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BEING AND BECOMING IN POSTMODERN PHILOSOPHY

- SUMMARY -

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BEING AND BECOMING IN POSTMODERN PHILOSOPHY

(The recapture of Heidegger's thinking in Vattimo's philosophy)

„in the experience of the metropolis human the being speaks to us again in its «weak» modus"

Gianni Vattimo

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Abstract

The main focus of this work aims at illuminating the new hypostases in which the fundamental philosophical concepts of "being" and "becoming" find themselves in the postmodern era. In this respect, the philosophical writings of a key figure in postmodern philosophy such as Gianni Vattimo, are meticulously and closely investigated, for Vattimo's choice to attribute to the concept of "being" a series of characteristics that belong exclusively to the concept of "becoming", represents the birth of this thesis principal hypothesis – Vattimo speaks about becoming under the name of being, trying to justify this by stating that in the postmodern era the being speaks to the metropolis human in its weak modus. The implications of this anti-metaphysical approach that reshapes the very foundation of philosophy, makes the object of the present thesis.

Key words: being, becoming, postmoderm, modern, hermeneutics, nihilism, time, temporality, weak being (*essere debole*), kenosis, secularization (*secolarizatione*), Christianity, the globalized and interconnected man (*l`uomo globalizzato e interconnesso*), truth (*verita*), caritas (*carita*).

1. INTRODUCTION

The project entitled "Being and becoming in postmodern philosophy" aims at bringing into light the concept of "becoming" which has been censured by the long-lasting metaphysical concept of "being". At the very core of the philosophical tradition lies the concept of "being" which serves as the main concept of the great metaphysical systems; but once faced with the reality of the proven failure of this great metaphysical systems, the hole corpus of philosophy has witnessed a need for *different* and *new*. The failure of the great metaphysical systems led inevitably to the weakening of the concept of "being"; as Nietzsche prophetically anticipated, the inevitable transition from the eternal idols to the contemporary idols has finally happened and all this at the expense of the being itself. For now, what is proper to the concept of "being" is the fact of "*emptying*" in the sense of wasting itself, and not anymore the fact of "imposing" itself by the means of violence.

In order to prove my thesis according to which the concept of "becoming" with its wide implications represents the key concept in understanding the essence of postmodern philosophy, I have conjugated the philosophical efforts of some of the world's greatest thinkers (such as Gianni Vattimo or Jacques Derrida). This enabled me to touch upon issues such as those regarding the relationship between *being* and *becoming*, or *modern* and *postmodern*. For example, in Vattimo's writings I was able to identify those specific elements that pointed out towards the presence of *the becoming* in the very heart of the concept of "being". The opposing relationship between *being* and *becoming* has been established since the period of Hellenic antique philosophy and it functioned as an *a*

priori of the major metaphysical systems that followed. Being perfectly aware of this, Gianni Vattimo attributes (in his philosophical writings) to the concept of "being" a series of features that belong exclusively to the concept of "becoming". Stating that "*in the experience of the metropolis human, the being speaks to us again it its **weak** modus*", the Italian philosopher fabricates the concept of the so called **"weak being"** (or "*l'essere debole*", in Italian). Now, the problem with this concept of "weak being" is that it is described using attributes such as: time, ageing, decline, change, all of these belonging to Heraclites concept of "becoming". So, one might ask this legitimate question: *why would anyone talk about being in terms of becoming*?

The main premises assumed by the metaphysical tradition towards the concept of "becoming" are:

1) Becoming isn't part of being;

2) Becoming is an appearance, meaning an illusion.

The truth surpassing of the metaphysics implies rethinking philosophy, history, hermeneutics and the world, beyond the boundaries suggested by the traditional thinking, thus it implies not thinking in the manner of the being. In this sense, the nihilist ontological hermeneutics presents itself as the main frame for the manifestation of the so called "weak thinking" which emerged as a result of the state of incertitude that amplified the tonus of social instability that led to various ways of protest (both peaceful and violent). From experiencing the weakening of the apparently omnipotent structural system, derived both the necessity and the idea of a new philosophical construct that will reject any possible form of idealism. The nihilist ontological hermeneutics represents exactly the answer to this issue, fore it is within this line of thinking that *the **truth** becomes **interpretation*** and reality is the very product of the "game of interpretations".

The present work is structured in three major parts:

I. The first part is entitled "The nihilist ontological hermeneutics – the answer of Postmodernism" and it encompasses the following chapters:

➢ Postmodernism   as a result of the "history illness"

- ➢ The meaning of understanding and interpreting the being
- ➢ On interpretation
- ➢ "Towards the facts themselves"
- ➢ Nihilism as the destiny of Hermeneutics
- ➢ A Hermeneutics build around the concept of "carita"

II. The second part is entitled "The recovery of Heidegger's concept of "time" with its implications" and it encompasses the following chapters:
- ➢ "Humanus – The authentic human and the image construct"
- ➢ Time and Dasein
- ➢ Time and temporality
- ➢ The temporality of the present as time-of-now
- ➢ Temporality and History
- ➢ „Zeit und Sein" – The long awaited answer to „Sein und Zeit"?

