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The Fading of Philosophy

Summary:

Psycho-analysis emerged as the science of modern man within the decline of metaphysics, the limitation of philosophy's claims to immutable knowledge. Established by Plato as speculation upon eternal structures, followed by the subjectification of truth in Christianity, Kant, and Romanticism, philosophy became with Heidegger a knowledge of the event situated within contingency and history. As metaphysical imperiousness fades, psychoanalysis is recognized as an historical project, invoking a new understanding of truth and bringing up questions about friendship, charity, health and salvation.[1]

The SGAI[2], Diego Napolitani in particular, was for me one of the first and most serious encounters with non-philosophers interested in philosophy and working in a specific discipline. Previously my extra-mural contacts were with artists, and I say this with a bit of irony, since I remember that my professor of esthetics, Luigi Pareyson[3], when describing a rather dubious neighborhood, would say, "Over there are merchants, dancers, artists..." and he was a professor of esthetics! Even with architects, for example, I've often had exchanges within departments of architecture, but they never led to much. It is especially talking with Diego that I found what seems to me the dimension of the relationship between a philosophical discourse and a more specialized discourse, like the one you carry out—one that is more, being sure to put it between many quotation marks, "scientific", like yours.

I realized that, paradoxically, compared to what philosophy always believed or always wanted to be in the tradition, when philosophy enters into dialogue with specific sciences, even if those of you here are certainly somewhat peculiar, it functions as a reminder of the historicity of scientific projects. One of the first shocks that we experienced together along with Diego, when we were discussing hermeneutics at the SGAI, was my reluctance to take psychoanalysis into consideration, with its vague scientific nature compared to a positivist, experimental ideal of science. Psychoanalysis presents itself as a discipline that proposes objective descriptions of a state of things that must be recognized in order to work upon it: how the psyche functions; where the unconscious lies; what the Ego, Id and Super-ego are. I feel like a philosopher, one who calls attention to the non-eternity of ideas. I put it this way because it's the opposite of what Plato claims. Western philosophy seems to be born from the assumption—it's the Platonic thesis—that there are essences that are not subject to becoming, and these are the business of philosophy. The title of today's talk could also be initially approached this way: philosophy is declining, is fading away, in the sense that the course of philosophical thought from the Greeks to today is the long decline of the idea of philosophy as the knowledge of immutable structures.

However, as Nietzsche, Heidegger and many others have taught, this decline also passes through the constitution of Western science. Don't forget that modern science, at least beginning with Galileo, but already at bottom, is a Platonic science, that is, a science that develops by formulating itself mathematically and thus by working on external structures, which Plato believed to be eternal, that are not given in sensible experience as such. Perfect triangles are only constructed in the mind: the mathematical formulae through

which physical becoming enters, stripping it of all accidental properties; they are the eternal, ideal, in short Platonic, structures. It's certainly not by wandering around, by watching things, that we discover the pure geometric forms which instead are used for ordering the objects of experience.

The decline, then, of an idea of philosophy as the consummation of the belief in the eternity of Plato's ideas also occurs through, and especially through, the imposition, the diffusion of this idea of eternal structures in the various forms of knowledge, such as the mathematization of knowledge. When I find myself debating with scientists, I'm the one who says, "But look, this concept began in the nineteenth century and perhaps it'll end in 2100"; and the scientists, instead, describe for me structures, create formulae for them, and these formulae—also because they're tested by scientific prediction—seem to be fundamental, stable, eternal formulae. Now, it's important to highlight the mainly historical essence of philosophy. I posed questions to you having this premise: "But what do you think, that you're describing the human psyche in general?"; or "To what extent are you within an historical project of which psychoanalysis is also a part?" I'm convinced that psychoanalysis is the science of modern man, in the dual sense of the genitive: in the sense that it is the science that was constructed by modern man and that has to do with modern man! I'm not sure whether cavemen had an unconscious, but I'm not sure whether cavemen really existed, at least as we depict them. Yet, it seems quite interesting to reflect on this: that certain mechanisms that, from Freud onward, we began to know, study and practice on the therapeutic level, are characteristic of our mentality.

