

## What moral order?

### Man and Society in Genovesi's ethics

Antonio Scoppettuolo

#### Individual and society

Yet unlike many of his contemporaries (and later modern philosophers), Genovesi did not reject the natural law tradition in ethics and civil society in favour of the emergent modern view of the individual human being as a being that is dictated by individual interests and of society as the outcome of a social contract regulating competing individual interests. He sought, rather, to bring together the humanist ideas of the Italian enlightenment with radical Christian metaphysics and the natural law tradition in philosophy in his proposals for social and political reform in the Kingdom of Naples. Genovesi was not only a priest, moral philosopher and economist but also a reformer of civic society.

According to Genovesi, two different paths of reflection had arisen and opened up among his contemporaries on the question of the relation of the individual to society in moral theory: first, there was a modern enlightenment one that stressed the opposition between individuals and society, between the particular and the universal, and appealed to some form of social contract theory of competing individual interests as the explanation and justification for the existence of a regulated society. Secondly, there was a more, traditional classical Aristotelian idea that viewed human beings as social beings by nature who, by working together with others in society pursuing the common good, improve the good of individuals themselves. In this traditional account, part of what it is to be an individual human being is to have a stable human nature and a social dimension. Furthermore, from a Judeo-Christian point of view, that human being is made for God and the perfection of that being's nature. All of that beings' actions, the

actions of human beings, therefore, should be directed towards the last end, to God, who created the universe and who is provident of all of this. In this Aristotelian-Thomistic scheme of things, it is the natural sociability of human beings that necessitates both the regulation and supervision of state-civil law as part of the fulfilment of this plan, but the nature of such states is not pre-determined. States, rather, are of different kinds and evolve over time and in time throughout history (as Vico had argued). The state, nonetheless, exists as a product of moral evaluation of the common good of society for all individuals. Far from being antagonistic to historico-socio-political developments or individual interests, therefore, natural law theory of morality is compatible with the regulation of the state as a natural society, whatever form that state takes; or, at least, so Genovesi argues around the time of the unification of Italy and before the establishment of Modern Italy as a nation-state.

Genovesi notes that in modern social contract theory, the person is viewed as an autonomous agent who pursues that being's own interests against the interests of the others. In this view, some regulation by the state of those interests that is both limiting and limited to all within that particular society is necessary in order to have the prospect of both individual and social life. The other traditional Aristotelian approach emphasizes the idea that individuals in society co-operate with others because, by pursuing the common good, those individuals also build their own individual good. According to Genovesi, this traditional position is not necessarily antagonistic to the modern enlightenment position in many respects. In fact, he argues that in both cases what makes the moral person act is not the guarantee of that individual's own existence in society and the sharing of the existential human condition — for if one does not exist, one can do nothing — but the personal benefit from living in society for one's own existence that is orientated towards the common good, just as Aquinas and Aristotle had argued. Benefit is profit, and so, searching for one's own good profits society.

Genovesi, then, was well aware of the value that the utilitarian perspective placed on the individual and society where society is devoted to the social benefits and interests of human beings (and not to the interests and benefits of the few over the many). His unique contri-

bution in his elaboration of the natural law tradition in morality and society, however, was to argue that human interests include and extend to both the good of the individual and the common good of society. Consequently, Genovesi develops a more complex ethical and social reflection on the individual and society than either modern social contract theories or traditional natural law accounts of the individual and society could provide. To do this successfully, however, Genovesi has to reject the philosophical anthropology underpinning modern social contract theory and revitalize two traditional notions of the human being as a being that, by nature, desires to know (Aristotle) and that, by nature, desires to be happy (Augustine) and lives in a society, freely in pursuit of eternal truth and the attainment of complete fulfilment as a human being with God in the next life.

