

Review of Gianni Vattimo, *A Farewell to Truth*, trans. William McCuaig. New York: Columbia University Press. 192 pages.

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Preview

Could a book such as *A Farewell to Truth* by Gianni Vattimo have been better received? It doesn't seem so. Those who think that saying goodbye to the truth might be a much too risky business are still the majority. However, simply going through the first pages of this book is enough to realize that the philosopher from Turin wants to get rid of only one of the senses given to the concept of truth. This sense is the realistic meaning of *adaequatio intellectus et rei*. For Vattimo, *adaequatio* is nothing other than an interpretation which is oblivious of being such a thing, as Nietzsche had already claimed in his time. It is an interpretation which is considered foreign to a community's agreement and which relies on its ability to rescue "facts" just as they are, regardless of our language and of the conditions that give meaning to them. Thus, these very "naked" facts are attempted to be pressed upon others, as if this was the only worth-abiding rule. Against this interpretation, the writer privileges a less emphatic sense of the truth. This is a concept that we always use provisionally. In fact, an explanation may be deemed true as long as a better or more efficient one, which could refute it, does not exist. This is decided by the consensus reached by a society. Such consensus may even be the strictest agreement reached by experts about a technical issue. We can see, then, that truth can be verified even when considered from such a weak viewpoint. But we can only do so if we rely on previously accepted conditions. Obviously, these conditions cannot be accepted without an assumption.

ISSN 1918-7351
Volume 6 (2014)

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Could a book such as *A Farewell to Truth* by Gianni Vattimo have been better received? It doesn't seem so. Those who think that saying goodbye to the truth might be a much too risky business are still the majority. However, simply going through the first pages of this book is enough to realize that the philosopher from Turin wants to get rid of only one of the senses given to the concept of truth. This sense is the realistic meaning of *adaequatio intellectus et rei*. For Vattimo, *adaequatio* is nothing other than an interpretation which is oblivious of being such a thing, as Nietzsche had already claimed in his time. It is an interpretation which is considered foreign to a community's agreement and which relies on its ability to rescue "facts" just as they are, regardless of our language and of the conditions that give meaning to them. Thus, these very "naked" facts are attempted to be pressed upon others, as if this was the only worth-abiding rule. Against this interpretation, the writer privileges a less emphatic sense of the truth. This is a concept that we always use provisionally. In fact, an explanation may be deemed true as long as a better or more efficient one, which could refute it, does not exist. This is decided by the consensus reached by a society. Such consensus may even be the strictest agreement reached by experts about a technical issue. We can see, then, that truth can be verified even when considered from such a weak viewpoint. But we can only do so if we rely on previously accepted conditions. Obviously, these conditions cannot be accepted without an assumption.

From a Heideggerian "logic," all truth always occurs within a prior disclosure of meaning (*Erschlossenheit*). Vattimo suggests that this prior disclosure of meaning which makes the truth of a statement possible could also be described with the famous "dwelling" metaphor. This metaphor is extremely significant in Heideggerian philosophy. But in order to achieve some clarity, this idea can be illustrated by Thomas Kuhn's more current concept of "paradigm." Those paradigms within which the particular truth of a statement is verified or refuted cannot be considered objective, since they are socially shared horizons of meaning. However, establishing this distinction does not mean completely invalidating the idea of truth as adequacy. Rather, Vattimo is trying to think this idea without reducing it to a faithful correspondence between intellect and a completely independently-given object. Just as in Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein* in the first section of *Being and Time*, adequacy can only make sense within a pre-given sphere of truth, as *Alétheia*. This hermeneutic conception of the truth

not only allows us to understand why truth changes in different periods of time; we can also deploy it to interpret the manner of proceeding in the 'hard sciences' as well. We thus confirm that the sciences verify their propositions within certain paradigms. This entails the existence of certain presuppositions which are not, in turn, fully proved. On the contrary, we would have to go on a never-ending chain of justifications to achieve this, and all justification attempts would become impossible in this way. However, the fact that not even the hard sciences can achieve an ultimate justification of knowledge, as Aristotle thought they could when looking for solid preliminary principles, reveals that truth can only be held as a matter of interpretation.

