference that it does not intend to establish universal laws, but recognizes that it is a perspective. In practical language, for example, we can easily say that a chair exists, but who makes this statement from a practical point of view does not intend to establish a universal truth, a philosophical principle; he means that that chair exists only to the extent that this statement serves him for practical purposes; for the rest, he is ready to admit doubt. Since therefore it is easy to confuse those who make statements for practical use with those who instead intend to place them as absolute truths, when we listen to a person we must refer to the context of the whole discourse that that person does, it is not enough to hear a single affirmation.

The prospects are like rooms; there is no being outside all the rooms, in a universal perspective. Every statement that is pronounced in this world is interpreted within a perspective. There are no statements that can be put out of any perspective, that is absolute or superior to the others. Each of us represents a different perspective. Instead, the dictator considers his own perspective as universal.

A deadly defect of journalists is to say first the sentence pronounced and then the author of the sentence: this way they weaken the critical capacity of the listener preventing him from immediately placing the sentence in its context.

Different perspectives also coexist in the same person, based on different moments, moods, health, and even at the same time. In each of us different perspectives coexist in continual evolution, which uninterruptedly dialogue or contradict each other.

In order for making possible dialogue with another person it is necessary trying to welcome into us, at least temporarily, his own perspective. I cannot understand the thoughts of a thief if I never felt the desire to take possession of something. A husband cannot appreciate the beauty of another woman except by placing himself, at least to some extent, in the view of those who look at that woman with appreciation of her beauty; this way, however, we could say that, at least to some extent, that husband is cheating on his wife. Actually we can say that it is not betrayal, because in practice we all know that life is like this, feeling emotions and interests of all kinds within us; a different thing is then cultivating them specifically. Therefore, a boyfriend, at the height of his falling in love with his girlfriend, could say that all the other girls are nothing compared to his one; then he could come to his senses, look at things while considering other's points of view, and he will be able to tell others: excuse me, I spoke for a moment from the intimacy of my falling in love, but I realize that for each of you as well his one is the most beautiful. At this point the girlfriend could

also say to him: I suspect that you, by welcoming in yourself the understanding for the sympathy of others towards their girls, host this sympathy towards the others a little too much in you; that is, the girl could also begin to feel a little cheated on.

The same situation is created with regard to the relationship between a believer and his religion, compared to other religions. In this case, religion takes the place of his own girl, other religions take the place of other girls. God could complain to the believer that he, out of a desire for openness, a desire to put himself in others' shoes, is hosting the attachment to other religions a little too much in himself. God could complain about feeling cheated on by those who try to understand other religions.

Actually things are not like this, because this contamination with the desire of the other woman or of the other religion already takes place without us realizing it; it is practical experience that makes us understand that such contamination has nothing to worry about.

If instead it is considered from a theoretical point of view, it can also be interpreted as a betrayal of one's religion. This kind of exclusively theoretical consideration, without paying attention to what actually happens in practice, led Pope Ratzinger to conclude that dialogue with religions, strictly speaking, is impossible; he wrote it in 2008, on the occasion of a review of a book by Marcello Pera:

Dear Senator Pera, recently I was able to read your new book Why We Must Call Ourselves Christians. It was for me a fascinating experience. With a stupendous

knowledge of the sources and a cogent logic, you analyze the essence of liberalism beginning with its foundations, demonstrating its roots in the Christian image of God that belongs to the essence of liberalism: the relationship with God of which man is the image, and from which we have received the gift of liberty. With incontestable logic, you show that liberalism loses its basis and destroys itself if it abandons this foundation. No less impressive are your analyses of liberty and of multi-culturalism, in which you illustrate the self-contradictory nature of this concept and hence its political and cultural impossibility. Of fundamental importance is your analysis of what Europe can be, and of a European constitution in which Europe does not transform itself into a cosmopolitan reality, but rather finds its identity in its Christian-liberal foundation. Particularly meaningful for me too is your analysis of interreligious and intercultural dialogue. You explain with great clarity that an interreligious dialogue in the strict sense of the term is not possible, while you urge intercultural dialogue that develops the cultural consequences of the religious option which lies beneath. While a true dialogue is not possible about this basic option without putting one's own faith into parentheses, it's important in public exchange to explore the cultural consequences of these religious options. Here, dialogue and mutual correction and enrichment are both possible and necessary. With regard to the importance of all this for the contemporary crisis in ethics, I find what you say about the trajectory of liberal ethics important. You demonstrate that liberalism, without ceasing to be liberalism, but, on the contrary, in order to be

faithful to itself, can link itself to a doctrine of the good, in particular that of Christianity, which is in fact genetically linked to liberalism. You thereby offer a true contribution to overcoming the crisis. With its sober rationality, its ample philosophical information and the force of its argument, the present book, in my opinion, is of fundamental importance in this hour for Europe and for the world. I hope that it finds a large audience, and that it can give to political debate, beyond the most urgent problems, that depth without which we cannot overcome the challenge of our historical moment. With gratitude for your work, I heartily offer God's blessings.

Benedict XVI, 23 November 2008

Along the same lines the Pope had already expressed himself in 2000, in the *Dominus Iesus* declaration.

After what we have said, we can realize that Christianity, despite making use of absolute languages, cannot help but confront itself with other perspectives, which are also able to relativize it. Each prospect is in contact with all the others and cannot avoid being influenced by them; in other words, the whole world is connected. If we don't accept to host extraneous perspectives in ourselves, we only make dialogue between deaf, in which everyone tries only to incorporate the other's perspective into his own. For example, one can tell me: in order to speak you use the principle of non-contradiction, which is objective; and I answer him: but the principle of non-contradiction is conditioned by our brain; and he tells me: you, to be able to answer, have right now used the principle of non-

contradiction ... and so on endlessly. Or if I said to a Muslim: you are a quasi-Christian; and he to me: you are a quasi-Muslim. In other words, there is no perspective able to impose itself and convince dialectically all the others who think differently.

3.4 Jesus' resurrection and miracles

Did Jesus really make the miracles told in the Gospel? Has he really risen? Here is what Pope Benedict XVI said in the general audience of April 15, 2009: *“Consequently, it is fundamental for our faith and for our Christian witness to proclaim the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as a real, historical event, attested by many authoritative witnesses. We assert this forcefully because, in our day too, there are plenty of people who seek to deny its historicity, reducing the Gospel narrative to a myth, to a “vision” of the Apostles, taking up and presenting old and already worn-out theories as new and scientific.”*

In the words of the Pope the term “historic” is ambiguous: if we understand it in the same way as we consider Giuseppe Garibaldi a historical figure, we should conclude that believing in the resurrection of Jesus requires not an act of faith, but a forced assent, in the same way we cannot allow ourselves not to believe that Giuseppe Garibaldi existed. But “historical” can also mean “of historical significance”, that is “capable of having effects on history”; in this sense any novel is also historical, because it is able to arouse concrete effects in the people who read it, who are historical figures. However, the context of the

Pope's speech suggests that he refers to the first sense of the word "historical" that we have referred to.

After knowing metaphysics, we understand that applying the term "real" to something does not increase its concreteness. The knowledge of the three main ways of thinking, metaphysical, anti-metaphysical and practical, leads us at this point to adopt practical thought as the best tool for thinking about the resurrection. We can therefore say that Jesus is "really" risen, but meaning the term "really" not in opposition to dreams, fairy tales, fantasies, since reality itself can be considered a dream, but in opposition to what is not capable to be appreciated with practical effects in our lives.

We can ask ourselves: but then does resurrection depend on our putting it into practice? In doing so, however, we would fall into a new metaphysics, that is, the metaphysics of our practice, which would become the source of salvation for everything, even for the resurrection of Jesus. Instead it is a matter of understanding that practicing something does not mean making it real, but relating to it in the way that today appears to us to be the best. We do not save the resurrection by putting it into practice, nor does it save us in a metaphysical sense. The term "salvation" itself contains a metaphysical, totalizing temptation. Today, instead, we find it better to say that the method of practicing appears to us better and, once this method is adopted, a Christian can realize that actually even God himself has always related to him in relative, practical, not absolute ways.

After this, it will be easy to deduce that it makes no sense to ask whether miracles happened in a way independent from believing. The statements of the doctors cannot make a healing “real”, because saying “real” does not mean anything clear. It would be like thinking of understanding a thing better if they explain it to us in Chinese. When doctors say that a person who could not heal is healed, actually they have not demonstrated anything. In fact, when we face unexplainable events, science refers to research and faith refers to choice; in both cases the need to stop on a definitive conclusion is disappointed. The insistence on doctors’ statements is a dishonest effort to lighten the weight of the choice of faith, trying to steal some support from science, asking it for what it cannot give.

Why then does the gospel tell about miracles? It tells them not to testify scientifically, historically the existence of inexplicable events (it could not, even if it wanted to), nor to ensure that believers can comfort themselves by stealing scientific support from it, but to say that God is greater than the human mind and is able to accomplish what man is not even able to imagine. This actually already applies to any person. What does it mean to be God then? The greatness of God is not in the ability to break the laws of nature, also because actually we don’t even know what breaking the laws of nature means, but in the fact that he offers the possibility of relationships capable of being appreciated practically as superior to those possible with the other people of this world.

