

CULTURE AND POLITICS IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION: SOME SUGGESTIONS FROM TWO ITALIAN PHILOSOPHERS

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Abstract: Over the past few decades, the global phenomenology of political power has changed. Unlike what happened in the past, increasingly the practical applications of scientific discoveries are no longer immediately or exclusively used by the legally formalized political power. They are consumed and disseminated throughout civil society escaping from the old logic of the legitimate power or judicial power and generating a new political power, which could be defined as “glocal”. All these new dynamics can be better understood through the lenses offered by past philosophical dialogues on the same topics and in this case we can enrich our perspective from a discussion, which was developed in mid-twentieth century Italy. In 1950, the formal establishment of the Société Européenne de Culture took place in Venice with the hope of building a bridge between West and East political Europe. Through constant reflection on the general development of European society, this cultural institution tried to focus on priorities regarding theory and practice, in order to foster cultural positions that could take ethical-political responsibilities regarding understanding, collaboration and peace. This commitment was theoretically founded on the concept of “politics of culture”, formulated by Umberto Campagnolo and expressed in a session of the General Assembly in November 1951 and later in January of 1952, Norberto Bobbio gave notice of it in the “Rivista di Filosofia” (“Journal of Philosophy”), sharing the principles expressed by Campagnolo. The theoretical dialogue between the two philosophers intensified at the beginning of the 60s, when it became clear that the common civil commitment sprang from a different conception of philosophy and politics.

Keywords: Globalization, Politics, Culture, Norberto Bobbio, Umberto Campagnolo.

Power is freedom. Power is the freedom of action (mental, verbal or physical) of a subject (individual or collective) that springs from the existence of the subject and that may interfere or collide with the power (freedom or existence) of another subject. The relationship between two or more subjects is not, therefore, necessarily a zero-sum: the possibility of conditioning is mutual and expresses itself in forms that are not always empirically de-

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tectable or measurable. On the contrary, the political dimension of power by definition concerns the interaction of more than one subject and implies the consideration of the effects generated by the encounter of a plurality of actions (verbal or physical) on the actual existence of the subjects themselves. This dialectic may manifest itself through various organizational forms, spatially and historically determined, that generally condition the phenomenology of power and obviously also depend on its differing ontology, according to the analytical paradigm contemplated by the subject-interpreter.

Over the past few decades, the global phenomenology of political power has changed. Unlike what happened in the past, increasingly the practical applications of scientific discoveries are no longer immediately or exclusively used by the legally formalized political power. They are consumed and disseminated throughout civil society escaping from the old logic of the legitimate power or judicial power and generating a new political power, which could be defined as “glocal”. All these new dynamics can be better understood through the lenses offered by past philosophical dialogues on the same topics and in this case we can enrich our perspective from a discussion, which was developed in mid-twentieth century Italy¹.

To mark ten years since the death of Benedetto Croce, Norberto Bobbio wrote an article for the journal *Belfagor* in November 1962, in which he considered how Croce had replaced the traditional idea of philosophy as an end in itself with an idea of philosophy as a profession². He explained: “If philosophy was a job, it would not be a job like any other. Indeed, it could not be practiced, as he said, on its own: a good philosopher has a sound understanding of at least one other field other than philosophy. It would be an auxiliary profession. Second, it could not be practiced for every hour of the day, but only at the right time and place. Paradoxically, it would be a job that required working not during the week but on Sundays and holidays, that is, the days when work is put on hold and strength is restored for fresh efforts”³. A few months later, in the journal *Annali della Facoltà di Lingue e Letterature Straniere di Ca' Foscari*, one read: “Bobbio remains closeted in the scientific world and, unlike Croce, who practices philosophy even when he claims not to want to, Bobbio

never does so, even when trying to pull philosophy apart. The distinctively philosophical way of thinking lies outside the limits of his critical scheme. The philosophy and the philosopher that he repudiates and derides are only caricatures of philosophy and the philosopher". And with irony: "Bobbio, I believe, does not make use of philosophy during either the working day or holidays, not only because philosophy is of no use to anyone but also because he never had any need to resort to it and if he did touch upon it, it was in a purely accidental manner"⁴.

Umberto Campagnolo's words marked the climax of a philosophical debate that had begun in October 1960 in the *Rivista di Filosofia*, a journal directed by Bobbio, when Campagnolo had an article published entitled *Politica e filosofia* ("Politics and Philosophy"). In a note prefacing the article in the Ca' Foscari annals (from where the previous quote is taken), the author recalled the essay and explained: "this piece was born from reading Norberto Bobbio's article, published in the November 1962 issue of the journal *Belfagor*, with the title *Benedetto Croce, a dieci anni dalla morte* ("Benedetto Croce, ten years after his death"). Despite the title indicating that the article might be a commemorative piece, it was in fact an important study on the concept of philosophy". He stated: "The text, almost dictated by personal resentment, is keenly critical, littered with irony and is rather harsh, such that it provoked a debate with those who, like me, had a different concept of philosophy"⁵.