If it is legitimate to claim that truth occurs, that it takes place, it is because, in order for this to happen, certain previously accepted suppositions, methodologies and postulates are already in operation. Without this horizon of signification no proposition could either be understood or confirmed. This means that truth is possible because human communities share certain common beliefs which lack a definite basis. These beliefs and suppositions, though, are the ones which uphold the acceptability of the paradigms. We cannot ignore the fact that this is a risky, or, a "dangerous" way of understanding truth, but it is certainly more favorable to freedom, tolerance and listening to others than the obligation of having to surrender to the evidence of a crushing truth imposed on us as indisputable.

In the first chapter of Vattimo's book, "Beyond the Myth of Objective Truth," Vattimo develops his position by establishing a debate with today's two main philosophical trends. It is not by chance that these trends have become the main defenders of metaphysical realism. In the section entitled "From Phenomenology to an Ontology of Actuality," Vattimo questions the Husserlian inheritance in current thought. He reproaches phenomenology for its attempt to dissolve philosophy into a series of regional ontologies, therefore losing interest in "fundamental ontology." According to Vattimo, we must admit that such a temptation was no longer present in the last Husserl, the one who wrote a work such as *Krisis*. But we must also state that Husserl has largely inspired contemporary philosophy to a wave of objectivism. This development has, precisely, enabled some of the current phenomenological trends to cross paths with the post-analytical philosophical trends which defend new forms of realism.

Vattimo, in fact, directs his criticism to those trends in the section entitled, "The Tarski Principle." There we find the shortest version of his argument against the ideal of objective truth. Vattimo devotes this significant section to discussing the interpretation of Polish philosopher Alfred Tarski's famous *T* principle. This principle states that P is true if and only if P. If we translated that formal logic expression into one of the most commonly used examples of everyday language, we might obtain a statement in English like the following: "It rains" if and only if it rains. This means that the statement is true only if the existence of the state of things to which the proposition refers can be confirmed within the reality existing outside language. But are we absolutely sure, asks Vattimo, that the second term of this proposition is not within the

quotation marks? In any case, we can say that we have become used to identifying such an event on a regular basis because, culturally, we possess a certain prior notion of what the rain means. But that natural phenomenon which is quite familiar to us now hasn't always been so absolutely evident to all human beings. Many examples of other cultures in the past could be found, in which the rain was given very different senses from the ones we would be willing to accept nowadays.

On some occasions, the Italian philosopher has been reproached for the fact that such a conclusion is no longer new. This observation is, of course, undeniable. However, the consequences have not been fully accepted either by common sense or by an important part of contemporary philosophy. The new expressions of "realism" firmly reject those consequences. So the reflections within this little book are born in the heat of this paradoxical situation of contemporary culture. This is the same situation that Nietzsche denounced as he remembered the dead God's shadows which struggled against disappearing. This is why Vattimo wants to rethink the characteristics of the historical event which defines the period in which we are living. This event need not be experienced as a fearsome threat, but rather as a forecasting of an opportunity to open up horizons of freedom.

Having said that, it is clear that, if we are no longer able to appeal to an objective truth for legitimizing discourse, then we cannot assume that what inspires the rejection of the idea of truth as adequacy is a faithful description of the facts. If we accepted that solution, we would obviously remain prisoners of the very logical foundation that we are trying to avoid. The only reasons which can justify the negation of objective truth are practical, ethical-political reasons. Ultimately, those reasons are no different from the reasons which inspired Heidegger's controversial critique of metaphysics. In fact, Heidegger did not reject metaphysics because he was convinced that a truer description of Being could be offered than that which had come up during the history of Being. He has, rather, before his eyes, the devastating effects of the world's techno-scientific rationalization. He is therefore conscious of the intolerable violence that the consummation of metaphysics entails. This realization presupposes Dasein's loss of freedom. Understanding the reasons behind the movement of weak thought towards Richard Rorty's pragmatism might be easier from such a practical position. This movement has enabled Vattimo to notice that the "truth that sets us free" (going back to a beautiful phrase from John's Gospel) is also the one that proves the most useful in order to live together with our fellow men in a better way. Paradoxical though this may seem, Vattimo's attempt to extract an emancipation policy from this farewell to the dream of objective truth is not strange. The reason for this is that that dream has often been used to impose things on us which we do not agree with.

