

The Concept of “Revolution”: Analytical Epistemic-Moral Nuances in the Post-Complexity Age

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Abstract

We live in a society we may often perceive as unfair and oppressive. When political and social oppression becomes suffocating, rebellion against such oppression emerges as the sole viable course of action. An oppressed social climate harbors feelings that could lead to revolutionary fervor. This work intends to deal with the topic of revolution, in line with predominantly theoretical-moral connotations, tending towards social ethics. Drawing on a phenomenological analysis of revolution, this work endeavors to delineate the form of justice that should prevail amidst the fragile times we are living in. In effect, it proposes a path which crosses different ethical-moral matrices, which are linked to the epistemic context surrounding the concept of revolution, to finally arrive at proposing a new moral typology of justice. This theoretical scenario gives us the possibility of categorizing the revolutionary phenomenon within different dynamics, functions, and perspectives, opening up glimmers of criticism and reflection on our times. Furthermore, the research aims to demonstrate how the topic of revolution is not a theme of a “univocal” nature. It can be understood in various ways. From a first point of view, the revolution could be interpreted positively or negatively, depending on the meaning we attribute to the concepts of revolution and justice. Revolutionary justice, if oppressive and unequal, can indeed become a new form of injustice. Moreover, depending on how we interpret pre-revolutionary feelings, the concept of limit could vary in its ontological dimension. Within the branch of social and moral philosophy, this analysis will be conducted according to an analytical method. The method used concerns first of all the critical analysis, as the in-depth study of various concepts, such as e.g. the concepts of limit, shame, indignation, resilience, disobedience, vulnerability, temperance, consciousness, equality, difference, freedom, love, hope, honesty, trust, compassion, empathy, and care.

The methodology also concerns the use of original expository plots, capable of crossing epistemic boundaries.

Keywords

Ontological Revolution, Civil and In-Civil Disobedience, Pre-Revolutionary Feelings, Resilient Ethics, Oppression, Justice, Progress & Regression, Epistemic Limit Philosophy, Care Power

1. Introduction

Our times, characterized by volatility, could serve as a logical precursor to revolution. Can the revolution be considered a form of justice? Or rather is it the annulment of a justice civilly understood? What relationship exists between revolution, oppression, freedom, and free will? Can the revolution be understood as progress or rather as regression? What relationship does the practice of “civil disobedience” have with the theme of justice, and what limits does it hold? What revolutionary role should philosophy have?

This work does not intend to propose a historical examination of the various political revolutions or forms of resistance¹ that have occurred². It investigates “pre-revolutionary” feelings, i.e. those feelings that cause the inspiration of the revolution in human beings. In particular, I mention resentment, as well as indignation and shame. The research also properly concerns the philosophy of the limit, as it will be compared with the revolutionary and pre-revolutionary dimension.

In the light of a phenomenological analysis of the concept of revolution, I will be trying to identify the form of justice that should dominate the fragile times we are living in. Justice as care (or “caring justice”), perhaps, could be understood as the “noble aim” of justice. In this scenario, what role does dignity play in our lives?

From my point of view, ideal justice is represented by a path that is not achieved immediately, it is not sudden. Consequently, it requires patience and resilience, in the sense of perseverance that tends to seek the truth. Furthermore, the justice that cares is a justice that is as compassionate as it is vigilant.

From this work, the reader may draw analytical and critical insights aimed at a more accurate conceptual reformulation of the topic of revolution, also providing an original interpretation to better understand our times. To this end, it undertakes an examination of the concept of revolution through the study of the epistemic scenario of pre-revolutionary feelings, as well as the relationship between the sense of limit, the oppressive power, and the phenomenon of revolutionary justice.

I would like to make a brief mention at this point of the relationship between oppression and justice, in accordance with a critical vision. In effect, justice can be

¹On the subject of resistance, I suggest the books written by Giuseppe Fenoglio.

²On this point, for instance, read: Godwin Okaneme (2015), “The Libyan Revolution: Philosophical Interpretations, in *Open Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.5 No.1, January 21, 2015; Islam Abdelbary (2018), “Governance Matters and Economic Growth: Beyond the Egyptian Revolution”, in *Theoretical Economics Letters*, Vol.8 No.4, March 19, 2018.

conceived as a denunciation of oppression and a critique of capitalism. Nancy Fraser (2023) proposed an integrated model of justice, through the critique of capitalism. The critique of dominant economic forms and egalitarian settings is accompanied by claims of justice connected to the respect of differences. These claims, however, do not always take into account the effects of substantial discrimination, sometimes falling into mere “ideology”.

