Senso e paradosso by Emilio Garroni

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Some of my reasons for this hunch connect with my earlier remarks. If the dialectic is conceived methodologically as a manner of thinking that may be employed in the "scientific" investigation of human affairs (which is my inclination, and if space allowed I would have mentioned the specific conceptual content that defines it), then such a dialectical interpretation would provide the answer to the first issue I raised, namely, what is Mosca's method or approach, as distinct from the specifics of his doctrines. Second, since, as I have argued elsewhere, the dialectic defines the deep structure of Gramsci's thought in the Notebooks, this would add a methodological similarity to the substantive one postulated above to exist between the two thinkers.

In conclusion, Albertoni's work is useful, valuable, and welcome for the information and accounts it provides. But it is even more significant for the insights it indirectly suggests, and for the future research it challenges us to do, those of us who are so impertinent as to complain about its omissions and blemishes.

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Senso e paradosso
By Emilio Garroni
Bari: Laterza, 1986

The definition of "what philosophy is" and what kind of knowledge it legitimizes is a problem unresolved and, to a certain extent, unresolvable. If philosophy is just a form of literary discourse—as has been stated—we still do not know what literariness is. Maybe philosophy is, more properly, the old name given to the unlimited process of interpretation that characterizes the human enterprise in history. In one word: it is "hermeneutics." We can also ask in what sense philosophical knowledge is different from scientific knowledge. Is the task of the philosopher to build, with "archaeological" or "genealogical" methods, a "history of the ideas"? Or is the purpose of philosophy to build a metalanguage, a "superscience" of some sort, able to re-elaborate the results of the different sciences on a higher level?

To explore and determine what is the "object" of the philosophical enterprise is the main purpose of the most recent book by Emilio Garroni. In it he investigates the nature of philosophical questioning more than philosophy as a discipline or a type of knowledge. Garroni, professor of Aesthetics at Rome University, in recent years has increasingly concentrated his attention on authors like Kant (and especially the Critique of Judgment), Wittgenstein, and Heidegger in order to understand in what sense answers to questions concerning the foundations of the philosophical enterprise are possible. And if the nature of "general" philosophical knowledge is a problem, an even bigger difficulty surrounds the status of the so-called special philosophies, among which Aesthetics seems to suffer a paradoxically weak position. A close reading of its history, since the first "modern" use of the word by Baumgarten, shows that Aesthetics has been, since the beginning, a "philosophy of art dissatisfied with itself." The dominion of the "aesthetic" as an adjective is nowadays so large and vague that Garroni needs to begin his book by asking himself if, perhaps, Aesthetics is a philosophy "without object," and if, in that case, it is ready to
dissolve into other disciplines.

But this is only Garroni’s first move. His second move, in a book written in a very careful style which tends to avoid a “difficult” and “specialized” terminology, is to try to understand in what sense these questions about Aesthetics and Philosophy go beyond the purely academic and touch upon more essential preoccupations. The shift is a philosophical one: in Kant’s terms, a “transcendental” one. These questions about philosophy—Garroni states—underscore the problem of “questioning” in general. Philosophy is the thematization of an endless interrogation about knowledge, because it is the instance that poses the question: “What is a question in general?” But such a paradoxical question shouldn’t be understood as just a verbalistic one; and its purpose is not precisely to explore the “essence” of questioning. “Object or theme of this book”—Garroni writes in the preface—“is the ‘sense’, the problem of sense and experience in general.”

The point is that all knowledge and all experience are marked by an instance of comprehension that philosophy, since Socrates—here opposed to Thales—and more radically Kant, thematizes, disputing in this movement its own legitimacy. But the problem is not created by philosophy; it is already there, and it appears every time knowledge and experience, thoughts as “processes” more than “systems,” come into being. So, for example, the “progress” of the sciences, the transformation of their paradigms, begins with a putting-into-question and a thematization of the paradigms themselves. The authentic form of philosophy, then, is not an activity of definition or judgment, but interrogation, wonder, as the Greeks very well knew. Interrogation, in this sense, is the condition through which the institution, the foundation of knowledge, reveals
itself. Philosophy is not knowledge *strictu sensu*: it doesn’t give definitions and, to a certain extent, it is unable to give explanations. It is not a privileged branch of what we know, because it is first of all subsequent and continuous putting into question of the already constituted knowledge: it is the institution of a *distance* through which the conditions of possibility of knowledge are thematized. Philosophy’s problem is the problem of the possibility of a knowledge. In its most radical move, another step back (we can read in this “transcendental” sense Heidegger’s *Schritt zurück*), philosophy faces the problem of a philosophical investigation about knowledge. Philosophy, and experience also, are both founded on this *paradox* of self-thematization. The “paradox” is basically the double implication of paradigm and knowledge, implicit and explicit, even unknown and known, “earth” and “world” in Heideggerian terms, “sense” and “meaning.” Every movement of understanding comes from the relation between these two levels. Experience itself is embedded in this original condition. Garroni’s reflection about the “founding paradox” (paradosso fondante), together with his distinction between “understanding” (*intendere*) and “comprehending” (*comprendere*) and his persistent reference to common language are worthwhile contributions to the rethinking of both philosophical and everyday experience.