Let's take the example of sociology. Sociology was probably born in a highly structured society having social classes and different social levels. It's difficult to apply sociological frameworks to societies that are much simpler, more traditional or more "primitive" than ours. Something like this could also hold for psychoanalysis. What seems to me important to highlight in the dialogue between philosophy and other knowledge domains is the *historicity of knowledge domains*. I do you no injustice in considering psychoanalysis as one knowledge domain among others, like botany. Although I've never dealt with botanists, I must say that it's more difficult discussing the historicity of their frameworks, perhaps because plants have slower histories. Perhaps botany changes at a certain pace every thousand years, while the human psyche is somewhat more plastic. In any case, what is always at stake in my dialogue with knowledge domains, in my dialogue with a philosopher of my kind, but perhaps generally, is that *philosophy represents transience, it is the custodian of mortality*. Present before others, it reminds them of historicity. And therefore its role is above all to say *Warnung*, to "alert us" against the reification of frameworks. If someone says, "Things are this way, this is a structure..." No, it's an event.

Heidegger is my great teacher, he is one of the few philosophers I really read, and I hope to have at least understood him. He introduced into contemporary philosophy the very profound term of *event*, which substitutes, in my view, that of structure, of essence. It's the very meaning of history that's proposed in today's title: "The Fading of Philosophy." But what does this fading or decline mean? Well, you'll say, "There will be another philosophy." No, because in the fading of philosophy as the knowledge of stable essences, any number of other elements are involved. The decline also represents an essential content of what I'm saying, in that the sense that it's not just a discipline that had existed until a certain moment which is now fading away. Yesterday, during another discussion, I used the example of vampirology which no longer exists today, but existed until the eighteenth-nineteenth century: there were knowledge domains regarding vampires—as Dracula. That has now faded away. The fading, or decline, of philosophy is also the decline which philosophy talks about, fading away itself, and discovering it as a guiding thread. Anyway, today I'll try to show that there is an element of decline which is also an element of salvation. At this moment I'm influenced by the fact that yesterday evening Diego was talking to me about his paper, which is based on the premise that psychoanalysis has arrived at the end of its time.[4] Not in the sense that you must all immediately change profession... I myself, as a philosopher, have no intention of changing my job; indeed, I don't know how long this political parenthesis will last, but at any rate, I'm not abandoning ship.

Decline. Philosophy in the process of declining and philosophy as a continuous reminder of historicity. The question could be put in these terms: those of you here are concerned with making the mechanism of

analysis work better. And making it work is already a problem—what does making it work better mean? In the first place, if we think of analysis as a therapy, it means better at curing people. But then there's the problem of the cure—I don't even want to touch it (Diego Napolitani, of course, told me earlier that I could consider myself safe precisely because I'm sick, much like the joke in which a patient says, "Before, I used to drink and would later feel guilty. Now that I'm seeing an analyst, I continue to drink but no longer feel guilty." Perhaps this could also be true). In short, there is the problem to make that machine work better, that machine you find yourselves handling, which is your professional and life condition; the problem, in my view as a philosopher, is placing it within an historical discourse, within an historical project. I'm convinced that philosophy is the critique, the theoretic reflection upon this project-like nature, not only individual. There are many analogies with politics as well; for example, one may decide to improve one's living condition. How? By investing money in the stock market, by trying to exploit as much as possible the mechanisms of society just as it is. One may also decide for some reason, however, because one's unsatisfied with these mechanisms, to somehow change them. One may decide that one needs to create a different society. And one may become a professional revolutionary or a member of the European parliament who, in the end, changes them moderately, but, after all, would like to change them. I have now solved my problem, but not in the way my colleagues in the Italian parliament claim, telling me, "Lucky you. You have five easy years ahead of you, seeing that the European parliament is never dissolved before election time... Whatever happens, unless you set fire to the building in Brussels or Strasbourg, no one can kick you out of there, whether you work or not." However, this would only have solved my own problem. And this morning, I thought that one could ultimately try to place this matter under the rubric of a pair of terms: Do we seek only health or salvation[5]? In the end, if we want to make a distinction between these two terms—even in French *l'histoire du salut* is not *l'histoire de la santé*—the history of salvation is not the history of health. The history of health would be the history of medicine, of therapies. The idea of health and the idea of salvation are two considerably different things. Now, one might say that without salvation there is no real health. But who knows whether without health there is or is not salvation? All the dead heroes—the Red Hero, shot by the enemy, who wanted to save the working class etc.—are examples of salvation pursued without health. Perhaps even the entire ascetic tradition is also an example of this, although one may think that asceticism is also a form of individual health. The connection between these two terms is important because it is another way of thinking about the relation between knowledge domains and philosophy.

