

Autonomy of Reason?

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ABSTRACT

My contribution is a review of the Proceedings of the V Meeting of Italian-American Philosophy *Autonomy of Reason? Autonomie der Vernunft?* (Riccardo Dottori ed., Yearbook of Philosophical Hermeneutics I/2009, Lit Verlag, Münster) that took place in Rome (October 2007). American and European philosophers established a fruitful dialog aiming to show the complexity of the notion of “Reason” and, in particular, the possibility of its “Autonomy”. As we will see in the following discussion, human reason seems to be characterized by somewhat vague borders.

The *V Meeting of Italian-American Philosophy* is not a specific debate on “autonomy” as in contemporary theories of autonomy; it is rather a fruitful confrontation on some relevant philosophical issues that arise when we reflect on the relationship between judgment and desires, emotions, preferences and values. Interesting cues come from different areas: aesthetics, hermeneutics, logic and science, social science, ethics and politics.

Let’s follow this order of discussion. Ivan Soll raises doubts about the “superiority of aesthetically disengaged experience’ and establishes a fruitful connection between pragmatic and cognitive aspects of consciousness. Moreover he argues for the selective task of the aesthetic experience. There is more than one way to visually contemplate the same object aesthetically: one can concentrate on the quality and play of its colors, or focus upon its structure, or its representative content, or its psychological expressiveness. It is not a matter of a “pragmatic” consciousness” but it is how the life of desire and action works as experience one has while engaged in action and driven by desire. Piero Montani proposes to reconcile reason and sensibility by following Schiller and some bioaesthetical issues. The interesting question is the expressive power of the technical projection of sensibility in contemporary art that is anchored in a bioaesthetical context and possesses an “emancipatory” potential. The Frankfurt’s school already presented a view on this power but a lucid glance back to Schiller reveals the reciprocal game of reason and sensibility in different forms of arts beyond the superiority of a single form of expression as, for instance, music. One good example is the proposal of Susan L. Feagin who considers the rationality of empathizing with fictional characters. The inter-

esting point is that she challenges the opposition between rational and non rational ability to empathize which respectively correspond to interpersonal relationship and literature. In particular, the difficulties of simulating the mental processes of actual persons and hence of emphasizing with them do not entail that it will be equally difficult to simulate and empathize when reading fiction; skilled authors may write in ways that facilitate simulation and empathy on the part of appropriately sensitive readers. Luigi Lombardi Vallauri establishes a fruitful comparison between juridical and aesthetic judgments in order to show the “cognitive” aspect of emotions in the latter. It is clear that juridical judgment entails a sort of detachment from emotions because of its conformity to norms. The central point of Vallauri’s paper is how to avoid a sort of “rule following” in the aesthetic field where there is a strong tendency to conform to academic “metaaesthetical” norms. Another interesting and plausible point is the “intersubjective” character of aesthetic judgment that manifests itself in the phenomenon of “deixis”: even though the individual is ultimately ungraspable “we” have the possibility to “approve” and “disapprove” the emotions it provoke us.

Robert Pippin’s paper aims to defend the Hegelian notion of “the absolute idea” namely of conceptuality itself. He argues against those who think that an independent category theory or that a doctrine of self-moving conceptual or actually noetic structure underlying the apparent world, constitutes the basic Hegelian position as the Spirit’s self-knowledge is an externalization that manifests itself in the history of art, religion, politics and world history. Plausibly, he rejects contemporary attempts to “logicize” the Hegelian Phenomenology. Gianni Vattimo follows Pippin indication to read Hegel in the right sense as the Hermeneutic tradition seems to have done. Vattimo analyzes some relativist results such as the theory of truth presented by Richard Rorty. The core of his contribution is the warning not to confuse some Anglo-Saxon interpretations of Hegel with the hermeneutic approach of Gadamer whose philosophy cannot be considered as relativistic. Contrary to Pippin, Therry Pinkard presents a critical paper on the Hegelian “monism of reason” that represents the culminating point of the phenomenology. He embraces the interpretation provided by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and can be summarized in the idea that the order of the logic of our thoughts meshes with the order of the universe in that we are giving shape and expression to the rational *logos* that is at work in everything. Roberta De Monticelli presents a very interesting contribution on the “emergency” of a person through a hierarchy of acts. Her primary reference is Husserl and the notion of “positionality” that expresses itself in first level positions such as perceptions and emotions. They are not free because they depend on their positionality namely neither on the free subject nor on the external world. According to De Monticelli, by free acts in a strict sense, or self-constitutive acts, a personal identity through time emerges,

