

DIFFERENTLY SOPHISTS:
DOUBLE BREASTED SUITS AND TANK TOP T-SHIRTS

EDITORIAL

For this issue of *SpazioFilosofico*, we have chosen the theme “Sophists” because when it comes to marking the urgency of a rethinking, such a theme seems to us to be more precise than the subject “Truth.” This is not the place to list all the book titles devoted to truth that are currently present within the cultural debate; they are quite numerous, though. Relativism and postmodernity also receive widespread attention. In comparison with some time ago, in both productions (on truth and postmodernity) one can notice a sort of liberation from embarrassment, as if the taboo regarding truth had been removed and one could again mention “truth” and not end up labeled as a dogmatic metaphysician. On the side of postmodernity, it is as if, with its relativism, the postmodern has by now become a historical fact, no longer a project or an anti-totalitarian idea, and as if it can now be subjected to judgment; such judgment ends up being definitely less positive than the assessment postmodernity was granted as a project.

September 11, 2001 has been a colossal fact, which has provoked reactions that up to a second earlier could have never been imagined (such as Oriana Fallaci’s *La rabbia e l’orgoglio*) and that a second later became the manifesto for a sudden turn, from plus to minus, to be imparted on the weakened features of the once strong Western thought. For the suddenly many, strong had to return to mean strong such as facts. The time of nuances, interpretations, cultures, and tolerance that generate vulnerability was over. There are individuals around who, like the terrorists, take advantage of such a refined and freely willed vulnerability and turn it into decay and then ruins. Value judgments and criteria had to return to be as strong as facts. One cannot say that this position has become majoritarian, at least not within the intellectual world; yet a reevaluation of the claim that facts cannot be ignored is in act. It is in act, as it were, as a form of comfort for a part of the world that breaths air that has been stale for too long; and, we think, it is in act well beyond what is justified by the content and theoretical contribution that it carries within itself. It resembles a (sophistic?) song of sirens that, if we listen and relinquish ourselves to it, nourishes, guides, and delivers us from the anxiety of keeping together complicated issues in a complex manner. It thus seems mainly to possess a conspicuous use value within a time of crisis.

In this appeal to *wake up from the anti-dogmatic slumber* there is something simply regressive (as in Fallaci’s sermon), but also something epochal, new. We realize this now, ten years after 2001, when another global albeit not sudden fact such as the economic crisis has reached levels that can only minimally be interpreted. In a few days such an event has done away with improbable social and linguistic constructs that used to lie there unchallenged and that are now turned upside down, and no one can set them straight up again through the simple use of rational arguments or the naïve weapon of “the king is naked.” Naked historical facts perhaps cannot be grasped as such, yet their astonishing effects are an excellent reason why we should take them seriously.

The waking up from the anti-dogmatic slumber does not consent to being a new dogmatism but rather, at most, a sensed pragmatism, which aims not at the good but rather at the best. Situations, reasons of opportunity, the ineluctability of the decisions.... In this long and painful detour, what surprises is that we find ourselves within a sophistic atmosphere in an ordinary sense, exactly at the moment when

relativism seemed to have been cornered. And truly, relativism is cornered, whereas pragmatism rages in many different forms. Sophistry has been both, though, and for this reason it has been deemed dangerous.

In the unpopularity of sophistry and its many revaluations there is something that deserves thinking, now, again, and anew. The goal is not to re-evaluate sophistry again but rather better to understand what game is currently been played, and whether there exist alternatives that go beyond the choice between facts that overwhelm reason through a replacement of the truth purely and simply with themselves and reasons that quibble in the absence of gravity and responsibility due to the decline of both truth and lies. Frankly, this choice is asphyxiating within politics as well as philosophy, action as well as thought.

The victim of such an equal fight between facts without interpretations and interpretations without facts might be truth itself. Sophistic in different manners, the two parties find themselves together in their judging the question of truth as forever archived, if by truth we understand something else than mere correspondence (in this box there are 1000 beans). Whether in the form of saying good-bye to it or in that of taking possession of it, the exclusion of truth is the shared ground on which most of the contemporary debate unfolds.

Not the one who says “Truth! Truth!” will enter the kingdom of philosophy. Perhaps what is happening in philosophy is the same as what has already occurred in politics. Have we not observed that opposites attract? Doesn't the town of Milan, dressed up in double breasted suits, all interpretations and no facts, go perfectly hand in hand with the town of Varese, dressed down in tank tops, no form and all substance? What is the difference between a double breasted suit and a tank top? Of course the difference is great, but in the end it is not insurmountable. Differences here count less than resemblances. Isn't it time to turn page?

The articles gathered in this first issue of the second year of *SpazioFilosofico* (happy birthday!) are a small contribution in the direction of a different Italy—intellectually and politically. There is, in fact, need for change.

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(Translated by Silvia Benso)