3.5 Charity and politics

The philosopher Dario Antiseri, in an intervention on the Italian TV channel Raitre for the program “Ballarò” of February 16, 2010, taking up the position of Popper, an Austrian philosopher who lived between 1902 and 1994, said: *“It is not a question of the Right or the Left, here is a question of rules. That is, an open society is open to the greatest possible number of ideas and ideals, different and perhaps conflicting. The basic question that, as it were, the theorist of the open society, or in any case the defender of the rule of law, poses, is not who should be in charge, but rather how to control those who are in charge. Because, if you look carefully, if we look at the answer that has been given in the course of the history of political thought to the question of the masters “who should be in charge”, is an answer that has led to disasters: philosophers must be in charge because they know what is good and what is evil, industrialists, priests, and so on. Then the past century came: who should command? This race; who should command? This class. I mean, really, the basic problem, I repeat, is not who should command. While we think the question “who should command” is so obvious, Balthazar must command, others ... this is not the problem. The problem is another, that is, how we control those who are in charge; that is to say, through which rules we control who commands. So, every time we, as it were, hit one of these rules, which can be the Constitutional Court, the Judiciary, the press, television, etc., one of these tools, of these presidia, a piece of freedom dies. It is often said: the people*

command. Applies to Right and Left. No. In a state of law the people do not command, the law commands. Sovereign is the law, and it is a law that sets limits to those who command. This is an important thing, because the people elected Barabbas; the people, as it were, went into raptures for Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, etc. So I respect the people, but the people must be neither mythicized nor discredited. Lord Acton, a great English Catholic liberal, said that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This is why the price of freedom is truly eternal vigilance.”

Consequently, the real question turns to the voters' commitment after the elections: not so much “what tools does the candidate offer me to get controlled”, but “what will we do after the elections to control the elected”. But history shows that it is not certain that a people knows what its good is, so with what criteria will the people try to control who governs? In this sense, I don't share Antiseri's trust in the law, a trust that already Jesus did not have, and even less St. Paul in his letters.

When we tried to distinguish the three ways of thinking, I wrote: metaphysical thought believes it can affirm that this table exists; weak thought denies this possibility; practical thinking asks what to do with this table. At this point, it is a question of questioning ourselves about doing, since every man can believe that the best, most authentic way of acting is what he believes to be the best and most authentic. Faced with this subjectivism, relativism, the natural consequence is *conventionalism*: that is, the best way of acting is to constantly try to agree. The basis of the conventions is the being of the people who work for them.

Therefore the political commitment must consist in working first of all on one's own personal being, and then proposing it to the community as a contribution to the path of all.

At this point it is good to keep in mind that our being coincides with our cultural being, because the image we make of ourselves always passes through our brain, which is a human brain. It is impossible for us to think of ourselves except from a human perspective, and therefore from a perspective of human culture. Then the human criterion of doing charity and politics, that is, the way to the question "what to do with this table", must have as a basis the work of each on his own culture and then the proposal of this contribution to the community.

Therefore, the reason why to fight, for example, against hunger in the world, is because a hungry person, due to her urgency to eat, has no possibility to devote herself to research on herself, to self-criticism, to her culture; we must fight against dictatorships because every dictatorship, by imposing the thought of the dictator, prevents citizens from working to self-awareness, with the possibility of choosing which thought and culture to use. This is more than freedom, because the term freedom on its own is reduced to the possibility for everyone to do what they like, with all the problems that follow.

A people that fights only for bread and work, forgetting to fight for support for culture, is destined to elect a dictator, there is no escape. This was the Italians' mistake in having elected Berlusconi: they elected him because they saw him as the one who would give bread and work, losing sight of what culture he was the bearer. In some ways every

people is doomed to this error, because democracy ultimately means mass power, but mass means superficiality and therefore it is obvious that the mass does not cultivate cultural research about itself. Therefore, if the Italians depose Berlusconi because he did not give bread and work, in order to choose another one that gives bread and work, they don't solve the problem, because the problem is the lack of cultural awareness in the Italians themselves. Then the real revolution is not made by electing someone who finally brings bread and work, but with the management of what makes culture, that is, school and the means of communication, and if anything electing those who prove to be more bearers of culture. It may also happen that a people depose a governor bearer of culture, because it is easy to take hold of the mass by waving all the problems of lack of bread and lack of work, which will always be there. A more culturally formed people will be more immune against leveraging these material arguments. If a governor is interested in culture, he will automatically be interested so that everyone can access it, while those who make bread and work propaganda are already working to become dictators, distracting people from cultural awareness. The same happens when in a family they work only so that the children have bread and work and not cultural reflection.

It could be objected that without bread one cannot have the energy, the life necessary to cultivate culture, but this reasoning is valid only in appearance, actually it is deceptive. On the contrary, we must keep in mind another one: if one seeks culture, he will automatically look for bread in order to have material life and make culture; the

starting motivation must serve to not forget that that bread must be sought not for itself, but to get to the next step, that is to do culture; instead, those who start with the search for bread are much more likely to forget immediately that the bread had to serve them for another thing.

In other words, if we ask ourselves what to do with this table and nobody in the meantime questions himself, it is sure that we will hand over the table to some dictator: it will be one of us, or a law, or any rule. In this sense it is always the people who create the dictators; even if a governor is not such one, when the members of the people do not reflect on themselves, they automatically make him a dictator.

In Italy the difficulty toward culture could be traced back to the fragmented political origins; Italian and world unity can then be achieved only by starting from this awareness in doing culture: culture creates union.

4. The Christian synthesis of the cross

In this reflection I will indicate with the word “Christian” not the baptized person, but the one who, independently of having known Jesus Christ, carries out behaviors that appear to conform to the logic of the cross, which we will try to understand below. From this point of view, Falcone and Borsellino, Jesus, Gandhi, Socrates and many others come to be “Christians”. Our purpose here is to try to understand something of this logic, which is appreciated as different from common thinking.

In the logic of the cross, existence is lived as a struggle against evil; aspects of life such as serenity, relaxation, the pleasure of not working on holidays, of being able to do good even without suffering, are certainly appreciated, but the reference point, which gives the fundamental sense, with which to understand these things, is anyway fight. In this way of seeing things, relativism on good and evil is overcome by an attitude of uninterrupted openness and dialogue. The Christian does not struggle for his idea of good, but is always ready *to seek* together with others the sense of good. There could also be those who deny the existence of evil, but this vision can be accused of a metaphysical claim. The hermeneutics of existence as a struggle against evil does not arise as a metaphysical reading, since it is not based on definitions but on research. However, this research does not paralyze the struggle, because it does not absolutize itself, that is, it does not require doing nothing until a definition of what is good has been found, but it refers in semi-stable way to the temporary ideas of good that are shared in the present.

Once these premises have been clarified, we ask ourselves: in what sense is the Christian's death defeat and in what sense is victory?

It is defeat because the Christian dies; this death can also be understood in a broad sense: even the loss of five minutes, dedicated to the service of the neighbour, is a small death, because it is anyway a piece of our life that is spent on something; a part of life that, for a first immediate consideration, is lost. In this sense, evil won, defeated the Christian, because it managed to deprive him of a piece of

life, which according to other logics would have yielded more if used differently; even more if it took away his entire life. Another important aspect, which can highlight death as a defeat, is the consideration of others: an action can be lost not only as time spent, but also because it may not have contributed at all to building a positive image of the author at the society in which he lives. On the contrary, even the opposite can occur: a gesture of love, due to the various mechanisms of logic and misunderstandings that can occur in the world, can turn into a cause of shame, of disapproval in the community. Let's take an example to make things easier. Let's suppose a train is about to run over a person, whom we will call victim; suppose that in the vicinity there is a Christian who decides to throw himself against the victim, so as to push her out of the trajectory of the train and save her; in this way, however, it is he who ends up under the train. Let us imagine that there is also a spectator, who from his point of view cannot see the victim who was about to be hit, but can instead see that, in the trajectory towards which the Christian threw himself, there is a coin. The victim is then saved, but after a couple of days he dies, for other reasons. The viewer writes an article in the newspaper and says: a Christian has shown himself so fond of money that to get a coin he ended up under a train. We can imagine a lot of examples like this, but life itself often puts us in front of similar episodes of unjust defamation that the existence in itself procures for the Christian.

It is more difficult, but not impossible, to understand in what sense the death of the Christian can be considered a victory. We cannot refer to the reputation of a martyr, and

therefore to the memory, to the publicity, to having been an example to others, since, based on what we have said in the previous point, fame is not guaranteed, on the contrary, it is often the life in itself that gives us unjust slander, sometimes even without anyone's fault.

A first easily understandable sense of victory consists in the fact that the Christian, at least on that occasion of crossing the cross, *did not do an evil thing*: the Christian, whether known or unknown, honored or defamed, in any case did not do evil. However, this sense of victory cannot but appear scarce, or even completely useless, because humanly we fail to understand what the resulting good is, once life succeeds in turning its meaning upside down, transforming an action into a opportunity for total misunderstanding and even defamation. We cannot even appeal to a fanciful hope, in the sense that sooner or later it will come out that that action was good, since the history of the world makes it easy for us to think of so many people whose accomplished good remained totally unknown. We cannot even refer to the indirect consequences of good, because man is not reliable, his gratitude is not guaranteed and therefore unfortunately he is also able to transform good into evil. Despite all these oppositions, which life is able to carry out against a done good deed, however, there remains the perception that not having committed evil, even if totally unknown, or misunderstood, is still a crumb, a speck of dust, a drop into an ocean, which in any case can no longer be destroyed, erased. Be that as it may, anyway it was a good thing, it was a gesture that saved a person's life; in this sense, this grain is able to maintain its indestructible consistency

even in the hypothesis of the bad intentions that may have lodged in the mind of that Christian; the Christian in fact is a sinner, but we perceive that anyway that gesture was a good thing, at least according to how we today, temporarily, can get an idea of what good is.

Another grain of victory in dying as Christians is the fact that, if physical death actually occurred, the Christian *can no longer do evil*; from this point of view, evil can no longer do anything against him, since he can no longer try it. This too is certainly an infinitesimal grain, a very thin consolation, but, like the previous grain, this too is indestructible, even in its smallness.