III. The third part is entitled "Remembering the Differe(a)nce" and it encompasses the following chapters:
- ➢ The issue of the Differe(a)nce
- ➢ The link An-denken-Ge-Stell
- ➢ The Differe(a)nce between silence and speech
- ➢ The possibility of speech and the dynamic logic of the contradictory

2. THE NIHILIST ONTOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS – THE ANSWER OF POSTMODERNISM

The truth of hermeneutics enunciated by the expression *non ci sono fatti, solo interpretazioni* is based on the nihilistic foundation how` s action of consuming and erosion towards the principle of **reality** <u>becomes</u> the **interpretation** that governs modernity. Thru nihilism, hermeneutics succeeds in communicating with modernity by being not just a consequence to it but really a key factor – *"l' ermeneutica sembra essere stata non solo una conseguenza (in quando filosofia che nasce della dissoluzione metafisica dell' oggettivita) ma anche, anyitutto, un agente determinante"*. In this respect we are able to speak for example about the decisive impact of the new way of reading the Bible by the principle "*sola Scriptura*" in respect with the splitting of the Catholic Church` s unity and the emergence of Protestantism in Europe. Also, as Gianni Vattimo himself remarks, Baruch Spinoza's philosophical works have their part (merit) in witch the *rationalist exegesis* is concerned as a mode of manifestation of hermeneutics. Such modes of manifestation typical for hermeneutics led to the rising of modernity as a consequence of the secularization of the western religious tradition.

By going beyond the fact that "*l'ermeneutica si sviluppa su un robusto sfondo razionalistico*", Gianni Vattimo overtakes the line of thinking towards hermeneutics proposed by Dilthey, reminding that "*per diventare una teoria generale dell`interpretazione (e dell'esistenza come interpretazione) l`ermeneutica deve cessare di identificarsi con una serie di regole per la comprensione di una categoria speciale di tesi nei confronti dei quail resta sempre una pura tecnica, subordinata e strumentale, la cui portata dipende tutta dal peso assegnato al testo stesso.*"[2] The main transformation which occurs inside hermeneutics is represented by the passing from the vision that regards hermeneutics as being strictly linked to the exegesis of the biblical text that

enjoys a privileged and fundamental role, towards the hermeneutical paradigm that considers the biblical text as being (just) one of many other texts.

Throughout the chronological process of ontological radicalization in relation with the concepts of *temporality* and *historicity* that characterize existence (process proposed by martin Heidegger), we arrive at a point where hermeneutics liberates itself from what is known as the *methodic model*. And so we are facing a hermeneutics that presents itself as a theory which: "*libera la ragione dalla schiaviti dell'ideala scientifico dell'oggettivita, ma unicamente per aprire la via a una filosofia della cultura I cui confine (e il cui senso) finiscono per perdersi.*"[3] Gianni Vattimo proposes a hermeneutics unhampered by boundaries that thru its special and specific way of thinking manages to liberate the *positivism* of mythological, religious and poetic speeches from the obstacles that the *rationalist ideal* poses once **truth** is conceived as **objectivity**. Thinking hermeneutics as an act of liberation we'll come to the conclusion that this notion of liberation represents the recognition of the plurality that characterizes reality; to be more specific, it's all about realizing the existence of the **alternative**. Thus the world presents itself in various ways when regarding the ***truth***, without having a supreme instance that legitimates and ranks its modes.

Moving forward we reach the central point that involves both the issue of interaction between hermeneutics and religious tradition and the question of the philosophical significant of hermeneutics. In this respect we are facing a vision of a hermeneutics that recognizes it's trajectory towards a nihilistic ontology and that consists as "*il risultato di una contaminatione del pluralismo aristotelico con lo storicismo paolino*"; in other words, hermeneutics implies the interaction between Aristotle's "*to on leghetai pollachos*" and Saint Paul's "*multifriam multisque modis olim loquens Deus patribus in prophetis.*" Also, the fact that (what Gianni Vattimo calls) *the modern philosophical hermeneutic* is born in Europe isn't an accident at all; this aspect is not only due to the presence of a text culture that focuses on the phenomenon of interpretation, but also to Christianity as the religion based, founded on the idea of *God's incarnation*, a God that creates as **kenosis**. Furthermore, hermeneutics represents the key reading of all myths belonging to the pre-Christian religions. By opening the path to the understanding of the religious myths of humanity, hermeneutics locates even the myth of

objectivity as a myth among others and in the same time highlights the interpretative nature that characterizes any experience of the **truth**.

Touching upon the issue of the encounter between hermeneutics and dogma, Gianni Vattimo finds in Gioacchino da Fiore's works the source of inspiration and also the guiding line that leads to the evidence of the fact that hermeneutics triggers the critical aspect of rethinking the *disciplinary* aspect that characterizes dogmatism. As Gianni Vattimo says: "*e stato Gioacchino da Fiore a parlare di una terza eta nella storia dell`umanita e nella storia della salvezza, il regno dello Spirito (dopo quello del Padre, l1Antiquo Testamento, e quello del Figlio), nel quale emerge sempre piu il senso spirituale dell Scrittura, e la **carita** <u>prende il posto della</u> **disciplina**"[4]* and continues: "*il senso della Scrittura, nell`eta aperta con la disceza dello Spirito Santo, diventa sempre piu spirituale, dunque meno legata al rigore di definizioni dogmatiche e di osservaze disciplinary strette.*"[5] From Gioacchino da Fiore's works, Gianni Vattimo recuperates the concept of **carita** that would become later on a key concept in his vision of Christianity and western culture loosely. The concept of **carita** won't limit itself by simply taking the place, role of the concept of **discipline** implied by the dogma, but will go even farther replacing the concept of truth; therefore a *key role* is given to the concept of **carita**, role that would prove decisive in comprehending the faith of humanity itself.