According to Iris Marion Young (2022), a just society must take into account the differences of social groups. The analysis of oppression that excludes some groups, such as women, the elderly, the poor, and black people, requires a social policy that protects disadvantaged groups’ power of representation.

“Cannibal capitalism” is Nancy Fraser’s term for the social system that has brought us to the current crisis: crushing debt, precarious work, and besieged livelihoods; as well as, crumbling infrastructure and declining services, extreme weather, deadly pandemics, racial violence, and not least, political dysfunctions that conflict with our ability to think of new solutions. Cannibal capitalism creates wealth, which is expropriated from nature and subjugated peoples. It is a system that is devouring democracy, our sense of community, and the planet. In this context, the multiple forms of care work are undervalued and disavowed. Cannibal capitalist society is ready to devour its substance, the same way the ouroboros eats its tail (Fraser, 2023).

Iris Marion Young (1990) investigates the adverse reactions of contemporary societies and uses the concepts of “abjection” and “unconscious prejudice” to describe how fears and aversions interact with social anguish. Racism, homophobia, and sexism, which are the object of unacceptable social “habits” rooted in the most varied cultural contexts, contribute to unconsciously structuring the concept of “oppression”.

2. Justice and Revolution: A Preliminary Framework

The times we are living in are “post-complex times”. As I will say later, speaking of vulnerable conditions, the concept of “complexity” is in the process of transformation and its constitutive elements are giving way to new elements, such as instrumentalizations of power, epistemic precariousness, and an ever-increasing social vulnerability.

The post-complex era is characterized by increasing social vulnerability. The main factors contributing this vulnerability today are mainly related to: 1) increasingly precarious living conditions; 2) disillusioned social expectations; 3) social frustration, impotence, and resignation resulting from the abuses of power.

Within this “fragile” scenario, the relationship between justice and revolution can be defined as a “biunivocal relationship”. A justice regime, that is damaged by corruption and abuse, becomes part of epistemic injustice. This injustice is followed by an ideal justice that wants to restore the previous justice, or rather, a new and better justice. The beating heart of a revolution should therefore be justice, which tends to promote authentic care of dignity.

The relationship between revolution and justice arises from the observation of a sense of profound injustice, which undermines human dignity. This sense of profound injustice, coupled with feelings of shame, resentment, and indignation, fosters the development of a “critical conscience”, which allows us to think autonomously, free of external conditioning. Cultivating such a critical conscience in a pre-revolutionary context proves challenging, especially in contexts where authoritarian regimes require ideological conformity and do not allow diversity of thought.

The connection between revolution and justice can be better understood if we think about the abuses of power and the style that today’s capitalism undertakes. I think that contemporary capitalism overcomes some moral limits through a “sneaky veil”, namely, it uses a sneaky attitude to pursue its profit.

This attitude materializes in the apparent attempt to care (no genuine care), which in reality masks utilitarian catastrophes, perceivable through solutions created *ad hoc* to safeguard the interests of a few elites³. Let us think, for example, of the enormous interests that lie behind the war weapons trade, as well as the interests related to some “green solutions”, which are proposed mostly by those who contribute most to causing environmental or climatic damages and who have interest in investing economically in the green sector (e.g. see [Shiva, 2022](#)).

In the post-complex era, in the name of ecological emergency, several unsustainable solutions are made up, and in the name of peace, war industries are financed. Even the technological revolution, which partially could be considered a form of utopic illusion or rather a useful tool to create an increasingly evident weakening of relational bonds, hides many economic interests behind it. In this framework, degeneration could disguise itself as resolution, and catastrophe could disguise itself as care ([Grasso, 2022a](#))⁴. It seems we can only hope for a better world that is more honest and less corrupt, where the sense of justice prevails.

Faced with political and social systems that inflict harm on human dignity—through abuses and underhand strategies aimed at enriching those who already hold power—this hope, combined with a sense of impotence, can lead to a variety of social emotions, which can become “pre-revolutionary feelings”.

Within this scenario, the sense of justice becomes the real hope, which can only be realized through the conscience that is grafted onto these feelings.

