Introduction

Contemporary Italian Philosophy

The Confrontation between Religious and Secular Thought

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In the first thirty years after World War II (1945–1975), the Catholic and secular [*laica*] cultures in Italy lived in a regimen of separation. This does not mean that no relations occurred between the two sides. What was missing, however, was mutual acknowledgment, the conviction that the other side's issues and theoretical proposals were meaningful and relevant. Secular culture tended to consider religion as a topic of confessional interest, and thus it excluded it from the issues worthy of discussion, whereas Catholic culture lived somewhat as if it were in a separate enclosure. This was mirrored also in the modes of circulation of culture because the important publishers and most well-known bookstores offer mainly secular products, whereas religious, philosophical, and theological themes are confined in a separate and marginal space.

This situation is a legacy of Italian history. The country had been unified in 1870 with the capture of Rome, a move against the temporal power of the Church. The new Kingdom of Italy had developed as a secular, liberal state. The teaching of theology was banned from state universities and that of religion from all schools. On its side, the Church situated itself almost always against the state and modernity. Moreover, unlike in the United States, the Protestant presence was very small, so Catholics did not find themselves conversant with Christians from other confessions, but only with representatives of a culture indifferent or hostile to their religious perspective.

To evaluate how the debate around religion develops on philosophical grounds, one must first consider the figures of Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile, the greatest representatives of Italian philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century. Croce and Gentile played a lively part in that vast movement of European thought that arose at the end of the nineteenth

century, looking for new avenues of philosophy after the crisis of positivism. For both, the starting point was a critical confrontation with positivism and Marxism, which at the end of the nineteenth century had itself come very close to positivism. Both Croce and Gentile put forth their proposals as critical renewals of Hegel, even as a "reformation" of his dialectic. Croce, with his solid grounding in history and literature, had a passion for concrete analyses, and in his philosophy looked for an articulate picture to support and frame his particular inquiries. Gentile, on the other hand, was a speculative mind who wanted to further the modern philosophy of the subject and make it coherent by constructing a rigorous, unitary system.

The issue on which both philosophers completely agree is the idea that one should eliminate any element of transcendence from philosophy. Both aim at delineating a totally immanent conception of Spirit [*Spirito*]. The whole of reality is resolved in the experience of Spirit, in the history through which Spirit creates and realizes itself. Both Croce and Gentile mean to elaborate a secular thought that, one should note, does not despise religion, but rather wants to retrieve within itself the best and truest meaning of religiosity. Their outlet will thus be a secular religion, or rather a religious secularity.

According to Croce, Hegel's system is too unitary, too monolithic. It is not true that Spirit unfolds along a single path culminating into philosophy. On the contrary, it consists of spheres that are linked to and at the same time distinct from one another. These spheres, or degrees, are four in number: two of a cognitive character (art and logic) and two of a practical nature (economics and ethics). As one can see, religion does not have a specific place. It is reduced to aesthetics as far as liturgical elements are concerned and to ethics and conceptual thought as far as other aspects. Croce does not actually give any special consideration to the autonomous features of religious experience. In this respect, his position remains greatly inferior to Hegel's philosophy of religion. As critics have amply acknowledged, the best and most fecund aspect of Croce's work does not lie in his systematic framework, but rather in his concrete work of analysis of the human world in its various forms. Of his work, one should say that it has always been sustained by a deep ethico-religious drive, which brought Croce, especially in his last years, to question intensely the presence of evil and the negative in history. The same inspiration guided him in his political opposition to fascism and defense of liberalism, which in him became a "religion of freedom."

Unlike Croce, Gentile finds that Hegel's system is not coherent enough. The great enemies of idealism are realism and naturalism; in short any theory that admits as its presupposition something else that is located outside and before thought. Idealism can maintain itself and win its fight only if it is coherent to the end and denies that any reality (whether idea or nature) exists outside thought thinking of it. The only reality is thus Spirit, and this reduces itself to the act of thought. Certainly thought, as subject, always comes across an objective reality opposed to itself; yet it realizes itself precisely by bringing

it back to itself time after time in an infinite process of spiritualization of the world. Such a radical position finds its confirmation in the history of philosophy. From Descartes to Berkeley, from Kant to Hegel, modern thought has asserted the centrality of the subject in an increasingly clearer manner and has progressively reduced the meaning of reality to it. Gentile's absolute idealism advances itself as the most coherent form in which this line of development finds its climax. Because the whole of history is the history of Spirit, the history of philosophy is the core of history. On this ground the entire experience of modernity is read as an irresistible movement toward radical immanence and thus toward the elimination of any transcendence.