I say these things having begun to reflect upon the history of salvation in the religious sense. Philosophy is closely linked to religious issues; it was born as an argument with religious thinkers, follows the same path, and handles the same goods. After all, those of you here are also philosophers, in the sense that people come to you instead of going to confession, or to a spiritual leader, or they do both. In short, these are matters that, in my opinion, we need to think about: what is the relation between health and salvation? What is the relation between a project of more detailed knowledge of the mechanisms of our individual and collective existence and the handling of these mechanisms and transformation of these mechanisms as part of a general project? Even in the idea of treating someone, one needs to consider what one is treating them for. Perhaps a businessman sends his son to an analyst because the child is lazy, reads novels all day, paints, and the father would instead like his son to become an expert in finance. He then tells you, "Cure him." Must we produce the best financial experts? Perhaps. I don't know.

Must I free myself of the sin of philosophy or not? It depends. Perhaps even my political bosses will now tell me, "Enough of this blabbering! Get working on mad cow disease, study." Thus, *the project of health is never separated from a project of salvation*. This seems important in order to frame what I want to say today regarding decline, within this history of decline.

What is it that has declined, faded away, in the history of Western philosophy, which we're taking note of today? I want to point out that it is not philosophy that is speaking through me; I believe it, but you can take it with a pinch of salt. However, what has faded away is what Heidegger calls Metaphysics, and he calls Metaphysics the clearest possible knowledge of essences, of the essences of things. Let's say that according to the mindset in which we find ourselves, at least in which I find myself, this idea of man as knowing the

essences of the world is Metaphysics as Heidegger describes it. That is, we are made—as religious tradition also maintains—in order to contemplate truth. Spinoza, for example, is a great philosopher who thought just this way; namely, he thought that the kind of salvation we are addressing consisted in moving ever closer towards what he called “the intellectual love of God,” that is, becoming aware of the necessary, rational, geometric structure of all reality, eliminating all that discontent and impurity which make up our specific individuality. There is, in this position, any number of things that come from Plato, of course. What is your salvation, according to Plato? It’s becoming as similar as possible to the eternal ideas that your mind contemplated in that mythical prenatal past that you then forgot upon taking on fleshly form, and from which you must free yourself through asceticism, by abandoning the passions, studying, etc. The entire Western ascetic tradition, which Christianity then assimilated, began there. That is, why mustn’t I get drunk every night with the sailors at the bar? Because this obscures that part of me that is able to purely recognize the ideas. In fact, when I’m drunk I don’t understand anything... and I must keep clean this mirror of the soul which purely reflects the eternal order. Do I benefit from it? Certainly, because the ideas are eternal. The more I bring out that part of me that is similar to them—here, there is also the idea that the similar knows the similar, an idea that’s also found in Aristotle—the more I have in me that part of the spiritual world, of the ideas which comprise the stable world. I thus save myself from death. I think that Plato believed in the immortality of the soul since the earthly world has the defect of being transitory. It’s not that Plato hated the passions, only that the passions aren’t very stable: one can’t invest in a currency that continuously changes value. At a certain point one’s left with nothing. What endures must be favored, and it’s the spiritual that endures; the essential that endures; the ideal that endures; the idea. We must thus elevate ourselves to that. This is essentially the concept of salvation in the metaphysical tradition.

The contemplation of God that one also finds in the New Testament—“You will contemplate God”—cannot be inscribed within this tradition. When we seriously consider the problem of what we will do in paradise, we’re a little embarrassed. Contemplating God is very difficult to ponder. One doesn’t clearly understand how one could imagine God as an object we can contemplate—there is the tradition of mystics who instead think in terms of a fusion, as if we were deified, as if we became like God, in some way uniting with His life—but it is certainly difficult to imagine God as a definite form before our eyes, as was instead the ideal of Greek knowledge and philosophy. Naturally, Christian readers of Aristotle, Thomists, etc., wouldn’t accept this reading of Aristotle—of whom we don’t even know whether or not he thought the soul was immortal, in that the immortal part of us is perhaps already so immortal before entering us that it’s not even ours. The problem of the unity of the intellect is all here: is what endures in you your soul, or Soul with a capital ‘S’, for which you were its momentary seat, but in fact, as an individual, you have nothing to do with it? This is a question. When the Gospel says, “The truth will set you free,” tradition has often read this as, “The more clearly you see the immutable order of things, the freer you will be”; but when you see the immutable order of things it is, in short, the beginning of the end, since if the order is immutable, you can do nothing but sit and watch it. All of your earlier ascetic work consisted in cleaning the mirror of your eyes, of the mind, in order to be able to see the immutable order of things, that is, in order to be able to see that your life essentially doesn’t mean much. If the immutable order of things is already there, it’s only a greater pleasure, for your greater comfort, as they say on the plane, that we suggest you keep your seatbelt buckled, that is, that you note that the order is immutable. But, strictly speaking, this immutable order was already there, and will always be there afterward, and you are a passing cloud that actually saves itself by gradually dissolving. I don’t believe this can be taken as the history of salvation in the historical sense of the word, because here as regards history there isn’t anything: one need only recognize the order. Between us and Parmenides there is no historical difference; there is a difference on the moral level and on the level of intelligence. If Aristotle didn’t understand certain things, it’s not because he was dumber than I or more dishonest. If we speak of history, of historicity, of a history of salvation, we speak of it because we are within another period, one outside of Greek metaphysics.

