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Meeting for Friendship amongst People
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The recovery of the existential borderlines in nihilism

Mazzarella: "We are in a society of those who are too free actually to be free."

Rimini, August 28th, 2014 – "The society of global risk, to use the sociologist Ulrich Beck's term, lives the paradox between the exaltation of individuality on one hand, and the risk for someone to become marginal compared with the social context he or she is in, on the other hand." With this Costantino Esposito, Professor of History of Philosophy at the University of Bari, introduced the theme of the annual appointment with philosophy at the Meeting, which was held in Eni "Caffè Letterario". Esposito then presented the speakers Eugenio Mazzarella, Professor of Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Naples; Luigi Manconi, President of the Extraordinary Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights of the Senate of the Italian Republic, and Adrian Fabris, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Pisa.

Mazzarella exposes the current "anthropological shock that creates an estranged self, without culture, sexual identity, or genes" and the presence of a "crisis which attacks the *homo sapiens'* social genesis." This damages the foundations of the human as a political being, according to the classical philosophical concept. "We are witnessing the demoralization of a society in which people feel too free to be actually free, where the person can negotiate everything, from social role to gender identity."

Discussing the problem of moral relativism, Mazzarella said that "it is a factor of the history of our freedom." He notices at the same time the danger of a decrease of freedom, mentioning Nietzsche, a "wishing for day and wishing for night" and the danger, in the era of nihilism, that "technicians in the lab claim to rewrite the anthropological bases of the human being."

"We must understand the periphery even in the socio-economic sense," said Manconi. "We are over the shock of the crisis, in an era of painful transition, but the explosion of subjectivity is actually a good thing, and allows for the reconstruction of new social ties." For Manconi, the crisis of traditional values involves a pluralism of values: it does not amount to nihilism, lack of morals, and human defeat.

"The human being is at the center of it all, and, at the same time, is subject to a morality dictated by others," said Fabris. "Individuality and individualism are not the same thing. The problem of today's nihilism is when the relationship we have with ourselves becomes the basis of every other relationship," i.e., it becomes the only means to judge reality and the exclusive parameter of each relationship. "The danger of this approach is that, if one is isolated, then one is also the master of one's own meaning. This creates a dog-eat-dog situation which then the state is called and forced to regulate." The antidote to such anthropological reduction requires the recovery of the awareness that "I am in relationship with the other, especially with the Other that gives me meaning."

According to Fabris, the current paradigm is of man as machine – no longer seen, as in the past, as made up of both body and soul, and thus in relation with other people – made up of single parts functioning together."

Therefore, we need to be reminded that a person is not just a 'body', but that she is made of flesh and is responsible for her own actions and their consequences. "Freedom necessarily implies responsibility. If we were not responsible we would not be free either."



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If Manconi looks positively at the “ethical experiment to build the new morality necessary to build new social ties,” Mazzarella instead points out that “no individualization will ever be possible without the community ‘I-you’ preceeding us.” Esposito concluded the session stating that to set a limit to modern nihilism, we need to return to the idea of truth as proclaimed by St. Augustine: a relationship with and infinite longing for the Other.

(F.Pi.)

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