Unlike Croce again, at the climax of his system Gentile retrieves Hegel's triad of art, religion, and philosophy. Yet, his conception of religion is much more schematic and hasty than the German philosopher's. For Hegel, religious experience has at its center the relation, full of tension, between the freedom of the finite subject and the infinite divine object. It stretches itself therefore from the moment of rupture, in which the subject asserts its autonomy, to the moment of reconciliation, in which the two extremes reunite. For Gentile, religion is simply the sphere within which the Absolute is asserted as object entirely independent from and opposed to the subject. Religion is characterized by a dogmatism that denies freedom; yet religion is also a spiritual experience, so here too does Spirit gradually assert its rights. This occurs in part already in religion itself, especially with Christianity and the dogma of the unity of God and humanity in Christ. The process, however, fulfills itself only in philosophy, in absolute idealism, which in the experience of Spirit, finds again the unity of divine and human. Gentile thus proposes his thought as the true theology, a totally immanent theology that denies any revelation and alterity; only thereby one that can fully assert the freedom of Spirit. Gentile advances a radical demythologization of Christianity in which religion is considered as an inferior philosophy. His entire thought and work, however, are supported by a strong ethico-religious drive, which brings him to understand his own historical task as that of a religious reformer who aims at realizing the liveliest legacy of Italian *Risorgimento* (Mazzini's secular religion) against the degenerations of the liberal state and against socialism, forgetful of the young Marx's humanism. Given this perspective, Gentile adhered to fascism and was the minister of education in the first Mussolini government. In that role, he introduced the teaching of religion in elementary schools, understanding religion as an inferior philosophy apt for children, whereas in the high schools the entire learning process would find its climax in philosophy. According to Gentile, education must be secular and nonconfessional. Yet secularity must be understood not as an agnostic and purely neutral attitude, but rather as a faith realized in the free quest of Spirit.

Croce and Gentile's neoidealism exerted a dominating, although not exclusive, influence on Italian philosophy and culture in the first part of the twentieth century. Among the alternative voices, the most important is

certainly Antonio Gramsci, the prestigious communist leader whose main work only became known after World War II. Born in Sardinia, Gramsci was educated in the extraordinary climate of 1915–1920 Turin, where he led the workers' fights at Fiat and planned the democracy of workers' councils. Here he worked with Togliatti and came to be on the same wavelength as the leftist liberal Piero Gobetti. After Mussolini's rise to power, Fascists murdered Gobetti. Together with other communist leaders, the regime condemned Gramsci to prison in a mock trial in 1927. He remained in prison until close to his death in 1937 due to a disease his imprisonment had worsened. His main thoughts are contained in the *Prison Notebooks* [*Quaderni dal carcere*], written between 1929 and 1934, and published in Italy in 1948 by Togliatti's initiative. In these notes, Gramsci deeply rethinks "the philosophy of praxis" (how he refers to historical materialism). On the one hand, he strictly connects it to his politically revolutionary project; on the other, he inserts it in the tradition of modern, especially Italian, thought. For Gramsci, Marxism is an integral historicism, which represents the climax of modern history. The decisive turn on this path is brought about by Hegel, who eliminates any dualistic and naturalistic residue, thereby giving birth to a philosophy of the subject. Marx makes such a subject concrete, and Croce retranslates into speculative terms the philosophy of praxis, definitively eliminating any transcendence and thus reaching the highest climax of bourgeois thinking. Gramsci in turn eliminates the idealistic elements within Croce's thought, thereby realizing a completely immanent vision, focused on human being as a concrete and social subject who indissolubly links his or her theoretical understanding to his or her praxis of transformation of the world.