I’ll only briefly remind you not only of Hegel, of course, since Hegel is one of the chief exponents of this way of thinking, but also of one who is chronologically closer to us and also a little less ambitious than Hegel, namely, Dilthey. This gentleman, whom I always find in the way, is not well known! Everybody

knows Hegel, but Dilthey is not as famous. Dilthey was a thinker of the end of the nineteenth century, more or less a contemporary of Nietzsche, and died, I believe, in 1911; he wrote in the years during which Nietzsche was also writing. Perhaps Dilthey knew Nietzsche's name, but Nietzsche never quoted Dilthey. At any rate, Dilthey attempted, among other things, to reconstruct the history of Western metaphysics. Of course, the historians are already saying, "Hmm, the usual extremely general frameworks." Yes, but it's precisely because for Dilthey it was of great importance to know at what point we are. During exams I'm very lenient; I never fail anyone. But when a student says, for example, that the French Revolution occurred before the Protestant Reformation, I get chills, goose bumps, it really seems too much! In such cases I fail someone. But why? Because I'm shocked. I feel lost, like in the scene from Bergmann's *Wild Strawberries* where there's a watch with no hands; there are situations in which one asks, "But where are we?" I could never trust such a person; that is, I could even think that he might strangle me if he doesn't know where we are.

In short, Dilthey thought that it was essential to know at what point we are, precisely because he didn't believe that we could grasp the First Principle. If we cannot get hold of the stable and absolute essence of reality, we ought to at least know at what point we are: what happened just before; in what direction can we go. Otherwise, we no longer understand anything. And so Dilthey constructed a framework, what I am now trying to take up with some difficulty, which was: "Ancient metaphysics is constitutively oriented towards the contemplation of visible forms." The word 'idea', as you'll recall, originates in seeing, visibility, the visible form: *eidōs* or *idea* come from the same root meaning 'to see'. So, too, with 'knowledge': *oída* is knowledge resulting from having seen. One could perhaps provide a different etymology of '*epistēmē*', but it always refers to something that's there before me.

Modernity began when first the Old Testament and then Christianity introduced the principle of spirituality, of subjectivity. The salvation of the soul concerns me as an individual, one who looks within himself. Christianity, according to Dilthey—but this framework isn't so arbitrary—introduced the principle of subjectivity. So, you have here a number of interesting elements. There's a wonderful book that twenty years ago everyone was reading: *Mimesis*, by Erich Auerbach. Auerbach is a Romance philologist who wrote a history of realism in Western literature. Realism, according to Auerbach, began with Saint Augustine, with Christianity. Christianity is a religion of the poor, of classes once excluded from the social dialogue, and focuses on the unique historicity of persons. We can say that, for Dilthey—and Auerbach probably took a lot from Dilthey as well—the human being of psychoanalysis entered the world with Christianity. The Greek was perhaps relatively little distressed by guilt, by the Super-ego. I don't know if psychoanalysts could scrape by in a Greek world. Let's say that the profession of analyst is perhaps due to the arrival of Christianity. So, be careful when you argue against the history of religion... Anyway, the principle of subjectivity was introduced in the world. Augustine's phrase *in te redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas*, "Retire within, truth dwells in the inner man", in the inner life—which, however, I needn't accept for a number of other reasons—is certainly the sign of the transformation.

This is a picture of Western history that mainly the Romantics had, since in the Romantic period that the idea of a passage from the objective to the subjective was born. The Romantics were aware of the sense of guilt, of the fact that we had broken the harmony between inner and outer, that we had broken with the classical world. For the Romantics, it was the world of the perfect balance of sculptural figures and hence also of the perfectly balanced man who immediately identifies with his community of life, what Hegel called the "beautiful ethnicity", the shared *ēthos*. Of course, there are also sinners, but no one dreams of thinking that one needn't love one's country or father—only that, sometimes, one doesn't. We, instead, feel increasingly less bound by this mentality: none of us awakes in the morning feeling like a citizen. We feel like citizens when taxes are due and we complain; there is no immediate sense of belonging to a community.