A third grain is the awareness that the Christian can have. He, even in the midst of his weaknesses, ambiguities, temptations, sins, may decide to appreciate the provisional objectivity of that gesture, precisely in the two aspects seen above of indestructible grains of victory. That is, just like we can appreciate those two grains, certainly that Christian himself we brought as an example is able to appreciate them. So that gesture that I have exemplified does apply not so much because we are understanding those grains of victory, but because, before us, he who made the gesture showed that he understood them. In other words, the train victim could also have been saved by a stone that rolled there by accident and pushed her off the rails, but we understand that it's not the same thing. The difference lies precisely in the fact that, if we are succeeding now in understanding those two grains, we cannot deny that that Christian as well was capable of understanding them; therefore, his *capacity for awareness* constitutes a third grain of indestructible victory. It is not

even necessary that he actually thought of all the things we are reflecting on right now: certainly, in so many emergencies life doesn't give time to do it; what matters is that he was not a stone that rolled there by chance, but a person able to be aware, to sense.

This capacity for awareness constitutes a healing, an overcoming of the limits of conscience of the Christian, because it is able to make him improve. He, during his action, as already mentioned, could carry with him wrong intentions, ignorance, superstitions, even fanaticism. However, the practical objectivity of that action is able to gradually lead him towards a global and continuous improvement of his awareness and also of his whole being. In other words, every action we take has an influence on ourselves. For example, one who, through the spirit of imitation, begins to adopt a coarse language, is, in time, moving towards a mentality of superficiality and contempt for things that have value. In the same way, one who for any reason undertakes a path of following good, will inevitably receive, as a consequence, an influence of growth on his being. For this reason, the Christian's action is *able to nullify his sinfulness*, as it shows him capable of growing. If one is on a path of growth, he is already in the utmost perfection; therefore his errors, his sins, have no longer any importance, any value that can claim a minimum of consideration. Also in this case it is a fourth infinitesimal grain, but indestructible: that is, it is a small gesture, which however influences in a non-cancelable way his personality, even if he were an inveterate sinner.

A fifth grain is that of the *ability to convince and attract* that this gesture has. After taking into account the capacity of the world to produce and be evil, its ability to transform any good into evil, the fact that our very being is part of this world with these negative characteristics, the behavior of the Christian is the only choice capable of ensuring a practically objective good (at least in the provisional sense in which today we can understand the word “good”), capable of resisting the attacks of the world. This ability to resist corresponds to the different aspects of indestructibility that I highlighted above, regarding the grains of victory. In other words: given the wickedness of the world, it is not possible to think of ways of responding to this world that are more effective than this; such effectiveness is able to attract the hearts of people.

A sixth grain of victory of the Christian gesture is constituted by his *capacity to give concreteness to human hope*. Hope is an aspect of existence, without which it is not humanly possible to live, even at the cost of inventing it. Therefore, every man of this world finds in himself this need that he cannot do without, a need so urgent and inalienable that it is often satisfied even with consciously artificial surrogates, in order to find satisfaction, relief. Now, wanting to establish that all hope is in vain would mean entering into metaphysics, in the same way as mechanists. What to do then with this hope, or desire for hope, that every man needs to satisfy? The Christian gesture makes the object of this hope present in the world. It will undoubtedly be a grain of presence, something infinitesimal, but even here we find ourselves faced with a concreteness capable of overcoming

any other concreteness that we can imagine; it is therefore a grain that for the sixth time is able to arouse the sensation of maximum materiality, of indestructibility; once the gesture is completed, it will no longer be possible to deny that, however it may be, for that moment the object of all supreme hope, that is good, has taken up residence in this world.

It doesn't however follow that for this reason the Christian will obsessively pursue tension and his own death: it would be like trying to commit suicide. Instead, thanks to his action, he is able to appreciate and enjoy every beauty of the world. Even if he knows that the world is polluted by its own constitutive destructiveness, even if he knows that he is fighting for goals that seem ultimately infinite and unattainable, yet that tiny concretization of a hope makes him aware that these goals have the capacity to become present. This is why his capacity for joy is not a flash in the pan, they are not flares of enthusiasm that last a day. The indestructibility of those grains is able to educate him to live with the optimism of an adult person, one who knows how to bring hope into the world, one who sees more than others see; he knows that this hope is greater than him, since lately he himself is unable to define it; he knows that it is not possible to establish how the perfect world should be structured, the ideal society; for this reason he knows that no form of politics can be adopted as the ultimate, ideal reference; it cannot because it would mean neglecting, ignoring the constitutive malice of the world and therefore also of all the people of this world, including himself; and yet, once he has experienced the concretization of hope, nothing can destroy this fundamental joy that sustains him,

even when he finds himself in tears and no longer sees any support. Note the difference of this concept, compared to the famous story of the footprints in the sand: the story of the footprints arises from the point of view of the final victory understood as the triumph of the good in which the defeats no longer exist: “You only saw a couple of footprints because I had taken you in my arms”; instead, what we are explaining is able to make itself appreciated even before the good triumphs, precisely *during* the defeat. The Christian aware of these dynamics will love his defeat, because he knows that the meanings of victory are already there, during the defeat and not only in a further moment of triumph of good. The next moment of triumph will be a celebration of what happened, a highlighting the true meaning of what happened, but the whole, the essence, takes place at the very moment of defeat. This is obviously not masochism, because the Christian’s love for his own defeat means searching for it not as a final goal, but as an essential step to overcome evil. The Christian hates his defeat more than anyone else, he is afraid of it, yet he loves it, because he has understood that this passage can make him the winner of evil without appeal.

So far we have only considered those grains that can withstand the world’s attacks the hardest; if we keep in mind that actually the world is not exactly evil and destructiveness one hundred percent, the Christian’s gesture will come to be even more appreciable.

We must still note that the hardness of our grains does not mean ability to impose itself on reason; they impose themselves as happened facts, as undeniable provocations,

but it doesn't follow that they are able to force the mind to a rational adhesion, as when it is shown, for example, that two and two make four. In other words, it is not possible to demonstrate in a stringent way the existence of good, nor what it consists of, nor that good wins. If a person wants to adhere to the logic of defeat, he will have to do it as his act of courage, as recognition of a good that gives itself to him, as a use of all his human faculties, not limiting himself therefore to using only reason, but in any case must necessarily be a free choice; the Christian can never say he relies on stringent, rational demonstrations. He must also contain a measure of listening to the human, so that it does not turn into alienation.

What relationship can be identified between the logic of walking, dating back to the time of Heraclitus, and the logic of defeat? A relationship can be identified in the fact that in the logic of walking the true goal is not the goals to be achieved, but precisely keeping on the move. The goals serve to give oneself directions to walk. Several people find a difficulty in the fact that it is frustrating to realize that so many goals seem to move away as long as we move forward. It can be kept in mind that those who walk are already in perfection, even if they have not yet achieved anything, and perhaps even in the future they will never achieve anything: what's important is being in the activity of trying to make progress. The cross is the same thing: in the cross everything seems having failed, yet the Christian perseveres in his struggle, because he saw that there is no other better way. This fact is also expressed by the parable of the talents: it does not matter if one received two talents and gained two

more, another one five and gained five more; what matters is having traded. In this sense, those who have fought, although history may have canceled them and therefore no one will ever know them, in any case lived, walked, and therefore their action remains an indelible and indisputably beneficial fact. Thus we can understand the meaning of the saying of Jesus “do not let your right hand know what your left does”.

The logic of indestructible granules can result as a metaphysical logic, which means that it claims to be able to establish objective and indestructible truths, which rhymes with unquestionable. But we must keep in mind that the logic of the cross is not based on theorems or reasoning patterns, but is only an invitation; it knows that it cannot prove himself and therefore is an invitation to make a free choice. It is therefore an invitation to acknowledge the value of certain facts, not basing on some reasoning or philosophy, but on the basis of our own decision to take responsibility for making choices, which will never be sufficiently sustainable by theorems or ideologies. In this sense, the very term “logic” must not be misleading: the logic of the cross is a type of logic that is humanly not logical; it is a way of reasoning that actually is not based on reasoning, but on free choices, it is based on the decision to see things in a different way, which is impossible to justify with human reasoning.

On the contrary, the idea that everyone in the world can consider good and evil in completely different ways, and therefore a real dialogue on the criteria is not possible, can be considered metaphysical. It is a metaphysical idea if it is taken as a justification for not taking the responsibility of

making creative choices, going against the tide, against any negative reading of reality, such as the interpretation that the mafia does (the world is evil and therefore I behave in evil ways) or what the indifferent do (good and bad do not differ and therefore everyone does what he likes).

On this line we could still observe that conclusively the struggle against evil people in power does not make much sense, because, since the world exists, the progress of so many, I would even say all, revolutions, born to dismiss the bad ones in power, later showed that the new rulers are never better than the deposed ones. This is what Israel had already understood, when it had placed its hopes in some just king, but soon realized that a truly just king does not exist and will never exist. The ideal had been King David, but soon it was seen that David was not at all better than the others: he too resorted to his dishonest intrigues. Therefore the expectation of a Messiah was born: we need a new David that is finally the good king, different from the other kings. But how will the new David be better than the other kings? The answer, according to the Christian faith, came a few centuries later, from Jesus; this is why Jesus will be called “son of David”: Jesus is finally the good king able to realize the ideal of kings that no human king can ever realize; he can because he is not a man like the others: he is a man but he is also God himself.