with *actual responsibility* of one's past and present self. This thesis means that consciousness and self-consciousness presuppose subjectivity as capacity for acts namely acquiring a linguistically and conceptually articulated first person perspective. I think that De Monticelli presents a highly idealized model of identity that does not consider the nature we share with animals and moreover the difficulty for marginalized people, cultural minorities and women themselves to realize their personality because of cultural and social obstacles. A lot of authors working in the field of logics maintain that it is fundamental to give a response to the question "is it possible to explain why norms or reasons are correct?" It is indeed an original and maybe plausible answer the one given by Paul Horwich who thinks that actually we do not need to provide a philosophical solution. Obviously philosophers presented several interesting solutions and Horwich critically considers four attempts to ground our norms of rational belief. The first is the *semantogenetic* that finds normativity in the meanings of word. The second invokes "rational intuitions" that require a special form of experience different from immediate experience. The third is reliabilism according to which a true belief is a worthwhile end justifying an epistemic procedure. The fourth is a form of *constructivism* such as that Horwich sees in Bob Brandom's account. This is that the facts of epistemic normativity are grounded in our epistemical *practice* namely in the norms we take to be correct. Horwich maintains that these solutions are not adequate to fund our norms of justification but he does not fall in relativism or skepticism. Rather he thinks that a certain belief-forming procedure itemizes the rational one and probably the explanation of the nature of procedure will be provided by naturalistic accounts (neurological or evolutionary or social). Against this result Franca D'Agostino argues for what she calls *anomalous foundationalism*, which seems to be the most large shared picture of reason. It consists in saying that there are various inverted pyramids (which is how d'Agostino interprets the Cartesian Strategy namely as an inverted pyramid) and they all move, change in time. The fine paper of Maria Luisa Dalla Chiara, Giuliano Toraldo Di Francia ed Eleonora Negri poses interesting questions concerning the relationship between logic and music: is it possible to represent a musical score as a peculiar example of a *formal* language? In a sense, are scores *formalizable*? According to the authors, one can positively answer to this question, by introducing the notion of *formal representation of a musical score*, as we can identify some classes of symbolic expressions that play a fundamental role. One of the most important point of discussion in analytic philosophy concerns the interpretation of the notions of "thought" and "judgment" by Frege. Carlo Penco concentrates on the tension between "cognitive" and "semantic" sense that are present in several passages of Frege's work and concludes that there are some disadvantages in recent attempts to recover Frege's duality of senses. Penco individuates some interesting points to be followed by contemporary logic: (1) distin-

guishing different procedures depending on the needs and goals of speakers; (2) enlarging the scope of logic from representing mathematical reasoning to also representing commonsense reasoning; (3) giving space to the cognitive differences of expressions without falling into psychologism and (4) taking care of the role of context of utterance. Starting from the difference driven by pierce between different methods of “fixating our beliefs”. Mauro Dorato offers a way to make the “method of tenacity” and the “method of science” compatible; they characterize respectively pragmatism and naturalism. Dorato presents the reasons normally taken to show that they are incompatible; these very reasons support rather their complementarity both within science and decision-making.

John McDowell presents an original interpretation of the Kantian notion of freedom and establishes a mediation between it and some Hegelian issues in order to consider the fact that we live in a real community. According to McDowell, we must avoid two tendencies. The first is the tendency to abandon the idea that there is something like that of doing the right things. We cannot but supposing that there exist right and wrong answers to the question of what we ought to think or to do. The second is the tendency to fall in the Myth of the Given as Sellars called it. Mc Dowell describes this myth as the idea that things are available to us in a simple passive way as a transaction that does not require from the part of the subject the capacity to actively take responsibility for his/her claims and actions. This result seems to rule out the very possibility of individual reflection that rather is a fundamental condition to reach the end of consent between individual and community. McDowell proposal gives rise to several problems. As the comment of Giovanni Iorio Giannoli shows, if we establish a strong connection between individual and community by emphasizing the role of the consent we run the risk to fall in homologation. Moreover, we cannot grasp the real dynamic between cognitive individual systems with their particular abilities, beliefs and desires and the collective systems with their own properties and general characteristics and structures. Robert Brandom tries to reconcile Kant and Hegel by establishing a deep relation between attitude dependence and content dependence. He privileges the latter because the objectivity of the content of reasons can be publicly recognized in virtue of its material-inferential articulation. This move implies to collapse freedom into autonomy as agents are autonomous just because they bind their reasoning to shared commitments namely commitments publicly recognized and approved by their community. In this context, I think that the criticism of Eva Picardi to the Brandom’s paper is illuminating. She underscores a certain obscurity as regards (1) the individualism of meaning and (2) the distinction between public and shared. The first issue comes from Davidson and Dummett but Dummett has the advantage to maintain that the speaker hold him/herelf as responsible for the meaning he/she attributes to