In the second chapter, we encounter another of the Italian philosopher's great interests, not a new interest, but one that has intensified in the past years: Christianity. Vattimo's re-reading of Christianity has matured together with an increase in political concerns.

It is well known that, aided by anthropologist René Girard, Vattimo was able to re-discover the relevance of Christianity as a stronger, more remote destiny for the West than modernity. In fact, modernity is now regarded, by the Italian philosopher, as one moment within the secularization process of the Christian tradition which defines our Western way of being. According to Vattimo, the Christian message of charity is the most valuable heritage that the West might have to offer the other cultures with which it comes into contact. Moreover, within the discouraging context of today's world, such charity heritage is one of the main reasons which can explain the radicalization, in political terms, experienced by the "weak thought" during the last years. This return to a secularized Christianity of the *Kenosis* also allows us to understand this philosopher's response to the difficult issue of the limits of interpretation. Vattimo does not actually believe that we will succumb to irrationalism if the 20th century parable of the notion of truth is understood to be a transition from truth to charity. In other words, nowadays it is easier for us to see charity as conditioning and simultaneously enabling truth. In fact, if the horizons within which we experience things are historical in nature and, therefore, cannot become objects of a definite demonstration without the need of any presuppositions, the acceptability of those very paradigms cannot depend on any demonstrative testing either. Such acceptability can only be based on an act of unfounded "faith," some trust with conjecture traits. It is, all in all, a risky bet which could only be held on the basis of charity, love, and friendship towards those people with whom one shares a horizon.

Now, the novelty provided by this book does not only consist of having proved that the idea of truth as adequacy can and, better still, must be done away with if a true democratic politics is to be fulfilled. Vattimo is also aware that politics without truth has not always been democratic either. Perhaps the most interesting and future-oriented contribution that this work makes is Vattimo's return to a path taken in his youth but from a different angle. This path, strange though this may seem, leads from Marx into Heidegger in depth. The return to this project began in articles compiled by Santiago Zabala in *Nihilism & Emancipation*. But it can be pointed out that such an intention is more clearly expressed in *Ecce Comu*, published for the first time in Spanish at the end of 2006 by Cuba's publishing house, *Ciencias Sociales*. In the end, the project only begins to take distinctive shape with *A Farewell to Truth* and *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx*. The latter has been written in collaboration with his disciple, Zabala.

Already in the introduction to *A Farewell to Truth*, Vattimo attempts to show the relationship between nihilist hermeneutics and Hegelian-Marxist dialectic thought. According to the philosopher from Turin, Heideggerian hermeneutics inherits and completes the emancipation vocation of the disappearing dialectic thought during the second half of the 20th century. This dialectic thought had been unable to fulfill its own freedom and aspirations for emancipation because it was still tied to a concept of truth that had not managed to completely abandon metaphysical violence. The phenomenon to which we

make reference can be clearly appreciated in the ample spectrum going from the utopic movement, to the reconciliatory moment in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, to the reappearance of the sense of history in the concept of the group in fusion in Sartre's *Critique of Dialectic Reason*.

In the section entitled, "*The Political Task of Thought*," Vattimo points out again that Heidegger has succeeded in providing the emancipatory spirit of disappearing dialectical thought with a radicality that it had never possessed. This has been possible because the later Heidegger has come to think about the idea of praxis in a more radical way than the tradition of dialectical thought had done until Adorno and Sartre. This was possible because of the way the *Meßkirch* philosopher thinks about the event of Being, therefore managing to free himself from the violence dragged along by the objectivist ideal of truth. This ideal still remains a negative horizon even in Adorno's case. It was already presupposed, though, in Marx's concept of revolutionary *praxis*; Marx's idea of social transformation rested upon a theoretical knowledge of the necessary and objective laws of history. According to Marxist theory, it was the expropriated proletariat who had access to that objective truth, precisely because they were not blinded by the veils of a class-divided societal ideology. Therefore, that idea of *praxis* resulting from an objective scientific knowledge is not free from metaphysical violence. Neither is it, then, compatible with the freedom that dialectical thought expected to achieve in the world. Conversely, Heidegger does not develop his understanding of the Being as *Ereignis*, which forces us to think about it as freedom, novelty, and project, by resting on a theoretical knowledge which ultimately leads to the imposition of objective truth as unquestionable. As it has been pointed out before, he does not arrive at the concept of *Ereignis* upon the basis of a truer description of Being than the one provided in the history of metaphysics. The reasons behind Heidegger's attempt at developing his own understanding of the *Ereignis* are rather ethical-political (practical) in nature. Generally speaking, those reasons were also shared by the artistic and philosophical vanguards from the early 20th century. Heidegger managed to further radicalize this general rejection.