Undoubtedly the struggle against the bad and the injustices brings its results; we cannot deny that today we live in a world that is in many ways better than others of the past and present: at least in Italy, for example, we do not have torture, there are scientific achievements that have

increased our well-being, there is a certain degree of democracy, etc. This assessment of our world as better than others can be taken, however, only if we keep it within the limits of a strong insecurity on this way of thinking, a strong willingness to self-criticism. It is now largely acquired that this way of thinking (which can be traced back to Auguste Comte, Montpellier, France, 1798 - Paris 1857) is wrong. The idea of having reached a better situation than that of other worlds of the past and the present is the one that has led and continues to lead many civilizations to consider themselves justified in imposing by violence their civilization, their own democracy, to other people. It is the idea that had as a result the frightening oppressions of Spain over America discovered by Christopher Columbus, led America to launch its intelligent bombs to export Western democracy to Afghanistan and Iraq. Therefore, an idea of good is needed, in order to have goals for one's own paths, but this idea must be continually subjected to self-criticism and listening to those who think differently, so that it does not turn into dogmatism ready to consider itself authorized to impose itself on others even by resorting to violence.

A final reflection. Faced with difficulties, it is natural that the first task is to solve them; however, there are such problems that in all probability cannot be solved in short. Let's imagine, for example, who has a tumor that makes him with two months of life left: it will certainly be right to resort to some treatment; but, while knowing that the road remains that one, how will it be better to use those last two months of life? The logic becomes this one: when a road becomes obligatory and we know where it will pass and where it will

end, we might as well dedicate ourselves to the only possibility that is still available to us: the way to cross it. There is difference between crossing in a state of useless desperation and attempting attitudes that better exploit the human riches we are capable of. The problem is that a situation of difficulty, suffering, also implies a diminished psychological capacity: in the midst of sufferings that sadden, depress, affect the intimate of the person, we are certainly not in the best conditions to free the best of our human riches. Consequently, faced with the possibility of a forced path that exhausts the best of our human resources, the work to be done becomes preparation, that is, to ensure that our human riches, the best of us, can come out on their own, during difficulties, without needing to call for a mental effort; this will be possible to the extent that expressing the best of ourselves will have been previously cultivated as a habit. Then the crossing of suffering can become an occasion by which to communicate to ourselves and to others the trust in the existence of a hope greater than ourselves. It seems to me that Jesus managed to communicate this through the way he crossed his cross; it is as if he said: I am suffering so much that I no longer feel in control of my thoughts, but the path of growth that I traveled throughout my life now allows me to communicate to you my adherence to a hope greater than myself, although at this moment I cannot understand it myself; the path I covered leads me to this optimistic trust, even amidst the infinite despondency that destroys me, faced with the awareness of being on the verge of being killed.

5. The practice of walking

After having said that everything becomes or, more humanly, walks, according to its own physiognomy, it becomes appropriate to examine what a person's walking can be. In my experience, I consider it essential following a methodology of walking, if we really want to cultivate a spiritual experience, which also seeks the possibility of growing continuously and communicating with others. Certainly even living for the day allows for an experience; the choice of organizing a path or not may depend on the type of experience one wishes to pursue and on the vicissitudes that until now we have been able to appreciate more. In fact, a good path, before setting goals, simply takes note of the point where we are and the directions we are already moving toward.

The methodology proposed here should in any case serve only as a suggestion, as a stimulus for everyone to acquire his own personal ability to design for himself not only a path, but also the best method to follow to draw up and continually rework a life project. Maybe those who, at the beginning, without experience, will feel lost, could follow step by step the indications presented here, but later personalization will always be necessary, otherwise the very meaning of these pages would be misunderstood. The exposition is explained here with a practical organizational hypothesis of a path.

In this organizational hypothesis we start from a higher level of definition of a general sense for our life; this formulation will have to serve for a temporary start and

therefore it will not have to require an excessive commitment; it will only start the work, to be able to be later revised more comfortably. So let us suppose that the imagined meaning is formulated in these terms: “*I want to live to know the most beautiful things*”. At this point we have already occupied a first part of a written sheet, which will have to function as an orientation, it will have to be the project on paper, as happens when a building needs to be constructed. I consider essential for this work to use pen and paper (or computer), because only this way it is possible to have a term with which to be faced, without falling into the problems of forgetfulness or too vague memories. The writing of a sheet could obviously arouse the concern of being read by prying eyes; for this problem it is necessary to get organized: we will think about solutions to make what we write not too explicit: abbreviations, symbols, custom words, etc.; at the same time, the sheet should not be so protected and coded as to make it difficult for us to understand it quickly: it must necessarily be simple and clear enough to make an assessment possible at a glance, to favor the formation of simple ideas about our path and about ourselves.

Returning therefore to our hypothetical test, we have drawn a first section of the sheet:

I want to live to know the most beautiful things.

A subsequent section may contain a phrase that in this period of my life is serving as my orientation, perhaps based

on some important situations that have arisen; here too we make a simple example:

*I want to live to know the most beautiful things
Treat others with affection*

We have therefore determined in our paper some basic criteria on how we want to live, precisely one general and another one related to the most immediate period of life; the content of the sentences itself shows that the first has a more general value, while the second draws attention to a more particular aspect of existence that, once imprinted in our behavior or in our mind for a certain period, or once another sentence is thought to be more effective and suitable for the moment, can be deleted from the sheet.

We must now ask ourselves about *doing*: what do I want to do in my life? To discover our real possibilities we can use a method of exclusion, which will also require some patient but not useless work. We will put under our eyes a list of all the things that can be done in life; it will obviously be a list of a certain length. A brief example:

eating, playing music, working, praying, having fun, studying, visiting, watching TV, going to meetings, celebrating, listening to music, thinking, repairing, walking, going to school, making phone calls, paying taxes, ordering, chatting, relaxing, doing politics, paperwork, writing, organizing the path, helping the children, talking with the children, playing, learning, getting informed, singing, and so on.

Once this endless list is drawn up (but then we will notice, perhaps with regret, that it is not really infinite as we expected), we will have to form a ranking. To do this, we will begin with the first written term and will compare it with the second one: the one of the two that will be the most important, meaningful, achievable, will be compared with the third, and so on, until finally we will obtain the thing in our life that is the most important to do and therefore to put in the first place; the result can still be corrected if, in the meantime, we will remember another thing that is even more important. We may even face moments of perplexity due to balance issues: is it more important eating or working? To solve these problems, some criteria will be used regarding the work being done; we can decide, for example: since I am studying the things to do in relation to the meaning of my life, for now I choose to ignore the aspect of eating and I keep in mind only working; later I will have a lifetime to review and correct everything. For now, it is important to start. We are thus beginning to understand that the real work that in this method proves fruitful is that of continuous and patient revision and correction. Furthermore, someone might think of things that are too general, for example that the most important thing to do in life is loving; it should not be forgotten, however, that this type of important things had to be thought of for the first line of the sheet, that one about the meaning to be given to our life; in this third section we must instead leave apart the basic guidelines, since they have already been written, and think only of concrete things. We also sense now that often in our lives or in our discussions

we make so much confusion because we confuse the basic orientations with the concrete things to do.

Once we have identified the most important concrete activity to do, that is the one to put in the first place, we will do the same job to identify the one to put to the second place, having the patience to start again the comparisons, excluding only the term that has been put now in first place. Based on how the eliminatory work will proceed, we will evaluate how many degrees it is appropriate to consider: four, six, ten ... At the end we could find ourselves in front of such a ranking:

Working
Having moments of relaxation
Visiting
Reading
Meditating

which will be inserted in the sheet:

I want to live to know the most beautiful things
Treat others with affection
Working
Relaxation
Visiting
Reading
Meditating

This list does not expose the only things we do; it will only serve as a reference point for when we need to think

about how it will be better to use our time, or for other indicative purposes.

At this point, we will be concerned about our self-formation, considering, in particular, what the school did not teach us. Since we cannot have, during all our life, teachers at our complete disposal, we need to resort to the most accessible means: first of all reading, then the media, then also meetings with the most different people, etc.

Some things may come to coincide with the previous list of things to do, but for now we will neglect this problem, providing later to operate those choices and corrections that will serve to streamline and simplify the pathway.

Since the time of life that we can devote to reading is very little, compared to all that in the whole world we would have to read, we will have to make a decisive, severe selection, with the same method used to determine the things to do.

It should also be borne in mind that we cannot devote our life to keep ourselves up-to-date with everything important that others do or write about, eventually coming to no longer find the time to live a personal experience of ours ourselves. Information and communication, actually, cannot guarantee for themselves the originality of the experience to be lived; they must be programmed simply as components, among others, of the project of walking, dictated by experience, and not as absolute needs.

We must therefore have the patience to draw up a list of all the things that in life is possible to study or deepen, to gradually acquire a certain competence about them, to build up a formation, including even those things on which one

becomes an expert not only through reading, but especially with practice, for example sport, an art, a hobby. Compared to the list of things to be done, the latter differs because it is aimed rather at those activities that form; one could think that work also forms us, but here we are dealing with activities chosen precisely to form ourselves: would we ever have freely chosen our job for the sole purpose of providing us a formation? If the answer is no, then our job does not fall into this category. Furthermore, reading is of the utmost importance in this field. To draw up a list of all the disciplines that can be studied and the types of books or magazines that can be read, we can also help with similar lists found in certain dictionaries or encyclopedias, or we can even think of all the subjects that are studied in all types of schools; we will help ourselves by all means, putting everything together, for a list that must be as complete as possible. As usual, we know that the work can always be revised, improved even further. A brief example:

history, geography, sciences, religion, architecture, sports, chemistry, engineering, zoology, botany, literature, music, arts, sociology, anthropology, Bible, etc.

