

# Editorial

## Editoriale

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**Abstract.** In introducing the inspiration behind and aims of the new Rivista Italiana di Filosofia Politica (Italian Journal of Political Philosophy), launched by the Italian Society for Political Philosophy, this editorial explores the relationship between politics and philosophy. As does all philosophy, political philosophy arises from the desire to understand what is new and to question existing reality. Political philosophy is thus political in a twofold sense: on the one hand, it is an act of freedom vis-à-vis existing power or knowledge, and, on the other, it is an attempt to establish social relations based on discursive reasoning, and on open participatory mechanisms for decision-making. This dual political attitude is ever more vital in the face of challenges to contemporary societies, such as climate change, migratory movements, dramatic inequalities, and the apparatus of surveillance. Eschewing a philosophy of distraction and non-engagement, political philosophy (and this Journal) endorses the idea of another, “more civic”, philosophy, one which is committed to the opening of new spaces of personal and collective freedom. This Journal intends to nurture the dialogue between Italian and international philosophical-political communities, showing the richness of Italian discussion, and highlighting some of the most authoritative international scholars.

**Keywords:** politicity of philosophy, engagement, freedom, wonder, *philosophia civilior*.

**Riassunto.** Nel presentare l'intento che ispira il progetto della nuova Rivista Italiana di Filosofia Politica, promossa dalla Società Italiana di Filosofia Politica, l'editoriale discute della relazione tra politica e filosofia. La filosofia politica nasce, come ogni indagine filosofica, dalla volontà di comprendere ciò che è nuovo e di mettere in questione la realtà esistente. In ciò ha una doppia dimensione “politica”: è atto di

libertà nei confronti di ogni potere e sapere dominante ed è tentativo di istituire relazioni sociali basate sulla parola, sulla razionalità discorsiva, su meccanismi partecipativi aperti. Questo atteggiamento appare tanto più essenziale di fronte alle sfide che la società contemporanea si trova a vivere a partire dalla sfida ambientale, ai movimenti migratori, alle drammatiche disuguaglianze e ai meccanismi di controllo della vita individuale. Di fronte al rischio di una “filosofia d’evasione”, la filosofia politica (e questa Rivista) vuole custodire l’idea di un’altra filosofia, più civile, impegnata ad aprire nuovi spazi di libertà personale e collettiva. La Rivista intende inaugurare uno spazio di dialogo tra la comunità filosofico-politica italiana e quella internazionale, rappresentando all’esterno la ricchezza della ricerca e della discussione italiana e facendo rifluire all’interno alcune delle voci più autorevoli della comunità internazionale.

**Parole chiave:** politicità della filosofia, engagement, libertà, stupore, *philosophia civilior*.

Every new philosophical journal aspires to open up a – public – space for philosophical expression and, above all, for the gesture from which it arises: that sense of wonder regarding being, which is both delight in the new but also a questioning of that which has always been seen, and its explanations.

Philosophy is always open to radical questioning. It is not enmeshed in those webs of thought which it itself has woven over the centuries, in the concepts, principles and theories – so profound, so pure, so sophisticated – which it has painstakingly elaborated, in such abundance that one might easily imagine that there is nothing that hasn’t already been conceived and comprehended. But, indeed, and always, there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. And the true exercise of philosophical thought goes in search of these things, of that which has not yet been entirely seen or thought, and waits to find eyes that are able to fill with wonder and thus to allow us to ask: “what is this?”, “why is this?”, “what does this mean?”. Of this tradition, of philosophy understood as the capacity to be astonished, and to never stop asking new questions, this journal would like to be the heir.

But philosophizing is not only wonder in the face of the new, it is also judgement, critique, questioning, radical and merciless, of the existent and of the knowledge with which the existent – the dominant – surrounds itself. The obvious, that which stands out on its own in its immediacy, that which appears to need no explanation since its presence, its substance, its persistence, are evident, to the point of making one think that reality could not be otherwise, is constantly challenged by philosophy. Doubt,

irony, deconstruction, critique – as demolition, as revelation –, the seemingly inescapable imperative to an impertinent questioning, an insatiable thirst for rigour, for solid foundations, for explanation, for sense giving: however one interprets them, every philosophical gesture appears to challenge the evidently existent.

In both this marvelling quest for the new and the ardent questioning of what is, we witness not only an exercise of human thought, but also, always, a liberatory act. Raising one's gaze to seek, finding the words to question, are not only intellectual acts, they are acts of will, they are acts which involve an existential choice, a way of being, a way of living, or of wanting to live. And given that they challenge existing realities, powers and knowledges, they have always been political "acts". They have a public dimension. They influence the ways in which knowledges and power are organized in society. They are dangerous acts which expose those who undertake them. To philosophize is to lay bare not only one's thoughts but also one's life. It leaves one's life open to the risk of the new which may be not only wonderful but also terrible. It exposes it to the revenge of the old, which, when challenged, may want to rid itself of this impertinent questioning which, defenceless as it seems, disturbs the status quo.

The politicity of philosophy – the inherently political nature of philosophy – is the lifeblood of political philosophy. As the rational search for the true and the right, to philosophize is to question what is. It implies having already taken a position regarding reality. It expresses a subjectivity which does not limit itself to doing its duty, or to passively accepting prevailing opinion, but which asserts possession of critical reason, wants to think for itself, and does not relinquish its desire to understand. Then, when this questioning of "what is" is addressed – in speech or in writing – to others, and can be taken up by them, philosophy enters the field of human relations: its intention is to establish not only a personal relationship with reality, the result of critical protagonism, but also a form of social relations founded upon this constant questioning.