his/her expressions as a member of a linguistic community. It is indeed a merit of Brandom to insist on the circumstances (Sellars) and the consequences of the application of concepts. Picardi thinks however that we can rely to a more plausible account of the practices “we share”; Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* present a valid example of the connection between words and acts. According to Diego Marconi, Brandom’s model is exposed to objections because it aims to be a plausible view on recognition based on a kind of “linguistic normativity”. But, Hegel himself intended recognition as recognition among persons who recognize the others and themselves as “imputable”. Marconi challenges the way in which Brandom intends normativity as a bound to a linguistic competence that seems to be apanage of experts. Indeed we cannot rule out the authority of experts but we have to admit a third player of the game of giving and acting for reasons namely nature. To move in a “social” space of reasons could imply to conceive freedom in a normative sense as it is grounded on shareable social norms i.e. to make a bootstrapping from individual to sociality as James Swindler suggests in his fine paper. By demonstrating the ultimate transcendental linguistic game on which freedom is essentially related Swindler recalls the elenctic strategy adopted by Karl Otto Apel. However, he points on the social notion of “imputability” which takes its sense from the fact that we can rely on a normative background as a conceptual background that recalls the Fregean “platonic given”. In my brief comment I share the normative nature of freedom but, like Brandom, Swindler proposes a kind of “positive freedom” that in my opinion does not give the right weight to the attitudes of the speakers through which they take position in the discursive game of giving and asking for reasons.

Warren Reich offers a lucid and shareable discussion about the notion of “laicality” and the sense we have to assign to the “secular society”. After a brilliant historical-conceptual reconstruction of the real sense of the word “secularization” and its influences on bioethics Reich focuses on some ideas of Stout who does not want to consider the religious ethics as an “Outsider”. He embraces the Fornero’s meaning of “laicality” that is compatible with a meaning of secular society as a “non-exclusionist” arena. Laicality entails the principle of reciprocal autonomy for if religious presentors expect respect for pluralism, liberty and tolerance they should present their information by appealing to liberty, tolerance and respect for pluralism. The relationship between moral and right is crucial not only in the public/political field but also in the personal field of bioethics. Stefano Semplici maintains that bioethical choices such us euthanasia and abortion are not only a private affair. It is however difficult to regulate them entirely from a legal point of view because of the moral dilemmas we meet in the peculiar dramatic situation as the movie of Clint Eastwood *Million dollar baby* shows in a lucid way. Another important philosophical issue is the nature for the mental contents of animals namely if

they have beliefs. Simone Gozzano introduces and criticizes the arguments against animal beliefs and presents some general conditions for the attribution of intentional states to animals. He provides a distinction of three kinds of mental contents we share we animals: (1) the content related to instinctive and autonomic reactions such as reflexes; (2) the content associated with some representational capacities which are not fully epistemic but deserve to change a the structure of the system by providing *more* or *new information* and (3) the content that allows for opaque readings and their correct individuation which establishes an epistemic relation to truth conditions. That is because according to Gozzano we cannot infer from John's belief that Cicero denounced Catiline that Tully denounced Catiline because John may not have the information. My question to Gozzano is about the necessity of posing truth condition at that level for animals. On the one side it is true that we have ordinary language to perform substitutinal moves. On the other side animals have their very sophisticated way of communicating about state in the world. Communication is the basic phenomenon common to animals and humans and we are lucky that sometimes and somehow we can communicate with animals. Urban Wiesling establishes a fruitful connection between the Kantian judgment as presented in the third *Critic* and medicine. As many authors think nowadays philosophy must reflect from concrete situations where individual choices take place and the requirement of the evidence of results plays an important role in the affair.

