

The Texts of the Convivium

EVERY REALITY, HOWEVER . SMALL, IS INTERESTING AND EVERYTHING SHOULD BE REMEMBERED: EVEN EVIL

According to a certain traditional mentality that comes to us from the Orient and in particular from India, but which also passes through Greek thought, the metaphysical entities are of exclusive interest, expressible in general ideas, in universal concepts.

The empirical realities, in their many diversities, in their incessant becoming, in each one's unrepeatable singularity, are of no importance in this vision. They appear, so to speak, to be of a shadowy nature. Lacking in ontological density, it's as if they remain half way between being and not being.

As far as Plato is concerned, the concepts are unchangeable and transcendent metaphysical entities. They live in a hyperuranium, detached from worldly things.

Aristotle saw the universal concepts incarnated in things themselves. Therefore, as far as he is concerned, science is knowledge of the universals, not of the variety of detail.

In order to make an example, science is the knowledge of the form of the horse, that is to say, of its universal nature, which could be conceptually summed up in the definition of the horse in general. This definition can be strictly applied to all single horses, as it affirms what they all have in common: their universal and unchangeable "being a horse".

Aristotelian science is not interested in the individual characteristics of single horses, as single beings and phenomena of nature and life. Becoming is of very little interest to science conceived in this manner, because it exclusively concentrates its attention on the nature of every species which, found in every single one, escapes any change.

The attention to singularity and their becoming only begins to gradually take shape after many centuries have passed. It will be particularly established in human sciences, in psychology, in history.

So, what importance could history have in that Indian thought, which is the first to focus its attention exclusively on the metaphysical ambit? The single event distinguishes itself and comes together with the others, making itself history, more or less in the same way as a wave that breaks onto the rocks can be distinguished from the waves that come before and after it. In the picture of this kind of mentality, what scientist would ever take the trouble to study each wave in its singularity? The difference between each one and the others appears totally irrelevant.

We can see the historical discernment, the taste of history, emerge in the age of Romanticism. It is the sense that every fact is something new, original, compared to what came before it, so that one can speak of true development.

Historiography describes the more important facts, identifying them in the significant events of power politics, in the formation of States, in wars, in crucial battles. The attention is then extended to the developments of the economy which greatly influence living conditions.

Nowadays, historiography focuses on the daily life styles of the more humble, ordinary people. The historian acts as a reporter, his curiosity becomes insatiable, at the most he would like to reconstruct, relive everything that has happened, the ups and downs of family life, adventures, loves, differences, quarrels and troubles, the personal biography of every person.

In particular, the French historians are making an extremely valid contribution to this new kind of historiography. For example I would like to propose *The history of a village: Montaillou*, by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. The news matter is obtained from interrogation records, since in the XIII century Montaillou was a village with a

population of two hundred inhabitants located in the Pyrenees and populated by a majority of Albigensian heretics. The inquisitor, Jacques Fournier, future pope of Avignon with the name of Benedict XII, was an intellect with an extraordinary curiosity for the details of life – I'm more inclined to define him a forerunner of many of today's historians – and this taste of his for detail drove him to taking advantage of his role as judge to interrogate in depth the unfortunate persons subjected to the inquisition regarding all their personal business.

The confessions and information that emerge from this inquisition, re-elaborated and re-organized in subject order by Le Roy Ladurie, have given rise to a large, successful volume destined to be of interest to any reader who enjoys this type of research.

The other branches of science have also extended more of their attention on the particulars.

Medicine limits its own possibilities to the point of making them futile unless it studies the anatomy, physiology, pathology of the single case, and with this aim in mind will also act on its clinical intuition.

Psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, are, par excellence, the study of single and unique cases.

Literary criticism cannot do without the poet or writer's biography and verification of many small facts that concern him, which are negligible only in appearance.

Natural sciences also extend themselves to embrace life in all its tiniest expressions and articulations. One may wonder why so many entomologists become specialized in the study of every single species of ants. At the most they would like to know every single anthill.

I recall the passage of a discourse made by pope Luciani, John Paul I. By quoting an Arab-Islamic proverb, he once said that in the black night there is a black stone and on it an ant (one supposes the ant is also black). Well, God doesn't ignore that ant either.