Philosophy is political not only because it remains detached from, and critiques, the status quo, weakening its power to enchant, but also because it lays the foundations for a human sociality based on words, on rational discussion, on open research. It is an expression of freedom which aims to establish free social relations. To the seductive power of rhetoric, which brings with it the desire to dominate the other in an asymmetrical relationship, it counterposes the labour of dialectic, which desires freedom for itself and for the other in order that both can enjoy an equal relationship.

Philosophy is political because it "gives shape to" society, seeking to critique social relations, revealing their mechanisms of domination and trying to establish spaces for decision-making entrusted to a rational and

plural knowledge, and to open participatory mechanisms. This does not, of course, mean the transformation of the political community into one of exclusively discursive reason(ing). It continues to be a complex entity made up of economic interests, defences against attack, shared ideas of what is right, characterized by ways of thinking that cannot be reduced to mere critical reasoning. Nevertheless, philosophical inquiry seeks to question the logic underpinning the construction and preservation of every sphere of human activity, in an attempt to create the space, both within and outside these spheres, for critical consciousness, and with it the freedom of the human subject and their potential to transform society.

Not only the political nature of philosophizing, but also the philosophical nature of the political thus becomes apparent. The concept of the political sphere, as conceived by the ancient Greeks, is, of course, closely linked to the practice of collective debate and judgement with regard to common matters, starting from the free consideration of diverse and opposing arguments. Political power is thus constituted as a power exercised over free individuals by appealing to their reason. It is, in other words, a power which is subjected to criticism and which is required, in all its forms, to justify its existence and its exercise. If it does not do this, it becomes despotic, tyrannical, not political. And so we see that the shared exercise of reason, the presence of a *consilium*, is fundamental to the tradition in which both philosophy and politics, together, originated.

Starting from these ancient roots, political philosophy went along not only with the birth and development of the Greek *polis*, but also that of modern and contemporary society, with the emergence of the modern individual, the State and the system of international relations in which we are now embedded. There is no political process that has not been anticipated and interpreted by political philosophy: from the construction of sovereignty to liberal and democratic revolution, from the struggle for women's and workers' rights to processes of social regulation, from the establishment of totalitarian regimes to the emergence of democracies and the beginning of decolonialization.

And, today too, the radical transformations of group living that we are witnessing are accompanied by a tremendously vibrant discussion in contemporary political debate, committed to understanding the new forms that human power is assuming in the Anthropocene, with its domination of all other living beings, its critical environmental challenges, in this era of mass migration, new forms of discrimination, and the unprecedented surveillance of the individual. And in the middle of all of this, the effort not only to understand but to seek, still, potential spaces for freedom and change. These are the themes addressed by the monographs in this journal, starting, in this issue, with reflections on different forms of

“power”, to be followed, in subsequent issues, by attempts to “rethink capitalism” and to examine “the Anthropocene”.

Philosophical-political inquiry knows no borders, and the Italian Society for Political Philosophy, which founded this journal, very much feels itself to be part of a wider international community. An important part of the journal’s remit is to further this process of close integration: to present to the outside world the richness of Italian philosophical-political research and debate, and to allow some of the greatest international voices in the philosophical-political community to be heard again in Italy. To this end, we have chosen an editorial board composed entirely of scholars currently working at foreign universities. We are very grateful indeed to them for having accepted our invitation. Our intention is to provide them with a platform from which, through articles and interviews, and starting with the interview with Jürgen Habermas included in this issue, they can speak to us all.

But an “Italian” journal of political philosophy cannot but also seek to cherish and do justice to the extraordinary wealth of thought to be found in the tradition, culture and language of its own country. This peninsula has been the cradle of many of the ideas and theories that lie at the heart of our understanding of our socio-political reality – from late antiquity to the Middle Ages and from the modern era to today. Diderot, in his *Preliminary Discourse* to the *Encyclopédie*, calls attention to the extraordinary contribution of Italian culture to Europe. And not much more than a century ago, Benedetto Croce went so far as to say that “political philosophy” was, fundamentally, an Italian invention. Regardless of the veracity of that particular claim, the Italian tradition contains remarkable expressions of *civic philosophy* which are the fruit not only of people’s intellectual labours but also of their personal, immediate, commitment, for which, sometimes, they paid with their liberty. Lines written in prison, from Boetio to Gramsci. This, too, is why the section of the *Classics* in this first issue opens with two articles on Gramsci. And, in the next issue, the thought of Cesare Beccaria will be revisited.

Always aware of the risk of indulging in a “philosophy of distraction”, political philosophy preserves the idea of reflective processes which both arise from, and desire to return to, history: an embodied and engaged philosophy, such as that which Thomas More called for, in his *Dialogue of Counsel* in the first book of *Utopia*. If philosophy wants to win the ear of princes – More warned – it certainly cannot dress itself in the garb of *philosophia scholastica*, formulating abstract principles without concerning itself with how they play out in historical reality. To presume that there is space in politics for this sort of thought is like bursting onto the stage in a theatre when the actors are performing an amusing comedy,

reciting a passage from a tragedy, and imagining that the audience will applaud you. To blame the spectators for not seeming to understand or appreciate what you are doing is pointless. What is needed, More avers, is not declamatory philosophy but an “*alia philosophia civilior*” – another philosophy, more civic, more passionate about the lived, historical, human experience, more able to live with human imperfections, while remaining committed to finding new spaces for personal and collective freedom. Today, as much as ever, an *alia philosophia civilior* would serve us well.

*Translation by Rachel Murphy*