Another name worth mentioning for his exemplary value is Piero Martinetti. Inspired by Plato, Schopenhauer, and especially Kant, he delineates a dualistic and pessimistic vision, in which reason gradually elevates itself to a principle of absolute and transcendent unity, which reason itself however can never fully possess. Furthermore, Martinetti was one of the first Italian philosophers seriously to study Indian thought. He severely criticized neoidealism, but also the Catholicism of his times. Martinetti was one of the eleven professors who refused to pledge allegiance to the fascist regime. Thus in 1931 he had to relinquish the position he held in Milan, where he had founded an important school, which through his student Antonio Banfi and his disciples exists to this day. After returning to his country house near Turin, Martinetti lived in solitude, cultivating the land; yet, he remained a point of reference for many young anti-Fascists. He was also arrested in 1935 for a few days. To the police officer who had arrested him and asked for his identification, he replied disdainfully: "I am a European citizen, who by chance was born in Italy." With his rigorous coherence, Martinetti is a spiritual master, and a source of inspiration both for secular philosophers such as Norberto Bobbio and Ludovico Geymonat, and for Catholic thinkers such as Augusto Del Noce and Luigi Pareyson. He is perhaps the only figure with

whom both secular and Catholic thinkers can identify with equal devotion and admiration to the point that one often hears of a Turinese "Martinettism."

The only organized and efficacious opposition to Gentile's predominance in philosophy was in the Catholic area, and precisely in the neoscholastic trend that went back to Thomas Aquinas and had its center in the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan. This orientation dominated Catholic thought in the first thirty years of the twentieth century, but it did not bring new results at the theoretical level.

The entire panorama of Italian thought started to change in the 1930s, both because new foreign trends, such as phenomenology and especially existentialism, became known and discussed, and because Gentile's school started to split internally. For both theoretical and political reasons, some of his students moved closer to Croce and then later to Marxism. Other thinkers close to him developed an interest for the religious dimension that was inspired by Augustine and Antonio Rosmini and privileged the interior experience of the subject. From this tendency, whose representatives were especially Armando Carlini, Augusto Guzzo, and Federico Sciacca, a second area of Christian thought developed, which was an alternative to neoscholasticism and which, although it was not a real school, was qualified with the collective name of "spiritualism." Some years later, an important thinker who was developing his own formation at that time at Guzzo's school, Luigi Pareyson, will reevoke that experience by saying that the diaspora of Gentile's school repeated in Italy, 100 years later, the division in the Hegelian school between the left and the right. The Hegelian attempt to reconcile Christianity and modernity had failed, according to Pareyson, and opened the way for the alternative between Feuerbach's atheistic humanism and Kierkegaard's rediscovered Christianity. The same choice presented itself again more urgently after the exhaustion of Gentile's thought. This alternative was the theme with which Italian thought found itself confronted, according to Pareyson, at the end of the war.

The panorama one encountered immediately after the end of the war presented a sharp division between Catholic and secular thought. Because the latter was in turn split between the supporters of Marxism and those of a liberal-democratic orientation, one can properly say that Italian philosophy in the first decades after the end of the war unfolded within three sharply distinct areas: the Catholic, the Marxist, and the one that defines itself as "secular" in the strict sense. The common element in all is the conviction that in the previous period, because of the fascist dictatorship and the predominance of idealism, Italian culture had closed itself off to the external world and lost its contacts with the most vital movements of the European culture. The urgent task presenting itself after the war was that of intensively resuming such relations, and building a new and more open culture. This shared inspiration was lively and efficacious in the first two years after the Liberation, and even caused some collaboration among the various areas.

The climate changed abruptly in 1947 when De Gasperi under pressure from the United States expelled communists and socialists from the government, and worsened with the excommunication of the communists, which Pius XII decreed in 1949. For the entire period of the cold war, the three areas conversed almost exclusively within themselves. Contacts resumed around the 1960s, when conditions were favored by the de-Stalinization of the communist world and by the renewal brought about by John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council among Catholics. During this period an intense dialogue between Catholics and Marxists developed in the search for points of convergence that might enable a shared involvement in society.

The main theme on which postwar Italian Marxism focused was the confrontation with Gramsci's thought. By prominently publishing Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* beginning in 1948, Togliatti imposed his own theoretical and political views, which saw Marxism as a historicism capable of both continuing the Italian cultural tradition and of renewing it in a democratic direction. An alternative line of thought, which failed to gain influence, was promoted by intellectuals such as Elio Vittorini and by philosophers such as Galvano Della Volpe and Giulio Preti, who were especially active in northern Italy and who proposed a sharp break with the past and a radical opening of Italian culture to new trends coming from the United States and from the most advanced European countries.