Although hermeneutics rises the tide of demythologization and rationalism that floods the very ground and structure of archaic religiosity and also determines, in (post)modern thinking, the desegregation of the myth of objectivity, one might say that hermeneutics finds itself captive to a myth – the myth of the eternal return. Truly, hermeneutics presents itself as the key reading of all myths, but its nihilist faith makes it captive to the myth of the eternal return. In the light of this we are dealing with a hermeneutics that appears to us *ab initio* under the rationalist shape specific to the demythologization, but once that the myth of objectivity is dissolved all this leads back to the rehabilitation of the myth and implicitly of religion. Suppressing the myth of objectivity and returning to myth and religion marks the end, but also the beginning of a new cycle, this proves that religion wins (in the end) its battle with: the idealism of philosophical systems, the idealism of politic doctrines and the idealism of exact sciences.

Next we will focus our attention on a interrogation proposed to us by Gianni Vattimo, this interrogation is meant to lead us towards the very essence of the phenomenon of secularization. The question is formulated like this: "*ma la stessa secolarizzazione non sara invece una <u>deriva</u> iscritta positivamente nel destino della kenosis?*" The fact that modernity is marked by a nihilist destiny makes us question whether secularization considered as the catalyst of modernity isn't belonging to the same path drawn by the nihilistic determinism. And so we can explain why the nihilistic character that is embodied by secularization as a phenomenon of modernity is emphasized by the mutation that takes place at the level of transcendental concepts. Once with the rise of the *(post)modern era*, Gianni Vattimo announces the key passage from the core concept of metaphysics – **the being**, to the concept of **essere debole** formed as a result of both weakening the structures of **the being** and dissolving the concept of **verita** (or **truth**) that is replaced by the concept of **carita**. This is in a nutshell the meaning of the (post)modern philosophical hermeneutics envisioned and proposed to us by Gianni Vattimo. All this changes reinforce a new vision upon the dimension of life and death and in this respect for us as (post)modern men: "*il fine della nostra vita e un fine estetico e non puo essere un fine etico.*" One must not overlook the fact that the passing from the age in which the hall society and human existence used to be constituted around the idea of *God*, to the present age in which the hall society and human existence is constituted around the nihilistic idea of *God's death*, represents in fact (for the Italian philosopher) the transition from the concept of **verita** to the concept of **carita**. In other words, the **truth** (or **verita**) which isn't anything else but another name for God (*un altro nome di Dio*), is denied and based on this denial of God (equivalent to the denial of **truth**) the world becomes a **<u>fable</u>**. And by dealing with a world that is captive to a nihilistic faith we are confronted with the following situation: there is no deeper reality that comes to replace God (the **truth**), but the place held by the **truth** is taken by **the game of interpretations** (*il gioco delle interpretazioni*). It's worth mentioning that the *game of interpretations* itself is nothing but an interpretation. Given this conditions that lead to the self-cancellation of **truth's essence**, the passing from **verita** to **carita** represents (for Gianni Vattimo) a milestone and also a way of escape regarding the faith of human society and existence in the *(post)modern era*.

The main theme that rises as a result of the interrelation between hermeneutics and religion is, according to Vattimo, related to the argumentation of the possibility of existence of hermeneutics itself. The Italian philosopher says: "*l`ermeneutica puo essere quello che e – filosofia non metafiosica del carattere essenzialmente interpretativo della verita, e percio ontologia nichilistica – solo in quanto erede del mito cristiano dell`incarnazione di Dio.*"[6] This quote tells us clearly that at the very heart of hermeneutics stands a **myth!** – *il mito cristiano dell`incarnazione di Dio*. In this respect, Gianni Vattimo remembers Luigi Pareyson who conceived philosophy as hermeneutics of the religious experience and used the term *myth* when referring to it. So from this point on Christianity isn't considered any more the *faccia opposta* in relation to mythology. Christianity reveals the hidden side of all myths and acts as the truth of all mythology (*la verita di tutta mitologia*). And in doing so, Christianity doesn't tell us the truth regarding *God* from a scientific point of view, following the methods used by exact sciences, but it unravels the truth of myths and human culture.

The scientist proposes a certain thesis based upon a demonstration that follows a method specific to the exact science field, by contrast the philosopher that forwards a thesis according to hermeneutics won't base its thesis upon a scientific demonstration, but will propose something: "*quasi come un giudizio di gusto, la cui universalita si realizza come risultato di un consenso sempre contingente e teso ad ampliarsi.*"[7] The mix between the aesthetic experience and the religious experience forms the frame in which the game of calling and response (*il gioco di appelo e risposta*) belonging to the game of interpretations, takes place.

Aesthetics plays, according to Gianni Vattimo, a key role in the social life of the (post)modern age, all this because of the specific historicity that characterizes the late modernity, meaning the historicity of the **weakening** of the *being* (*storia dell'indebolimento dell'essere*). As part of the historic meaning of late modernity, aesthetics finds itself face to face with the process of secularization. Describing the relation between secularization and aesthetics, Vattimo remarks that: "*consiste palesemente nel fetto che non c'e piu, un unico orizzonte condivisso, e dunque che l'esperienza dell'arta anche come mitologia e religione razionale e essenzialmente un'esperienza plurale.*"[8] The plurality of experiences and horizons that is available once

with the phenomenon of secularization makes a tenting proposal to art – the regain of its essence by becoming aware of its status of *secularized religion (religione secolarizzata)*. From this interaction with art, religion might rethink itself in a more *aesthetic* way (characteristic to the third stage – the stage of the **Spirit**) appeasing the magnitude of dogmatism and tipping the scale from *discipline* to *caritas*. *Caritas* is the answer of an aesthetic call specific to human existence therefore we help our closer because that's a nice thing to do and not because we are obliged by some disciplinary ethics norm. And by doing so we don't act in the name of a dogmatic *truth* (meaning *veritas*), but in the name of *caritas* that is formed by the joining of two types of experiences: the religious experience and the aesthetic experience.