The principle of inwardness—I continue to follow Dilthey—ushered in modern metaphysics and a subjective metaphysics which culminated with Kant. Why is Kant contrasted against Plato? Because Kant, according to Dilthey, is the one who locates the possibility of truth within the subject. We can say that the external world comes and goes, we don't know much about what it is in itself. We perceive it through our

sense organs and organize it through the structures of which we are the bearers, Kant's "a priori". This means, however, that truth dwells more in the subject than in the object. Modernity—we won't pause on this for too long—considered as Christian, that is, considered as biblical, both Old and New Testament, is characterized, in contrast to classical antiquity, as the era of subjectivity. This era of subjectivity continued even beyond Kant. After all, as a subjectivist Kant is no great shakes since he thinks that human inwardness is the same in all humans. In Kant, the structure of reason is written with capital letters; it's the same in everyone. This is why we can develop a universally valid science: we all operate according to the same "a priori"; we all organize the world according to the same spatio-temporal categories and intellectual and conceptual structures. In short, everything works just fine. Yet, even this idea was still a little too objectivist according to Kant's critics: "Is it really as Kant says? And if we discovered civilizations that are very different from ours, that have principles of experience, of organizing the world, that are radically different from ours?" Between Kant and Heidegger, cultural anthropology was born, as was the knowledge that there are cultures profoundly different from ours which endure, hold out; that there are cultures where the sorcerer substitutes what is for us the doctor; cultures that believe in vampires and yet have withstood. From this derives the realization of the fact that these "a priori" through which we order the world are themselves historical. *All is an event, all is occurrence; all depends on our historical-cultural affiliations.*

The history of Western philosophy's decline could also be summarized in the thesis according to which, from the Greeks to the present, the possibility of that statement attributed to Aristotle is consummated—only his biographers attribute it to Aristotle, he never wrote it in one of his works, at least in those we have—, namely, *Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas*, "Plato is dear to me, but dearer still is truth." One can sum up the decline of philosophy with the thought that today no one could, should, any longer say, "OK, of course you're dear to me, but truth is still dearer," since in the entire matter of the subjectivization made possible and ushered in by Christianity, truth always appears more as a *question of friendship*. For example, in *Demons*, Dostoevsky turns this sentence around; he has one of his characters say, "If they asked me to choose between Jesus Christ and truth, I would of course choose Christ." And in one of his letters he says the same thing: he himself would prefer Christ over truth. Dostoevsky is an exception in Christian thought. With respect to an Aristotelian and Thomistic tradition, no one would accept the alternative between Christ and truth. Christ came to teach us the truth: *Ego sum via, veritas et vita*, "I am the truth;" you can't think that the truth is one thing and that I'm another. But: do I come to teach you that truth consists in knowing the Pythagorean theorem? Who believes this? Dostoevsky, Nietzsche no longer thought that the alternative between Christ and truth is a real one; that is, truth itself is only a demonstration of friendship. Marxism is also an expression of this thesis, namely: you see a certain truth because you have an ideology, because you're part of an historical-social context (of a particular friendship); but you can eventually see THE truth (Marx would think of it this way) if you're a proletarian, that is, if you're a member of that non-class class that has no interest in defending, and hence can see history outside of ideology (if you're part of another, TRUER, for Marx, friendship). Even the ideology of psychoanalysis could be brought within this since in its case it's also difficult to distinguish, so to speak, your way of seeing the world from friendships, animosities, bonds, traditions, legacies within which you find yourselves thrown.

For Nietzsche, truth is nothing more than the will to power in its various forms. I call true what is useful for my claim and, of course, I'm not an objective judge; I'm not a pure eye before the world, I'm one who has an interest in the project. Would Heidegger disagree with this? No, because for him 'truth' is only given within a project. That is, I'm in the world, I look at the world? Yes. How do I see it? Well, I see it. For one thing, I see it because I look at it, but if I look at it, I have my personal interest. I wouldn't even open my eyes if I weren't interested in some way in seeing how things were. And this is essential for 20th-century philosophy. Heidegger wasn't the only one to say this; the pragmatists also said it in other terms: "What's true is what works," but in order to work it must already work within a given project. "I'm in the world, not as a pure eye that looks at things, but as a thrown project," says Heidegger. That one is naturally thrown is also important. That is, I see things, I see the world, I have an image of the world not only because my senses operate according to Kant's "a priori" forms—time, space, categories etc.—but because I'm in some way interested in changing the world, in changing myself, in creating conditions of existence. I

am not a pure eye; I am an interested agent. If I weren't interested, I couldn't even see. I couldn't even distinguish a shape from the background since distinguishing shapes from the background means creating a hierarchy, a hierarchy towards which I'm pushed or from a tradition within which I easily place myself, or from my own effective, specific, vital interests.