3. Pre-Revolutionary Feelings: Indignation, Shame, and *Ressentiment*

Shame, indignation, and resentment can be considered “pre-revolutionary” feelings. I find that among these feelings, indignation is particularly important. Indeed,

³In this sense, I am recalling my book: “The Ontological Maze. Ethics, Dignity and the Critical Essences of Identity and Sustainability” ([Grasso, 2024](#)), which concludes with an ethical manifesto of dignity (“Dignity Ethical Manifesto”).

⁴“Shattered Rights, Emerging Economies and Laws, and New Awareness: What Ethical Visions in a Stormy Reality?: Emergency Powers”, Conference at University of Salerno, 2022. Regarding the executive power, which swallows up the legislative and judicial ones, see: Paolo Becchi, *Kant col green pass. Dalla sorveglianza al controllo sociale*, 2022. According to the author, “In an environment saturated with single thought, intelligence will eventually run out of air” ([Becchi, 2022](#)).

indignation affects civil consciousness. It moves towards a path of *dignitas*, when the oppressed people become aware of the wounds to their dignity inflicted. If indignation is truly aimed at healing these wounds, it can regenerate a primordial conscience capable of taking care of oneself and others. This conscience, moreover, is supported by awareness of the oppressed people relating to their right to rebel against the offenses suffered. In this regard, according to [Paulo Reglus Neves Freire \(2004\)](#), the great humanist and historical task of oppressed people consists in liberating themselves and their oppressors.

After describing this, I will move on to describe the concept of resilience, which is linked to that of vulnerability, and then arrive at the concept of revolution, which is placed between progress and regression.

Last but not least, the “ambiguous” concept of civil disobedience – oscillating between notions of justice and injustice – depends on the *modus operandi* through which disobedience takes place. Furthermore, its relationship with the right to resist will also be scrutinized.

3.1. Indignation

Indignation may be regarded as a response to injustices suffered by others. In such instances, it presents itself as a bridge of solidarity towards others, which finds its fundamental pillar in respect for social norms. If indignation were to stem from a resentment devoid of constructive purpose, then it would risk presenting itself as a masochistic feeling. Behind social indignation, there could also be a sort of envious utopia. According to Nietzsche, indignation can turn into masochism, when avenues for self-affirmation are obstructed (due to weakness, for example).

In part III of his *Ethics*, dedicated to the nature of affections, Spinoza delineates a series of sad passions, such as disdain (*dedignatio*), contempt (*contemptus*), indignation (*indignatio*), consternation (*consternatio*) and shame (*pudor*). To him, indignation is hatred towards someone who inflicted harm upon others, constituting a social feeling.

Where indignation fails to materialize, shame inevitably appears. Spinoza associates shame with the gaze of others on us. Modesty (*verecundia*), however, is different from shame; as it is more an internal restraint, meanwhile shame is predominantly social in nature.

For Saint Augustine, indignation, together with courage, can help see things as they really are. Furthermore, courage is needed to change for the better.

Indignation can be considered a form of sharing: whatever evil happens to someone, it would happen to us at the same time, as the suffering of one is tantamount to the suffering of all.

Primo Levi underlines how the annihilation of human beings can also generate the impossibility of disdain.

Indignation, according to [Frédéric Gros \(2023\)](#), is considered a virtuous and reassuring anger, which provides a good conscience. Indeed, through indignation we denounce injustice, firmly asserting our rights and those of others.

3.2. Shame

According to Gros (2023), one must be ashamed of the world to be able to imagine that things could be for the better. In his opinion, the shame experienced by the righteous manifests itself when they confront the painful reality of their impotence in the face of the spectacle of human degradation. Unlike indignation, which has a voice, shame is for Gros a form of suffering. Within it, a sense of helplessness exists (Gros, 2023: p. 156).

Greek philosophers identified the root of shame in the “*thumos*”, the heart, understood as a transformative energy. To the ancient Greeks shame is the sister of anger: in the latter, we can perceive a veil of sadness which constitutes the fertile ground for shame to arise. In the *Iliad*, for example, the culture of shame is very visible: Hector experiences shame when contemplating the possibility of not returning from the battlefield.

Shame can be understood as “revolutionary” because it belongs to a broader anger against the world, but also because it is fueled by the imagination. Gros (2023: p. 158) states that it takes imagination to feel shame as imagination accompanies our shame into the ‘garden of others’.

New forms of solidarity can shape anger, re-establishing the right value in the person who feels shame (for example, the awareness of being worth more than the contempt of others).