Notes:

1) Vattimo Gianni, Oltre l'interpretazione, Editori Laterza, Roma, 2002, p. 53;
2) Ibidem, p. 54;
3) Ibidem, p. 56;
4) Ibidem, p. 61;
5) Ibidem, p. 62;
6) Ibidem, p. 68;
7) Ibidem, p. 70;
8) Ibidem, p. 91.

3. THE RECOVERY OF HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF "TIME" WITH ITS IMPLICATIONS

Trying to conceive the concept of "time" starting from the presence of "now" which determines us to look at the time-flow of the succession of the "now's" as becoming, we will reach the conclusion according to witch time can be tooth as non-being. This represents the prove that time is in fact the intuited becoming, the transcending from being to not-being and vice versa takes us back to the heraclitean theory of the unity of the opposites. The transcending is intuited as becoming for both being and not-being change into something else when "the now" presents itself as "now-not-anymore" or "now-not-yet".

One must clearly comprehend the fact that *time* isn't a background where the beings exist, but rather an entity that interacts with the being and the result of this interaction has nothing to do with the metaphysical conception. Time has the possibility of anticipating itself and this means that it opens the possibility of the possible itself; in other words, time is making the possible "*possible*". Having this property time alters the being so that we cannot properly say: "time is …", but rather that the *Dasein* temporaries its being as time. Following this line of thinking we can identify the principal attributes of the concept of "time", these are:

1) Time isn't something which happens outside us.
2) Time doesn't serve as a frame for what happens inside the world.
3) Time isn't something that exists somewhere in our conscious.
4) Time is what makes possible "*the being in front of one's self by being from the beginning around something*".

One of the major implications that result from the debate of the concept of "time" is linked to the understanding of the concept of "history"; therefore it is crucial to see the meanings specific to the concept of "history":

1)   Te first tells us that history isn't the past as something that went by, rather it is the provenience in the shape of what comes from the past; thus everything that has a history finds itself in the context of the becoming.

2)   The second considers history as the sum of events and outcomes that surpass the time line consisting in: past, present and future.

3)   The third characterizes history by identifying it with the hole of being that changes over time, meaning it becomes.

4)   The fourth tells us that history is that what has been send, past down thru generations belonging to different ages.

Next we will focus our attention upon the effects felt by the concept of *truth* once with the collapse of the myth of the *metaphysic truth*. Abandoning the concept of *truth* inherited from Parmenides, leads to the breaking of the tautological chain that holds the phrase *the Being is the Being* (and nothing else); this phrase was consolidated row on row by the great metaphysical theories. The reconsideration of the concept of *truth* is closely related to the act of rethinking and reencountering the *Being* as **Ereignes** in the (post)modern age. By thinking the *Being* as **Ereignes** and implicitly consider the *truth* of *Being* as a **gift** of the **Ereignes**, we can be entirely sure that we are not dealing with Parmenides phrase *the Being is the Being*, nor with the *truth* implied by it. Although German philosopher Martin Heidegger speaks in his work Sein und Zeit about the rethinking of the concept of Being in non-metaphysical terms and invites us to follow the path opened by the vision of the *Being* as a **gift** of the **Ereignes**, he hesitates in naming this new *type* of *Being* (for it is clearly that we are not talking about the *Being* postulated by metaphysics). The one that will name this new *type* of *Being* is the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo (for some, disciple and continuator of Heidegger's philosophy) who calls it the **weak being** (or *essere debole* in Italian).

In order to think the *Being* as *Ereignes* we must envision the closer between the concept of *Being* and that of **time** and further more (via the concept of *time*) the concept of **_becoming_** as the jet unseen, unnamed face lying in the shadows. Metaphysics speaks about the relation between *Being* and *becoming* as of a relation between two opposing terms – *that what **is** doesn't **become** and what **becomes** is **not*** - thus resulting that the

becoming belongs to the non-existent and therefore the philosophical tradition leaves the concept of *becoming* in obscurity. But, thinking the *Being* as *Ereignes* supposes that specific elements belonging to the concept of *becoming* are attributed to the *Being* and that is just impossible according to the metaphysics for **Being** is <u>totally they opposed</u> of **becoming**. So one might question: why doesn't Heidegger name this *Being* as *Ereignes* – **becoming**? If the main reason is that we are not jet prepared to free ourselves from the language of metaphysics, then I would recon that Vattimo`s concept of *weak being* (*essere debole*) might just hold the key answer in the attempt of suppressing the main metaphysical concept (the concept of *Being*) and thus liberate us from having to use the metaphysical language. It is imperative for the reader to acknowledge the fact that the concept of *Being* sustains the entire platform of the metaphysical language and only once that this concept is removed we can totally renounce at the metaphysical language. The type of hermeneutics envisioned by Heidegger and consolidated by Vattimo may offer the adequate answer to the debated issue for it is the philosophical hermeneutics of the (post)modern age the one that forces the Being to looses itself under the numerous tides of interpretations that step by step dissolve its *truth* by splitting it. If Rene Descartes in his *Meditations* puts in brackets the world, thus resulting *dubito ergo cogito*, the (post)modern philosophical hermeneutics puts in brackets the **truth**. The sap of the (post)modern philosophical hermeneutics comes from Nietzsche's nihilism that preached the birth of an age that is to be characterized as extra moral. This extra moral age is dominated by the idea that the essentialist thinking according to which the *truth* (as *essence*) holds a higher value then the **appearance** is nothing but a moral prejudice.