What, then, were these two different concepts of philosophy? For Bobbio, philosophy was the methodological aspect of every science, whether empirical or formal, whether historical or natural⁶. His position was radically anti-metaphysical. In Campagnolo's view, though, philosophy was, in essence, "the creation *ex nihilo* of new understandings of objects of experience and of science, from where philosophy begins and from which it can draw material for reflection"⁷. The only possible starting point for philosophy was the "concreteness of experience" – "where practice and theory are indissolubly fused in the unity of action"⁸: experience was concrete only when "aware of the universality of the subject which verifies it"⁹. Philosophy, in fact, was its own object; in philosophy, the questioner was the one examined¹⁰.

Two philosophical realms, one very distant from the other, were being compared. The Turin philosopher analyzed, with

some irritation, Campagnolo's general line of argument, observing that it was "old hat": he looked on empiricism with a condescending air, where, in the attempt to lift oneself up from the phenomenological level to the conceptual, one ended up with "the essence, or rather the void, a notion that is so cleansed, purified and drained that it serves every need and serves nothing"¹¹. The point of greatest conflict between the two was, according to Bobbio, Campagnolo's "disparaging view" of political science¹². Political science had the possibility to understand phenomena but not to extract the profound essence from reality: "The notional philosopher's preferred argument is that the sciences provide us with more or less safe generalisations, but do not discover the essence of things"¹³. The thrust of Campagnolo's retort was similar, noting that the political theories of empirical thinkers, theories that were "linear, clear, but often superficial", were popular because they shared ideals (especially those of liberal Anglo-Saxons) and admired "their plain good sense", but which failed, though, as soon as "the deepest problems of life and thought" emerged¹⁴.

In short, such was the distance between their concepts of philosophy. But perhaps even greater was the distance where politics was concerned. Campagnolo defined politics "in the fullness of its philosophical meaning" as "an activity where man gains his existence, becoming a creator of values"¹⁵. But for Bobbio this was not a satisfactory definition and was certainly "more benevolent" than that offered by other "political scientists" such as Machiavelli, Marx, Mosca and Pareto¹⁶. Campagnolo stated though, these thinkers gave politics "a sense drawn from social phenomena to which they wished to give their attention" and not revealing in any way "the basic reason why man comes into his own in society". They could not produce ethical principles such as "the imperative of dialogue" and that of the "political responsibility of the learned man", to which both he and Bobbio subscribed: "The truth is that politics cannot be reduced to those arts, even though it is all that human society values and lives for"¹⁷. The definition of 'man as a political animal' was true, on the one hand "because of man's social vocation" and, on the other, because "the very structure of his thought" was political. On an empirical level, man's own relationship with society could be conducted in a conflictual manner, as "an obstacle to its development", but on a philosophical level,



the conflict highlighted man's own dialectical nature, which led individuals and society to move toward a mutual goal¹⁸. Keeping company with political scientists, from Machiavelli to Marx, and from Mosca to Pareto, Bobbio had identified politics with the abilities and strategies “run for the most part by an organized minority, to gain and hold on to power”, and claimed that “the notion of ‘power’ and ideas connected with ‘authority,’ ‘dominion,’ ‘command,’ ‘obedience,’ ‘group interests,’ were important in any definition of politics”¹⁹.

When the subject of the politics of culture was discussed, the distance between the two philosophers' concepts of philosophy and politics diminished, even though there was inevitably a different depth in meaning. Norberto Bobbio understood the “politics of culture”, deemed a “fitting” expression by Campagnolo, as the “stance of moral conscience against political power” or, rather, the endeavors of those who, through dialogue, made every effort to make it possible for every form of culture to exist and develop²⁰. For Umberto Campagnolo, the concept implicit in the phrase which he himself had coined constituted a “term of transition” between politics and philosophy; it was part of a process that, in implying the “virtual unity of the two activities”, lead the first – politics – to reach “the fullness of its reality” in the second – philosophy²¹.