#### Augustinian Anthropology

Genovesi appreciates, very much so, the contribution of utilitarian ethical theory to the philosophy of the state (his research influenced Adam Smith), but he overcomes utilitarianism thanks to a defence of a social philosophy from which a person's moral, social and spiritual complexity emerges more and more. For our author the individual's moral life is founded on the pursuit of virtue. Virtues have as their counterpart *cupidity*, which acts like a *spring* that gets longer and shorter. The human being, therefore, achieves his task in society and in spiritual life on the basis of the variable use of *cupidity*. In fact, Genovesi writes: «The state [of our soul], which we must search for, is the one in which our happiness is less subject to disquietude and restlessness, and which returns the most to the security of our state [our human condition], and that unlocks a fruitful source of permanent and pure joy. The state [of the human soul] that contains all these advantages is the state of virtue»<sup>1</sup>. The state of any human soul that does not contain all of these advantages, therefore, is a state not only lacking in virtues (of prudence and temperance) for the individual but also one in which our social happiness is more subject to disquietude

---

<sup>1</sup> A. Genovesi, *Elementi di filosofia morale*, libro II, sez. II, f. XXIII, p. 138.

and restlessness resulting is a more insecure social environment and thus a hindrance to the flourishing of both the society and the individual as such. In order to appreciate Genovesi's position, therefore, it is of importance to begin with his Augustinian view of the human being as a being that naturally desires happiness.

Genovesi does not deny the validity of *cupiditas* (desire) as a natural element in the relationship with goods and riches. On the contrary, he draws our attention to this. In the First chapter of the First Book of his *Diceosina, o sia della filosofia del giusto e dell'onesto* (1766), Genovesi writes that «every man is inclined, by nature, to love his own existence, and to follow that state of being, in which he is very comfortable and satisfied»<sup>2</sup>. In this starting point, Genovesi begins with Augustine's famous discovery that, on reflection about his own existence, as a matter of fact, he, as a human being, and so, by extension, all human beings, want to be happy. All human beings, by nature, desire happiness. Thus Genovesi would like to stress the point that *to be* happy is the natural orientation of each and every one of us as human beings. He also, however, indicates, as Augustine did before him, the dangers and risks to which *cupidity* may lead. Wanting to be happy is not the problem, but what we want may well be. This is why Augustine argues in *The Happy Life*, alluding to Cicero's *Hortensius*, that «to wish for what is not fitting is the worst kind of misery. It is not quite so misfortunate not to attain what you wish as to wish to acquire what you ought not». Thus it follows that «no one can be happy who does not have what he wants, and that not everyone who necessarily has what he wants is happy»<sup>3</sup>. Obtaining what is not fit to wish for, then, cannot make anyone *happier* because its attainment does not make one happy *in the first place*. The only time that we will be guaranteed that true happiness will obtain is when the truth of that happiness is eternal. This is why our human condition desires not only happiness in this life but eternal happiness. This condition, howev-

---

<sup>2</sup> Id., *Della Dioceosina o sia della filosofia del giusto e dell'onesto*, a cura di N. Guasti, Centro di Studi sull'Illuminismo europeo "G. Stiffoni", Ed. della Laguna, Mariano del Friuli 2008, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Happy Life*, in *Ancient Wisdom for Modern Minds*, trans. by M.S. Russo, SophiaOmni Press, New York 2011, p. 303.

er, is only obtainable for each any one of us with the existence of God and immortality in the next life. As Augustine famously put it, «restless is the heart until it rests in the Lord». Yet this condition of fundamental unrest requires in this life, as an existential task, to search for a possible unifying principle that leads both to the proper private good and the proper public good commensurate with human happiness at the same time. This is fundamental to Genovesi's reflection, but this is not founded on a view of human nature withdrawn into itself and devoted to its own benefit and to the mixture of pleasure and pain, as Hobbes and utilitarian social contract theorists would have it. It is, rather, based upon the social needs of a human being in pursuit of the common goal of happiness in relation to others for that being's individual happiness. In this respect, Genovesi expands the moral paradigm underpinning utilitarian ethics to include the consideration of the natural sociability of human beings as part of the range of the characteristics of that being's desire for happiness.

Individuality, in Genovesi's thought, certainly continues to maintain its importance stressed in utilitarian ethical theory, but its nature is understood in a completely different fashion because satisfying the needs of others is an intrinsic part of its needs and its own happiness. The change of the paradigm of individuality model still makes the individual be the centre of the aggregated life, but the individual's pursuit of happiness is not only private as it must also meet the public one. In this respect, the pursuit of happiness is a shared concept in the sense that it belongs both to the single individual and to the society of which that individual is a member in the same way. Public happiness, then, can be increased, but not as an arithmetical sum of personal benefits in a collection of aggregated facts, but thanks to the individual's sociability and capacity for moral (social) growth. Work can and should perfect a human being. To act humanly is to act purposefully, to do something in order to do something else, to set about to achieve what you know and want. Work and industry, then, must be purposive and arrange its purposes hierarchically in the sense of stemming from an evaluation of the common goal through co-operative work on existing resources and property that is not to the detriment of any individual as a human being, whether that individual human being be the employer as manager or the employee as labourer.