Judging by the way that (post)modern philosophical hermeneutics presents itself to us we can conclude on the fact that it proposes a set back from Parmenides vision to that of Heraclites (from Efes) and thus signaling in our minds (and souls) the return of the following question: *how can something be born out of its otherwise?* The immediate answer to this question seems to be no other then the famous **panta rhei**, but all this takes us to the point where we must admit that there is a deceiving tenet in the very heart (*essence*) of the existing things and therefore the falseness of the world that we imagine to live in is the most stable and certain aspect our eye can notice. Here there is <u>no difference</u> between **essence** and **appearance** for we are captives of a *nihilist* faith.

4. REMEMBERING THE DIFFERE(A)NCE

The differe(a)nce stands *ab inition* at the origin of every opening of the being, this makes accessible the being as *"differencing difference"* (or *"differenza differe(nzia)nte"* as Vattimo calls it). It is thanks to the *An-denken* that we can reenact the original *act* in witch the being opens the horizon for the appearance of the beings and thus not confuse the being with one of the beings as it happens in all metaphysical philosophies.

Willing to maintain an in decidable character that makes the **effect of the differe(a)nce** persist, Drrida's philosophy touches upon the issue of the manifestation of the *one* in the form of *panta rhei*, thus the *one* differs from itself and *becomes*. This idea of the *one* that *becomes* implies the fact that the *one* can no longer stand as an *axis mundi*, the point of equilibrium and stability, representing the absolute certainty and safety upon which the idealist transcendentalism used to stand. The action of wasting itself and thus becoming, witch characterizes the *one* puts into light the *differe(a)nce* as a common boundary between all those classical metaphysical oppositions such as: theory-practice, thinking-unthinking, self-other, determined-undetermined, presence-absence, affirmation-negation etc. Here we find ourselves captive (again) to the heraclitean paradigm of the interconnection of possibilities.

The interconnection of possibilities represents the main argument in avoiding thinking anymore inside the box of the old paradigm, thus the classical oppositions are dismissed as false preconceived judgments. In this respect we will exemplify in the following rows the fact that Christianity and secularization do not oppose each other, but rather the complete each other. Our attention will focus on the theoretical perspective proposed to us by Gianni Vattimo, according to which:"*la secolarizatione – e quindi il laicismo – sono sostanzialmente prodoti del Cristianesimo.*" The horizon of this theoretical perspective is identified by the Italian philosopher in Marcel Gauchet`s work

”*Il disincanto del mondo. Una storia politica della religione*” from which Vattimo quotes in ”*Verita o fede debole? Dialogo su cristianesimo e relativismo*” the folowing: ” *che il Cristianesimo sia (...) la religione dell`uscita dalla religione.*”[1] Pursuing this premise, Gianni Vattimo advances the idea according to which the main components of the modern western civilization such as: democracy, free market, civil rights and individual freedoms were featured by Christianity. This specific type of interpretation of the relation between Christianity and secularization presents itself as an alternative (worthy to be taken in consideration) to the more traditional vision that somehow succeeded in imposing itself; here I'm taking about the interpretation according to which the relation between Christianity and secularization is based on the assumption of the existence of a disruption.

The work: ”*Verita o fede debole? Dialogo su cristianesimo e relativismo*”, features the interpretative positions of Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo and French anthropologist Rene Girard towards the issue of the relation between Christianity and secularization. Both Vattimo and Girard reject the idea that the relation in question is based on the existence of a disruption and suggest the idea of a continuum that characterizes the presence and manifestation of Christianity for which secularization doesn't represent anything else but a moment of its *nihilistic* faith. And so one can say that there is a convergent point between Vattimo's philosophical view and Girard's anthropological view; this point where the two authors meet consists in Nietzsche's announcement of *God's death* that becomes the unifying theme. Rene Girard sees in Friedrich Nietzsche: ”*il piu grande teologo moderno*”[2], while Gianni Vattimo admits the fact that Nietzsche's *nihilism* withholds the seed of what would later became the concept of **weak being** in the Italian's philosophy, all this because for Vattimo the statement of *God's death* is interpreted as being: ”*un indebolimento della sua potenza transcendentale che ci ha storicamente condotto all conseguente destrutturazione di tutte le verita ontologiche che hanno caratterizato la storia e il pensiero dell`uomo*”[3].

The hermeneutic bet that challenges both the thinking of Girard and Vattimo stands on the ground (*Grund*) constituted by the acknowledgement of the fact that: ”*il Cristianesimo non e una religione in senso proprio, ma il principio di destrutturazione di tutti i culti arcaici: questo principio deve vestirsi da religione istituzionale se vuole*

entrare in dialogo con la storia dei credi tradizionali"[4]. So, we have in front of our eyes the image of Christianity who as the Trojan horse places itself in the ancient castle of the archaic religions (*il castello millenario delle religioni naturali*) and suppresses it gradually by assuming the language and symbols that define the archaic religions with the purpose of overthrowing their significant. This overthrowing occurs within the ancient castle of the archaic religions and leads to the demystification of the whole violence based on which: "*erano stati eretti i bastioni della fortezza religiosa tradizionale.*"[5] It is the Christianity that unravels the violent matrix of the cultural order (*la matrice violenta dell`ordine culturale*) and starting from here emerge questions such as: *verita o fede debole?* ; *fede or relativismo?*

Although Christianity triggered an extraordinary historical development that reached its climax in today's age, it is (post)modernity itself that reflects a puzzling situation: "*proprio nel momento in cui sembra volersi definitivamente liberare dalla costrizione dei vincoli religiosi e confesionali, la cultura occidentale rivela – attraverso quella che Rene Girard definisce **un`espulsione razionalista del religioso** – la sua redice piu profondamente cristiana*"[6]. What Vattimo is trying to say here is that the whole ideological horizon of today's culture is built around the concept of the victim and it is known that the Judeo-Christian tradition (especially) is the one that placed the victim at the very heart of our speech horizon. The *death of God* itself represents the real death of an innocent victim and further more it represents the real death of **the innocent victim**.