We will identify the usual ranking by exclusions and a scheme like the following one will come out:

News

Philosophy

Religion

History

to be added to the sheet:

I want to live to know the most beautiful things
Treat others with affection

Working

Relaxation

Visiting

Reading

Meditating

News

Philosophy

Religion

History

This scheme reminds us that now being interested in other disciplines is useless for us; not because they are not important, but because we cannot read everything, due to the short time of our life, and therefore we must make decisive choices; this does not mean that we will feel authorized to hermetically close ourselves to any other aspect of culture, but only that we will not dedicate continuous time to it, like we will do instead for the other fields. Under each of the items concerning formation, it will be useful to write the concrete means with which we wish to cultivate it; for example, under the heading *News* we could add the magazines that we intend to read, or to which we want to subscribe; under the heading *Philosophy* we can write down the title of the book we are reading, writing also the date by which we think we can finish it, taking into account our possibilities. Next to the things to do, we can add the time to dedicate to them. Under the heading *Meditating* we can add the places where we can go to do it in nice ways, etc .:

<i>I want to live to know the most beautiful things</i>	
<i>Treat others with affection</i>	
<i>Working</i>	<i>News</i>
<i>Relaxing</i>	<i>TV news</i>
<i>Visiting (1 x week at least)</i>	<i>New York Times (1 x week at least)</i>
<i>reading (5 min. a day at least)</i>	<i>Philosophy</i>
<i>Meditating (1 hr a week at least)</i>	<i>The philosophers (begun on 3.02.2019; to read by 3.03.2020)</i>
<i>(In my room - On Everest - among the trees of the equatorial forest - At the sea - In the blue Cave)</i>	<i>Religion</i>
	<i>History (next summer 0 years)</i>

Once this work is completed, we could finally add a weekly timetable, similar to the class schedule that students write in their school diary, to have under our eyes how we spend our time day by day; perhaps there will be a period in which we will feel the need to write down also the time we dedicate even to daily meals; then maybe that period will pass and we will only note our most important activities.

A separate entry in this whole scheme could refer to the time to be devoted to the research itself about the methodology of walking, the paths for creativity and originality; like the way a manager can plan the search for ever new strategies, to keep up in the competitive market, for us it is a matter of keeping up with the need not to become stagnating.

Once this work is done, all that remains is letting time pass and looking at the paper quite often. We will notice soon the improvements that can be made and we will need soon the patience to tear it up and rewrite it, revised and corrected. We will have to learn to never be discouraged by the fact of having to continually revise our path: this tearing and rewriting can also become, without any need to feel frustrated, a daily habit. On the contrary, often the feeling of impossibility we face when we run up a project can become a very important provocative tool, it can serve as a stimulus to look for other possibilities, other ways of seeing and doing.

Later, perhaps, we will feel the need to use more than one sheet, but then we will realize that too many details prevent us from grasping the global design and then we will strive to streamline and synthesize. We will also realize that the sheet leads us to rethink the meaning of our life and therefore we will have to try, from time to time, to re-express it in better terms. The programmed reading will begin to bear its fruits and we will understand that we can see things in a lot of other different ways. Life will begin to be a fruitful pathway in which we will try to add our projecting collaboration to what God or life already gives us to live. We will realize that we can also help others to orient themselves in life and we will be able to teach them how to organize themselves a pathway, taking advantage of our experience. Then we will discuss something, basing on the path of each one, and we will enrich each other: this will be communicating. There will be no need to worry about a lot of things, because we will write on the paper that we cannot

get to those and they are postponed, for example, to the following year; the written sheet guarantees us that we will not forget.

A criterion to keep in mind in this work will be that the project thus organized must be the best mediation between simply taking note of what is already taking place in our life and what we instead would like to achieve; actually, walking is first of all listening to our own existence and then also attempting to introduce guidelines, works and see how they work.

6. The spiritual experience

At this point it would be easy to suspect that the final problem is referred to the question, at least for believers, “God, what do you want from me? In what do you want me to specialize?”, which is that of vocation. It is actually an extremely useful hermeneutics, but now I would rather let see the possibility of a type of work capable of constructing the best mediations between concentration and openness. This work is based on the awareness that, as we are successful in defining our path better and better, a spiritual experience becomes present in our person. It is a sensation that is difficult to define in words, but all the same worthy of consideration, of trying to become aware of it and think about it; we could call it “feeling good with our spirit”. This feeling can be compared to certain moments of meditation, in which we begin to feel good and we don’t want to do anything else in life, we would never leave that moment. We can try to compare this experience with what we read in the

Gospel in Mark 9:5: “Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” However, this is not exactly what I want to make clear, because the feeling I have described here also tends to make us suffer from nostalgia and to make people seek standstill, as if a given situation were the absolute ideal. What I call spiritual experience, instead, is indeed feeling good about one’s spirit at a given moment, but in the perspective open to following a thread, a path; a feeling lived therefore, rather than with the desire to remain forever in that pleasant situation, with the purpose, of not losing sight of this thread of spiritual approach, making use of the project about the pathway. It could therefore be better to call it a *course* of spiritual experience. Actually, we will also have to realize that the spiritual experience can never be identified with any aspect of the journey: all the components of the journey, even if followed with commitment, compared to pure spiritual experience are only crude tools, to be used without losing sight of the inner experience itself. At this point it no longer matters whether it is better to specialize in something or engage in many activities: what matters is that any choice is practiced and carried out in the awareness of its limited instrumentality, in service of the course of the inner experience. This experience could be recreated, with practice, as often as we want, simply by thinking about it. Even the reading or rereading of these pages could serve to recall and recover this possibility for ourselves. The fact that it cannot last uninterruptedly could be a cause of discouragement, for several reasons: because it is itself destined to evolve and

not become stagnant, and because our being, as well as the context in which we live, inevitably affect us to distract ourselves from this sort of meditation. It is a situation that seems to me present in the film *La dolce vita* by Fellini, in which one of the characters at a certain point kills two children first and then himself; the reason for these killings seems to me to be precisely the regret experienced by this man, carried to its extreme consequences, of not being able to live in a stable manner the spiritual experience that he had the opportunity to taste and appreciate. About this difficulty, solutions must be found. One may be to get used to periodically reconstructing this experience; certainly the awareness that it is not even correct to wish, to expect, to convince ourselves that this experience must necessarily be uninterrupted will help our serenity: precisely the distractions are, in a certain sense, precious; they will lead us to perfect it, make it grow, look at it critically and make it progress. Furthermore, it will also be useful working on forecasting, preparing ourselves, as far as possible, to the situations that will gradually come as next to be lived.

Once we set out on this path, we will be able to see how a true physiognomy is gradually forming in us. It seems to me that this corresponds to what we often look for when we instinctively tend to build an image of ourselves. An example may be when a child tends to identify himself with some features of his father's physiognomy, which allow him to feel an individual with a certain confidence, or when we tend to imitate a film actor, a singer or a teacher known at school, in short, when we tend to have a model of personality to be imitated or anyway referred to. A destructive way,

which often gives us the illusion of having a physiognomy, is instead making choices according to the fashions that circulate or the topics that are fashionable to discuss. A path, organized according to what I have indicated, should help to form a physiognomy capable of creating its own characteristics, without therefore being a hundred percent dependent on a single infantile idealized model, become an object of worship.

In a perspective of faith we could imagine that perhaps this is also why God does not want to be too visible.

Actually, behavioral models are always conditioned by the cultural environment in which they exist or were born, so that certain behaviors that are considered essential, indispensable, certain ways of reacting, talking, even modulating the tone of the voice, are actually only aspects of a local culture, both historically and geographically; in several cases, they are even counterproductive or destructive. In this sense it will be easy to understand that no model of behavior is essential or indispensable. A path about physiognomy will try to explore, moment by moment, different behavioral models, in an endless constructive work, taking advantage of the most essential comparisons we can make, for example the comparison with the physiognomies with which we come into contact and with what our memory is able to call us back. This walking could also become the motivation itself of doing and living; we can think that it is the very purpose of nature, of the universe: an innate push, present in all that exists, even in every single atom of matter, a push of nature to experiment paths of physiognomies, which in mutual comparison create

harmonies and always new beauties; the criterion of harmony and beauty will be provided, from time to time, by the comparison itself between physiognomies.

An interesting thing is that this drive towards existence and exploration of possibilities is not anarchic, gratuitous, precisely because it does not arise from an abstractness, but from a universe that begins its existence in an already sectoral, determined way, already providing a memory with which to confront each other: our universe was not born symmetrical, otherwise it would still be symmetrical today. This network of universal relationships leads us to experiments that are not experimentation for experimentation, but experimentation for physiognomies that cannot but start from what was previously determined as a physiognomy (as Massimo Troisi nicely claimed in his film *Ricomincio da tre*).

It is a critical journey to build our physiognomy, which also allows us to become aware of, and in case try to avoid, the conditioning of thematization by words. In other words, many behavioral ways and even many ways of thinking are extremely conditioned by the languages in which we were born. It is impossible to live outside of a language, but gaining awareness can also make us able to take some measure of distance. In this context, globalization and the increasing dependence on thematic languages makes increasingly difficult experiences free of this: we are continually bombarded with increasingly standardized languages, which tend to make us forget that there are other languages, that we may not even be able to imagine (without going in this way into falling into superstitious fanaticisms,

which in the end are nothing more than low-level metaphysics), and that it is possible and even beneficial, for a while, to suspend communication and information, to leave room for our spontaneity; here too, however, it is easy to delude ourselves and to consider spontaneity what was induced by other standardized methods; in this sense spontaneity, genuineness is not an idea, but a path of research as well.

