

Ethics¹ and Administration of the 'Res publica'. Dynamics of Democracy

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Introduction

These reflections derive from a specific choice:

**To promote organisational action in favour of society,
for an increasingly genuine service of the 'res publica' / public good².**

We are all born into a shared reality in which we are always enveloped.

We spend our days and years in the positive development of this, constructively conditioned by our historical and ethno-cultural belonging.

This essay is a summary, subdivided into five thematic parts, which are interconnected.

We begin with a **concept of the administration of the public good** as a mirror of the condition of any socio-economic system, whether this be mature, undeveloped or decadent.

We then describe **six ethical systems** in order to guarantee that our analysis is both dynamic and flexible.

¹ Besides the usual sociological, philosophical, religious definitions of the term 'ethics' I mention the etymological origin (taken from the work of Giovanni Semerano, *Le origini della cultura europea* Firenze 1994, vol. II/1: *Dizionario etimologici...*, pag. 108: from the Greek "êthos", the hellenic term means 'place, dwelling; character, custom'. Gothic: sidus, German: Sitte (costum).

Apart from indicating "way to be, social custom, social behaviour it also means 'dwelling, shelter'.

The main meaning in Homer 'stable', 'pasture', traces back to the Akkadian term 'betu' ('house, shelter') a combination with the Akkadian term ešdu (place, ground, solemn seat, throne; social status, 'base foundation, administrative or political organization: of a country or city; discipline, social status or position, support, assurance of continuation; of a family; stance, horizon, CAD 7, 235). Cf. also the Hebrew term šet (seat, 'Gesäss'), the Syriac term ešta. The Akkadian term ešdu, išdu, is to be connected also with the Sanskrit suvadhā-

The formation of the Gothic term sidus makes reference to the Akkadian išdu, construct-state i-ši-id. Moreover, the semantic wealth of the Greek term êthos emphasizes the meaning of 'character', 'distinguishing feature': the influence of the corresponding Akkadian term ettu, 'characteristic, maek, sign, feature' is recognizable in it.

As you can see the root of the word 'ethics' is connected with the Administrative Management.

² As President of the *InGentibus Foundation e.V.*, I allow myself to explain in few words the organisation I am directing. *InGentibus* is an international non-profit making institution, with legal registration in Germany, inspired by strong moral and ethical principles and based on Franciscan ideals.

The mission and overall task of the foundation is to encourage and support research and development, in particular in the fields of nanotechnologies and ICT, with the goal to support new professions and consequently to propose to society new kind of works and professions. Another task of the foundation is to privilege the 'minor/remote' territories where marginal and poor social communities are living in. The major sectors of interventions are: Health Care, Environment and Cultural Heritage, Social Economy and Education. You will find more information in: <http://www.ingentibus.org>

Later in points 3 and 4 we explain some priorities and strategies and some historical models, which will give us some clear insights into administration.

We will conclude with practical proposals.

1. Territoriality, the context in which the quality of a system of managerial responsibility is realized.

We hear a lot these days about globalization, about universalism and the breaking down of national frontiers, about the meeting of, or the confrontation of cultures and civilizations.

Insufficient attention has been given to the fact that such a way of considering the ‘global’ human reality runs the risk of being theoretical, if not ideological, and far from the concrete everyday living of social micro-groups (families, neighbourhoods, villages, small towns) or social macro-sectors (metropolitan areas, bio-regions, nations, federations).

The people (too often recognized as sovereign only at election time) and the modern ‘democratic’ system, await with renewed patience and cyclic trust, a wise management by central and local public administration.

The degree of civilization of a people, the cultural level of a nation or group of nations, the quality of the ethical scale of a civilization are certified in the style of life, visible every day at local and central level.

The administrator is not only a ‘delegate’ of the global society, but if, in the first place, he himself represents the central power, he also holds in himself all the strengths and the limits of his political system located in a precise historical moment.

All of social life is ideologized or at least weakened by every attempt to distance or run away from the local and macro-regional territoriality, by any proposal removed from the real life of the citizen and his family, or from the working reality of a region or of a small village.

Those who have responsibility for a national, regional or local society, no matter what their socio-political adherence, are directly involved in the ethics of administration and are called to account by the *ethos* of conduct according to justice.

2. The Ethic and Ethics: Pluralism and Wisdom

The capacity to distinguish various aspects or divers levels of/in a phenomenon, allows for a wise understanding with a view to a considered way of acting, which can be strengthened and perfected through experience and time.

Also, and above all, in the field of ethics this capacity for classification is of the utmost usefulness for avoiding the monolithic and maximalist, which are corrosives that devour democratic structures, which only appear to be immune to degenerative processes.