For Gianni Vattimo the process of gradual suppression of all ontology's is just another step that is part of the positive and irreversible faith of western culture. This emancipation towards the ontological structures and also towards the concept of truth is nothing else but the inevitable result of the no coming back road of western culture. In this context, today's man is: *l`uomo globalizzato e interconnesso*; this means that today's man finds himself exposed more and more to:" higher doses of interdependence" (*dosi sempre piu massice d`interdipendenza e alterita*). Finding himself narrowed in the so called *strutture di contenimento*, the (post)modern man oscillates between the limits of two poles: one is **carita totale** and the other is **violenza totale**. This oscillation is what succeeds in postponing the apocalyptic outcome, as the *strutture di contenimento* are based on different forms of secularized transcendence such as: the ideology of the

democratic state, the advanced capitalism, the technology and technique, the mass-media show, the mercantilism of individual relations and so on. As a conclusion, we might as well agree with Gianni Vattimo on the fact that we have a world culture that is already infiltrated by laicism, technique, economy and mass-media propagand: *"e gia infiltrate di laicismo secolare, di razionalita tecnica, di utilitarismo economico, di propaganda mass-mediatica e para-ideologica"*.[7]

By stating that: *"il destino della cristianita sara quello di disolvere tutte le strutture ontologiche e di verita che l`uomo, violentamente, ha imposto agli altri uomini"*[8], Vattimo signals the return in the (post)modern age of the concept of **apocalypse**. It is noteworthy that this concept isn't recuperated in the (post)modern age just as *rivelatione*, but also as *dispiegamento della violenza*. In the same time Vattimo admits that: *"il Cristianesimo e creativamente liberatorio, ma in questa liberazione c`e posto anche per una creativita nagativa, diabolica e distruttrice"*[9]. Emphasizing the key role played by Christianity in revealing the violent matrix of the cultural order (*la matrice violenta dell`ordine culturale*) shouldn't force us to adopt an extreme attitude of rejection towards the other religions; by contrary, the importance of the religious dialog stands in the necessity of finding in different religious traditions those centers of common interest that lead to a substantial diminution of violence and conflict. The theme of religious violence can't be ignored because it characterizes the very core of the religious fundamentalism by being: *il prodotto di una tormentata negoziazione storica con la secolarizzazione e la modernita*. And starting from here, Gianni Vattimo notices that the main issue of the Islamic fundamentalism in relation with Christianity doesn't consist in the word of the gospels or in the authority represented by the Pope's image, but in the presence of secularization facilitated by Christianity and as an implicit result, the presence of the phenomenon of laicization that comes with it. One must admit that the disruptive force of secularization in relation with the traditional religious order represent the greatest threat at the address of the archaic religions that are forced to face self disintegration once they find themselves in an laic context.

In order to offer an even more complete image in what the issue of religious violence is concern, the French anthropologist Rene Girard notices the fact that the disrupting and liberating action undertaking by Christianity towards the traditional

ontology's doesn't mean at all that we are facing a weakening of the Church. In this respect, Girard remarks that a weak Church, meaning a less structured and ranked one, doesn't present a guarantee of the fact that society won't be affected by even more religious violence. Here, the French anthropologist gives as example the protestant religions that despite having lighter and more secularized ecclesiastic means and a more mature hermeneutical relation with the biblical text, they produced more violent theologies that even more radical visions on what is or should be the Christian spirit. The example of the USA speaks for itself, there they have an abundance of religions and sects and this didn't led at all to a less violent and more pacifist society compared to the European society besieged by Catholicism. Therefore we might conclude that these protestant religions tend to favor the pole of *violence* rather than the pole of *charity* and all this because the splitting is often made in the name of a higher truth that takes us back to the presence of the *sacred* that censures the whole violence that sustains it.

Regarding the sacred texts, Gianni Vattimo underlines the importance of approaching them starting from the historical context in which they appeared and also gives us warning upon the necessity of freeing ourselves from the negative impact of the sacred texts interpretations that present themselves in the persecutory form specific to the *sacred*. Following this direction, Vattimo rejects Girard's opinion that the Ten Commandments are universally truth, arguing that, for example, the commandment: "*do not kill*" isn't universally truth but rather it depends strictly on the historical context – in case of war the interdiction to kill is lifted. Therefore the Ten Commandments should be considered and interpreted strictly in their historical context in which they appeared and also they should be considered and interpreted in a demythologized manner that doesn't allow the *sacred* to mask the religious violence.

In his works Gianni Vattimo speaks *of una dinamica consumativa del Cristianesimo* and explains it: *sempre meno idoli, sempre piu ateismo*. This consuming dynamics is what makes out of Christianity the religion that opens the gate towards an existence that is freed from the suffocating grab of the archaic religions. Vattimo fulfills in his philosophy Gioacchino da Fiore's vision – *la carita prende il posto della disciplina*. By adopting Gioacchino da Fiore's concept of *carita* in his own philosophy, Gianni Vattimo can explain the outcome of the consuming dynamics that characterizes

Christianity using the term ***positive atheism***. This concept of positive atheism withholds the key and the solution for the way in which the (post)modern society should approach the issue of reducing violence – "*niente prove naturali di Dio, ma solo carita e, certamente, l`etica*. This way we are drawn to the pole of *carita* and of *ethics*; in fact, (post)modern *ethics* means *carita* as Vattimo says: *io dico sempre che l`etica e semplicemente la carita piu le leggi del traffico*"[10]. And we can also notice that finding the physical evidence of God's existence is no longer a necessity.

