

Introduction

1. A new, ancient language

Language is one of the most defining traits of humanity. Along with technology, it is one of the main and primal tools that enable humans' interaction with their environment, and more than technology, it does the same in the interaction between people.

While language surely describes reality, creating categories for items and events, assigning names and functions, establishing a collective orientation in a world of otherwise unrelated and alien phenomena, it also does much more than that, and its inherent and symbolical power determines reality as it is collectively perceived. When a reasonably large community shares a language and applies it to the place they inhabit, to the relations between its members, to physical objects as well as to feelings and thoughts, it creates a shared reality that assumes a precise meaning for the community itself, to the point that a single phenomenon, described by said shared language, will come to be itself and, at the same time, to symbolize something else.

Whether language influences “common sense” or the other way round is quite a complex matter, and still debated: according to some (Livi, 1990; 1992) the common sense, intended as humanity's intellectual perception of reality, is rooted in a transcendental dimension accessible to every human being as such, that grants the existence of a number of moral elements, values included, and of the language expressing them, so that abstract concepts like “truth”, “good” or “fair” are immediately comprehensible to anyone independently from geographical, historical or

cultural background. A different approach regarding ethics has been attempted by Habermas (1981) and Apel (1967), who stated that the first effect of language in an ethical discourse is that of building the community in the first place. By defining through dialogue right and wrong, ethical and unethical, allowed and forbidden, a group of people creates itself by creating the (moral) world they move within, enriching mere events with the additional value of significance, of meaning. What is morally neutral in the natural world becomes meaningful for the good or the bad, and the shared values emerging from such judgements modify, transform and shape the world with the same efficacy, if not with a greater one, than technological tools designed properly for the task. Even more, Habermas' (1973) dialogical ethics sees in dialogue itself a common will shaped through discourse, and delegates to it its own legitimation in terms of consensus and representativeness, since, allegedly, all interests, all views, all needs meet as peers within the discourse. A merely "communicational" ethics like this one, however, finds its limits in the verification of the basic conditions for its own realization: it ignores the power relationships that can – and do – emerge even within a dialogue, it doesn't assure that all the participants to the discourse are competent, that everything is said is relevant or valid, that an impartial objectivity drives the examination of all the positions and proposals, that there are no influencing factors moving the dialogue from the outside and that the "logic of the action" is indeed the only objective pursued, that all the stakeholders have a chance to speak and express their view, that no part in the dialogue arbitrarily interrupts the discourse. Such a frail and most of the times inapplicable "universal" discourse, has indeed little claims to a true universality.

One more convincing way to look at language in ethics is that of a Lacanian barrage: the introduction of the symbol opens new possibilities to the shared content of language itself, and the very fact that a group of people is speaking the same language, implies that they are inhabiting also a symbolical world in which the Self lives in the symbolical Other, and the "here" and "now" opens to the "not-here" and "not-now". In the psychic operator Lacan (1966) calls Name-of-the-Father, the word is not an image, but rather a symbol, as it takes the place of what is missing, not only representing it but actualizing it under a different form. In this sense, the word is strictly connected to the desire, as desire is born from the lack of something: if both word and desire originate from lack, grammar and syntax, the "law of the word", are the first, universal forms of legislation, establishing also a form of ethical law as they regulate desire in its symbolical manifestation. Law and desire are intertwined, both on the physical and on the symbolical plane, all thanks to the performative value of the word, the Hebrew *Dabar*, that holds in itself the very essence of the thing it is naming and thus taking the place of.

Being the faculty of speaking so universal to humanity as such, independently on the single languages spoken, and that all languages have rules and vocabulary (law), we can speak of a shared, universal Transcendental all languages refer to, the same one that pairs desire and law. It is only natural, then, after connecting ethics and language, to introduce a transcendence that could be the foundation of both.

2. The need of a strong foundation

As the world changes in response to an ever-growing complexity generated by the very presence of inter-human relations and of relations between humans and the natural world, as well as of the natural world with the artificial one, language must change in accord, finding in itself that primeval power of describing reality and of moulding it in the process.

In our opinion, the current crisis, that is investing several aspects of human existence, from the economic to the cultural one, from the financial to the political one, from the social to the environmental one, is born from an inability of language to evolve as fast as a world that has been exponentially accelerating the frequency of revolutionary transformations in the arc of a century. Globalization has been an overwhelming force, that deeply changed the planetary landscape, international relationships, market and finance, but several parts of human society still try to read it with an old language, incapable of generating sense and meaning for the new situations, trying to apply old and empty categories to phenomena that are unprecedented and in desperate need of an ethical framing.

On the business side, politics proved to be unarmed in dealing with the new multinational giants that are slowly but relentlessly replacing National States in their role and power, while philosophies failed to be widespread enough to provide a collective social reading of the new phenomena in happening. The result is a complex and unregulated world devoid of a prominent ethical orientation, that tries to correct itself in a way similar to the famous Baron Münchhausen, who broke his fall from a cliff by grabbing his own wig and lifting himself to safety.

As the consequences of this lack of a universally – or as near to universally as possible – recognised ethics, of a shared system of values and of practical behaviours, appear direr and more severe year by year, the need of a new language able to define such an ethical system grows proportionately more urgent.

Among the many social, cultural and overall anthropological realities existing that could be the source of such a system, only one has proven itself over the consuming strength of the centuries, emerging victorious after each foreseen or announced “death”: religions.

Humanity’s great religions have crossed millennia, surviving historical transformations, epochal changes, exiles, diaspores, conquests, wars, persecutions and revolutions, always managing to adapt their moral discourse to the time they were facing, without rejecting nor denying their core values. Thanks to their wisdom traditions, they managed to protect their ethical treasures, keeping their basis strong, all the while finding new and fit ways to adapt them to the new cultural, social, even political and economical challenges, introducing new practices consistent with their identity and yet utterly new to face emerging issues; the most fitting image is probably that of a tree, firm and strong in its roots, but ever expanding, growing and embracing with its branches.