In his reflections on the individual and society, therefore, Genovesi, as Galanti points out, has come to and approaches «those disciplines that help preserve man, and make his life less unhappy»<sup>4</sup>.

The paradigm of rationality that Genovesi advocates is not that of classic utilitarianism. Reason is not a sponge that absorbs resources and transforms them into gain; its purpose is not to increase pleasure, but to lead man to what is *right, useful and true for the individual and society* through a process of reflection. It is in reason, and starting from it, that the line between morality, nature, freedom and law is fixed. Although man does not possess the necessary strength to comprehend the secrets of nature, he has *enough strength*, Genovesi remarks, *to feel its effects and order*<sup>5</sup>. What order, however, is Genovesi talking about here? The order that he means includes the one for which we have responsibility, that is, the moral order that we bring about through our free acts. The order that concerns Genovesi, then, extends to and includes the ethical and political life of *both* individuals *and* society in addition to the natural order of nature upon which man depends and works and has to work in order to earn a living, invigorate and expand society. For Genovesi, society is thus more than a collection of human beings, it is a community of human beings that includes working with nature as part and parcel of our human nature and destiny.

According to Genovesi, the use of reason represents the possibility of individuals accessing the possibility of a social life in line with norms: «Reason is nothing other than the calculating faculty: but to well calculate it needs certain evident and fixed principles, without which it will never be upright»<sup>6</sup>. Using reason in line with ethical principles will, above all, leads to happiness; the goal is to lead an individual along the path of virtue, even before preserving the existence and continued existence of the social body. Genovesi raises and answers the question: «But what should a rule be that could well help us conduct ourselves in the course of our life, so that by holding on

---

<sup>4</sup> G.M. Galanti, *Elogio storico del Signor Abate Antonio Genovesi*, Firenze presso Francesco Pisoni 1781, p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> A. Genovesi, *Della Diceosina*, cit., p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, pp. 33-34.

to that, we could march straight and sure toward our happiness? I believe it should have all the following conditions, that is, it should be true, upright, indisputable, immutable and divine, obligatory»<sup>7</sup>. Thus the moral dynamics within the communal life requires individual practice of prudence because the same communal life depends on laws oriented towards moral principles to which every human being and the pacts that that human being makes with his fellow human being, depends.

### Mutual Assistance

The happiness of the social body depends, therefore, on the happiness of the individual. But what is their relationship? Certainly, it is a relationship built on the balance between private virtues and social body virtues. In *Elementi di Filosofia morale* (1770) Genovesi states that the human being who acts in a moral fashion keeps passions and cupidity within the private sphere. Passions and individual imbalances undermine harmony in society and transform it into an arena of conflict. By comparison, happiness, which can be pursued through a path of individual moral development, becomes the bond that ensures progress and conservation of the social body. Personal virtues generate public virtues, among which the greatest one is that of justice. The venerable institution of justice originates in the subjective moral sphere and then takes a public form. In fact, justice, even before being realized at the formal level of institutions, belongs to the way one lives his and her own life and to the relationship established with others. The pursuit of private good in a selfish sense contradicts the very nature of man that is neither evil nor savage but relational with others, just as Aristotle would have it, that is to say, man, by nature, is a social being (*zoon echon politikon*).

Individuals, as foundation of the community, and their civil improvement generate the improvement of the whole body. They do not abstractly ask for the execution of justice, but generate it through their own subjective behaviour. According to Genovesi, the social contract, in this sense, is not generated out of the stratagem of fear, nor by the