Conversely, in the introduction to his book, Vattimo points out that the relation between *Dasein* and historical openness is not a theoretical knowledge relation but an eminently practical one. According to Vattimo, this practical relation between *Dasein* and the sense horizon where it has been thrust is comparable to what Ludwig Wittgenstein identified with the fact of sharing a form of life. In this sense, the change in historical horizon does not derive from a person's voluntary decision enlightened by theoretical knowledge, but rather from the possibility of starting to share a different form of life with other people.

Another noteworthy idea from the section entitled, "*The Political Task of Thought*," is the thesis according to which Heidegger had not succeeded in offering a satisfactory explanation for our civilization's tendency to forget the "ontological difference" of Being and to remain stuck on the level of what is shown in the presence of what is present. It is probably with Marx as well as Nietzsche, though, that Heidegger's failed explanation could be developed, thus

avoiding the “mystical” outlet to which his thought has always been exposed. It is precisely by relating Heidegger’s thoughts with Nietzsche’s and Marx’s that we could start considering that Heidegger’s thesis of forgetfulness of Being is not necessarily abstruse and hard to conceive. On the contrary, it is something much more concrete and easy to identify, since such oblivion is related to conditions of domination. As it is shown by Nietzsche and, in a way, also by Walter Benjamin—let us only remember his famous *Theses on the Philosophy of History*—it is the dominant classes’ ideology that causes such oblivion, and has the effect of the imposition of presence. This forgetting leads us to accept “what is given” as if it was normal and unquestionable, and justifies Berthold Brecht’s well-known warning which urged us not to consider what happens as normal.

We have reached, then, what we consider to be Vattimo’s most interesting but also most problematic point: his effort to develop a still incipient hermeneutics of listening to the current situation. This hermeneutics aspires to hand the floor to those whom power has always tried to silence. The philosopher from Turin claims that it might be by listening to that silence that a true event of Being, which nowadays is absent from our world, could actually occur.

However, in order to understand the political implications of this “listening hermeneutics” which begins to take shape in Vattimo’s latest philosophy, we cannot forget that Vattimo interprets Heidegger’s notion of ontological difference in a “leftist” sense. As a matter of fact, he accentuates the nihilist elements of the *An-danken* because he wants to abandon the metaphysical idea which sees Being as something hidden somewhere beyond its historical occurrence. If this kind of interpretative solution, which apparently leads to some sort of “negative theology,” is chosen, then we run the risk of being unable to surpass the violent metaphysical boundaries. Therefore, Vattimo describes it as the Heideggerian “rightist” position. In this way, he draws a free analogy with the vicissitudes of the Hegelian school to describe the debate between Heidegger’s interpreters. Thus, if one wants to preserve the radicalism of the thought of ontological difference and avoid the risk of falling back into metaphysics, one must think Being within the event of the historical horizons. These historical horizons are the ones that condition and, at the same time, enable the interpretations of each era. The metaphysical violence in the culmination of modernity, when a first pressing flashing of the *Erreignis* would finally occur, can only be surpassed as long as the modern nihilist calling carries on, to the very end, in the direction pointed out by Nietzsche. Such surpassing would take place through an acceptance-distortion action (*Verwindung*) which claims that there cannot be any other being than the one that occurs in the history of metaphysics.

It is clear, then, that for this “leftist” interpretation, beings cannot be something deeper and more hidden than their events. This viewpoint still allows for the hope that the Being forgotten during the history of Metaphysics shall be experienced again in its full presence.