In the *Letters* that Marx wrote to Arnold Ruge in 1843, he asserted that shame itself already constitutes a revolution. It symbolizes the triumph of the French Revolution over German patriotism, which was vanquished in 1813. Furthermore, Shame is anger against oneself. If an entire nation were to be ashamed, it would be like a lion bending down to leap.

3.3. Revolutionary *Ressentiment*?

According to Rahel Jaeggi, the critical concept of “*ressentiment*” must be interpreted as a mode of regression. It is useful for understanding crises and, hence, the various social structures and social changes underway. It is a productive category but, at the same time, it is also too weak for critical theory. In effect, it would not have the analytical or normative strength to distinguish between emancipatory and anti-emancipatory movements. In this sense, it is an experiential blockage and an inadequate reaction to crises.

In Jaeggi’s opinion, “*ressentiment*” is a distinct form of envy, a negative, hostile attitude and ‘ill will’ that aims at the disparagement of others and their way of life, as well as at a devaluation of what they cherish and represent (Jaeggi, 2022). She also defines it as an affect stemming from the repression of another affect.

“*Ressentiment*” is relational and comparative, that is to say, socially mediated through the comparison with others, as it concerns what one lacks in comparison to what others possess. Within this perspective, there exists relative deprivation. Jaeggi points out that a natural disaster, affecting everyone to the same extent, should not generate “*ressentiment*”. However, it should be noted that “*ressenti-*

ment”, in this case, could arise when considering the political omissions that have occurred over the years, which likely could have prevented the disaster. This concept is also a normative reaction to relative deprivation, which stems out of a sense of entitlement.

According to Nietzsche, who introduced this concept, the “*ressentiment*” (arising from the slave revolt against the powerful) serves as the weapon of the powerless. In order to explain the social phenomena of escalating nationalism, proto-fascism, and the authoritarian hate of equality that culminated in World War I, the German phenomenologist Max Scheler used the concept of “*Ressentiment in the Construction of Morality*” in his essay from 1915.

We can interpret this concept in different ways. Joseph Vogl (2021) e.g. sees “*ressentiment*” as the basic outcome of the restructuring of the world by financialized capitalism.

4. Vulnerable Condition and Resilience

First of all, I would like to point out that the vulnerable conditions of societies are rooted in the concept of “post-complexity”. To understand this new concept, the notion of “complexity” should be preliminarily examined.

This notion comes from the Latin “*plexus*” (intertwined) – which is the past participle of the verb “*plexere*” (to intertwine) – and from “*cum*”. It means “intertwined together”. Complex systems are self-organizing, with their interconnections and interrelations resulting in another level of complexity. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Within and outside the system, complex systems also interact with other complex systems. The non-linearity of complex systems allows for radical changes to happen quickly and unexpectedly, potentially leading to entropy, as the considered system decays over time. Knowledge specialization arises from a postmodern conception of complexity, where everything is contingent and context-dependent.

In today’s era, the concept of complexity seems to be compounded by new constitutive elements, such as the various “instrumentalizations of power” (e.g. political, economic, and social instrumentalizations), increasingly manifesting in the most varied fields of human life, as well as “epistemic precariousness”, i.e. forms of precariousness affecting all aspects of human life and capable of rendering reality increasingly vulnerable.

These distinguishing features of contemporary times enrich the concept of “complexity”, to the point it almost is a ‘new concept’, which I would like to classify under the name of “post-complexity”.

The condition of those who suffer injustice and experience feelings such as shame, indignation, or resentment is certainly one of vulnerability. Individuals experiencing such emotions often want to change the state of things. However, they find themselves beset by feelings of helplessness and anger, rendering them profoundly vulnerable. What they must do is to be strong and resist, being “resilient”. Vulnerability, therefore, serves as a catalyst for resistance which, if well or-

ganized, could serve as the fundamental basis for developing forms of civil disobedience, if not even revolutions.

Etymologically speaking the concept of “vulnerability” derives from the Latin “*vulnus*”, which means wound. From an ontological point of view, its meaning brings us back to its passive connotation, representing that which one undergoes. Vulnerability is the essence of man. Hans Jonas (1990), in his “The Imperative of Responsibility” (“*Das Prinzip Verantwortung*”), posited that everything that exists is perceived through the lens of vulnerability that characterizes it.

However, vulnerability also possesses an active dimension, rooted in the recognition that individuals are relational and interdependent beings. In the philosophy of Hélène Cixous, for example, “*fragilité*” embodies a new possibility of strength, which doesn’t seek domination over others.