Rene Girard considers that in the context that philosophies are nearly dead, the ideologies are at their dawn, the politic theories are almost totally finished and the faith that science will be able to successfully replace religion is already part of the past, it results that all around the world there is a real necessity of religion comeback. According to Girard, we are living in a world where tragedy reemerges at all levels: politics, social, ecologic and so on; but the French anthropologist insists on the following aspect: "*se il nostro mondo e un mondo in cui la tragedia sta tornando, e se noi cominciamo a vedere questa tragedia come una tragedia religiosa, allora c'e speranza, se invece la consideriamo come una tragedia greca, allora e finita*"[11]. The fact that Girard proposes the comeback of tragedy as religious tragedy and not Greek tragedy come to prove his attachment towards the Church (especially the Catholic Church) that he conceders to be: "*come nucleo simbolico forte contro le derive patologiche dell'individualismo contemporaneo e come strumento storico irrinunciabile per contenere la violenza e i pericoli autodistruttivi dell'uomo, sempre pronti a scatenarsi*"[12].

Touching upon the interpretation of the two poles that form the interogation: *verita o fede debole?*, Rene Girard considers the concept of *verita* in two different ways – *verita come verita della vittima* and *verita come verita della rivelazione cristiana*. The first view of the concept of *verita* as *verita della vittima* involves the fact that: *ogni mito e una Passione fallita, non nel senso che la vittima non sia stata uccisa, ma che la verita antropologica di questa morte, di questa morte innocente, non e stata rivelata*. The term *Passione falita* plays a key role in unraveling the hidden side of mythology, *Passion* becomes the key of understanding mythology. The ***myth*** that always used to represent the point of view of the crowd that choused its victim by proclaiming its guilt, turns, once with the history of *Passion*, into the frame of the innocent victim's livings. It is the

history of *Passion* that transposes us in the skin of the innocent victim and makes us see thru its eyes. But, just because thru the history of *Passion* we have access to the other side, the victim's side, does it really mean that Christianity presents itself as *la faccia opposta della mitologia*? The answer is **no**. Christianity doesn't tell us the truth regarding God's existence from a scientific point of view, but what it does tell us is the *truth* of all myths and implicitly the *truth* of the human culture. This way in which Christianity presents itself to us, as the truth of all mythology leads us towards the hidden side of myths by illuminating those features of human culture that are censured by the sacred (such as violence) and are named by Girard using the Anglo-American concept of *common knowledge*.

The next topic we touch upon is the one involving the disjunctive relation of **faith** and **relativism**. Having to chose between these two, meaning the *universality of faith* on one hand and the *multi-cultural relativism* on the other, Gianni Vattimo assumes the following premise: *Dio possa essere solo un relativista*; and also upsides the Church's traditional view by abandoning Christianity's claim of *verita* in favor of the demythologizing solution offered with the implementation of the concept of *carita*. Gianni Vattimo straightens his assumption by arguing that the Pope himself shares the idea according to which the human kind should walk on the path opened by the concept of *carita* –" *sono anche edificato dal fatto che la prima enciclica del nuovo Papa sintitoli **Deus <u>caritas</u> est, e non Deus <u>veritas</u> est**"*[13]. Adopting the formula *Deus caritas est*, Vattimo expresses his attachment towards a God that shelters under his cupola the various cultures of humanity - "*penso a un Dio relativista perche e l'unico che puo esserlo davvero, dal momento che guarda le varie culture dall'alto*"[14]. This *God* is not to be recognized as the objective truth of a sentence or fraise, but is to be found in Jesus Christ as the matrix of *carita*. Vattimo`s option for the *multi-cultural relativism* supports the thought that solo una societa liberale puo essere relativista perche deve ammettere diversi tipi di opinioni". The Italian philosopher considers that a polemic against the *multi-cultural relativism* is in fact an attitude of rejection towards the liberalism of society; therefore, we must accept in virtue of *carita* the presence of various attitudes and values in the society that we live. For it is the society the place where the *objective truth* is rejected because people don't get along when encountering the *truth*, but rather

encounter the *truth* when they come to a mutual understanding; as Vattimo says: *si capisce che e ancora possibile parlare di verita, ma solo perche nell'acordo abbiamo realizzato la caritas*.

The French anthropologist Rene Girard doesn't share Vattimo`s enthusiasm for *relativism* and states that he cannot consider himself a *relativist* because in his opinion the relativism that characterizes the (post)modern age is the result of the modern anthropology's failure. Here Girard means the modern anthropology's failure in its attempt to answer the question regarding the presence of various human cultures, doesn't end in the disruption of the idea of *universalism*. The universality of human cultures is given by their **purpose** and even if there are lots of ways for codification of the social rules, this aspect shouldn't make us stumble in the multitude of obstacles posed to us by the various ways in which the social rules are coded, thus they all converse to one and the same *purpose*. In a nutshell: "*l'antropologia ha fallito perche non e riuscita a spiegare le diverse culture umane come un fenomeno unitario, ed e per questo che oggi siamo impantanati nel relativismo*"[15]. It is most interesting to notice that although Girard pronounces himself in favor of the *universalism* guaranteed by Christianity that he considers by contrast to the other religions to be: "infinitively more complex and understanding" - "*e infinitamente piu compleso e comprensivo (nel senso che riesce ad accogliere, a incorporare)*"[16], he underlines the necessity of *imposing* **limits**. And it is this very aspect that one might find most disturbing. How can we find the reconciliation between the necessity of *imposing* **limits** and the vision of Jesus Christ as *the universal victim* - idea that transcends the boundaries of Christian culture and also excludes the presence of an alternative vision? Considering that the other religions don't recognize the innocence of the victim, innocence that is recognized, stated and exemplified only by Christianity, Rene Girard intends to impose the model *Gesu vittima universale* as unique and unchallenged by any other vision that comes from another human culture that is not Christian. According to Girard, only "*Gesu svela (...) l`innocenza taciuta, il malinteso, che si nasconde sotto il sangue della storia*"[17] and the French anthropologist continues by making clear his position towards the problem posed by violence: "*se si comprendesse che Gesu e la vittima universale venuta apposta per superare questi conflitti, il problema sarebbe risolto*"[18].

