ANARCHISM AND PHILOSOPHY

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The meeting between anarchy and philosophy has been preparing for some time now, for years now through meetings, debates, conferences, miscellanies, but above all individual contributions. First of all, it is a question – as I happened to say in an article published for the Italian journal *Aut aut* and for the American website *Ill Will* – of deconstructing anarchism to redeem anarchy.

Classical anarchism has fallen into the trap of naively understood power relations. Just think of that very modern way of understanding both the subject and the State which culminates in a Manichaean vision: if the subject were by nature good, and the State bad, it would be enough to overturn the scheme personified by Hobbes's Leviathan, for which the good State it would redeem the human individual otherwise devoted to being a wolf. This very simplification has not worked – not even in politics.

Modernity, of which anarchism was the offspring, constitutes its impasse. The metaphysical limits within which it remains trapped, and which end up having inevitable political repercussions are now clear. The risk is losing the subversive charge and closing anarchy in an arche. Precisely the reductive concept of power – and this is just one example – has condemned the anarchist movement to many defeats.

Anarchism seems entrusted to a proud, stubborn, exclusive and cultic memory. The sacred texts, assembled in an inviolable canonical corpus, require faith and observance. Anarchists rely on a liturgy, follow a catechism, cultivate the unshakable certainty that

every answer is contained in those texts of nineteenth-twentieth century orthodoxy.

The petrification of fideism risks having the effect of dark sectarianism and cata-strophic inactivity. One would be tempted to think that the bell of the end has already rung for some time, if it weren't for the fact that the torch of anarchy has never been extinguished. It is therefore necessary to avoid the archive sickness that could take over. Philosophy pushes anarchism, in a sort of critical self-analysis, to rediscover its own re-moved ontology. In recent decades, an anarchic streak has been emerging in philosophy, or rather in continental thought. We speak in technical terms of post-foundationalist philosophy, which calls into question every *arché* and takes leave of the archic act. There are many names that could be mentioned – starting with that of Martin Heidegger who undermines the ultimate foundation and shakes philosophy. Many other names follow – a real constellation, to quote Walter Benjamin (who is part of it in all respects) that was drawn in the twentieth century.

Catherine Malabou's volume inserts itself in this trend, which has already been open for a few years and aims at comparing anarchism and philosophy. How to deal with this comparison? What setting should you give? The choice is not easy. And the answers so far have been varied. In his book, Malabou decidedly took the side of philosophy, not in the sense of a defense, but in the sense of an analysis entirely centered and con-centrated on some names of twentieth-century and contemporary philosophy. There are six names in total. In sequence: Schürmann, Levinas, Derrida, Foucault, Agamben, Rancière. These are therefore the names of those philosophers who for Malabou have offered, sometimes despite themselves, a rethinking of the theme of anarchy. And they did it – of course – under often very different aspects. This is the case, for example, of Levinas and Foucault, who appear further apart than one might imagine. The thread that perhaps can be indicated, the red thread that binds these names, is the question of the arché, the critical reflection around the two meanings of arché, principle and command, which as is known, are often in cahoots with each other, in an alliance that multiplies its effect: the beginning that commands and the command of the beginning. Before going into more detail, however, I would like to ask a question regarding the placement of this volume within Malabou's path. How does it relate to previous works? The question is not only autobiographical, but also philosophical. In addition to tackling other themes (I am thinking of *Becoming Form* or even *Metamorphosis of Intelligence*), his previous works seem to suggest another approach and even a certain closeness to analytical philosophy.

Returning instead to the book Anarchism and Philosophy, the path chosen is – with the exception of the introductory pages – entirely intraphilosophical, in the sense that

it moves within philosophy, intentionally setting aside the anarchist tradition. A drastic choice, but more than understandable if the intent is precisely to provide a comprehensive survey of the contribution offered by each of the six chosen philosophers.

It cannot be forgotten that after the introductory pages a chapter is dedicated to Aristotle, in particular to the question of arché and anarchy in Politics. There would be a lot to say about this – and to ask: why Aristotle and not Plato too? In fact, I do not believe that archi-politics is represented only by Aristotle and I am convinced, on the contrary, that without some passages from Plato it is difficult to understand the power of a political tradition dominant to this day. I dealt with this in my new book *Democracy and Anarchy: Power in the polis* (2024), where I argue that democracy is anarchic and that Plato and Aristotle were its worst detractors. I fear that this is where we should start again. But perhaps we will have the opportunity to talk about it in another context.

Malabou chooses six names – starting with Schürmann. This choice is well justified if we consider that he deserves the credit – in retrospect – of having introduced the question of anarchy into philosophy with his famous book *From Principles to Anarchy*, of which Malabou carefully disanimates. However, Schürmann's book is dedicated to Heidegger, it is a book about Heidegger. Not by chance – but because Heidegger (like it or not) is the philosopher who questions the foundation, the *Grund*, the *arché*. Today we talk about post-foundationalism to refer to the current of radical thought that ignores the foundation. Heidegger's absence is therefore a marked absence.

I found the chapters dedicated to Levinas and Derrida very successful and, in many respects, very convincing, which perhaps constitute the core of the book, the most valid part. With great balance, Malabou analyzes the texts of these two philosophers, whose thoughts are closely linked, underlining the anarchic charge of deconstruction – deconstruction of the subject, which in Levinas opens up another ethic, deconstruction as a path of philosophy with not least political repercussions in Derrida.

I must confess, however, that, alongside the marked absence of Heidegger, I lament another absence, in some respects more significant: that of Hannah Arendt. It is known that attempts have been made – for some years now – to domesticate Arendt by making her almost the pioneer of liberal and anti-totalitarian thought. But it is enough to remember Arendt's thoughts on refugees to know that things are very different. Personally, I believe that Arendt is part of the philosophy that recognizes its anarchic streak. And after all, it was she who denounced already in the 1960s (well before Schürmann) the association between principle and command – the doubled *arché* – an association taken up directly by Agamben first and then by Rancière (who gives her credit). We therefore understand the criticism of the State, of sovereignty, of the totalitarian regime

that denies the possibility of starting and re-starting. Therefore, although it is legitimate for everyone to choose their own interpretative path, and rightly so, I find it imperative to underline Arendt's absence in Malabou's endeavor.

I think – let it be said incidentally – that a place must be found for Miguel Abensour. Not only for his anarchic reading of Marx and his decisive essays on anarchy, but also for the disruptive role he had. Even though Agamben's and Rancière's projects are in progress, Malabou's two chapters focus on the most significant issues – also in this case with clarity and critical balance.

In the end, many open questions remain and, as a reader and admirer of Catherine, I would have liked a more personal tone in the final pages, a more decisive statement on her part, which will certainly come in the continuation of her reflection. Above all, there remains the great problem of the relationship between philosophy and politics, which surfaces almost everywhere. How are those thoughts translated politically? Many of the philosophers treated – especially Schürmann – remain on this side of the line. In this sense I believe that the anarchist tradition, in particular that which has remained more on the margins of the dominant narrative (I am thinking of Landauer) has a lot to say. But the operation carried out by Malabou is essential for us because it offers an insight into philosophy, including contemporary philosophy, showing how we work, for example, on the deconstruction: of sovereignty, of power understood in an instrumental and metaphysical sense, of a staging public that remains archival. If we do not think and re-think these concepts, we will continue to defend the sovereignty of citizens against migrants, to fall back into the stereotypes of state politics, to face power in a naive and losing way. Thanks, therefore, to Catherine for this volume which will engage us in the coming period.

References

Di Cesare, D. (2025) *Democracy and Anarchy: Power in the Polis*. Polity.