All this, in a perspective of faith, could be seen as a way of receiving history from God. History is first received. We can't create history if we don't receive history. But we cannot receive without making, with creative gratitude, our possible part of creation of history. Therefore, between the primacy of God and our answering, actually it is not possible to identify real precedences, to understand what really comes humanly before; therefore it is wrong to wait, as if it were a theorem, for identifying being loved before putting love into action.

7. Our relationship with God

In this section we will try to clarify some guiding criteria for the relationship with God to be realized to the best of its possibilities.

7.1 Instinct to relationship

Let's face a critical observation: it is possible to notice that human intelligence has inherent the need to relate with every person and thing in a language that has its origin in human relationships. We can, for example, notice the case

when one turns to an object or an animal as if they were capable of understanding; we can observe the instinct to see in any object a certain resemblance of reference to the human face: we can think about how a car's front or an animal's head can look like a human expression. In other words, it is possible to reasonably hypothesize that man has a certain tendency to relate to anything as if they were people, an instinctive tendency to recognize, in whatever falls under our senses, the characteristics of a face, of some "you" with which to relate. The relationship set up in this way can also be lived in the awareness of a distance from material truth, remembering that actually they are not people, but also in the awareness of an extra possibility of establishing relationships capable of bringing out other hidden, unexpected truths. In other words, a poet knows that he says many things scientifically not true when he addresses the moon, but he continues his artistic work because he realizes that, through his scientifically inaccurate language, other truths emerge which are able to impose themselves on the mind as they too very true, very important and also beautiful, therefore worthy of being looked for, even through a deliberately non-technical language.

7.2 Between otherness e humanity of God

What we have said so far allows us to affirm that relating to a hypothetical religious "you" is not a mere idle game, but an activity that demonstrates profound matches in human nature, able to suggest us hidden truths. This obviously shows nothing about the possibility that this

religious “you” actually exists: the human tendency to personify only demonstrates the existence of itself and nothing else; but I want to add right now that, actually, it doesn’t even matter whether this external “you” actually exists: it will never be possible to ascertain it in such a penetrating way as to be able to escape any skepticism, any opposing criticism. On the other hand, otherwise, we would have done nothing but return to Aristotelian metaphysics: if we cannot establish the existence of a reality external to our mind, there is no reason why this should become possible with the idea of God. In this perspective, the theology of Karl Barth, in favor of a God to be conceived as “totally other”, can also appear as a relapse into the typical objectification of Aristotelian metaphysics: saying that he is “totally other” can be an elegant way to remove as much as possible the idea that he is a production of our mind.

This critical reasoning about the objective existence of God, when compared with the desire of the heart to relate to him, cannot but make seem strange the situation of those who turn to their God while being accompanied by so much uncertainty about his existence. How could an intense, profound, not superficial, not purely intellectual relationship exist in these terms? Evidently, the perspective that arises, let’s say, from the *outside*, that is from the critical reason, will never allow this relationship to be something touching, not limited to rationality, but able to involve the whole person. Therefore, it will be a question about composing in harmony this *external* critical perspective with the affective *internal* one, that is, with that deriving from a decision to join, dictated by a lived experience.

Once the nature of the difficulty has emerged, it is possible, on the other hand, to suspect that the fervent relationship with God, as we have imagined it so far, takes a little romanticism. As if to say that the idea of a prayer that is all absorbed and concentrated, all taken from love for God, is more an imaginative desire than an experience to be considered as the maximum to aspire to. And yet, even bearing in mind this critical observation, the doubt about the existence of this “you” continues to appear as an unjust brake against a possible more intense deployment of the relationship, which nonetheless would seem to be pursued with all forces, even if we still don’t know exactly how. Actually, it is possible to observe, if we apply the hermeneutics of becoming that we have seen in Eràclito, that this deployment of intensity in prayer is never permanent, but always meets its fluctuating course, its ups and downs. Then, the strength of a relationship will have to find its source not in the absence of any doubt, but in the continuous realization of new experiences or spiritual acquisitions. Thus we find ourselves returned to the need for a walking.

Reflection on this alternation leads us to another thought: if God exists in our life in this way, that is, at times, now visiting us now abandoning us, then faith must necessarily be a coexistence with atheism, since it is not possible to believe in Lord if he abandons us. This perspective reminds us of the inevitability of having to go through desperation in our lives, without being able to escape it, but also opens us to the hope that we will be revisited and brought back to life at any time; a life which, as a return, can no longer be the same as before, precisely

because each time it adds to itself the memory of coming from a death which, by itself, was hopeless.

According to this line of thought, it would open the possibility of deciding, for our own life, to let our own belief be totally guided by the experience of God actually lived and not by our own intellectual research efforts; this would mean deciding not to want to keep up in moments of death, but to cross this death in all that it is; it implies that in every moment of life we are also listening to how God comes to visit us and what experience of his presence (or absence) calls us to live. That is like saying to ourselves: if a God exists, I want to experience him as he is, listening to his actual presence, with all the willingness to let myself be involved in its planning action, including the courage to live death during this same life, without wanting to get life by myself. In this sense it is possible to glimpse a hidden meaning in the episode of Abraham, who would seem stupidly called to bet on the possibility of giving his son death; the hidden meaning consists in this challenge to ourselves: if I have chosen to follow God, I will follow him with all my life dedicated to him, without trying to protect myself by relying in my solutions, especially if I realize that the sacrifice of life is part of his plan. If God wants my son's life, only he will have to save it, certainly not me; only God must be able to save me from God, not me. In this sense it can be understood that it was not only God putting Abraham to the test, but also Abraham tested God. But how can such a relationship with God be guaranteed from falling into a blind fanaticism? The solution could be simpler than we might think: faith must be lived in a continuous dialogue,

within ourselves, among different perspectives cohabiting. This coexistence is possible only in a perception of the experience of faith that is realized in different times. A theology of the experience of faith that contains the hidden desire for a unitary, global, holistic vision will inevitably lead to this problem of dialogue between experiential, affective choice, therefore interior, decisive choice, and the need for critical vision claimed by reason, which also lives in us and is indispensable to protect us from any fanaticism. Instead, an experience of faith seen as a course allows the coexistence of the two components, since it allows us to give the necessary space, at different times in personal history, now to the emotional momentum, now to criticism.

7.3 Criticism of criticism

At this point it remains to be clarified how, in the course of faith, we can experience moments not disturbed by criticism, even though we will dedicate them relevant spaces at other times. It may be helping making use of another simple reasoning: if criticism is to be really serious and courageous, it must always have the courage to criticize itself. What does criticism of criticism mean? Obviously at first sight it appears as a vicious circle, since even criticism of criticism should then be criticized in its turn and so on endlessly. We can, however, observe that a serious criticism of criticism shall not make use of criticism only, because it would be like getting the *par condicio* on television only by asking a politician to do sometimes a little self-criticism. This is tantamount to saying that the task of criticizing

criticism cannot be entrusted to criticism itself, but to what really opposes it, that is our human faculties of spiritual choice, which can claim to be larger and deeper than any understanding on which every criticism thinks to be based. This sort of defense of the spiritual experience is not based on its phantomal magnitude and mysterious depth never demonstrated, but on the very fact that, in history, nothing has ever been given that any criticism has shown to have understood one hundred percent. But is history enough to always demonstrate the existence of elements not yet understood? How is it possible to prove that they exist, if they have not yet been understood? If the history of criticism can be an element to relativize it, another blow against criticism can be suggested by a methodology that is often adopted by the critic itself: the accusation of explaining *obscura for obscuriora* (i.e. explaining unknown things by using references to other things that, to think of it, are even more unknown than the first ones). If this accusation can be applied to any answer, to any explanation, actually it can also be directed against any question, since there can be no questions that are not based on a minimum of precomprehension, and it is precisely this precomprehension that can always be accused of claim to have understood something. In other words, if there is a crisis of all the answers, we must not stop at this conclusion, but we must understand that actually this amounts to saying that there is also a crisis of all the questions. Thus the answers take their revenge: there is no question that does not need to be based on some answer in order to be formulated. Therefore statements can also claim to exist without being obliged to

provide explanations to all the questions. In fact the world exists in our experience without having to give an account to anyone of why and how it exists. We can do all of this, obviously, without claiming to kill questions, which, as we said, are the only true, precious defense and protection against fanaticism.

7.4 Divine person and human persons

At this point we immediately understand that saying “you” presupposes a concept that needs to be clarified: what is “person”? Obviously we make an idea of this word basing on our relationships between human beings only. But it is not possible to define what “person” is in theory: it cannot be explained, but only experimented. Therefore, my relationship with God, considered as a personal “you”, cannot but start from a reference to the meetings already lived with human persons. I believe that all this finds a synthesis in another fact to reflect on: faith actually seems never to be born by itself, but only following relationships with human persons; there is always someone who transmits a creed, which is then studied in depth. Even if we go back to prehistoric times, it is possible to realize that believing in a god always arises within a relationship between people, even if it is the problem of relationships that break due to death. An interesting article on this topic is *La scoperta dell’aldilà. Credenze e miti alle origini dell’uomo* in *Archeo* 75 (1991) 56-109.

Then turning to God as a “you”, exposed to the doubting of reason, can be adequately realized only by keeping alive reference to the relationships with human persons that we lived and we are still living. From there, by analogy, we can come to relate to a you who is not seen, but who can be seen witnessed in people. If the most important aspect of God is being a “you” person, that I as a believer can see turning to me and to which I can respond, then the primary place to refer to to meet God will be people, even when I find myself alone in praying. My spiritual encounter with God will have to be structured so as to be born from the encounter with other people; moreover, it must also be realized in the perspective of the future meeting with other people. This way, the encounter with other people can effectively be defined as *fons et culmen* (source and summit) of my encounter with God.