In spite of all the difficulties encountered during the characterization of this idea, it can be pointed out that, for Vattimo, Being is a transmission of messages coming both from the past and from the present. This transmission is

not imposed on a deterministic way, though. Even though it is true that we have been thrust into a historical-cultural opening which conditions us, this situation does not make us completely lose our capacity to alter the sense horizon which we live in. For nihilist hermeneutics, the unfolding of a creative interpretation capable of transforming the cultural horizon to which it belongs is not impossible. On the contrary, the sense of tradition as *Überlieferung* which nihilist hermeneutics picks up from Heidegger's distinction in *Being and Time*, stresses the active quality of the transmission as a transforming inheritance of the past: the past is always presented as an open possibility. In this way, we can safely state that the experience of truth consists rather in questioning our horizons and prejudices, and showing that the possibilities which appear to be set can actually be changed. In this sense, the messages that we receive from the past, as well as those coming from the present, prompt us to try to answer its calling. And if it is true that such possibility is at all within our reach, it is precisely because Being is not an unchangeable structure, but it is rather a historical event.

"*L'essere non è, l'essere accade*,"¹ claims the most popular thesis of weak thought. The most eloquent characterizations of this concept, which is so hard to grasp, even in Heidegger himself, might very well be the one we come across on the pages of Vattimo's recent work, *Ecce Comu*. In the section entitled, "Weak thought, nihilism," Vattimo claims that,

The Being is not transcendent at all; it is the very history of humanity upon which it has consolidated as translation, memory, institution, art forms. It is the 'others' in the wider sense of the term. Not only those who were victorious and left a mark. Being is also—after the advent of Christianity—those who waited and were defeated and who, precisely because they failed to have an 'achievement,' deserve to survive as an open, not yet fulfilled past. Perhaps Heidegger in *Being and Time* could teach something to Benjamin, and such teaching should be read along with Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*. Could the mysticism attributed to the later Heidegger, the mysticism attributed to the task of thinking that has not been thought yet in the history of Being, be another way of referring to the duty to remember the defeated in the game of history, in the terms formulated by Benjamin?²

Taking these elements into account might make it easier for us to understand the need to listen to Being, which called for a nihilist hermeneutics, such as Vattimo's, which is intended to be the heir of Heidegger's *An-denken* in a post-metaphysical age. This task cannot entail, as the right wing interpretations of the ontological difference pretend it to entail, recalling "the voices of an archaic

¹ Gianni Vattimo, "Dialettica, differenza, pensiero debole," in idem, *Il pensiero debole*, ed. Gianni Vattimo & Pier Aldo Rovatti, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1998), 9.

² Gianni Vattimo, "Pensamiento débil, Nihilismo," in idem, *Ecce Comu. Cómo se llega a ser lo que se era*, trans. Rosa Rius Gatell y Carmen Castells Auleda (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2009), 94.

original mystery supposedly lost in the precipitous onset of Modernity.”³ In the section entitled “Philosophy and politics” from *Farewell to Truth*, Vattimo writes:

There is no origin placed somewhere outside the actuality of the event. There is the density of the event, which certainly bears the imprint of the past but which is equally composed of the voices of the present, and the past itself is something to which we accede only through whatever part of it survives down to us, its *Wirkungsgeschichte*.⁴

Having said that, in the difficult conditions of late modernity, a hermeneutics of sensitive listening to what is going on must take as a priority the political task of being the expression of the silence of the defeated in history. In order to achieve this, it must try to give the floor—if such a thing is possible at all—to the weak and the marginal within the current order of things. The marginal have always been neglected by the dominant powers who have tried to silence them, therefore making them invisible.

Nowadays such silence seems to be one of the ways in which the loss of freedom is revealed in the world of instrumental, technical-scientific rationalization denounced by Heidegger and Adorno. In fact, that loss of freedom which has always been one of the most threatening consequences of the end of metaphysics, seems to have become a heavy burden in our times, particularly in the industrialized West ruled by the “objectivist neutralization” of “pensée unique” or single thought. It is not difficult to see that such “neutralization” covers up the actions of imperialist-dominated economic globalization. Then, allowing himself to be questioned by what we could call the situation of the industrialized West, which seems to close the possibility that something new and different from current domination could ever happen, Vattimo clearly senses that an authentic event is lacking today. What this absence explains is that the Event, which is in essence a project, can only occur as long as man is still free. This is why, if we are sensitive to today’s lack of an authentic Event, we cannot but react urgently, Vattimo claims, to the loss of freedom in the economically globalized world. The philosopher from Turin urges us in this direction through the challenging proposal to take sides in the decisive struggle against ideological “neutralization” (*Neutralisierung*)—if we may use Carl Schmitt’s famous phrase—already completely dominating culture in the industrialized West.