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

threat of the foulness innate in everyone: what leads to the civil union is the recognition of the innate weakness and of the interdependence between human beings. The latter is the base that establishes the building of its original contractual version. Fragility has, above all, an ontological nature; it is part of the natural metaphysical nature of finitude and our mortal state. The remedy to fragility can be found, on the one hand, in the family and, on the other, in the union of several families through a covenant, that is, state law<sup>8</sup>. The purpose of state law is certainly there to restrain instincts that are non-conducive to commodious living, but more positively it also contains the guarantee that moral and natural needs can be satisfied for individuals. The covenant is a subsequent and consequent bond deriving from the *law of nature* as founded on human sociability. In this regard, Genovesi re-iterates the adage 'the state is a natural society'; it extends and strengthens natural (moral) law of justice by defining its outlines through what Genovesi calls *general law (state positive law)*. *The invasion of the strongest or the bad habit of the many* has a detrimental effect on the fragility of the individual who finds his and her own shelter in the natural tendency to sociability. Both instincts, that of sociability and that which takes shape in the immoderate instincts that produces injustice, are part of human nature. It is the balance between the two instincts and the discipline of the passions through the virtue of prudence that paves the path to happiness. Thus, a social contract that establishes the state is necessary for both individual as such and society as such to exist at all.

In short, Genovesi's version of 'contractualism' is modeled on human being's moral needs: these needs are both individual and social but the first need is that of sociality which represents the code to understand individual's character and properties. Cohesion becomes a fulfilment of providence (natural and divine) that draws the path to happiness, making strong what is weak. Passions, according to a universal project, are mediated by providence which helps individual pursuit of happiness harmonize with the public one. Yet to say God is provident, means God is outside of time whereas human state law must be in time. Thus human written state law will need to take into

---

<sup>8</sup> Ivi, f. XII, libro II.



considerations the conditions under which it operates and to change to improve the condition and lot of human individuals.

If moral life is realized in the individual, the social one needs everyone because happiness pursued at individual level produces public happiness. The ruin of the individual generates the ruin of the whole body. Genovesi's lesson reinterprets the contractualism and introduces the element of mutual assistance as a moral code of man's ontological condition. Such a moral code, however, undoubtedly calls into question any arbitrariness in the power exercised by the State over individuals because just as man's frailty and physical senility can be faced thanks to reciprocity among individuals, this, according to Genovesi, is a natural right equal to property and other primordial rights. «Among the rights of our nature, we want to put not only that one regarding the security of our properties, which is called *perfect law*, but also that right of the man to be rescued by another man when in need, that mutual aid, which is called *imperfect right*, because it seems that we cannot force others to lend it to us»<sup>9</sup>.

This right is founded on three properties of human nature: the first consists in the mutual need to overcome natural weakness; the second is based on *attracting energy motions* that make human beings attracted to their fellow human beings by friendship, love, mercy and sociability; the third consists in true usefulness. According to Genovesi, violating these rights and properties is equivalent to opposing human nature itself. The character of this variation of Genovesi's version of utilitarianism, therefore, must be understood within the dynamics of reciprocity, based on the principle of inter-dependency and respect. The famous principle *preserve each one's rights* indicates this perspective. In fact, Genovesi writes,

All mankind naturally rejects mean, arid, cold, cruel souls by its nature. The only difference, which can be placed between *perfect and rescue rights*, is that when we require the first there is no action, and we require the latter there is action; and every man can always not do what is harmful to others, but not always and to everyone can do what benefits; the obligation to keep the prizes is infinite, but the second one cannot be<sup>10</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ivi, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Natural rights, therefore, are prior to civil laws, which can but do not necessarily produce morally acceptable social order. The construction of the civil law integrates the natural one and for this reason it is connected to the moral, so that the violation of each one's rights produces resentment, revenge and *anger against the civil body* while «The observance of rights and duties, and the practice of virtue brings health and tranquillity of nature, and love, and benefit to the other men. And these are innate pains, and recompenses, connected to nature [and natural justice]»<sup>11</sup>. Unlike Hobbes, who had delegated the responsibility to restrain man's instincts to the external authority and to the force of the law, Genovesi seeks to discover in the individual's nature the good element both to cultivate and to refine through moral practice. For Genovesi, law can help to contribute to human elevation but it cannot completely replace individual moral life. Society, nonetheless, is not the product of a pact between adversaries or private interests, but between individuals that need mutual aid and who are naturally oriented to sociability. Mutual aid acts and operates on various levels, that is, between individuals (against other men's [external] violence) and between men and nature.

According to one commentator, the area where Genovesi sees such an opportunity to exercise reciprocity is that of the market. In fact, Bruni argues that economy is an area where Genovesi saw the greatest imbalances and injustices among men<sup>12</sup>. Genovesi interprets the network of relationships established from trade as the best expression of cooperation between counterparts.