To Levinas (1985: p. 127), embracing vulnerability can give life to a dimension of “radical openness”. The correlation between vulnerability and “active resistance” is in line with indigenous justice. Indigenous vulnerable identity - which has been described by post-colonial studies - evolves into a form of justice, with its primary protagonist being what I refer to as “identitarian resistance” (Grasso, 2024).

The concept of resilience finds its roots in the natural sciences: particularly in the notion of “ecological resilience” initially conceptualized by Holling (1973). It denotes an ecosystem’s capacity to withstand disturbances while maintaining fundamental processes and structures. Resilience concerns a recovering ability that manifests itself through the combination of perseverance, resistance, and transformation. However, the concept has become increasingly vague, as achieving a universally accepted definition of “resilience” across scientific disciplines proves challenging (Grasso, 2022b: p. 79).

Consequently, there exist numerous definitions of resilience in literature. Resilience could be understood as being oriented towards evil, for example. The human being is constantly battling the tension between the dominance of conscience and the cultivation of harmful instincts within him. According to Buber, this consideration implies that an internal revolution against evil is always possible. Thus, we exist in a state of suspension between disintegration and reunification, to the extent that one might argue that good and evil are inversely proportional (Mancini, 2019b: p. 98).

From a “transformative” perspective, in the model of “responsible catastrophism”, which I presented at the Faculty of Philosophy of Munich University⁵, I proposed the concept of “evolutionary vulnerability”, which refers to vulnerability capable of evolving and transforming itself into resilience. In this regard, we could also speak of a “Resilient vulnerability”, which can convert one’s fragility into an opportunity for regeneration (Grasso, 2022b: p. 81).

Resilience refers not only to a return to the original state but also to an “ame-

⁵University of Munich, Faculty of Philosophy (2016), “Catastrophism and Responsibilities: Towards a New Moral and Ethical Governance”.

liorated return”, characterized by strength, increased awareness, and readiness to care for oneself, one’s neighbour, and life in general. The transformation of a traumatic experience into a rebirth can only take place through authentic conversion of the heart, capable of changing our perspective and enhancing another dimension, full of spiritual richness.

A resilient community seizes the opportunity of trauma as a chance for regeneration. From an “evolutionary” perspective⁶, resilience may appear as an abstract concept, which can only be fully understood in light of the individual and collective desire for “redemption”, following a critical event.

In my opinion, however, this type of resilience acquires significance only from the standpoint of an “epiphany”, namely a “revelation” capable of transcending consciences. In this sense, I believe that “spiritual resilience” serves as the fundamental prerequisite capable of enabling any form of evolution or transformation. Only through the conversion of the heart, ignited by an encounter with the Creator, can the conditions for resilience be established. This resilience can still take on different meanings, such as that of “resurrection” or “rebirth” for instance.

From this perspective, resilience alludes not only to the strength required to return to the original state of things, but also underscores our ability to emerge as better individuals – strengthened, more aware, and prepared to care for the common good, both for ourselves and for others. Resilience indicates the strength needed to fight a critical situation, which can manifest as both “preventative” and “responsive/subsequent” to a critical event (Grasso, 2022b: p. 82).

“Resilience” is a term that could also be misused, thus taking on a more “negative” connotation. In effect, if employed to justify a certain despotic order, this term would take on the meaning of “extreme passivity”, characterized by submissive endurance of adverse circumstances or passive acceptance of decisions made by those in power, even if unjust and despotic, under the guise of benevolence.

The term “resilience” is often appropriated by ruling powers, evoking a form of evolution of the human species, through a new form of alleged “humanism”. This “evolutionary humanism” would manifest itself through the triumph of the most resilient, or those who staunchly resist the adverse effects that this “evolutionary process” would entail.

In line with my vision, ‘resilience’ can be defined as the ability to withstand various adversities whether of individual, social, ecological, psychological, spiritual, or anthropological nature. It aims to cause a positive transformation in the face of the prediction of occurrence of extreme shocks or crisis. In other words, ‘resilience’ is the ability to stand still, or rise again after a fall.

When we fall into the oblivion of error or misfortune, we are required to rise, and try to better confront the problem that grips us, while being aware that this earthly life is replete with tests; the overcoming of which fosters the growth of individuals, and therefore, of society.