The irrepressible “moral freedom” of the individual and the need for politics (or rather, the need for law and the State) were “the basic philosophical concepts” on which the idea of the politics of culture was founded²². The expression was new, but the underlying concept was old, “even though it was only in our time that it acquired a sense of absolute necessity and urgency”. The distinctive role of culture, facing the law and the State, Campagnolo stated, had never emerged in its full importance. Educated individuals became aware of “their own political duty” through philosophy, constituting together “almost a class” which could, and should have overcome the hostility present in the world. It was “almost a class” because the qualities of people of culture did not take into account objective social conditions and were instead consonant with “a subjective attitude” in which “a universal requirement is profoundly” expressed. People of culture, who can be found in every class and in every nation, had to shed light on, and defend, the universal value of justice, which no judicial system

could completely achieve. Their task was not to pursue a specific policy (perhaps one opposed to other policies), but “to keep a sense of duty alive” while preventing any established order from crystallizing, and so blocking the “creation of new values”²³. People of culture were distinct from mere intellectuals, who were in the service of mainstream politics, from whom they received “the outline of their work goals and the means of accomplishing them:” the main objective of intellectuals was “to act, analytically and deductively, on ‘statements of fact’”²⁴. The first such men, though, could be defined as “men of dialectical reasoning” or “utopian men” who, safe in the knowledge of the political role of culture that was established through philosophy, found that they were supportive of each other in action and, yet, they considered themselves, “in an ideal manner, members of that human society” towards which their own actions aimed. In this society, “that they prefigured in some way” and in which “philosophers were required to be not only the theoreticians but also the promoters and the guiding force for the political action of culture”²⁵ (as the philosophers of Plato’s *Republic* potentially were)²⁶, every person would have been capable of “pursuing, without limits, his work of creating values”²⁷. For Bobbio, the distinction between intellectuals and people of culture seemed to entail an idealization of reality, an image of his “desire to reform society”²⁸. The people of culture who Campagnolo actually thought able “to implement the politics of culture” were, instead, “the same individuals [...], many of whom are members of our society”. They displayed a philosophical conscience which was sufficient to undertake “acts designed to realize conditions for a new society towards which States, by their very nature, cannot aim”²⁹.

The politics of culture tended to feed “the conditions in which man could carry out the creative activity which dialectically opposes him to the State”, in order to compel him to overcome “every one of its particular conditions”³⁰. Moreover, it aspired to foster among people an understanding of the “rationality of their relationships”, emptying State hostilities of meaning in the eyes of their respective populations. According to Campagnolo, it was only after the Second World War that this particular idea and course of action became clear in all its universal and political meaning, since international conflicts could no longer be resolved

by depending on weapons that technology made available. The contradiction between the continual existence of conflict between States and the absurd attempt to resolve disputes by using force could only be overcome by envisaging an evolution of the State structure. In the light of creative and dialectical reasoning, State conflicts would be resolved in “a superior unity in fact and in law”³¹, which Campagnolo unusually hesitated to call a “Global Federal Republic”³². The politics of culture only fought the tendency of some States to become absolute and totalitarian: the only real adversary was “irrationality as a cause of violence”³³.

As Campagnolo had already written in *Comprendre* in a clearer manner, the politics of culture assumes “the moral essence and social reality of culture”. The goal of this politics was “to contribute to the creation of conditions necessary for the full development of the creative activities of mankind”, confirming “the autonomy of culture in the face of conformism, totalitarianism, moralism, opportunism and all the other ‘-isms’ that a society on the verge of a crisis can invent”³⁴. The politics of culture positions itself “in the space that is both ideal and real that exists between two historical moments, one in the present, the other in the future”, and “is aware it must contribute to the creation of the latter”. It is both “culture, in what it creates, and politics, in how it intends to shape the best circumstances for its creation. The act of creating the city, with its laws, its institutions and its material and spiritual heritage, is both political and cultural”. From this it results that “the distinction between politics and culture is purely dialectical, with each term having to define itself in relation to the other”³⁵.

Many years after the debate which had seen the two philosophers go head to head on the pages of *Rivista di Filosofia* (in the final issue of 1960 and the first of 1961), Bobbio celebrated Campagnolo in October 1989, recalling the “sometimes bitter but always fair” and the “sometimes vehement but never personal” discussions which had marked the official meetings of the society³⁶. When uttering these words, perhaps, Norberto Bobbio’s memory skirted around what both men had written with such intensity in the early 1960s. Reflecting on just how outspoken they were, it is possible for us to grasp today the profound and anti-rhetorical meaning of the word “dialogue” which, as Umberto Campagnolo wrote, is the very essence of culture³⁷.

Even today, this idea of the politics of culture can be meaningful in order to understand the current relation between culture and politics, and between knowledge and power, in the era of globalization. Innovation is changing our daily way of life and our perception (and therefore conception) of political power networks within which each of us is engaged in an unusual, unique and unprecedented way. The distance between State and society becomes progressively erased by an innovation that flows from civil society, circumventing the order of State and forcing it to follow the same innovation and ultimately transforming itself into a new form of crystallized politics.