Zamagni and Bruni remarks: Genovesi renews the classical vision of the Aristotelian economy. There is no separation between home and public affairs: «The common trait indicates a radical change in the new economy compared to the Aristotelian and ancient economy, where the law of the *oikos* (home) ended, therefore the *oikos-nomos*, laws of *polis*, politics; the first founded on blood ties and hierarchy and the second on *philia* between equals»<sup>13</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> Ivi, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. S. Zamagni, L. Bruni, *Introduzione*, in *Lezioni di economia civile*, Vita e pensiero, Milano 2013, pp. VIII-XXIV.

<sup>13</sup> Ivi, p. XVIII.

Now, public happiness and private happiness, therefore, are not mutually exclusive or mutually antagonistic because they can be pursued through [private and public] virtue.

Genovesi writes: «Ethical happiness is that of a private person; economic happiness is that of families; political or civil happiness is that of the republic [state]. A man whose sum or intensity of the pleasant points of all his life far exceeds that of unpleasant points will achieve natural happiness and this will be called *monastic* or happiness of a [one] person. The family in which there is unity, harmony and friendship of its members will join the monastic happiness of all, this will be a happy family; and blessed it will be said of that republic in which families it consists which will be harmoniously joined both together and with the head and will all enjoy economic and monastic happiness»<sup>14</sup>. It is quite clear, then, that Genovesi is using an analogous concept of 'the family', the state is not literally a real natural family as the product of natural human procreation but the product of providing structures and regulations that lead to the flourishing of all individuals in their families *like a well-functioning natural family*, within the given society under its jurisdiction. In reality, the state has to regulate between families, settling conflicting claims, provide necessary supervision of human activity that may lead to the disintegration of society, distribute resources and so forth – these are not and cannot be a matter for natural families themselves, but for the state.

The two types of happiness, personal-familial and state-social-familial, nonetheless, are neither in contradiction nor ethically distinct, but belong to a single analogous logical-moral progression of human sociability and moral advancement. In sum, private happiness is not predatory and does not arise in opposition to the public one.

#### Universal and particular

For Genovesi, the social body originates from mutual necessity to life and conservation. Thus the meaning and practice of virtue cannot remain a problem solely of private happiness, but must contribute to

---

<sup>14</sup> A. Genovesi, *La logica per gli giovanetti*, cap. VIII, f VIII.

the public happiness by establishing justice. This does not contradict the individual character of moral practice, it rather strengthens it. In this, however, Genovesi disagreed with Antonio Muratori's argument in *Pubblica felicità*<sup>15</sup> that public happiness was not born from the sum of the individual virtues, but from the practice of justice carried out by the political elect. The task of ensuring common happiness is not entrusted to individual progress but to the progress of some enlightened men. For Genovesi, on the contrary, the practice of virtue must and can be communal and scattered among all social classes starting from the simplest ones<sup>16</sup>. His reforming project cannot be realized without the moral elevation of the population. His doctrine is thus not a political one, a doctrine of classes and institutions, but above all a moral doctrine that finds application in reality. After all, the Enlightenment age is distinguished from the other ages precisely because of the attention by philosophical speculation to contingent reality and the application of doctrines to social reforms. The practice of virtue, achievable through the moderation of vice, the discipline of passions and the education to arts are all part of a philosophical-pedagogical program that views man as leaving his state of basic animality, in relation to any political-social issue, to restore human happiness. The latter represents a public goal to the extent that it is pursued through social harmony. In this sense, even the controversy with Rousseau had strengthened

in Genovesi the conviction that culture constituted the indispensable instrument to give communal life a harmonic and lasting structure, as far as possible. Consequently, the contribution by the arts and sciences became necessary for the creation of a new balanced political system which, in redistributing lands and wealth, was careful not to produce new social inequalities and to gradually reduce disparities between rich and poor, until the conflict between individual and social class interests on the one hand, and the entire community's interests on the other, was suppressed<sup>17</sup>.

---

<sup>15</sup> L.A. Muratori, *Della pubblica felicità* [1749], Donzelli Editore, Roma 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. C. Passetti, *Una fragile armonia: felicità e sapere nel pensiero di Antonio Genovesi*, in *Felicità pubblica, felicità privata nel Settecento*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, p. 867.