What we mean to do with this work, that is and remains an introductory and all-too syn-thetic attempt to the task, is to interrogate nine great religious tra-

ditions, putting them and their ethics to the test with just as many business ethics issues, trying to see if a millennia-old language can be the new language needed for contemporary times. Wisdom is the ability to adapt an unchanging value to an unprecedented situation, finding new ramifications and new applications of it, and following this spirit, we will test religious wisdom on a task failed by several philosophical systems and political reforms.

3. Letting the ancient speak to the new, letting tradition generate creativity

Following the trails of the aforementioned philosophy of language, we will first try to define the current languages put in use to describe and shape the current ethical issues, and then we will try and find a new one hopefully more apt to the challenge. In the first chapter, we will see what attempts have been made in the drafting of a Global Ethics, especially of one inspired by religious traditions, following the footprints of a pioneer in the field, Hans Küng, but taking our distance from his work under certain aspects.

The second chapter will be dedicated instead to the current, most popular and most used business ethics models, with a particular focus on the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) model introduced by Robert Edward Freeman, pointing out the reasons for its inefficiency in creating a viable shared ethics, and a common, possibly universal language that could truly reform the business ethics. The failure and limits of CSR, examined under different perspectives, will shed a light on how and why a new, truly shared language, capable of founding a new Global Business Ethics (GBE), is still needed.

The third chapter will move from the lack of a shared GBE to describe the ethical risks coming from a globalized economy and a disincorporated finance, particularly indulging on the cultural and social revolution coming from the new computer technologies. To the emerging techno-nihilism and techno-materialism, we answer with the hope of a techno-humanism, finding a truly human and humane dimension to the ongoing change of era, seen as a new “middle-age” in need of its Renaissance.

The fourth chapter will be divided into two different sections. The first one will introduce the rich and ancient religious traditions that we elected, among several others, for the present work, briefly introducing their history, beliefs, sacred texts, and main denominations. The second one will try and give an example on how said traditions can successfully deal with issues that, as modern as they can be, are still touched by their ethical system and answered to, consistently with their background. What does Judaism have to say on the use of technology, and what is the value that Christianity recognises to work? How can Islamic prohibitions on loans with interests pose the basis of a reconciliation between finance and real market? Can Hinduism shape a new view of entrepreneurship, or does Buddhism offer viable teachings to correct the excesses of consumerism? Can Taoist morality regulate advertising? Is Confucianism capable of forming modern virtuous

leaders as it did with past ones? How can we elaborate a sustainable ecology with the teachings of Animist traditions? Is Zoroastrianism capable of regulating a fair competition? All these questions will be tackled and tentatively answered to, with a method that will hopefully pave the way for further and deeper studies.

The last chapter follows the same methodology of the penultimate one, but concentrating all religious traditions on a single topic, that is also one of the most delicate and pressing issues of contemporary business ethics: work. All nine religions offer a unique view on work, but they also share interesting common traits that could indeed offer the basis for a GBE on the topic, calling back to a social dimension of work, to a value integrated by but not limited to the economical one, to a deeper meaning of human activities that goes beyond the apparent and even material one.

This work is the result of a cross-research between business ethics themes and compared religions ones, an attempt that has several precedents, but that tries its own different path nevertheless. We believe that the true value, and even strength, of the single religions, can be maintained only respecting their unicity and peculiarity, and thus, even if stressing similarities in certain positions, we wish to avoid any form of syncretism that could in any way disrespect the single traditions with the foundation of a “macro-religion” synthesizing and containing them all. Like a flower bouquet is all the more beautiful the more different colours and shapes it harmoniously holds together, our book wishes to reunite all the examined religions, but each one of them with their specific identity, challenging them to work together to face, and hopefully solve, some of the most pressing issues of contemporary BE.

It is with this spirit that we interrogated texts, traditions, commandments, intuitions and most of all wisdom traditions, looking in them for the grammar of a language capable of uniting people in a shared ethical view of the world and of its new challenges, opportunities and threats.

Our time is facing a change of era the likes of which humanity has seldom witnessed in its history, and it is only logical to seek for guidance from the only realities that already proved to be able to overcome such challenges. Maybe, the new language we have been trying to create in the past decades already exists, preserved and constantly renovated by those spiritualities born to answer the first and most pressing existential questions of humanity, and that keep doing so even millennia after their appearance. Such an operation, though, must not be some kind of moral archaeology, an attempt to dig up old rules to apply them without variations to situations that they could not possibly foresee: “Do we have to deny those who come later the right to reanimate the works of earlier times with their own souls? No, for it is only if we bestow upon them our soul that they can continue to live: it is only our blood that constrains them to speak to us. A truly ‘historical’ rendition would be ghostly speech before ghosts” (Nietzsche, 1878, II, 126). Bestowing our soul onto ancient texts and traditions means asking the past for the means needed to awaken the present and build the future, with all the necessary respect to the sour-

ces and their innermost identity, but also the acknowledgement of the necessities of our times.

“Rebirth doesn’t mean to bring the past back to life (that is never studied as such), but rather *awakening the present*. It is this time itself that we must awake to a new life, even through the *renovatio* of the Ancient; to this time, to its drama, to its expectations, it is necessary to *give a voice*, a voice as *powerful* as the one still resonating from classic auctores” (Cacciari, 2019, 15): new times need a new, powerful voice, a voice that in its being ancient and at the same time always renewed finds its own strength, the ability to speak to the present and, thus, to create a language for the future.