This means that, in the context of Catholicism, even within a church where Mass is celebrated, the presence of God in people is more important than that in bread and wine; so we can better understand that the essential of the Eucharist is being for people and not being “in itself” (the “real presence” of Jesus Christ in the Host, which is sometimes referred to): what use would I make about a Host that was only to be watched or eaten on my own? In this sense, my experience of prayer, as a dialogue with the Lord, will start from a synthetic image of the most recent meetings that best showed it to me in the people with whom I related: it may have been a meeting, or a conversation, a visit, a chance meeting with a friend, etc .; the horizon will therefore still be aimed at similar future moments of encountering.

Of course, meetings with people are often disappointing, sometimes even deadly. But no one can save us from the lack of satisfying relationships with other human persons, if not other people still more, who are also human and cannot be summarily reduced to God, even if it is the reference to God made man. In the latter case we note that God, who also presents himself as a person, and also human, in Jesus Christ, never presents himself in substitution of relations with men, but redirects each time again towards them, often on the basis of a new start. This reflection makes the enclosure life certainly not the closest to the project of God and not even to the model of life constituted by the earthly existence of Jesus of two thousand years ago.

7.5 My I

If subjectivity exists, it has the necessary attribute of not being able to be explained. First of all it should be clarified what explaining it would mean. Descartes' statement "*cogito, ergo sum*" ("I think, therefore I am"), is normally understood in this sense: I realized that there is an undeniable experience in me ("*cogito*"); from this fact I feel I can draw an undeniable rational conclusion ("*ergo sum*"); but what would that step be, that link that would allow the passage from an experience to a rational conclusion? This is not clear; actually rational conclusion is nothing but an interpretation; here we immediately fall into subjectivist skepticism. It is therefore clear that subjectivity cannot be explained precisely because it exists: since it exists, every explanation of it cannot be immune from being itself

subjective and therefore never one hundred percent acceptable.

The attempt to explain the reason and the ways in which “I feel myself”, to be correct, would have to trace at least two undeniable basic assumptions, from which to draw, in the manner of syllogism, a conclusion. However, since feeling myself does not provide assumptions, but only an experience, any attempt to pass from experience to the language of ideas immediately falls within the limits of subjectivism. Can we say that the inexplicability of subjectivity demonstrates its existence? In this sense inexplicability does not mean absolute unattainability, which would make us confuse it with its non-existence, but precisely what we have tried to say: athematic experience. In other words: if feeling “I” did not exist, we would not have the problem of explaining it; if the problem of its inexplicability is given, then at least it is clear that an experience exists in me that I do not know what it is. The fact that I am able to define it as “feeling myself” is not an explanation, since this first definition is too tied to the education received since birth, starting when they made me used to respond to a name. The fact that I feel myself master of my body and not that of another does nothing but confirm a hypothesis of inexplicability: it is something similar to what Leibniz said when speaking of “monads”. Therefore my feeling of my body, rather than that of another, cannot be explained precisely because of its impenetrability, that is because I, even if I wanted to, cannot render any other master of my body, and so anyone else about me. In this sense the inexplicability of the I is revealed as such precisely

because of what is meant as “explanation” in the context of radically Greek thought: since, in this context, “explaining” means abstracting common general concepts from several particular entities, the feeling “I” cannot be explained as long as only one exists; I imagine that others exist as different Is (“Is” meant here as a plural of “I”), but my being master of my body is exclusive to me in this world. But what do we have in common since we all call it “I”? We have practical results in common, but I will never know how the other feels his own I and to what extent it resembles my feeling I. On the contrary, my feeling I is not even equal to itself, since there is no doubt that there is some difference between this moment, when I am thinking about it, and other moments when I have no immediate awareness of it. After this we can once again relativize the importance of explaining: the I can be lived without needing to be explained. It can be told, regulated, in the likeness of the *haggadic* and *halakic midrash* that Jews used to do; it can be celebrated, related. In this sense, the unexplainability of the I may be a concern, or even a frustration, only to the extent that we are unable to look beyond our Greek way of thinking. We must remember that any explanation is actually only an illusion until we realize that it is open both backwards and forwards: that is, it is based on assumptions which in turn should be explained and it will open a thousand other questions. Every explanation is a median wagon of a train of which we neither see the beginning nor the end; a train that is going on.

In this context conscience could be conceived simply as an internal comparison of experiences and relative extent

in which this happens. This is obviously a (at least apparently) materialistic vision, but in a non-metaphysical perspective there is no longer the need to hypothesize another world, separate from the visible one, in order to find reasons for esteem for the dignity of human conscience.

The desire to take possession of the sense of our being “I” can hide the tendency, typically Greek, to consider ourselves masters of a thing because we gave it a meaning. In this perspective, the need to define our own I is the same as the metaphysical need, starting from a mentality conditioned by hypostatic orders, to find a meaning for our passage through this world.

7.6 Seeing God

According to the Bible, the answer to the question “why do I believe?” must contain references to some kind of personal walking experience, so engaging as to allow us to say: “I believe because I have seen and I see the Lord”, perceiving in the verb “seeing” the most suitable term to express the greatness of the lived experience; we can see what is written in the Gospel in Jn 4:42:

They said to the woman, «We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world»

1 Jn 1:1-3:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen

it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

In other words, according to the Bible, it is not possible to claim to believe in the Lord if, at the same time, one does not feel able to affirm that he has seen and sees it. Faced with this statement, many will immediately think they have no faith, or that it is impossible for everyone to have this kind of faith; yet the content of the Bible appears quite clear. If the Christian faith is faith in the risen Jesus Christ, we must remember that the Gospels do not tell the resurrection of Jesus, but rather describe the experience of those who saw him alive after his death. The essential thing is seeing Jesus alive.

At this point, to be clear, we must add a discussion on language: that is, we can legitimately ask ourselves what it means when the Gospels tell of people who have seen the Risen. A question of this kind might look like an intention to create confusion and to accommodate the meaning of any word. However, it has already been studied by various theologians. We can read, for example, G. Ghiberti, *La risurrezione di Gesù nella problematica attuale*, in R. Latourelle - G. O'Collins (edd.), *Problemi e prospettive di Teologia Fondamentale*, Brescia 1982, p. 279-316. These theologians, on the other hand, show that the doubt that is raised about the meaning of seeing the Risen is not a doubt put without reason at anything the Bible says. For example, when it is clear that the Gospels use a historiographical

language, with the possibility of comparisons with other testimonies of the time, nobody can feel authorized to pose unnecessary doubts or suspicions about the truth of what is narrated.

The doubt about the language of seeing the Risen arises in these terms: today we say, to indicate certain events: “I got an experience”; undoubtedly “getting an experience” was also part of the existence of the apostles; however in the Gospels the expression “getting an experience” is never found; we can understand right away the reason: this way of expressing was born recently in our culture, it is quite modern and did not exist at the time of the Gospels. So what did the apostles say when they wanted to say they “got an experience”? They used the phrases that were available at that time, they used the way of thinking and expressing themselves of their time. We can thus hypothesize that, since at the time of the apostles the expression “getting an experience” did not exist, the other expression “seeing the Lord” could have taken its place. This hypothesis is not far-fetched, since it is confirmed that other narratives are also constructed this way, that is, using languages that do not say literally what words mean to us today; that is, the author decides to use a certain language to say something, that we no longer know what exactly it is. Another example is that of the appearance of the angel to Mary, to announce the birth of Jesus, Lk 1, 26-38; if the reader has the patience to make the comparison with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist, Lk 1, 5-25, and with that of the birth of Samson, Jg 13, 2-7, he will notice the great similarity of language in all three stories.

Faced with this similarity, it is useless to claim that the stories are similar because the events that took place were similar: now studies on the languages of the Bible are at a so advanced degree that we can no more carry out a literal interpretation; only people like Jehovah's Witnesses, who reject any scientific openness, can support a similar way of interpreting the Bible, which is called "fundamentalist". Even the official documents of the Catholic Church now openly accept, although always with prudence, the interpretation open to the sciences of language. It can therefore be concluded that we no longer know what actually happened either about the announcement of the birth of Samson, nor about that of John the Baptist, nor about that of Jesus; those who wrote these things show that they wanted to use certain schemes of "announcement of birth of an important person", which had become standards; behind the standard scheme it remains difficult both to recover the author's personalized intervention and, even more, to understand what the event actually happened was.

Returning to our topic, on the basis of what we have observed, it is no longer possible for us to interpret having seen the risen Jesus, experienced by the apostles, literally. What should we imagine then? We must seek, not being able to catch the happened events, at least to respect the weight of the words as much as possible. So, even if "seeing the Risen" may not necessarily mean physically seeing, an apparition, the fact remains that the term is very strong, compared to our "getting an experience", which remains more generic, vague. Then, we can think that the apostles, although we don't know what their eyes saw, got so an alive

experience of the risen Jesus that, according to the evangelist, the most suitable word, to say the full greatness of that experience, was the verb “to see”. We must also observe another aspect of the verb “to see”, compared to our expression “getting an experience”: “to see” means to realize that that experience does not depend on our effort, but rather, we realize that we get a feeling which depends on another source; for example, if I see a flower, it is not because I have focused on it so strongly that I see it: I perceive that even if I do not concentrate I see it all the same; then I deduce that behind that feeling there is something, the flower, whose existence does not depend at all on my efforts to concentrate. Instead, the expression “to experience” can let us think of something that depends very much on the commitment of those who have to live it. Now, if the Gospels use the verb “to see”, about the risen Jesus, we can think that the experience of the apostles, even if not necessarily visual, gave the feeling of depending not on an effort of concentration, but on an existence able to make itself seen even without concentrating on it. This does not mean that the apostles thought they could see the Risen even while telling jokes; the context that is described in the apparitions of the Lord appears however a context of being absorbed; however, it seems that the apostles experienced that seeing the Risen did not depend, as a first source, on their effort to concentrate.

