

Sociocultural Crisis: Return to Humanity and The Real Economy

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Abstract

We are facing an anthropological crisis, not economic. The debate on economics and its method of study cannot be divorced from a correct reading of history that in the long term tends to repeat itself, as G.B vico had envisaged; the nature of man never changes, constantly Oscillating between Cain and Abel, and it would seem that only pain leads man to wisdom. The single technical-rational thought makes us see the future as the only guarantee of success and we therefore cannot understand the correlations between causes and effects in our history. We act as if the past had been erased and as if history had never manifested similar situations to those in which we find ourselves today.

The toxic consequences of this model are socio-cultural inequality, poverty, moral degradation, a raging and permanent conflict, lack of imagination and creativity. Is all this due to an incorrect adjustment of the problems of man as a person not as an object (anthropological crisis)? “once profit becomes the exclusive goal, if it is produced by improper means and without the common good its ultimate end, it risks destroying wealth and creating poverty” (caritas in veritate, chapter II, 21). The system taken to extremes created a concentration of financial wealth that is unparalleled in history with a sort of hegemonic senate that is superordinate to individual states. We have to return to the man and to a welfare system in which healthcare is fundamental because in this way we can understand the solidarity and we can build a real “societas” – the world in old latin means “alliance” – and this is a foundation of our happiness.

science not exact science : the society is a end and economy the mean ; we have changed the ends with the means.

It seems we need to rethink our way of being a society. The desire to give space to humanity's sense of omnipotence again seems to have whisked it back in history – to the myths of Prometheus, of Icarus – and force it once more to face the eternal dilemma of human destiny. A more social vision of life will be needed in order to re-pacify people with themselves, one in terms of relationships and not as single individuals, and to redefine the priorities of their needs. This doesn't mean curtailing progress but conceiving it in a different way. In this sense the priority becomes to refocus on people's spiritual dimension, today subordinated to the physical one, which determines choices and priorities of their needs. The spiritual and religious dimension are not closely bound to a religious belief because the ability to “feel” is within each one of us, it is innate. Today it is dormant but not lost, our task is to recover it, starting from each single moment of every day of our life, in relationships that bind us to others.

We need to return to a relationship with the natural world that the real economy can help reconstruct. Contact with this facilitates growth of the social dimension, not only considered as a series of mere chemical but also emotional reactions, which must once more become the subject of economics and other social sciences.

All of this doesn't mean renouncing the vital contribution of sciences in our life, but the acceptance of evidence that they cannot be absolute values, they cannot be considered moral knowledge to the point that we are induced to consider only the material dimension of our life. The return to a more spiritual dimension is a course to follow because it is written in the agenda of our history that, as European philosophy has attempted to describe, seems to follow an continual alternation over time of the predominance of material decadence and spiritual revival. In fact, we cannot renounce our spiritual dimension without renouncing living: we have a permanent nostalgia for our own being beyond material aspects, a nostalgia that is alive in us like embers that lie dormant under ashes.

In his work *Homo creatus est* written in 1986, Hans Urs von Balthasar speaks of “man's nostalgia”, reminding us that this need for a spiritual dimension is an innate feeling, first mentioned in Greek philosophy that aimed to explain the sense of harmony of life. Starting from Plato's Symposium, in which all the participants discuss Eros who has nostalgia and flies off towards the supreme and divine beauty, to Plotinus' key concept of conversion (epistrophé) and of nostalgia that hastens towards the return (hormé), all of Greek philosophy only considered the issue of the true nobility of man. Man, who must not be content with fleeting pleasures and joys unless he wants to renounce satisfying his aspiration to happiness. The focus of this search for wisdom (philosophia) is always

the blissful life as being man's aim and his ultimate essential form, towards which he tends after his conversion from mere earthly captivity (think of Plato's allegory of the cave). Given that, as we have said, the difference between the natural and supernatural was unknown in Greek philosophy, it was expressed in the fall of the human soul from the divine heights from which, however, man brings a spark that forces him to feel nostalgia for what was once his country, the paradise lost.

A return to the real economy means, in Italy, once more giving strength and dignity to the role of craftsmen by means of extraordinary measures to really (as opposed to theoretically) aid their development. It also means re-evaluating agriculture, which has always been an important factor in the country's economy. It means finding effective solutions to help young people to reconsider these opportunities. It means rediscovering our culture and abandoning those self-serving models of management that have failed exactly where they were created. It means once more giving the family, the foundation of society, a priority role. For instance, it would be useful on occasion of an important event in agricultural life, like the grape harvest, to involve school children in this activity so they can once more experience a sense of sociality.