In the secular area a program of retrieval and reassertion of a critical and antimetaphysical conception of reason prevailed. This was the area most involved in the effort of importing into Italy the best results of European and American thought, from historicism to existentialism, from pragmatism to neopositivism and analytic philosophy. The most vibrant center was Turin, where Nicola Abbagnano and Norberto Bobbio led the movement of "neoilluminism," which was greatly open to the contributions from human sciences and especially from sociology. Abbagnano was well known to the public because by the end of the 1930s he had started to develop his own original formulation of the philosophy of existence. In a polemic with Heidegger, Jaspers, and later with Sartre's positions, who emphasized the negative character of possibility, and with Marcel's religious existentialism, who anchored the ultimate guarantee for the realization of human projects in transcendence, Abbagnano advanced a "positive existentialism," which focused on the finitude of human projects and on the open and undecided character of possibility. In the new, postwar climate, Abbagnano was mainly concerned with discerning how, and with which instruments and which techniques, thought can cooperate to the enactment of the best possible choices, to the realization of possibility. For this reason, his philosophy opened up to cooperate with natural and human sciences, to deepen methodological studies, and to listen to the most current foreign voices. Among these, he privileged John Dewey's thought. On this path, his existentialism ended up with neoilluminism.

Another representative of positive existentialism, next to Abbagnano, was Enzo Paci, a student of Banfi's in Milan. In these years, Paci moved to a form of relationism that Whitehead inspired, and finally ended up with a thought attempting to combine Husserl's phenomenology and Marxism. In 1951, he founded *aut aut*, one of the most well-known and successful Italian philosophical journals, which Paci's student, Pier Aldo Rovatti, now directs. Several other thinkers who retain an important place within the Italian contemporary panorama have been educated at Paci's school: Carlo Sini, who, among other things, has deeply studied the philosophy of Charles Peirce, and Salvatore Veca, who has devoted himself especially to political philosophy, introducing in Italy the theories of John Rawls and other overseas thinkers. With respect to neoilluminism, the most genuine and coherent interpreter of this line of thought was Norberto Bobbio, who recently died. A philosopher of rights and politics linked to the legacy of Piero Gobetti's "liberal socialism" and attentive to Hans Kelsen's and analytic philosophy's contributions, Bobbio defended and reasserted the great themes of modern liberal and democratic thought. He engaged repeatedly in a constructive dialogue with the Marxists, spurring them to review their most dogmatic and extremist positions. With regard to religious themes, both neoilluminism and Marxism proved to be substantially insensitive to this dimension of existence.

Within the area of Catholic thought, the discussion between neoscholastics and spiritualists, who tended to prevail, continued. Both tendencies aim to show how a path leading to God, to a transcendent dimension, unfolds from experiences common to everyone. Neoscholastics, which Gustavo Bontadini led, start from the most general experience, that of becoming, and try to provide a rigorous and incontrovertible proof for the existence of God. Spiritualists, on the other hand, want to start with human experience with the dimension of the subject. With its peremptory need, which also generates some degree of anxiety, to provide a final and cogent proof, neoscholastic thought is certainly more rigorous, but also more distant from the issues and questions rising in a human world and in an increasingly lively and autonomous society. The spiritualist discourse is less solid on the level of argumentation, but as a whole is more attentive to catch the various and novel questions arising within human experience. Thus, its line fell apart sooner, but as a whole its experience prepared the establishment of a new, more mature, and open climate within the Christian thought of the following years.

This new generation of philosophers, educated between the end of Fascism and the beginning of the postwar period, soon distanced itself not only from idealism, but also from spiritualism. Through this path, it came into contact with the great European philosophies and also with the most important theologies, and it became a significant and in some cases original interlocutor within the international debate. Starting in 1961, Enrico Castelli organized in Rome a long series of meetings which world-class philosophers,

from Bultmann to Gadamer, Ricoeur to Levinas, attended. In this way, he introduced in Italy the interest for demythologization and biblical hermeneutics. Alberto Caracciolo, a thinker not connected to any Christian denomination, but strongly interested in the religious experience and in the themes of evil and nihilism, first developed a philosophy of religion aimed at showing, following Schleiermacher's example, the autonomy of this sphere in relation to other fields of experience. Moving from neoscholastic thought Italo Mancini and Virgilio Melchiorre opened an engagement with phenomenology and hermeneutics. The former also confronted himself with the entire German theology from Barth on, and he introduced the thought of Bonhoeffer to Italy.

