

Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology MJCP

ISSN: 2282-1619

VOL. 5, N.3 (2017)

Book Review

The need to Think

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In the book by the theologian and philosopher Vito Mancuso, entitled “Il bisogno di pensare”, p. 184, Garzanti editor, 2017, it is clear the intention of reflecting on big themes of life using an exquisitely socratic method, already starting from the title of the book and from the choice of dedicating it to Philosophy.

The author invites the reader to reflect with him, starting from some questions: what can we rely on to find a direction and support? Do we know toward what we direct our vital energy?

Vito Mancuso, right away, declares to belong to that type of people who can't forbear to think because they need it.

Availing of the existing distinction between the terms of necessity - urgency imposed by an external reality – and need – urgency born internally, in close contact with the desire – he invites us to reflect about the fact that discovering what we want results to be condition sine qua non to understand who we are.

The desire is able to define us. However, it always forces us to search, bringing us outside of ourselves; but it is right to be trapped in this mind ‘imprisonment’, or would it be better to try to eradicate this inclination to feel free and blessed finally?

Is it more convenient to follow the example of Jesus, «big raiser of the desire», or Buddha, «big eradicator of the desire»?

The author highlights the fact that can be considered three positions about the desire. That is, it is possible to have desires and to desire always more; it is possible to have desires trying to extinguish them; or it is possible to have a single big desire that is able, at the same time, to refer to all the others; a desire able to go over the egocentric coordinates, able to coincide with what is Good, True and Right.

By the way, to think really is not that easy. First of all, before getting to think, you need to feel, to perceive, to conceive; if we elaborate thoughts neglecting from the sensible level, probably we are referring to a fantasy, to an ideology etc. (in chapter II).

The thought, specifically, is characterized both by a constructive dimension (thought interpreted as Logos, Sophia producer) and by a destructive one (in this case it is interpreted as primordial Chaos, madness). The ideas, in addition to the concepts, are part of the first dimension. By the way, the ideas are not thought as it happens for the concepts; but rather they appear as visions, only when they want. And after they did it, they allow us to have a vision of the world, they reveal the direction of the meaning that we decide to give to our existence. Exactly at this point, we note how the author need to make a confession to us readers, that is to reveal which is the engine of his life – its idea -, which coincide with the love for the Sophia, with the Filo-sophia. He does it describing us minutely the meaning of Sophia, making us notice how it constitutes a «harmonious synthesis of Truth-Justice-Good».

Referring to the second dimension, which is the madness, the author highlights the fact it has not an 'evil' meaning, rather than something irrational and undisciplined.

Considering his own words, «Sophia is the need of think, Madness is the need of neglect the thought». By the way, it is useful to precise that the two dimensions do not have to be read in the light of a dichotomous thought, anything but. It will just be the harmonization of the two dimensions to make possible the develop of a mature personality.

«The mystery of anyone is contained and defined by his desire, and the secret of the mature personality is in bringing back the various contradictory desires to a single desire or unifying passion». This task, the author underlines, cannot really be completed considering only the personal dimension.

In fact, it will result essential to make the society as promoter of all those values that increase the probability of developing mature personalities. Considering the author's words, «anything, the world as a whole and each single objects inside it, originates from the relation and it is relation». So, the vision of the world proposed by the author make us notice how it is possible that the primordial Chaos, typical of the nature, can be progressively shaped by the unstopped work of the Logos. The ethical foundation is originated by this solicitation.

To rediscover the original Sophia of the humanity means to believe «in the primacy of the sense, of the good, of the justice, of the beauty».