It is very true: even that tiny ant is an essential component of the universe. The divine Mind also thinks of it, God places it into being with His thought. However, everything is interesting, everything is important, right down to the smallest atom, electron and quantum of energy. It is science, human knowledge whose utmost inspiration is to pursue divine omniscience, embrace everything and everyone.

It seems that this omniscience is really one of the most essential aspects of what we can conceive as the arrival point of the entire human evolution.

Mediumistic communications often speak to us about a phase of *post mortem* existence where personal memories are lost or at least suspended. Some interpreters, some theorists may feel driven to speak about a definitive loss of memories that are no longer needed, that are no longer functional to the further evolution of the soul.

If this were the case, since we are all destined to abandoning this earthly life, what would follow is that our sciences, like every knowledge of things of this world, would be nothing else than vain efforts and a waste of time.

I am inclined to object that, if the perfection of knowledge is knowledge of everything, the earthly world is nevertheless a part of life, therefore it should be included in everything: so the knowledge of everything has to necessarily include the knowledge of earthly life.

In this case, the temporary suspension of many memories will be functional to the soul's detachment from earth and its ambitions and cupidity, from frustrations and rancour, from passions that should be overcome and first of all not nourished.

However, in the end, memories no longer pose any danger and only mean further completeness and perfection. This is the moment in which every piece of information and knowledge, every memory, will be recovered and every ignored or forgotten thing will appear or re-emerge in full light.

This kind of conclusion will be of great pleasure to those who love science, history, knowledge and art itself, and they will never give in to the idea that everything connected to all this fall into total definitive oblivion, and everything should be as if nothing had ever existed.

One can understand that those who do not love knowledge, those who are not fascinated by certain forms of knowledge could remain totally indifferent to a subject matter of this kind. There are those who are satisfied with knowing very few limited things and immediately put themselves on the defensive shutting up like a clam against the possibility of learning anything more. In their reassuring ignorance, these people are definitely not the most sensitive to the discourse in question here.

The time has now come to take a last step forward in this discourse. We have said that everything is interesting, everything is worthy of being known and remembered. Now we could say: everything, yes, even evil.

I particularly refer to moral evil. Our roots are also in evil committed, or suffered. Also in evil is that past which explains, clarifies, makes one fully understand the present. Thoroughly considering evil is contributing to knowing what we are.

Identifying oneself with the evil in others, reliving it, is an act of knowledge as well as an act of understanding and love.

And, furthermore, of humbleness. There is a tendency to deviate rooted deep down in every one of us. There are those, gifted with a happier nature, who know how to keep it at bay, but there are those who abandon themselves to it, and this spells trouble.

Every one of us in life has committed rash, heedless acts. Most of us have been able to find our way out without any excessive damage done; but what can be said about those who, in a fit of madness, have gone so far as committing crimes? What can be said about those who are apt to committing this crime by their physical and psychic constitution, by the influence of wretched social conditions in every sense of the word, by the influence of negative ideas professed by the entire environment which they have grown up in?

In the deviated vision evil replaces good, it is pursued as good, often with extreme commitment that results in heroism.

Evil should be judged for what it is, it should be condemned to the point of execration, but it should also be understood. And the best way of understanding it is to relive it in one's heart of hearts, without justifying the negative acts, the "sins", the "faults" as such, but by sympathizing with the sinner, with wickedness itself, reliving its tragedy in one's heart of hearts.

Personally speaking I have always shown great interest for the deviated figure of man or even the delinquent. I remember the lessons of criminal anthropology I attended when I was twenty years old - although they weren't obligatory, since I was a pupil of a different faculty. These lessons took place in the Forensic Police Academy incorporated in the Regina Coeli prison and were held by professor Benigno Di Tullio.

The first part of the lesson consisted in the explanation of some points of our programme. The second part consisted of an interview with a prisoner who had offered himself of his own free will. The professor, who combined science with a deep humanity as well as an incomparable *savoir faire*, managed to establish a general atmosphere of comprehension and sympathy surrounding the interviewed prisoner that immediately put him at ease. In this way he therefore opened himself up and confided everything to us: the facts and how they happened, his motives, the moods which alternated in his heart of hearts during the criminal act.