One of the most original and incisive voices is that of Augusto Del Noce, who radically confronted the problem of atheism and its connection with modern thought. Faced with the enigma of existence and the problem of evil, one is called to a radical option: either one chooses a naturalistic vision, according to which evil is reduced to finitude, or one embraces the religious view, which takes evil back to human choices and sin. Already at the beginning of the history of the West, the myth of Anaximander and that of Genesis present these two alternatives. The issue presents itself again at the origin of modernity when Descartes asserts, on the one hand, the subject's centrality and autonomy, and on the other, God's absolute freedom. From here two alternative lines unfold: the one largely prevailing being the philosophy of the subject, the climax of which is Hegel, and which finds its actualization in Marx's atheism. This is the perspective that most decisively denies all transcendence and finds its most consequent formulation in Gentile's absolute idealism. For Del Noce, the failure of Gentile's thought affects this whole line and opens the way for a retrieval of the religious trend, which is minoritarian but truer moving from Pascal and Malebranche and through Vico coming to Rosmini and Gioberti. Rather than innovating, this second way represents and develops on modern grounds the insurmountable legacy of traditional Christian thought.

For Luigi Pareyson, too, Hegel is the climax of the main line of modern thought, which tends toward immanence and secularization. Unlike Del Noce, who in the end wants to retrieve traditional philosophy, Pareyson situates himself decisively on the ground of modernity, which is that of a philosophy of freedom. To the line of immanence he opposes a richer (although still minoritarian) series of thinkers, which goes from Pascal and Vico to Fichte and Schelling, Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. According to Pareyson, the conciliation that Hegel offers to Christianity is a kiss of death; in the end, it is an equivocation that comes to light immediately after the death of the philosopher. On the one hand, there are those who continue Hegel's philosophy and realize it as ending in radical atheism, such as Feuerbach and Marx. On the other hand, there are those who, against Hegel, find again genuine Christianity, as is the case with Kierkegaard. In this light, after the

dissolution of Hegel's synthesis or, 100 years after, of Gentile's, the decisive issue for philosophy itself is that of a choice in favor of or against Christianity. In this picture, Pareyson, a Christian thinker, situates himself on the side of existentialism, which he develops in the direction of an ontological personalism. The human being is not to be thought as a subject of knowledge, but rather, and more radically, as a person: as such, it is constitutively in relation with being and open to the truth. Nevertheless, it is itself an interpretation of the truth.

On these grounds and rethinking Heidegger's, Jaspers's, and Marcel's teachings, Pareyson develops a hermeneutic philosophy that unfolds in an autonomous and parallel manner with respect to Gadamer's and Ricoeur's. At its center is the idea that the truth is not to be conceived of as object, which thought may reproduce from the outside, but as inexhaustible origin, which thought interprets at its own risk. In this picture, different interpretations are entirely legimate, and a dialogue is thus guaranteed that recognizes in the other a different, but equally genuine, perspective on truth. With these developments, Pareyson provides a decisive contribution to the introduction of hermeneutics in Italy and to the raising of the Italian philosophical debate to a more mature level. The last years of his life were devoted to a further deepening. Because the relation of human beings to being and truth always has the feature of interpretation and because this is a free act always exposed to the risk of failure, the issue is that of focusing on this knot of freedom, on its double-edged and risky character, which involves both the human and the divine being, and which, in the end, is revealed as the very face of being. This is the stage of the "ontology of freedom," in which, following the example of the later Schelling, philosophy realizes itself as hermeneutic of the religious experience. Here, the discourse focuses on the theme of evil, on sin and suffering, and it finds in the religious myth the only language capable of approaching these themes without reducing their thickness. The task of philosophy then is that of resaying the truth of myth by transferring it on the universal ground of thought that is common to everybody, both believers and nonbelievers.

The novelty that imposed itself after the second half of the 1970s was the end of the division in the three areas and the fading of the separation between Christian thought and secular culture. First was the crisis of Marxism, which quickly lost its position of prominence after 1945. Immediately after this, the debate focused on the "crisis of reason," understood as modern reason, rigid and projectual. The retrieval of reason was the banner of neoilluminism, the movement that had dominated postwar secular philosophers. This very orientation was thus called into question. In general, a crisis of the great visions of synthesis, of totalizing discourses claiming to unveil the global sense of history and experience, arose so that what was asserted were perspectives that accepted as a starting point a situation of radical pluralism, devoid of synthesis. Hermeneutics came to replace dialectics and

metaphysics. In this horizon, the rigid separation between secular and Christian thinking fell apart, and philosophers met and separated on the basis of the themes they addressed.

