

# JOURNÉE MONDIALE DE LA PHILOSOPHIE - UNESCO

19 November 2015

Savona Town Hall

## Philosophy as a Life Experience

“Water, amazement, philosophy: observations about a principle of identity and difference”

Relator: **PROF. FRANCESCA RIGOTTI**

The *Journée* started with a clue to reflection on the victims of the 13 November attack in Paris with La Marsigliese and the European Anthem.

The conference officially started with the greetings of Alfonso Gargano, the headmaster of “Chiabrera-Martini” High School who defined these attacks as “an aggression to our identity”, reflecting on this word and its possible negative meaning of “closed centre with well defined values to be defended” which leads to the exclusion of the others. The treasure of every culture is the ability to recognize and accept the others with their differences. He concluded his speech highlighting the importance of history as a continuous development which helps man remove the strong bond with the past and open up to the future.

Mr Fulvio Bianchi, headmaster of Science High School “Grassi”, took the floor and meditated on classical philosophy and its meaning in our contemporary age.

He invited the participants to take more time to think about the concept of “philosopher” as “a man among men”, an individual among many others. He has the great merit to dedicate his time and his mental efforts to the community in a continuous attempt to help the others.

He concluded highlighting the importance of communication as an exchange and as a motor of life. Then he handed over the floor Paola Salmoiraghi, headmaster of “S.G. Calasanzio” High School in Carcare.

Resuming Mr Bianchi’s speech, she mentioned Cicero’s *De amicitia*, highlighting that friendship is not meaningful if it cannot be shared, and reflecting on pain in a similar way.

She ended her speech inviting the students to exercise their freedom of thought, which does not consist in freedom of thinking whatever they want but an educational path full of both mistakes and efforts, and satisfaction.

Mr Riccardo Sirello, Philosophy teacher at “Chiabrera-Martin”i High School and representative of the Philosophy Center, criticized the idea of pureness, emphasizing the “mixed” nature of the global human space and defining culture as a constant fight against ignorance, as the origin of the worst sins. He also encouraged the participants to leave the briskness that characterises our society in constant haste and to find time for culture, especially for dialogue as an exchange between different opinions that enrich our knowledge. He read a message by Irina Bokowa, General director of UNESCO and a letter posted by Professor Herman Lodewickz, President of A.I.P.Ph.

Ms Lia Ciciliot, Philosophy teacher at “Chiabrera-Martini” High School, introduced the speaker of the day, Ms Francesca Rigotti, Professor at Lugano University, who first explained the title of her report stating beforehand that philosophy is in everyday little things. She continued explaining the concept of “wonder” (the “*taumathein*”) which both in her positive meaning as “amazement” and in the negative one as “restlessness” is the motor of the philosophical speculation, since it pushes the man to pose questions to himself and then to renew that initial “attention’s waggle” which usually catches us in front of something new or unexpected, as “to be hit by a thunder”. In time this principle has been exploited by a lot of arts: in literature the contribution of pictures is the method to convey amazement, that is to say the metaphor (think about Shakespeare who writes “Juliet is the sun” in Romeo and Juliet).

Therefore bewilderment caused by wonder stimulates the philosopher to look for an explanation and to find his way to understand the situation he is living in.

Descartes in “The Discourse on the Method” and Kant in the article “What does it mean to orient ourselves in thinking?” meditated on the meaning of orienting (in opposition to wandering) as a quest for a way to be taken and kept.

She then introduced the concept of water, defined by Thales as “the primary principle of things”, the origin, “the first whimper of philosophy”, but also persistence. In fact it is recognizable the prevailing aspect of becoming, since it flows just as time does, and it must not be considered as a fixed and pure basis. The quest for pureness, typical of Fundamentalism, is a path that must be accurately avoided, since it excludes the critical thought, guilty of altering the source, and it tends to interpret things (e.g. written texts) in an exact and literal way, which is also limiting.

The paradox of Theseus’ ship is reported as an example. Pieces of the ship had been replaced until the original ones were completely covered. Did the ship still maintain its states as the ship of Theseus? Yes, it did, in spite of the modifications which had not changed its essence. If we compare the ship with a man’s life, we can note that even though it is subject to constant changes, which might change it completely, it does not change its nature.

What is nature? It is something that reflects ourselves, it is a fruit of our history and life experience. The term “character” must be separated from “identity”, which refers to the static thought.

Regarding this, Professor Rigotti mentioned Maurizio Battini’s book “Contro le radici” where people, who are stuck to their basic values, are associated to plants tightly rooted to the ground, immobile.

The word “character” in ancient Greek had the meaning of “imprint”.

Metaphorically, character can be compared to our imprints, marked during our becoming. A little curious parenthesis opens up in which we observe how the graphic character, the letter, is effectively composed by an eye, a lower and upper shoulder, an hip and a shank, as it was a person. After the report, a debate took place, where the participants posed questions and asked Professor

Rigotti for clarification. Mr Bianchi participated first and explained his remarks. He remembered how beauty was present in the Baroque poetry and how this actually did not have just a playful purpose. He then cited G. Pascoli and his “deforming lens”, able to keep the reader in a state of astonishment.

A particularly interesting question was asked by a student from Artistic High School “Chiabrera-Martini”. He asked Professor Rigotti whether the concept of water from an artistic point of view can be linked with Leonardo's idea of water as a whirling and pleasant element or with other authors' one, which considered it as a dangerous element. Mrs. Rigotti meditated on the negative aspect of water, starting from the verb "to liquidate", that is to destroy. A flood actually may even be more devastating than a fire. Moreover water can be boggy or stagnant.

She then underlined that the image of water she presented needs to be considered as a positive version, meant as an intersection between two different streams. After meeting and exchanging their waters, each stream keeps going their separate way, but both richer. The river has well defined edges (the bank); this fact does not limit its dynamicity, though.

The *Journée* ended with the viewing of two Unesco's videos.

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