Once we have an idea of what it can mean, about the apparitions of the Risen, the term “to see”, we will have to choose which word to use today in our language; we have already seen that the expression “getting an experience” or

“living an experience” does not have the same expressive force as the term “to see”. Then, we can consider it preferable to preserve the term as it is, preserving its strength, rather than translating it into our language which risks being more watered down or ambiguous. Of course, there will be the problem of the misunderstanding that we said at the beginning: if we say that to believe in the Lord we must see it, then people will think that, if this is the case, having faith is something of a few visionaries; so, if I say that I believe because I have seen the Lord, someone will think that I had an apparition; despite these difficulties, we understand that it is better to risk this misunderstanding, rather than letting people understand that faith consists simply in the effort to believe that God exists, as an alternative to being unbelieving.

At this point, we must still reflect on the fact that, compared to that of the apostles, our faith cannot be a second-class faith; that is, we cannot get used to thinking that an experience as strong as that of the apostles, expressed by the verb “to see”, was possible only for them, or even today, but only for a lucky few. Precisely the reflection on the verb “to see” and the reflection on the fact that our faith cannot be condemned to remain second-rate, compared to that of the apostles, must encourage us to think that we too can see the Lord. All the more so as this seeing, as we said above, if it is “seeing”, then does not depend on our efforts. Then we will have to go and look in our lives if it has ever existed and if it still exists in the present the possibility of such an experience, an easy and strong experience such as

seeing, about Jesus. Our faith will always be proportionate to the results of this research.

Another note before proceeding further: Jesus' answer to Thomas, Jn 20: 29: "*Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"*", does not show in what the "seeing" of Thomas consisted: it is not necessary that the seeing, which Jesus invites us not to claim, is reduced to the physical vision; any experience that God gives of himself can be considered a gift not to be claimed; not because we must believe without any gift from God, but because it is necessary to let him decide what experiences to give us so that our faith can be considered sufficiently provoked to exist. Nor can we appeal to the "implicit faith", wanting to affirm that even those belonging to another religion can be considered as people who, in their good faith, adore, for example, the God of Catholics calling him by another name: by reasoning in this way, the meaning of any word would be forced and emptied. Even a Muslim could tell Catholics that they are "anonymous Muslims", that is Muslims without being aware of it.

But we must warn against the error of making seeing God, or receiving an experience of his love capable of penetrating any resistance, or the principle of the primacy of God and therefore of his absolute initiative in everything, nothing else that a metaphysical object. In short, the claim to recreate in ourselves the experience of seeing God, according to the meaning we have clarified now, can hide nothing more than the claim to experience God as a metaphysical entity, that is, as a subject able to make himself

convincingly perceived as outside of us. Faced with the impossibility of achieving this experience, frustrations may arise, or fanaticism, in the event that we convince ourselves of having found it. Consequently, these things and their implications will have to be re-expressed.

An effective way to touch the crux of the matter could be facing the problem of talking to God: in order to start this action, should we first expect an objective experience, which is actually metaphysical? Obviously no; therefore we will have to base our speaking to God on our choice, which is an evaluation of our inner experience. We will therefore not have to wait for experiences from outside. It is a bit like the gospels themselves often give the impression of not letting anything concrete touch, so that they appear elusive; or in the same way as the Bible seems to ultimately refer to itself. We immediately realize that this choice of evaluation of the inner experience, that is to say, whether something we are experiencing is a sign of God that speaks to us, presupposes in itself a first forecast on the vital implementation modalities consequent to this acceptance. It will be precisely this prefiguration that determines choice or rejection. An inner experience could already be accepted simply for the human spirit of intelligent openness to any experience that promises to be constructive. Perhaps then all the restraints and hesitations to each call are due to a metaphysical misunderstanding? How then can we interpret God's idea of initiative? What can be the experience of God's initiative? It comes down to an interpretation of an inner experience. Why call it an experience of God's initiative? Not, therefore, to declare faith in an external world that has made itself

known, but to say that the experience of a dialogue was born and was accepted; also the poetic one is a dialogue born and accepted, but in the case of faith we accept to presuppose in the interlocutor the characteristic of person, in the likeness of human persons. Is it the perception of an external will? No, but rather the definition of a relationship in terms that, in another language, would presuppose this fact. Then, what is what we call the perception of an external will? It is definition of a relationship different from that implemented with objects: for example, acceptance of providing for a greater number of initiatives, disagreements or confirmations. Don't we say that an object seems alive when it opposes us too much? So being opposed is the basis for perceiving otherness? Yes, if in this we include the experience of something unexpected. Everything therefore would be based on the extent of the unexpected: we see an unexpected in us and we can decide to treat it as a you, within our spiritual life. This also applies to the other "you", that is, objects and human persons. The interesting thing to appreciate in all this is therefore the inner spiritual experience of relationship. Our relationship begins with perceptions of which we ignore the precise origin, but then realizes itself facing with the internal experiences born from these perceptions. From all this it also follows that we cannot expect to be able to live any spiritual experience that does not require the active use of our conscience and our intelligence; that is, in the tiredness of the evening, when we would like a spiritual experience of consolation that does not require intellectual commitment and maybe we turn on the TV, this expectation is, actually, still a search for a

metaphysical object or subject as something other and capable of penetrate beyond our tiredness. Spiritual experience cannot be lived without recourse to conscience and intelligence.

We will thus be in dialogue with our instinct which, without any effort, precisely because it is an instinct, captures the unexpected of existence and automatically interprets it as a moment of dialogue, grasping the aspects of harmony. Our part to be added will be to insert, in this experience of dialogic relationship, the hermeneutical abilities that come to us from our mind or, more globally, from the whole of our spiritual abilities. Furthermore we can also understand that we can act upstream: managing our concrete experiences so as to put our instinct to dialogue in the most positively stimulating, favorable, inviting situations to the best growths. Another component that guides the instinct to dialogue, which is upstream and that we can manage, in addition to concrete events, is mental attitudes. All this, however, should be done while avoiding falling into a technicality that would lead to a total separation from reality (in this language reality has no metaphysical meaning, but is constituted by the appreciation of what we perceive as not directly deriving from our productivity).

I believe that what we have said so far about the relationship with God can make us relate to the discourse on physiognomy: if the universe is a physiognomy, it will not be difficult to trace in our instinct the willingness to identify in this physiognomy the existence of a physiognomy that has originated it. As if to say that all that is physiognomy

suggests a personal being; this is why a poet can also feel led to speak with a stone. In this push of the universe to be a physiognomy there is the possibility of recognizing the sign of a personal otherness, capable of relating to us in a physiognomic manner as well; a bit like sometimes, looking at some strange sign, we are led to think that it could be a coded message sent to us by some martian. In this sense even God himself does not exist except in his physiognomic particularities, inseparable from the particularities that derive from our knowing him.

7.7 Myth and ecumenism

We now question about the particular characteristics that have been handed down to us about the person of God, to whom we intend to address (or whose addressing to us we wish to welcome). That is how to say: who exactly is the person to whom I turn? How is it defined? How does it stand out from the others? Should I only think, generically, that it is God, or should I also bear in mind all the other elements of a doctrine, for example the fact that it is a matter of Father, Son and Holy Spirit? And how can these complications be integrated into my need for a relationship that should also be simple, spontaneous, direct? This type of problem can be defined as a problem of the *mythological* contents of each religion; here we keep a specific attention to the Christian religion. For a correction of the traditionally negative perspective towards myth, a good article is G. Betori, *Mito* in P. Rossano - G. Ravasi - A. Girlanda (edd.), *Nuovo*

Dizionario di Teologia Biblica, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 1989³, p. 993-1012.

When a god is not only a generic celestial being, but something detailed is begun to be told of him, then we can say that a myth is being born. Any content of this kind in religion, as a descent into detail of the particular, cannot but appear to be no longer universal; on the other hand, however, a religion without mythological (or historical-divine) contents would be a vague feeling of the sacred, incapable of specifying anything. Therefore, there is a tension in religion due to the particular / universal relation, as to the contents.

Applying the Heraclitean perspective to the problem, we would arrive at this path: we start from the particular, in a path destined to widen and meet with the increasingly universal; as if to say: God leaves from Abraham to gradually reach the whole world. An ecumenical perspective reminds us, on the other hand, that the other religions as well are starting points. If this is the case, the religion I want to follow, whatever it may be, cannot but be thought, at least in part, as compromised with partial particularities, destined to leave room for the most universal, that is, for ecumenical dialogue. From this it follows that I cannot justify to myself my relationship with the religious “you” by telling myself that I live it *because it is true*: no religion is one hundred percent true; God is always greater than mine and any religion. Here too, then, the religious content will be adopted starting from a human experience and need, but its truth of involvement will be postponed to the specific unfolding of a spiritual history open to the prospects of dialogue and not to

the need for a true being metaphysical. My thought, therefore, but also my whole person, must be capable of sincerely addressing a “you” not on the basis of metaphysical security, but on that of lived events and events that continue to occur. The initial choice itself will not act as a pivot, but as a starting point. An adhesion of faith must actually be renewed continuously. Therefore, what in moral theology is called “fundamental option” cannot actually be thought of if not simply as the first step. The goal to be reached with other religions will not be the uniformity of the contents on God, but the availability to a dialogue more and more capable of gathering also the non-universal truths that are offered to me from the other person, without having to deny mine.

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