The new situation is introduced by Cacciari's "negative thought" [*pensiero negativo*] and finds a guide in the hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo, a student of Pareyson, who together with Pier Aldo Rovatti develops a "weak thought" [*pensiero debole*] in which the themes of nihilism and the postmodern condition are central. The crisis of modern reason in its claim to dominate the world and the fading of the metaphysical view that thought of being as presence have started a process of weakening which, according to Vattimo, is to be read as a positive *chance*. In fact, it can free us from the authoritarian and substantially violent perspective that was implied in the entire Western thought. Along this path hermeneutics meets again the biblical legacy: the Christian God, who in the incarnation consigns his absoluteness to the weakness of the flesh, to the risk of history and interpretation, is located at the origin of the process of weakening. On these grounds, one can read the whole history of the West as a process of secularization, that is, of interpretation and application of the Christian message. Thus, hermeneutics acknowledges its own origin in the core of Christian religion. In this way, however, Vattimo seems to advance again a global vision of history, seen as a linear process that, from a strong and authoritarian beginning, moves toward a development increasingly entrusted to the free interpretation of the human being. In this sense his proposal comes close to the move toward immanence that Gentile exalted and that Del Noce and Pareyson criticized, although Del Noce and Pareyson understood this unfolding as the main direction of modern thought and experience.

The need for a confrontation with the Christian tradition and in general with the religious dimension is largely common among the most significant contemporary philosophers. This tendency is particularly evident in Massimo Cacciari, who had started out with Marxism, and also in Vincenzo Vitiello. Something similar is true for Mario Ruggenini and for Salvatore Natoli, whereas their teacher, Emanuele Severino, remains strongly polemical against the Christian faith. After his formation at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan at Bontadini's school, Severino clamorously broke from it, asserting the need of a "return to Parmenides," that is, to a thought capable of asserting being and radically denying nothingness, and emphasizing a reading of the history of the West as a progressive path toward nihilism, which ensues from Plato's choice of asserting the reality of becoming. The religious inspiration, however, is explicit in Sergio Givone, who develops the legacy of Luigi Pareyson's "tragic thought" especially on aesthetic grounds. The philosophy of religion is at the center of the interests of the late Marco Maria Olivetti, a student of Enrico Castelli, who among other things kept the tradition his teacher started alive, and regularly organized in Rome important series of international conferences. The proceedings of these are

published in *Archivio di Filosofia*, a philosophy journal under Olivetti's direction. More distant from the religious themes is Remo Bodei, who is, however, very sensitive to ethical and political issues. He is among the most attentive intellectuals trying to grasp the transformations of the current society and reflect on the destinies of the individual within the new horizon of the contemporary world. These authors frequently enter in conversation with Italian theologians, who have left neoscholasticism behind and in their turn widely engage international theological thought. Particularly distinguished among them are Bruno Forte, Piero Coda, and the Milan group of Giuseppe Colombo and Pier Angelo Sequeri.

In this new horizon, not only a dialogue but also a cooperation and in some cases a real convergence between philosophy and theology occurs. This ground has been deepened especially by Giovanni Ferretti, a philosopher whose formation occurred at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan but who later worked at length with Pareyson's students, Claudio Ciancio and Ugo Perone. In this way, he approached hermeneutics. According to him, "critical hermeneutics" can be the shared ground for a kind of reason that has given up the claims to totality and for a theology that subtracts itself to confessional dependency to develop its reasons on a ground accessible to all. After the engagement in the 1960s and 1970s with the themes of history and eschatology, politics and secularization, now the common issues are those of evil and freedom, finitude, subjectivity, spirit, and the question of ethics on a planetary scale. Theology advances the themes of Christology and of the Trinity, philosophy those of intersubjectivity and alterity. Since 1987, *Filosofia e Teologia*, a journal regularly devoted to the confrontation between theology and philosophy has been published with editorial sites across Italy.