The relationship between private and public happiness is a necessary relationship, that is to say, distinct yet inseparable. Between the two there is a dependency bond because one does not exist without the other. This is clearly emphasized in *Lezioni*:

A civil body cannot be either stable or happy, when its parts do not feel sure of their rights and of that part of natural happiness, which nature and their efforts grant. To this end a superior force is necessary, which represses the not-right desire, that could arise in some, to disturb the rights of the others, and defends the whole body against the insults of the other political bodies around it<sup>18</sup>.

First of all, it is clear that the civil body has the task of ensuring *natural happiness* whose yearning as an essential right is already inherent in human nature; therefore, the civil body does not act *a posteriori*, it does not have the task of building up the conditions of happiness *ex post*, but of recognizing, by means of the certain laws of the Public Code, a reality that the individuals already establish through their own conduct by means of a process of scattered morality. The civil bodies, as Genovesi maintains, consist of people endowed with all the instincts and affections, passions and viciousness, and for this reason their task is to correct negative passions, while pursuing the moral raising of each member<sup>19</sup>. Men are not naturally at war against each other but, as a matter of fact, they go to war because of the drifting of their instincts. Genovesi writes: «Hobbes is wrong when he says that men are in a state of war by nature. If he said *de facto* he would be right»<sup>20</sup>. For Genovesi, there are two rights and two obligations at the same time: one is the right to seek and realize private happiness, which answers a right-obligation inherent in human nature, and the other one is to pursue common prosperity, which is included among the agreements establishing a community.

Therefore, rights are dependent on positive law and, at the same time, law would have no reason to be without rights. The great modernity of Genovesi, then, lies in the fact that he does not hold the

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ivi, p. 30.

view that the purpose of the state is to ensure the existence of an individual's life and safety in face of an existent tyrant's arbitrary act or the counterpart's retaliatory blind violence, but of guaranteeing man's very own properties; for this reason the science of rights is the moral science par excellence whose purpose is human happiness<sup>21</sup>.

The state of necessity and fragility of which man bears the pain does not contradict the natural tendency to sociability; actually, it is by its virtue that individuals form families, communities and States. Compared to other living beings, human beings are endowed with a more sublime feeling that is rooted in the human heart (a metaphor for social conscience) and human nature: this natural instinct is pity which, when it is not corrupted by passions, wrong education, or from the intellectually and socially destructive *spiritual belief* by some in a society of their moral superiority over other fellow human beings, therein overturning the concept of natural equality and interdependency among each and any human being in society, represents the peculiarity of *human* association. Humanity, in other words, is really a moral concept, a moral ideal to strive for, not a biological fact of being a group or species of living animals on earth. It is founded on social conscience and moral needs, not biological drives and instincts.

#### Moral sentiments and virtues

In light of his moral concerns for society and individual human beings, it is not surprising to find in Genovesi's *Logica per gli Giovanetti* (1776) that, for Genovesi, the analysis of human feelings represents the core for understanding moral sciences. Ethical life is realized within man's heart, that is to say, that being's moral conscience, emotional reasoning. Two opposing forces act here, one pushing human behaviour in one direction, then another in a different direction. One is a *concentric* force and the other a *diffusive* or *expansive* force. The *concentric* force is focused on self-love; the *diffusive* one, by comparison, pushes to realize the social good and right.

---

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. V. Ferrone, *Storia dei diritti dell'uomo*, Laterza, Bari 2014.

The *concentric* force alone detaches man from the species and isolates him, while man is a [social] animal, which cannot live alone. The *diffusive* force alone detaches man from himself and annihilates him. How many sacrifice themselves for their children, for their friends, for their country? How many sacrifice themselves for mercy of some poor wretches, for love? Therefore, man's happiness lies in the harmony between those two forces<sup>22</sup>.

Genovesi's main criticism of Hobbes and classical contractualism is that this theory originates from a political focus on the *concentric* force in a human being without having analysed the properties and functions of *moral* feelings. Hobbes has chosen the *concentric* force to justify a state of nature in which everyone looks at the other one as a creature to be killed; here, Hobbes has resorted to an affirmation of the *diffusive* force not because he recognizes the individuals' natural sociability, but because he bases his arguments solely on the fear that man can experience in front of his own counterparts and his own demise, the fear of one's own death. In this sense, attention to the other becomes only a utilitarian concession. «A system false in nature and evil in practice... Because love for one's own happiness is a concentric force, it does not have its whole range without love of the species»<sup>23</sup>. To avoid an excessively individualistic reading of Genovesi's anthropological vision, then, it may be useful to clarify the value of the *concentric* force.