NOTES

¹ For a general view, see Jachec 2015 and Guidali 2016, pp. 183 ss.

² N. Bobbio, *Benedetto Croce. A dieci anni dalla morte*, in “Belfagor”, 1962, no. 6, pp. 630-631. On the relation between Croce and Bobbio, see Sciarra 2017. For the general context, see Portinaro 2008 and Losano 2018.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 631-632.

⁴ U. Campagnolo, *La filosofia come... filosofia*, in “Annali della Facoltà di Lingue e Letterature Straniere di Ca’ Foscari”, 1963, no. 2, p. 74 (Fr. tr. *La philosophie en tant que... philosophie*, in “Comprendre”, 1964, no. 26-27). On Umberto Campagnolo, see Cedroni, Polito 2000.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 69.

⁶ Bobbio, *Benedetto Croce*, pp. 628-629.

⁷ Campagnolo, *La filosofia come... filosofia*, p. 75.

⁸ U. Campagnolo, *Politica e filosofia*, in “Rivista di Filosofia”, 1960, no. 4, p. 452 (Fr. tr. *Politique et philosophie*, in “Comprendre”, 1962-1963, no. 25).

⁹ U. Campagnolo, *Politica e filosofia. Replica a Norberto Bobbio*, in “Rivista di Filosofia”, 1961, no. 1, pp. 110-111 (Fr. tr. *Politique et philosophie. Réponse à Norberto Bobbio*, in “Comprendre”, 1962-1963, no. 25).

¹⁰ See also A. Alberti, *Il pensiero filosofico*, in “Comprendre”, 1999 (special issue), pp. 115-130; and F. Biasutti, *Le stagioni del Bo*, *ibidem*, pp. 97-113.

¹¹ N. Bobbio, *Filosofia politica o politica della filosofia? Risposta a U. Campagnolo*, in “Rivista di Filosofia”, 1960, no. 4, p. 475 (Fr. tr. *Philosophie politique ou politique de la philosophie? Réponse à Umberto Campagnolo*, in “Comprendre”, 1962-1963, no. 25).

¹² Letter by Bobbio to Campagnolo, Turin 17 October 1960, Archives of the Société européenne de culture, in Historical Archives of the European Union, Firenze.

¹³ Bobbio, *Filosofia politica*, p. 474.

¹⁴ Campagnolo, *Politica e filosofia. Replica*, p. 112.

¹⁵ Campagnolo, *Politica e filosofia*, p. 459.

¹⁶ Bobbio, *Filosofia politica*, p. 475.

¹⁷ Campagnolo, *Politica e filosofia. Replica*, p. 111.

¹⁸ Campagnolo, *Politica e filosofia*, p. 460.

¹⁹ Bobbio, *Filosofia politica*, p. 475.

²⁰ Letter by Bobbio to Campagnolo, Turin 17 October 1960, Archives of the Société européenne de culture, in Historical Archives of the European Union, Firenze.



- ²¹ Letter by Campagnolo to Bobbio, Venice 20 October 1960, Archives of the Société européenne de culture, in Historical Archives of the European Union, Firenze.
- ²² Campagnolo, *Politica e filosofia*, p. 468.
- ²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 468-469.
- ²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 471.
- ²⁵ *Ibidem*.
- ²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 462.
- ²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 471.
- ²⁸ Letter by Bobbio to Campagnolo, Turin 17 October 1960, Archives of the Société européenne de culture, in Historical Archives of the European Union, Firenze.
- ²⁹ Letter by Campagnolo to Bobbio, Venice 20 October 1960, Archives of the Société européenne de culture, in Historical Archives of the European Union, Firenze. See also U. Campagnolo, *Intellectuels et hommes de culture*, in "Comprendre", no. 23-24, 1961-1962, pp. 179-184.
- ³⁰ Campagnolo, *Politica e filosofia*, p. 462.
- ³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 470-471.
- ³² Note Campagnolo wrote in 1945 the book *Repubblica Federale Europea* [European Federal Republic] (Milano: La Fiaccola); reprinted with an introduction by L. Cedroni (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2004); Ger. tr. *Der europäische Bundesstaat* (Bern: A. Francke, 1945).
- ³³ Campagnolo, *Politica e filosofia*, pp. 471.
- ³⁴ U. Campagnolo, *Essence de la culture*, in "Comprendre", no. 17-18, 1957, p. 308.
- ³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 309.
- ³⁶ N. Bobbio, *Umberto Campagnolo*, in N. Bobbio (2000), p. 303 (Fr. tr. *En mémoire d'Umberto Campagnolo*, in "Comprendre", no. 43-44, 1977-1978).
- ³⁷ More in general, see Cadeddu 2009.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

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