There was a whole range of cases: from the young Sicilian teacher of philosophy who, in a fit of jealousy, had seized his wife by the neck, without realising what he was doing, to find her dead in his arms, strangled; to the most horrific crimes; so much so that at the end the confession of a pleasant middle aged Neapolitan gentleman, whom we had at

first mistaken for another professor due to his aristocratic small beard, but who was in reality an extremely skilful pick-pocket, provoked a sigh of comforting relief in all of us.

After more than half a century I found myself in hospital for about twenty days, most of them spent awaiting an operation that was continually postponed. I had brought a few books with me to kill time, one of which was *Ten famous trials*.

A head nurse who had noticed my interest in these trials and relative crimes, lent me a book of hers which bore a one worded Italian title: *Assassine (Female Murderers)*. It was a well documented copious review of a whole series of female murderers from the Renaissance to today. It kept me good company during that long wait for surgery and was of interest to quite a few doctors, with whom I had some excellent discussions on the topic.

I have an intellectual niece as spiritually close to me as generous, who always gives me a book for birthdays and other anniversaries or festivities. However, it's always hard for her to choose as she is torn between hesitations and doubts, being convinced that I have read almost everything and every time her present risks being the double of a book I already possess and have read over and over again. So what was her gift to me for my last birthday? A beautiful book, as always a heavy volume, which went by the title *Roma criminale (Criminal Rome)*. It is an *excursus* of all the principle killings committed in the Eternal City throughout the twentieth century.

I must confess that in reading these books I do not in any way try to vicariously live a criminal existence that my life has denied me. On the other hand, I try to understand even the worst criminals, their motivations, their physical, psychic, cultural and social conditions suffered, the twisted mentality of each one of them. I follow their existence with an avid feeling of pity. I continue to understand something more every day of the great mystery that is man, of that great mystery that I am also to myself.

I have spoken of deviance in moral terms; but – so to speak – I see that ethical deviance is strictly connected to psychological deviance. The more I consider them in their connections, the more I am convinced that in the end they are one and the same.

So, here we have the enormous interest that psychiatry raises, beside criminology. The descriptions of “cases” (I would especially like to call to mind *Medical Cases* by Freud) appear striking to us as do the biographies of famous madmen. I would like to mention one in particular, by Aldous Oberdorfer, bearing the title *The mad king* dedicated to Louis II of Bavaria, the famous “Ludwig”.

The title of this essay which is now drawing to an end, is: *Every reality, however small, is interesting and everything should be remembered: even evil*. We will have the perfect, definitive, absolute, everlasting and eternal memory at the final goal of our human evolution. Evil will also have its place here too, but it will no longer be painful either for those who committed it or others, since everything, and evil as well, will be transfigured into good.

From high up on the highest peak reached, on looking down we will see the journeys we have made, we will contemplate them in all their progressions but also involutions. We will relive all mistakes and disorientations or deviations, and even all horrors and atrocities. But catharsis will change sufferance into joy.

In order to have a brief idea of how all of this can happen, I would like to make a comparison with the magic of a catharsis cast on he who sees or reads, by the excellence of certain works of art, whether it concerns paintings, sculptures, poetry, theatre or cinema.

Out of all the possible examples I would like to consider Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, and in particular, his *Inferno*. Hearing, or reading of certain sufferance felt by one of fellow men could make us tremble with horror. However, I now ask myself: what could be more horrific than the infernal conditions described by Dante in the first

cantica of his poem? Atrocious torture inflicted in eternity, without any hope of redemption or the slightest relief. The reading of such horrors should produce the most depressing effect. So why is it, that on the contrary it cheers us up, it gives us such intimate pleasure? It is the miracle produced by real art, by the most sublime poetry.

A foul deed told by a mediocre writer preserves all its weight and the soul of he who reads it or listens to it becomes sad, disheartened and gloomy. So what atrocity could be greater than the one which Dante makes us relive? And yet the *Lectura Dantis*, in its most rough parts, gives us the highest spiritual gratifications. Furthermore, what about Shakespeare's tragedies, although the facts represented and their results and outcomes are far less horrific?

This example taken from literature and art could give us a notion, although somewhat vague and faint, of what, from an eschatological point of view, could the transfigured vision of all things be, where evil itself will be supreme good and incomparable, indescribable happiness.