If someone entered this hall and asked what was inside, I wouldn't say, "There are x grams of carbon dioxide," unless he were a chemist and said, "I came to see what the composition of gases is in this hall." Otherwise, I would say, "There are x people," because I'm interested in meeting you. If I were a furniture maker I'd wonder how many chairs there are, whether they're all the same, etc. So, I see the world only because I'm interested. This is the far point of arrival of the dissolution of Greek metaphysics, of the transformation of the philosophy of antiquity to that of modernity, as Dilthey presents it and as Heidegger takes it up from him, since Heidegger was a great reader of Dilthey.

Does all this concern us? It concerns us. You can also not think continually about this; as a philosopher, even if I also think about other things, this concerns me since I'm inside this situation of decline towards which I'm driven, not only by the fact that I've read Dilthey, but by the fact that, for example, I live in a multicultural society where it is very unlikely that there is a unique truth, where it is very unlikely that there is only one religion, where there are many explanatory agencies that compete with one another, different newspapers, different scientific languages, even fragmentation of the sciences.

Today, it is not easy to find scientists who use data from many other sciences in order to compose an image of the world. The images of the world vary greatly according to the scientific languages you adopt. I don't believe that there is a unified vision of the world today. And the problem is, of course: Can we manage with these situations or must we resign ourselves to a kind of socio-psychological schizophrenia? When one does physics one does physics, when one does ethics one does ethics, when one does medicine one does medicine, and then God help us! But even the expression, "God help us" is the expression of a pre-modern behavior, in the sense that in this situation one no longer knows who it is that works on God. Theologians, but then not even theologians would be happy to say, "We only work on one piece, God; let the others do as they like." But then they always try to stick their noses in everything else as well. After all, in this situation it's important, now that there is no longer the structure of the sciences where there was once metaphysics, physics, later divided into poetics, mathematics and physics proper... the entire tree of Aristotle's sciences, what is left? We could also decide to give up and focus only on health and not salvation. But if we focus only on health and not on salvation, we will always risk having to deal with the banker father who wants to cure his son, who wants to make a banker out of him. But, if you always want to deal with health and not salvation, it's like working for the Pentagon without bothering with the problem of how your scientific discoveries will be used: "We're physicists, they'll do the rest. After all, if they want to make bombs, fine; if they want to make meat tins for poor children, that's fine too. They decide; I don't have anything to do with it." If we must consider health in relation to salvation, we must try to construct a picture of this story we're in: philosophy that talks of decline, that considers itself as declining and speaks of decline, is a hypothesis, a reasonable one in my view, about the story we're in. Does this story appear at the basis of those things we said? It's a story that speaks of a path that goes from the objective coherence of structures to their relative arbitrariness, to their contingency.

[In Italy] I'm known as the thinker of the "weak thought", and the weak thought is the idea that if there is a possible thread in the philosophy of history, it is the thread that speaks of the dissolution of all the philosophies of history. This is the trick, so to speak. You show me that I can't carry out a philosophy of history, fine, but in order to say that you can't put the world on a platter for me and say, "Look here, the philosophy of history has no sense in the world." You can only tell me how the philosophy of history dissolved. You can tell me that Marx invented a system that, when it was applied, turned out to be totalitarian, bad and hence was refuted; you tell me that positivism believed that everything would be harmoniously scientized, but today we breathe polluted air and there are counter-aims, contradictions, in this progress, this so-called progress, that has also been refuted. In short, you're telling me a story in order to say that there are no longer any grand philosophies of history! I take note of this and try to construct around it.

And what do I construct? I construct the idea that the meaning of the process of which my search for health is a story of salvation that consists in the consummation of the resisting objectualities, of structural resistance in favor of contingency.

The principle of subjectivity does not mean that everyone does as they like; it means that when we try to reason with others we can only construct reasons of friendship and not reasons of objective truth of the kind, "I'll prove to you that things are this way."