In the 1990s, the Italian cultural situation described herein, characterized by the nearing of secular and Catholic thought and by the convergence of philosophy and theology within a hermeneutic horizon, faces a new, greater challenge: the confrontation between religions and cultures, and the theme of globalization. Italian philosophy has been slower to detect the new horizon, partly because it lingered in the discussion between the supporters of modernity and of postmodernity, which today appears to us as a rearguard debate. This time theology has moved more quickly, spurred by the international debate on pluralism and inclusivism that began in the United States and in Great Britain. I think that one can indicate at least three needs that the new situation imposes as urgent for philosophical thought: first, in-depth work on the issue of intercultural relations is required; second, a renewed reflection on the theme of universality is needed; and, finally, a style of thought that is attentive and sensitive to the dimension of conflict in all its various forms is in order.

As for the first point, the prevailing hermeneutic climate with its opening to dialogue among different positions seems to offer a favorable

starting point. An important premise to tackle the new tasks consists in the acknowledgment that Western reason is at its core a dialogical reason. In its modern path, it is marked by the long and at times harsh confrontation between philosophy and theology, as well as by the debate between secular and religious thought, the path of which has been here delineated for the last century in Italy. To evaluate this aspect deeply, Hegel's lesson remains essential, especially in the pages in the *Phenomenology* devoted to the fight of Enlightenment against faith, where he has shown the decisive relevance of this confrontation between religious dimension and autonomous reason.

This recognition of the pluralistic and dialogical character of Western thought is the premise to approach the confrontation with other cultures. The most recent discussions on this theme have convincingly shown that the dialogue with other cultures cannot be carried out by an objectifying thought that claims to have a panoramic view of its own and other traditions. We are situated in a determined situation, and we relate to others moving from there. In this sense the situated and perspectival aspect of thought and therewith its hermeneutic nature have been recognized. Theology has particularly emphasized the relational character qualifying the Christian revelation and the Absolute it proposes. More generally, several authors have claimed that this relational character affects our entire experience, and thus must orient our thinking. On these issues, the contributions of John Hick, John Cobb, and David Tracy meet those of French theologians such as Claude Geffré and Jacques Dupuis as well as the philosophical perspective of Paul Ricoeur.

The dimension of universality must be also thought in relational terms. The concept of universality, which becomes timely again in the epoch of globalization, has been traditionally conceived of as an a priori construed notion, as a category that reduces any particular to its homogeneous measure, according to a preconstituted and nonmodifiable norm. For this reason, nineteenth-century philosophy has rightly criticized and abandoned it already. Today it is making a comeback, especially in the discussions on world ethics, where it is understood as a regulative principle, as a set of criteria and norms that may obtain an intercultural acknowledgement and orient action. Time and again in the history of the West, starting as far back as with Xenophanes, the observation that other cultures and other religions exist has spurred one to look for a universal dimension of thought where one could understand one another. The universal is something that is elaborated in relation to the concrete experience, that allows it to enter a more adequate and richer relation with it to make it stand out in its specific features. At the roots of the genesis of the universal is always a break with respect to concreteness; by taking distance from it, one enters a more formal dimension in which the concrete is not obliterated but rather transposed and put in the condition to communicate with another concrete. In this sense the universal should be thought as a formal dimension that does not require rotation

around a single center. Thus, a "universal without one" is one that enables exchange among particulars without forcing them to become homogeneous.

Following the line here advanced, we can distinguish between the properly universal dimension, which has a formal character, and its concrete realizations, which develop on historical grounds. Think, for example, of the unity of the divine Xenophanes claimed, of the minimal element common to religions the deists sought after, of universal human rights the Enlightenment formulated. What is universal in these formulations is the formal element that lives in the distancing from the concrete. It supports, time after time, a historical concretization that is universal only in this formal ground, and which nevertheless is historically necessary to give life to that formal element. One can thus understand why various historical claims, even when they energetically claim universal validity, may be failing and come into conflict with one another. To examine them and to evaluate critically the reasons for their conflict, one must then refer to the formal dimension, which is properly universal. Here, however, we are not talking about a monocentric universal in which in the end there is room only for one contestant who as winner dominates the others. In the "universal without one" is room for a true "struggle for recognition" in which my particular claim fights not to annihilate the other, but so that the other acknowledges my needs. The other should not abandon his or her needs, but he or she must widen his or her horizon to be able to coexist with me. In this perspective, the universal is conceived of as a wider sphere that can embrace within itself the opposed reasons for the conflict without its own self-destruction and can offer the conditions for the conciliation of such reasons.