The last session is dedicated to politics; the contributions are mainly focused on the problem of justice. David Rasmussen introduces the important topic of global justice. Starting from the Kantian inheritance in the thought of John Rawls and Thomas Nagel, he argues for a form of cosmopolitanism that can do two things that the critique of global justice says it cannot, namely, accommodate pluralism and achieve sovereignty as an enabling condition on a global level. Rasmussen considers the paradox of global justice as the tension between the need to preserve the uniqueness of domestic institutions and the need to apply principles of law and justice with a sufficient force so that standards of fairness and equality are met on the international level. Cosmopolitanism is mostly based on the Kantian theory of human rights but there are several philosophical distinctions to be underscored inside it. Luigi Caranti clarifies the difference between freedom and autonomy and argues for a plausible conception of autonomy as a condition of possibility of all possible values. This move implies that even for instance religious loyalty or attachment to group traditions and the like have some significance if and only if are endorsed by free, autonomous individuals. In this sense there is genuine attachment to a tradition, even the most illiberal, that is not the result of the individual's autonomous decision. Caranti aims to propose to combine the logical dependence of all values from autonomy with the notion of respect to obtain a

powerful foundation of human rights capable to cut across the moral plurality of our world. Contrary to the cosmopolitan view of Caranti, Rudiger Bittner discusses the problem of normativity and plausibly maintains that the kind of normativity we must look for is not prescriptive but is the normativity of reason itself. It is controversial whether or not there are things such as moral norms. According to Bittner our experience is that of things we did or intend to do having various qualities which earn them moral and other recommendation or the opposite. We thus recognize these qualities by virtue of reason as we can give reasons for what we say and we can improve our judgments thanks to reasons we are given by others. The most fundamental question in politics is how to favor justice in a multicultural world. Some philosophers think that we can find conditions for implement justice though a sort of “communicative rationality”. Stefano Petrucciani discusses the approaches of Karl Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas; moreover he aims at demonstrating the validity of the Apelian position using some ideas from Wolfgang Kuhlmann. According to Petrucciani, a strong distinction between norms of argumentation and norms of justice is not plausible for the simple reason that it is incoherent to assume that a person can be divided into a part to which we own respect as participants to the argumentation and a part to which we do not own because of the particular interests, needs and validity claims. Petrucciani maintains that Habermas rests on a sort of skepticism about justice but I think that Habermas presents a powerful distinction between communicative action and reflexive communicative action that takes into consideration the potentialities of individual expression of his/her voice. The weak in Habermas’ theory is that we necessarily have to orient the discussion on a rational consent that seems to be an idealization. To avoid idealizations we have better to look at what Fulvio Cerutti calls “global challenges” namely nuclear weapons and anthropogenic climate change. Global challenges are those that bring about the end of modernity and raise the problem of survival. It is not a matter of individual problems such as poverty terrorism, human rights or international justice. The problem of global challenges involves into two problems, one moral and the other political. The moral problem concerns future generations and implies a “transcultural” argument. Cerutti shows the limits of the Rawlsian approach and looks at the normative implications of bearing and raising children in the transgenerational chain as an experience that we can seriously do in the actual moment. The three patterns that work in any caring parent or member of a human community are the *trust* you inspire in your children or the children you re caring for; then the *vulnerability* you see in those weaker beings and, as necessary consequence of the these, the *responsibility* toward future generations. The political problem aims to overcome Hobbesian strategies that are “abstract” namely seem not to see the wealth that irreducible plurality of mentality and custom can represent for all partners to

a new necessary worldwide governance. Respect for differences is the topic of the conclusive contribution. Leoluca Orlando introduces the important thesis that we cannot find a foundation for human rights without to consider identity. He speaks also as a politician with a significant experience in the field and focuses on the problem of an underestimation of the identitarian dimension. It is not a matter of considering the positive bond of individual to community, rather we often discover that the most relevant attacks to our security come from *identity based criminals* (as he calls them).

As Riccardo Dottori points out in the Introduction, the debate about a “purity” of reasons is an ancient question that goes back to Plato and Protagoras. Autonomy of reason is the core of the contrast between Kant and Hegel, but nowadays it cannot be solved in purely philosophical terms. Philosophy in its different areas ought to consider important results of natural and social sciences; the contemporary “challenge” for philosophy, that, in Habermas’ terms, cannot assign to sciences their place but can only translate scientific results into its own language, is thus to formulate its vocabulary also in the dialogue with other disciplines.