Recall that even one of the great revolutions in modern logic, that of Popper, which talks of scientific truth, between many inverted commas, claims that propositions that are not falsified are valid, that they're falsifiable and not falsified, but never those proven by a complete induction since complete induction has no sense. "All men are mortal"; if there is someone who says it, it can't be a complete induction. I can only say that I believe that all men are mortal, since so far I haven't seen anyone who is immortal, but I always have to wait until I kick the bucket myself because you never know, maybe I'm immortal. I cite this argument because even falsification is more of an *ad hominem* argument than an argument of objective truth. I convince you on the basis of the fact that I've never seen anyone not die, that it's very likely that you, too, will die, that all men are mortal; but I certainly do not prove it to you by showing that all cases are like this. And this is important because in this sense even an irrationalist like me reclaims Popper who, after all, perhaps wouldn't agree since deep down he thought, still in an objectivist way, that every time I falsify a proposition I free myself from some obstacle in order, basically, to arrive at seeing things as they are. However, I'd like to understand how Popper would imagine seeing things as they are, if at some point the idea of falsifiability is suspended. In the end, the final points are always somewhat difficult to perceive, to grasp.

We have thus consummated, so to speak, the idea of philosophy as knowledge of eternal structures; we've become capable of thinking of philosophy as knowledge of the event, and this is the decline of philosophy and also a philosophy of decline. This roundabout of words hadn't come to me, but it seems to me to be the most obvious thing. It's a philosophy of decline in the sense that it's a philosophy of the lessening of the grandeur of being's imperiousness. I am, of course, open to discussing whether this is a logical step because it's the entire content, indeed everything that's at stake in the weak thought. Once I became a non-foundationalist thinker—that is, once I no longer believed that thought consists in the reflection of an objective order that's given once and for all, etc.—did that mean I had to become a nihilist thinker as well? I think so. A thinker of the guiding thread of weakening, because if it weren't this way then the idea that, finally, I am no longer a foundationalist would have to be based on the discovery that the world is without foundations. Whereas when I try to convince you that nihilism is the only reasonable outcome, I present an historical discourse: "If this and that and the other thing happened, how can you still think that...?" But this is exactly presenting to you the idea of decline as a guiding thread. If I don't present to you the idea of decline as a guiding thread, I simply propose to tell you, "Look, I finally discovered that there are no foundations in the world." You ask, "But isn't that something objective?" Goodness, what's more objective than: The world is without foundations? "God doesn't exist." But Nietzsche, who was very astute, said that God was dead, not that God didn't exist, because saying that God doesn't exist would have been the umpteenth metaphysical proposition about structures. He said, "Look, this is the world, and where is God? God isn't there, see; there's no need to put him there." Nietzsche thought that even the idea that there was no need to put God in the world was an historical idea that we had slowly discovered, by reassuring ourselves, by building elevators, buses, umbrellas. We had freed ourselves from the fear of nature and we no longer needed to think that there was someone who commanded everything and to whom we needed to say, "Abracadabra." But this is the stuff of foundationalism, and not the metaphysical truth of anti-foundationalism. Thus, one cannot, in my view, acknowledge the pluralization of reason and situate oneself with the world of friendships, of truth as dialogue, if not by maintaining in the background an ontology of enfeeblement. We are weak, weak thought is exhausted, once the first edition came out they said it was a good thing. But what kind of philosophizing is this? It's nonsense, that is, it's precisely not acknowledging that something has changed. I think it's important for you to stick your nose into an area such as the one I'm speaking in, which deals with these problems. How can you justify, how can you situate your research on

health in relation to the history of salvation? And could you do without this idea of the history of salvation even if you wanted to? To what extent could you? That's not all: to what extent does the analytic experience, either in its popularized form or in its specific form as you know it, also contribute to this decline of eternity into contingency? All this seems to me quite intriguing.