At the other end, Gianni Vattimo approves the *multi-cultural relativism* and in the same time pronounces himself in favor of transcending the limits. It is the *liberalism* (backed by the Italian philosopher) the one that guarantees the existence of a multitude of visions that limit each other, in the society. In order to transcend the limits one needs a unique vision (such as Girard's – Gesu vittima universale) that isn't limited by any other vision that might be an alternative to it. Only this monopoly of vision can guarantee the transcending of the limits that is the expression of the universalism, rather then that of relativism. To conclude, one cannot be entirely convinced about the way in which the *multi-cultural relativism* matches the impulse of transcending the limits (Vattimo`s vision) and also one might lock with suspicion when the universalistic vision is matched with the necessity of imposing limits (Girard's vision).

Stating that „l'idea stessa del pluralismo delle culture esiste e si e sviluppata dentro una specifica cultura, quella occidentale"[28], Gianni Vattimo pronounces himself in favor of Christianity as the **symbol** of western culture. Representing the most radical critique addressed to the archaic religions and in the same time being the key reading of all myths, Christianity claims the great merit of draining step by step the vitality of the concept of *truth* - „sono convinto che il bello del Cristianesimo e aver svvotato un po' tutta la forza del <vero>"[19]. The ***truth*** <u>becomes</u> ***interpretation*** (just an interpretation among many others and nothing more) and the direct consequence of this fact is that the new concept of truth doesn't have to convince or oblige no one. This new concept of *truth* that characterizes the (post)modern age presents itself as the **image** of *relativism* and *liberalism*, but one must not overlook the fact that both *relativism* and *liberalism* are the *natural* outcome suggested by the determinism of the Christian faith.

Notes:

1) Rene Girard, Gianni Vattimo, Verita o fede debole? Dialogo su cristianesimo e relativismo, con introduzione a cura di Pierpaolo Antonello, Ed. Transeuropa, 2006, p. VIII;
2) Ibidem, p. IX;
3) Ibidem, p. IX;
4) Ibidem, p. X;
5) Ibidem, p. X;
6) Ibidem, p. XII;
7) Ibidem, pp. XX-XXI;
8) Ibidem, p. XIV;
9) Ibidem, p. XVI;
10) Ibidem, p. 16;
11) Ibidem, p. 18;
12) Ibidem, p. XIX;
13) Ibidem, p. 30;
14) Ibidem, p. 29;
15) Ibidem, p. 31;
16) Ibidem, p. 33;
17) Ibidem, p. 34;
18) Ibidem, p. 31;
19) Ibidem, p. 36.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Metaphysics attempt to *malleus maleficarum* towards the concept of "becoming" has its source in the misconception that if the reality consists in the way that the becoming features, then this would be against the just order (Themis), thus reality cannot be otherwise then perfect. It is the result of this refusal to accept that the reality cannot be "imperfect" (and thus having the features of the becoming) that led to the antique conception of being as transfixed. But in the quite different experience of the postmodern human, the being gives itself in a weak modus that surpasses the transfixed *status* of the parmenidian inspired antique being. For the postmodern being is no longer characterized by "the fact of imposing itself", but is best described as "the action of weakening / emptying itself".

The postmodern human isn't hopelessly captive to its predetermined faith that used to make the antique and modern human nothing but a simple pawn in the cold-blooded perfectly structured and elaborate system of hierarchy, because the new age that he exists within (meaning the postmodern era) presents itself as a *chance*. This *chance* is the result of the weakening of the *being* which doesn't present itself in its violent, powerful manner anymore, but rather in a fragmented, non-finalized and void leaving form that enables the manifestation of the *becoming*. As a result of this, the main metaphysical premises regarding the concept of "becoming" are overwhelmed in the postmodern era, thus obtaining the following premises:

1) The becoming is part of the being, because the being in its weak modus features the attributes of becoming.

2) The becoming is the reality, because the truth is interpretation as the nihilist ontological hermeneutics tells us, and the weakened and instable structure of the world is given by the game of interpretations.

The becoming represents the emptying of the being in the sense of *kenosis* and the concept of "weak being" is meant to prepare the path of this long goodbye said to the being an implicitly to metaphysics and modernity, for the "weak being" is in fact just

another name for the *becoming*. The parmenidian inspired doctrine of the being claims that the becoming is an illusion, the religious doctrines claim that death is an illusion and invite us to believe that live goes on even after death, whether we continue living in another dimension / sacred place or we reincarnate, thus proclaiming the idea of an eternal presence that features a complete and perfect *being*. In this sense the main focus of the great metaphysical doctrines (religious or not) aimed and still aims at censuring the concepts of *"the becoming"* and *"the being-towards-death"* from both the collective and the individual human conciseness. But those very concepts are broth into light step by step, of course also with the effort of this work, and they define the reality of a new way of thinking that corresponds to a new philosophical era – *the postmodernism*.

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