In the section entitled, “Philosophy and Emancipation,” Vattimo discusses the dilemma posed by this need to take sides without which Being could never happen. With this purpose in mind, he analyzes, as an example, Heidegger’s reproachful support of the Nazi regime in 1933. As is well known, Heidegger opted for Nazism because he hoped that the pre-metaphysical past, which he saw in a mythological way in classical Greece, would be recreated in

³ Gianni Vattimo, *A Farewell to Truth*, trans. W. McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 42.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Hitler's Germany. But in doing so, he never lost sight of the fact that his choice was finite. The *Meßkirch* philosopher was certainly aware that it might have been a completely wrong choice (*Wer gross denkt muss gross irren*). Similarly, Vattimo is acutely aware that his choice is as finite as Heidegger's, and he knows that with it there is the inevitable risk of erring to which the Heidegger referred. Vattimo accepts that risk, however, because he is ready to listen to a different historical calling. With such a decision, Vattimo wants to remain faithful to what is fundamental in that calling, which Heidegger believed to have heard when he prepared to provide an answer to the time of consummate techno-scientific domination. As it has been mentioned before, for Vattimo, today's calling, which philosophy must attempt to answer, leads to taking on a concrete commitment to those who have less. He finds an additional "ontological" reason in this decision, which emerges after understanding that Being's being is directly related to the destiny of society's most disadvantaged ones. Indeed, the most disadvantaged ones are also more open to make projections, because the contingency of their own daring existence orients them toward the future. Thus, the Italian philosopher believes that the future of a Being, which can only be remembered as freedom and project, lies in the hope of the most disadvantaged.

From these elements, a complex dialectic begins to appear in Vattimo's latest thought, which again raises the issue of violence in historical changes, which has always been so difficult to deal with.

In the section entitled "Dialectics, Dialogue, and Dominion," Vattimo points out that if we want to protect ourselves from the ideological illusion that power has created to maintain its position, we cannot quietly accept the repeated use of dialog that the highest circles of power have made. If what we are after is, in fact, to start an effective social dialogue within the uneven force relations of today's world, Vattimo's challenge must then be heard. Taking sides in the conflict with dominant powers seems to be precisely the only way to contribute so that the conditions of inequality taken away from the dialogue through the effects of an empty rhetoric may be redistributed. This power rhetoric persistently calls for dialogue, since it is conscious about the fact that the current order has no real chance of being altered. However, "knowing that the conflict is necessary in order for dialogue to commence also constitutes the normative limit of every liberation struggles."⁵ The Italian philosopher finds in this dialectic another "ontological" justification to support the need to react to the loss of freedom in the economically globalized world.

In "The Political Task of Thought," the philosopher from Turin poses the need to take up again that extraordinary suggestion left unfinished by Heidegger in *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*. The reader will surely remember those pages in which the German philosopher contemplated the possibility that the announcement of Being might be heard in historical events as less "original" than the words of such great poets as Anaximander. One of those events might very

⁵ Vattimo, *A Farewell to Truth*, 118.

well be the case of “actions founding a state,”⁶ claimed Heidegger. Thus it is by following this unfinished Heideggerian project that Vattimo manages to rescue the importance of reflection about the ontological implications of art in order to think about our condition in today’s violent world. This is not only because art can be considered, as Heidegger pointed out in *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, as a perfect example of man’s ontological action. Reflecting upon a work of art is undoubtedly a crucial milestone in the philosopher of *Meißkirch*’s development of a concept of the occurrence of Being understood as freedom, novelty, and project.