In short, it is important to engineer growth policies that can merge the needs of the economy with a functional approach to develop the creative and entrepreneurial sense that is part of the nature of Italians.

In effect the real challenge facing us is to "definancialize" the financial economy that has all the drawbacks mentioned previously. We cannot afford to have a financial sector that operates with unlimited means within an amoral framework and without responsibilities, because there is an unlimited volume of financial products for which there is no risk coverage for parties operating in those markets. Nor is it conceivable that so much power can be concentrated in so few banks that don't really take responsibility for their activities, given that their accounts are by no means transparent and therefore makes it impossible to see their true situation.

'To possess a power that is not defined and not controlled by a deep respect for individuals means the destruction of mankind in an absolute sense [...] The perversion of power becomes more and more threatening with the result that also human nature is perverted. As there seems to be no way of halting this [...] every action also entangles those who take it [...] Man is continually the result of what he does [...] So if power continues to grow along the lines indicated there is no way of predicting what will happen to those who use this power: an unknown kind of moral destruction and spiritual ruin'. (R. Guardini, *La Fine dell'Epoca Moderna* [The End of the Modern World])

Guardini wrote this in 1954 and wasn't able to really know what was to happen over fifty years later and in what way the financial world would fully vindicate his concerns. Writing at that time he indicated three fundamental qualities that people ought to possess:

- **reliability imposed by telling the truth;**
- **courage to take a position when faced with errors, a courage that will be considerable to the degree that they stand up to the many, public opinion, the non-truth condensed in slogans and in organi-**

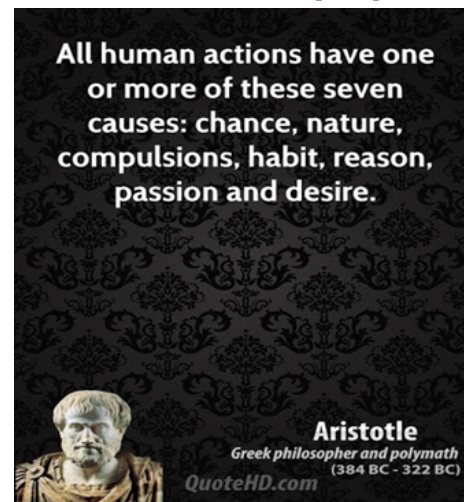
zations;

- **interior freedom, independent of the power of suggestion of propaganda, the press, television, cinema and the value model these express.**

The crisis we are experiencing has a negative component that makes it even more difficult to face and resolve. A component linked to the diminished spirit of that hope which in the postwar years guided older generations in the task of social reconstruction while faced with much more serious problems, given the shortage of material resources, but that was offset by an immense depth of intangible resources. It is fundamental to once again find what Ernst Bloch called the principle of hope (also the title of a book he started writing in 1938 while in the USA) as the essential factor and feeling necessary to tackle the future:

'It is a question of learning hope. Its work does not renounce, it is in love with success rather than failure. Hope, superior to fear, is neither passive like the latter, nor locked into nothingness. The emotion of hope goes out of itself, makes people broad instead of confining them, cannot know nearly enough of what it is that makes them inwardly aimed, of what may be allied to them outwardly. The work of this emotion requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong. It will not tolerate a dog's life which feels itself only passively thrown into What Is, which is not seen of even recognized as wretched'. (E. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*)

We ought to start asking ourselves questions about the meaning of life again, who we are, where we come from, where we are going, what the future holds for us and what we expect. This must be the starting point. Being aware of this will be an important step to see, through wisdom, the meaning of history and, for believers, also a redeeming vision of life. A life that goes ahead according to the degree that one faces suffering that leads to knowledge, to attempt an answer to the eternal problem that is, as Pilate asked Jesus: 'What is truth?' (New Testament, John 18, 28-40 Today, the predominance of personal interest justifies the fact that each one of us considers as truth whatever pleases us. In a world that changes incessantly aspirations and desires change all the time, as do the criteria that define truth, with the result that we are unable to understand what is true and what is false [1-35].



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