Let us consider, for now, a *double* structuring of ethics – negative or positive - expressed in six ethico-dynamic systems³.

2.1. The three negative Ethics

We will begin with the negative ones. Here we may look at the first three ethical systems.

a. The need to start with the absence of any ethic

In the human world there may at times exist an almost total absence of an ethic.

This happens in particular in moments of intense social changes (revolutions, wars) or in periods of excessive distributed wealth, which may render people insensible to the needs and the dignity of others.

Objectively the absence of ethics is seen in limited historical periods.

b. The Manipulated Ethic

A second ethical system, still on the negative side, with cunning intelligence uses lies, planned and managed, co-ordinating ideas, words and projects so as to **delude** the citizens and effectively evade the possibility of control, whether this be public or private.

Such negativity has unfortunately become widespread in the modern world, beginning with the political opinions, which since the 17th century advanced *reasons of state*, gradually leading to dictatorial ideologies.

c. The Violent Ethic

It seems a paradox, but in the scale of dangerousness we consider the violent ethic to be less of a problem. This is typical of societies, which have been constituted from nothing (cf. the Wild West, etc), or which have risen again after a total collapse (cf. Russia at the end of the 20th century, etc), or of fragmented, feudal societies, with clear and easy conflicts between ‘warlords’ and so on (cf. the situation in England before *Magna Carta*, etc).

In fact, differentiating from the total instability imposed by the lies and easy treachery of the manipulated ethic, in this behaviour – violent though it may be – we find **strong ethical codes**, based on the so called ‘honour’ of the clan/family/society with a clear exposition of ones own responsibility, even at the risk to life.

2.2. The three Constructive Ethics

Let us move now to the **positive area** in which it is possible to work with good reliability and sufficient guarantee concerning the earnestness of one’s counterparts.

³ These last will be dynamic or static, interactive or self-contained, with the variation of historico-cultural and politico-economic parameters

There are three ethical systems to which we will refer.

d. Ethic of ‘Self-Interest’ (Business Ethic)

Even though at first sight the term ‘self-interest’ seems to contrast with the ethical world, in reality the large part of human activity is regulated by this motivation.

It is through normal self-interest that most transactions are based normally on implicit ethical agreements. On the basis of interest – whether it be economic or psycho-social – various groups and societies establish rules of co-operation, criteria of control, protocols of understanding, parameters of practice, etc.

This type of ethic therefore has its own minimum ‘dignity’ – deriving from a prevailing ‘usefulness’ pure and simple – and does not distinguish itself by its social dedication or sensitivity to human solidarity.

d. The ‘Philanthropic’ Ethic, Narcissistic or Disinterested

There are other ethical systems deriving from various historical origins or philosophico-religious adherence, which are predisposed to a disinterested sympathy with the needs of society and of the poor.

We are dealing here with persons and groups of weak or adequate psycho-social maturity.

In fact, it is possible to change from a ‘paternalistic’ philanthropy, which is still too narcissistic in the carrying out of one’s own duty or doing good, to a philanthropy already on the way to a continuous disposition to pursue the common good, by means of a right-minded management of the ‘res publica’.

f. The Ethic of total Self-giving

We may permit ourselves to put at the summit of the ethical systems the self-giving ethic, which is characterized by a joyous self-giving, total and continual, for the good of others, even of those not always or completely worthy of such dedication.

We are at the peak of the human-historical journey towards perfection. Here we give prominence, above all, to Ghandi’s Hindu ethic, universally recognized as one of the high points of the modern sensitivity towards mankind.

We are reminded also of the ethic of the Gospel preached by Jesus of Nazareth, witnessed to by him even to death on the cross and given to the Church and to humanity under the form of the ‘new commandment’.

3. Priorities and Strategies

Now we place these ethical systems in relation to the concrete world of local administration.

We summarize our strategic judgement and our choice of priorities in the following concise statements:

1. In Italy and in Europe, at least on a broad level, **we are not facing** a total absence of ethics;
2. In particular in our country, Italy, there is a need to promote a **patient** work of purifying ‘**dialysis**’ from the cunning of the crafty (*astuzia dei furbi*), too often considered unpunished and unpunishable;
3. Also in our country, it is to be hoped that there will be an **appropriate confrontation with those closed systems** that are regulated by coercion and sometimes by a violent sense of honour;
4. There would be a need for a **highly developed ethic of ‘usefulness’ and of ‘self-interest’**, which is the first step towards further goals of mature democracy;
5. We should then adjust the democratic mentality to the **possibility of progressing further towards an ethic of disinterest and ultimately towards a self-giving ethic**, culminating in the service of others.