There is a specific, suggestive aspect that Vattimo is interested in rescuing in his last reading of Heidegger’s conference: the inaugural force with which the setting up of art bursts in. This is a manifestation which allows the occurrence of truth as well, even beyond the strict aesthetic sphere of experience. In fact, dealing in depth with this hypothesis does not seem to be an impossible task. And the truth is that this hypothesis permits looking at the idea of art as a setting up of the truth; it could be a privileged place to access the way in which the birth of a new era of Being takes place.

Evidently, this outline we are attempting to draw cannot be assigned a purely symbolic effect, irrespective of whether it is even possible to think that it does in the apparently more innocent sphere of art. Should we set aside part of the symbolic load which characterizes Heideggerian discourse about art, we may find that the conflict between the World and the Earth might be condensed within the following comparison. On the one hand, the tendency represented by the World is one which is searching for stability, for keeping an articulate horizon. On the other, the opposing force symbolized by the Earth refers us to that inexhaustible reservoir of ulterior senses which constitutes a dark halo from which comes the impulse to project, to change, to become something else.

In historical times, this impulse to project rises above a bottomless abyss of freedom, since the Earth is indissolubly linked with the mortality of generations of humans who succeed one another throughout history. The dynamism of these generations allows for the understanding of how paradigms change to leave room for other occurrences of Being. This change of paradigm follows man’s life and death rhythm.

This impossibility to stop the impulse promoting change, the impossibility to lock up the uncontrollable force of the Earth (which, paradigmatically, lies on the foundation of the inaugural force of the true work of art) forever inside an established and controlled order, might prove useful to explain what happens during the birth of a historical opening. The change installed by a new time does not generally occur peacefully, according to Vattimo, due to “rational and even less democratic decisions.”⁷ In fact, if we look closely at the occurrences of Being which took place in the past, we cannot but

⁶ Gianni Vattimo, “The End of Philosophy in the Age of Democracy,” *Le Portique* 18 (2006), no. 5: 30, 31, 32, 33, 34.

⁷ Gianni Vattimo, “Dal dialogo al conflitto,” in idem, *Della realtà: Fini della filosofia* (Milan: Garzanti, 2012), 236.

confirm that the moment when a new paradigm is installed does not come over without the use of force, without some violence. Indeed, the greatest historical transformations do not usually occur unless a rather abrupt break takes place with the preceding horizon. Vattimo remembers this by quoting Thomas Khun's most widely used example of the abandonment of Ptolemy's hypothesis in favor of Copernicus'. This eloquently illustrates the features of the experience of the loss of continuity in which Being is renewed. This is an intermittent event, similar to that of the work of art, which also contributes to raising awareness through the creation of a radical novelty, irreducible to a historically given world.

That is why it is not strange for the opening-up of a historical horizon to very often seem like a "catastrophic" event. This event is lived by whoever is involved in it as some sort of disorientation state. This experience is similar to the intensity with which the founding force of art is lived. This intensity can be felt in the *Befindlichkeit* of the individual who experiences the work through the anguish caused by the inrush of a different world. Such a world comes to shake the placid relations with the inhabited world. If we take up the scheme which has been outlined, we can also imagine that what seems to have stopped or have lost strength in today's society are the conflicts which are necessary for Being to occur. To put it in the symbolic language of *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, it seems as if the World's "structuring" tendency had been imposed and had crushed the Earth's "dissolving" force. What has originated this subjection is the disappearance of conflict; and the freedom of human existence which enables Being's historical occurrence is extinguished with it. It is precisely this possibility of something different in the history of Being that seems to have been shut down in the last decades of economic globalization by the metaphysics that justifies violence. As was mentioned before, nowadays this metaphysics adopts the most elusive actions of the forces of neutralization. This action makes dominance hide under the mask of economic rationality and of science and technology, seen as the only hope for "peace" and "progress." That is why, for Vattimo, re-opening the conflict is of vital importance. It is only in this way that we can hope for the chance that something new may happen in history: a conflict with no hope for a radical superseding of a still metaphysical order. Vattimo claims that no global proletariat revolution would have been successful in today's power relations. However, conflict should help multiple anarchical resistance initiatives to wake up in the midst of the current order. It is clear, though, that this will be impossible to achieve if we avoid our concrete commitment to what is going on.

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