I'm convinced that Freud and his descendents fall clearly within the process of the subjectivization of truth, of the consummation of Greek objectivism. But where is one now going? Where does what's happening in the analytic schools take us? I've always said, even to Diego, that one of the reasons for the richness of dialogues is reciprocal misunderstanding. I'm always afraid of not correctly understanding what he says; I always suspect that he doesn't correctly understand what I say, but in a certain sense it also functions this way. It also functions this way, and this is a kind of example *in corpore vili* of an analytic group. I think that if you misunderstand each other, you're even more productive. But in the end, the problem turns on this. We can place the history of health, the search for health, in the context of a history of salvation that seems to me to be characterized as necessarily shifted towards a reduction of objective imperiousness. *Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas*, not *amica veritas sed magis amicus Plato*. The problem could also be this: it might also be—I have to make at this point an acrobatic leap that I haven't yet spelled out—that the discovery of the nexus truth/friendship necessarily remains pure relativism, if it's not completed once again with an ontology of the reduction of imperiousness initiated by charity. This is why, in my view, Christianity plays an important role in this reading of thought, of Heidegger, of Nietzsche, etc. If I only discover that truth is reduced to friendship, I can also become Hitler; that is, simply become one who thinks that the struggle for truth is the struggle for the triumph of my group, race, class, over others, etc. And it is, it actually was, this way. Relativism can often give rise to a form of pure, explicit recurrence of the primitive struggle and, I must say, it can also give rise to liberalism, that is, to the idea that we must, for sheer convenience, organize ourselves in such a way as not to collide continually with one another. Given that it's easier to live in a world where one needn't go around armed, always looking over one's shoulder, let's create spheres of freedom, let's respect traffic laws. However, all this always comes up against everyone's dissatisfaction. If I see someone who, in my view, errs, I say, "Hmm, it's probably someone who has a different mathematics than mine," or I say, "If another counts in a manner unlike mine, is he only applying a different calculus, which I'll possibly have to respect, or is he making a mistake?" And we're made in such a way that it's difficult for us to accept a purely liberal society: let everyone mind their own business; let everyone keep to their own yard. We accept it as a lesser evil when we have to organize a social order, but there is, of course, also the problem of reciprocal help, as if to say, "Is it possible you say this as well?" Then there are all those situations that are not only monogamous: one finds another person in the world with whom to live, and that's no longer a liberal society; one could already call it a community. But do we really live in just one community, our monogamous union, and the rest is a liberal society, each one keeping to his own yard? There is an entire sphere of belonging, of affinity, etc. that is the lifeblood of our social life, and we cannot resign ourselves simply to thinking within the categories of respect for reciprocal spheres.

All this has to do with the project of salvation, that is, we must think of how we imagine, how we want, where we want to go, on the basis of where we are. Certainly, if we were in a completely totalitarian world we might find ourselves hidden here, probably sharpening our knives or oiling our guns in order to free ourselves. In this world we are at a point where we discover a direction, a guiding thread of the history of salvation that will allow us to make a living experiment of our communal and social lives, of the moments in which these two come into contact, or we are just servants of an order we don't question, and it may even be that some are satisfied with the order they're in. This is also the problem of politics: who represents us? Who represents the left, the right, the center? Who are we? It seems to me that there are enough reasons for dissatisfaction with the social order—even if none of us are dying of hunger—to want to change it, not just to say, "Well, I'll now get organized, I'll try to earn a little more money, I'll buy a nicer car..." However, this is all a problem of historical projects, of which the question of the specific project concerning health is, in some way, also a part. For the rest, I do you no injustice—Diego, at least, would consider it an injustice—in simply considering you doctors, the kind of people one goes to in order to say, "My foot hurts, let's see if you can set it right." Mind you, finding a good orthopedist is also always important! But, let's

say that I think there's a certain intolerance in the SGAI, certainly in Diego, towards a purely therapeutic conception of psychoanalysis. And the problem then is: this intolerance also becomes part of a project of salvation, which is not simply a project of health. In drawing out what's contained in this intolerance, one will probably also find the problems I tried to discuss today. For me, this discourse is important, not because one says, "It's important to have made it." No, it's important because I want continually to develop it in a dialogue with people like you, who in principle and by hypothesis deal more with health than with salvation. I hope it's so, that it's important for you as well and that something results from further dialogue.

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Notes:

[1] What follows is the transcript of the lecture given by Gianni Vattimo at the Italian Group-Analytic Society (SGAI) in Milan, April 11-12, 1999, as part of the seminar series on "Mind and Complexity".

[2] Italian Group-Analytic Society.

[3] Luigi Pareyson (1918-1991), disciple of A. Guzzo and K. Jaspers, had the tenure of Esthetics at the University of Turin. Among his pupils, beyond Vattimo: Mario Perniola, Sergio Givone, Valerio Verra and Umberto Eco [Editor's Note].

[4] Cf. Napolitani (1999).

[5] The author uses the single term *salvezza* which means both 'safety' and 'salvation' [Translator's Note].

Bio:

Gianni Vattimo, born in 1936, studied philosophy with Luigi Pareyson, Hans Georg Gadamer and Karl Löwith. He teaches theoretical philosophy at the University of Turin, Italy, and has taught as visiting professor in many universities in the US. He was a member of the European Parliament for Italy. Among his books published in English: *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991); *The Transparent Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992); with A. Bonito Oliva, eds., James Lee Byars: *The Perfect Thought* (Distributed Art Publishers, 1992); *The Adventures of Difference: Philosophy After Nietzsche and Heidegger* (Parallax Re-Visions of

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