Yet it is in the second part that the investigation develops its best insights, in the third chapter titled “Aesthetic Comprehension.” Here Garroni develops the Kantian legacy with analyses of the interweaving of aesthetics and philosophy in thinkers such as Dewey, Croce, and again Wittgenstein and Heidegger, thinkers that postulate the problem of “sense” by means of a transcendental reflection of some sort.

In Garroni’s discussion the aesthetic experience exemplarily shows, as already in Kant, the existence of a principle conditioning that *Stimmung*, that “being-already in situation,” which is preliminary to any possible knowledge. Long and dense pages of the book are dedicated to the analysis of the nature of that “faculty of judgment” which is the keystone of Kant’s critical arch. The question “What is aesthetics?” becomes an internal articulation of the question “What is philosophy?” And in its being related to the problem of the “conditions of experience,” before any possible “knowledge,” it presents itself in some ways as the “most original” (originaria) question, in Heideggerian terms. In other words: what is fundamental in this reflection is the presupposition, in terms of “conditions of possibility,” of a *sense*—even as a “feeling”—preceding and internal to any thinkable *meaning*.

Kant’s *Third Critique*, Garroni suggests, configures “Aesthetics” not as a philosophy of art, but as a philosophy of “sense.” The “works of art” are, in this perspective, only some historical phenomena, exemplifying that “institution of sense” which “opens” the possibility of meaning in general. In this formulation Kant is very close to Heidegger, and in particular to Heidegger’s famous essay on The *Origin of the Work of Art*, in which art is just one of the events of the “setting-into-work of truth.” Here again the problem is “sense,” considered as origin and “horizon” of meanings and concepts. We are always and since the beginning immersed into experience in general; art, what we historically call “art,” has constituted, in a certain tradition, the place in which the *determinate* experience is exemplarily represented as revelation. What is at stake here is not the “definition” of art but the comprehension of the coming-into-being of experience, in general and in particular. We understood better, in this per-
Prospective, the use of metaphors of "illumination" and "disclosure," both in Heidegger and Wittgenstein, to conote the happening of sense. An authentic, "transcendental" Aesthetics can be thought without referring to any "art" whatsoever; its questioning concerns comprehension and experience themselves.

Garroni's readings of Kant, Heidegger and Wittgenstein are provoking and original and different from the philosophers of "weak thought," explicitly criticized in a section of the book. His discourse is always well articulated and controlled and in its conclusions even passionate. Its difficulties are related to the nature of the questions it raises: it states that paradox and sense are the two inseparable faces of the human condition; it stresses the necessity, for an authentic comprehension, of radical movements of de-familiarization; and puts into question the certainties of knowledge in general.

Garroni has returned to the problems discussed in Senso e paradosso on various occasions, among which we would like to recall his long essay on "Aesthetics and Literary Criticism," published in the fourth volume on the Letteratura Italiana edited by Alberto Asor Rosa (Einaudi, 1987).

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The Hidden Italy: A Bilingual Edition of Italian Dialect Poetry
Hermann W. Haller, ed.
Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986

On the crowded subway, making my way to the prison to teach Black and Puerto Rican inmates how to write, I think of the fable of the shoemaker who struggles to make shoes for the oppressed while his own go barefoot over the stones

(Daniela Gioseffi, in Alfonso, 217)

Cintin no'I va a li sagris, pai país dal Friul, a sunin li ciampanis, no i violins pal Friul! Co al jòt in plassa un puòr pierdút in tal Friul ghi dà la so giacheta dongia il clìpit di un mur, co al jòt un dai puòrs ch'a van soj pal Friul content ghi dà il so cùrr sot il sël ch'al ven scur.

"Adio mari, adio pari, jo i vai via dal Friul, e i vai via ta la Mérica, l'aligria dal Friul!" Treno, ti l'as puartat viers il mar azur, ah se malincunia via dal Friul.

[Vincent doesn't attend the feasts of the Friulan town, the bells are ringing, and the violins are not playing in the Friuli! When he sees in the square a poor soul lost in the Friuli, he gives him his jacket, near the small warm wall, when he sees one of the poor souls go by lonely through the Friuli, he gives him happily his own heart, under the darkening sky.

"Good-bye, Mother, good-bye Father, I am leaving the Friuli, I am going away to America, the happy land of the Friuli!"

Train, you took him to the blue sea, oh what a gloom, far away from the Friuli.]

(Pier Paolo Pasolini, in Haller, 266-67)

Poeti italo-americani / Italo-American Poets
Antologia bilingue / A Bilingual Anthology
Ferdinando Alfonso, ed.
Catanzaro: Antonio Carello Editore, 1985