For Genovesi, *concentric* force represents the dynamics in humans that produces self-love and motivation to take care of themselves, their own survival and own happiness. If a human being, however, is solely motivated by private interest, this, Genovesi remarks, will convert that human being's life into a chain of unhappiness – precisely because the human being is naturally inclined to sociability – thus depriving that individual being of the opportunity to be receptive to the environment around that being, that is, the social world. Openness to species, given by *diffusive* or *expansive* force, represents a necessity of the individual who *does not stem from the earth as a fungus*, producing modifications of the primitive law of nature dealing with the survival of the self; the modification in humans is rather a conse-

---

<sup>22</sup> A. Genovesi, *La logica per gli Giovanetti*, p. 227.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. 228.

quence of *various human beings' unions*<sup>24</sup>. Love for *species* extends to and includes one's own fellow human beings without excluding oneself and one's own realization. For Genovesi, separating the individual dimension from the social one, that is, separating private interest from the pursuit of virtue and honesty, means, on the one hand, contradicting nature, and, on the other, contradicting the same interest of each member of this relationship. In *Diceosina* he writes: «If Justice is to preserve God's rights, our rights and those of the others, it is also an honest and true moral virtue. And it this balance of the law between concentric and expansive force, and only this balance that can make our present a state of happiness, it alone [this balance] is in our true benefit and our true interest»<sup>25</sup>.

The purpose of moral philosophy is to regulate human behaviour whilst denying the primordial forces that stir and direct the human being and human societies to self-destruction. The first rule of happiness and laws is founded on nature itself, thus: «If the nature of things; if the human being; if human beings' relationships; if the civil body and its relations; if the interest of man and of the Republic and so forth, are not the foundation of laws, laws come into a conflict with the physical part and do not last, or are in endless ways deceived»<sup>26</sup>.

The order of morality and that of law therefore rest on the order of essences and cannot deviate from it. Happiness is not the preserve of rulers only or of some enlightened princes, it does not reach men through the fatherly benevolence of the sovereign. It is rather everyone's right of divine origin that falls within that ordered general plan in which individual and social body are included. Every man naturally loves his own existence, «Human happiness lies here. Everyone craves it as long as he believes he must live; no one is so stupid or crazy as to tell you truly that he seeks happiness not for all his life long but only for a part of it»<sup>27</sup>. However, the civil body and what supports it, that is, the feeling of sociability, has in *law* the capability to produce moral notions itself and therefore, to cause good in the members. General

---

<sup>24</sup> A. Genovesi, *Della Diceosina*, cit., p. 323.

<sup>25</sup> Ivi, p. 52.

<sup>26</sup> Ivi, p. 233.

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p. 19.



morality produces in the individual a capability to generate the right solicitations; at the same time, it is precisely in virtue of the practice of justice by the single participant that moral life enriches those who are initially excluded from it. It is a group effect that only much later social research would have coded, for example, with Weber and the methodological individualism.

The cruelty of man towards his fellow man, nonetheless, according to Genovesi, is not given by natural wickedness, but by his miseries, that is, by his needs. Such needs can be satisfied within the social body, but also denied and when it happens it is *because of the weakness of certain governments, or it is the corruption of the governors that increases these evils, and increases wickedness*<sup>28</sup>. Thus, Genovesi remarks, rules and regulation of social behaviour by Governments, then, are conceived with virtues and vices which, in the same way, become internalized by individuals in society. Thus, the contents of the law represent the external rule of reason on the basis of which passions may increase against someone or return to the harmony of law and sociality: «Stupidity, luxury, greed, crimes of one family enrich the other one that will be wise, prudent, moderate, abstinent, right, human, kind: and wisdom and virtue of this family will obtain the punishment over the slothful or bad one. In no part of the World this can be seen more clearly than in the entire political bodies»<sup>29</sup>. Rules and individual morality, which is structured also by means of external laws and, at the same time, helps create them according to a common sharing of the concept of nature, gradually intersect. Genovesi's Enlightenment reformism places, therefore, as basis the creation of a science of happiness to be realized starting from individual's different levels of expression and sense of belonging. One of these levels is the political one, within which Law and Governments, as Genovesi explains in *Lezioni*, firstly must guarantee tranquillity and preservation of the society, and secondly must assure *comfort* and welfare, and thirdly promote *natural and civil happiness*<sup>30</sup>.