In this series of evaluations, the priority I would propose –in Italy’s present European context– is in the direction of points 2 and 4.

- a. Above all we need to dedicate our intellectual and formative energies towards the healing of the ‘pandemic virus’ of politics understood as a perennial guarantee of personal power, obtained and preserved at any cost and by whatever means.

In fact it is clear that by carrying on in this manner, the very concept of ‘local and central administration’ is completely wrecked.

This would be a matter of assuming in one’s own person a double identity of the owner (: in relation to the people, the community) and of the official (: in relation to someone who administers something on behalf of someone else...)

- b. With a strong sense of realism –in the ecclesiastic world we would speak about humility and wisdom– the ethical substratum of our country needs to be recovered first of all in handicrafts and in small to medium-sized enterprises, from the ‘utilitarian’ environment of financial negotiations and of economico-industrial undertakings.

Among these in fact, it is still easy to find – taken from the world of the historical and popular wisdom of proverbs - the value of ‘giving one’s word’, of the ‘total faithfulness to contracts’, of direct and personal responsibility in cases that are difficult or have multiple outcomes.

Such ethical arrangements are becoming even more current after the recent failure of the hypertrophic aspect of the ‘new Economy’, which happened so quickly as to become uncontrollable, at time existing only in a ‘virtual world’, and at such a level managed imprudently.

4. Some Historical Models

Let us go back now and place the Administration of the public Good in the global context with which we started.

What follows is a concise and scientific comparison- which will be truly important for everyone - between some models of effective local administration set up by some civilizations to serve diverse ethnic groups scattered over widespread territory.

We choose four models: The Greco-Roman, The Anglo-Britannic, the Inca and the Confucian.

We would like to declare straight away our preference for the Greco-Roman administration, though taking values and experiences from the remaining models as well, in particular from the Confucian model.

We will describe the four models in a strictly concise manner.

a) The Greco-Roman model

We prefer to begin with the model which arose in the Mediterranean area, because the ‘populus’ (people) and the ‘senatus’ (senate) represent real authorities shared with and controlled by the citizens.

Bearing in mind how in the eight centuries of Roman history – from the official foundation of the city to the administrative management of the ‘antonine’ emperors in the second century after Christ – **wide variations** of administrative models succeeded one another, nevertheless a privileged connection with this type of management of the ‘public good’ remains central for Italy in the 21st century.

The strong sense of the kingdom, of the republic, of the empire, which, at least in the better moments, motivated the whole array of Roman officials, remains to the present day a field of precious investigation for all those – Italians and Europeans – who still wish to serve democracy in the whole Eurasiatic continental platform.

b) The Anglo-Britannic Model

Right away in the title itself, we wish to express an implicit cultural conflict between the Britons, Anglo-Saxons and Celts, which later gave rise to the ‘pax’ of the beginning of the 13th century established by the barons, ratified by the Magna Carta and guaranteed by the parliamentary representation of the barons themselves.

The Anglo-Britannic model is dominant in the politico-social practice of the modern world (18th to 20th centuries), directly applied in the countries of the Commonwealth, and revised in the cultural model of the United States of America.

c) The Inca Model

It will be interesting to analyse the local and central administration as it existed under the Incas, over an enormous territory (3.000 Km).

d) The Confucian Model

And finally the 'Chinese continent' governed by the Confucian ethical wisdom, deserves appropriate methodological attention.

Starting from the understanding of the 64 'hexagrams' of the 'I Ching', with a thorough grasp of the key ones, one grows through the daily dealing with the normal complexity of real life, fundamentally necessary for the wisdom of administrative management.

5. Practical Proposals

It follows, from what has been communicated during these minutes we have shared together, that the practical proposals with reference to an ethics intended for the leaders, who are in the process of forming managers for local government of a national and European territory like Italy, are necessarily of a cultural and formative nature.

a. On the **Cultural level**, the administrators

- can consider themselves the executive centre of a democratic system;
- stand constructively in relation to the various ethical systems, variously represented by numerous ethnic groups and cultures across the territory of their jurisdiction;
- become increasingly familiar with the Greco-Roman roots of a wise and true administration of the public good.

b. On a **formative level**, they

- guide the people and their leaders over the deserts of a short-sighted politics of untrustworthy duplicity;
- gain inspiration from plural models of administration;
- provide formation for citizens and those responsible for various sectors of social and productive life, moving gradually from an ethic of self-interest towards a more desirable ethic of disinterest and self-giving.

Basically, the 21st century has only just begun.