The efficacy of the *empire* contributes to the achievement of the individual's happiness *insofar* as it supervises and above all represses the *un-*

---

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, p. 135.

<sup>29</sup> Ivi, p. 48.

<sup>30</sup> Id., *Lezioni di economia civile*, cit., p. 28.

*fair cupidity* that could trouble the rights of the others. For Genovesi the satisfaction of desire is included in the range of possibilities man is given by nature. This is why for Genovesi, following Locke, bad and unjust Governments were also included in the list of evils and pains man could come across but ought not to<sup>31</sup>. Thus Genovesi places this form of evil as a *lesser of evils* by comparison to the golden rule of the satisfaction of existence, a rule that is explained through the practice of morality, assisted by good law: «Therefore, beatitude we can be given here [in actually regulated society] is having the least possible pain [over the alternative of most possible pain], both in body and in heart: MINIMUM PAIN and HOPE for the best, admirable nurturer of everyone who thinks»<sup>32</sup>. Thus Genovesi raises the rhetorical question «Where does prosperity and happiness of a republic derive from? [and he answers] Put together those magnanimous cares of the sovereigns, those of the magnates, these of the gentlemen, of the scholars, of the ministers of religion, the well-regulated labour of the people, and be sure that you will have a flourishing, prosperous and blessed State»<sup>33</sup>.

Thus, the social order reflects the moral one and the moral order reflects the gradual progress towards virtue, which is the engine that drives man to the pursuit of superior goods. This does not mean disdain for the basic goods, since for Genovesi all goods that lead to happiness, understood as physical and spiritual well-being, are primordial rights. The reformist plan of society has in moral progression a mirror where the State external goods coincide with the individual's internal ones. For this reason, avoiding the restlessness of the passions means eliminating the contradictions produced by poverty and need also in the relational dimension, while «The state we must look for is that where our happiness is less subject to restlessness and anxiety, and that returns as much as possible to the security of our state, and that opens a fruitful source of permanent and pure joy»<sup>34</sup>.

---

<sup>31</sup> J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, libro II, par. 43; ed. It., *Saggio sull'intelletto umano*, Bompiani, Milano 2004.

<sup>32</sup> A. Genovesi, *Della Diceosina*, cit., p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> Id., *Lezioni di economia civile*, cit., p. 48.

<sup>34</sup> Id., *Elementi di filosofia morale*, cit., libro II, sez. II, f. XXIII, p. 138.

In light of these observations, it is clear that there is a very close correlation between moral progress and social progress. Individual's happiness does not improve and does not increase in opposition to the public one because just social structures enable individual flourishing, and so, personal freedom is more protected within such social-political structures. Mismanagement of social institutions are bad for both individuals and society. It is precisely because the state is subject to moral evaluation of the common good that both the politics and economics of the day is ultimately a matter of morality and moral practice upon which the relationship between man and his material goods depends.

In this sense, even for Genovesi there is no mechanism of general compensation as it is in Smith ('the invisible hand') according to whom selfish interest, in the end, is good for general interest. The solution to market contradictions, which always derive from primarily individual attitude, is not entrusted to impersonal mechanisms. The perspective of Genovesi, one who had been involved in civil economy for a long time, is not that of the economist but of the moral philosopher. This is normal at that time. Here, however, we have the reversal of Smith's pyramid: from the individual's moral improvement, according to the conditions we have seen before, the general good also derives. That is, the individual is invested with an initial responsibility towards others as well as himself.

Let us now answer the initial question: Is an ethical order possible in society? And what it is based on?

For Genovesi it is in the nature of things, that is, of human life that there be societies. Thus the ethical order is a natural order based on sociability, inherent in nature of being a human being; an order that, however, must always be defended because, in reality, man has many contradictions in himself: not everyone will pull their weight, jealously corrodes social order, and some will seek unfair advantage over others. It is a miracle that society does exist, but it must exist in order to facilitate human flourishing. Thus the ethical order is an order based on reason restraining passions, but also on the structure of the subject, who is relational and not oppositional.