“Resilience” is also the courage to remain “honest” when others succumb to

⁶From this point of view, “evolutionary” can be synonymous with “transformative”.

dishonesty. It is the resolve to maintain one's integrity; the strength to say "no" when most say "yes". In other terms, it is the security of taking a stand, and not regretting its consequences; the desire to transform from caterpillar to butterfly; the ability to value your dignity, even if you live a "miserable" life; as well as the courage to take off your masks, and freely express your opinion, without fear of the consequences that this may entail (Grasso, 2022b: pp. 83-85).

5. Resilience and Civil Disobedience

As I have previously mentioned, the term "resilience" could also imply "resistance" or "struggle". "Resilience" can indeed allude to the type of resistance that human beings employ in response to abuses of power and injustice.

A recent example of resistance can be seen in the European farmers' protest. We are witnessing the rebellion of numerous farmers, who see their right to cultivate the land being violated, due to European regulations aimed at favoring the photovoltaic industry, and therefore the profits of multinational corporations. Faced with the government's attempt to undermine agriculture, farmers are rightfully resisting.

However, there are also resistant subjects who succumb to the risk of poverty and therefore abandon resistance to give in to the compromises of power.

In resistance, we witness pain, passion, strength, the yearning for a better life, the quest for redemption, and the fragility of human existence.

In 1936, Simone Weil wrote three invitations to read Sophoclean tragedies (*Antigone*, *Electra*, and *Philoctetes*). The tragedies are interpreted as paradigmatic of resistance against oppression perpetrated by authority.

Simone Weil's notes were originally intended for the factory newspaper, read by the workers of the Rosières foundry, though only the note to *Antigone* ended up being published. The publication of the other two notes was hindered by the factory director, Victor Bernard, who disapproved of Weil's support for strikes. Becoming aware of reality also means intervening through individual work, opposing the exploitation of workers.

We need to combine work, human existence, thought, and dignity. The resistance necessary to transform working life into a truly "human" existence manifests itself in the imperative to reconcile the relationship between work and the world, for the common good.

Antigone, *Electra* and *Philoctetes* are emblems of the desire for redemption, particularly useful examples for workers of the time. As Simone Weil states, through the power of this redemption, oppression is broken, and "Electra is free" (Weil, 2020).

"Civil disobedience", indeed, is a form of political struggle, which involves the violation of a norm considered unjust. In this case, we can speak about resistance to injustices or inequalities, which widen wounds, causing this "vulnerability".

In 1550, Etienne de la Boétie wrote an essay "*Discourse on voluntary servitude*" which theorized civil disobedience as a means of contrasting any form of tyranny.

Henry David Thoreau also wrote “*Civil Disobedience*” (originally titled “Resistance to Civil Government”), a text that inspired Gandhi’s thoughts on Indian national emancipation.

I would also recall Don Lorenzo Milani, who in 1965 wrote “*Obedience is no longer a virtue*”. This title pointed towards conscientious objection to military service.

Even Howard Zinn, in his famous collection of essays *Disobedience and Democracy*, highlights how it is right to disobey unjust laws or sentences that punish the violation of those same laws.

In this regard, I would like to highlight the theory of the “legitimacy of resistance to the tyrant” formulated by John Locke (1689) and further developed by Thoreau (1849), which requires human conscience to take precedence over law. It also criticizes social institutions and policies regarding slavery and war.

Within this perspective, resilience can also entail resisting something that may hurt us, even if not directly apparent. For instance, resisting a temptation that would lead to error, the negative effects of which, even from a spiritual point of view, would not be seen immediately, but only upon careful examination of our conscience.

Civil disobedience represents a political tool aimed at innovatively altering the political equilibrium of a social system. This technique is inherently collective (public) and voluntary and seeks to challenge the widespread adherence to the law by its members. According to Rawls (1971), civil disobedience is a public, conscientious, non-violent⁷, and political act of dissent against the law, usually accompanied by the desire to change the law or government policy. In Rawls’s view, civil disobedience is nonviolent and diverges from rebellion or revolt. “Civil disobedience” must not aim to overthrow the political system, but to modify it.

Similarly, to Jürgen Habermas (1985), civil disobedience is a morally acceptable form of protest that is not limited to one’s personal beliefs or self-interest.

The disobedient one therefore accepts, without resistance, the arrest and the penalties resulting from violations of the law knowingly committed by him.

Plato stated that laws are better ones if they allow institutions and citizens to resist the will to dominate the powerful *élite* (Il Politico, [Πολιτικός]: 306a - 308b). Unjust laws were deemed extremely difficult to uphold by Plato (Crito 53a). Conscience is an important factor in this scenario, as it is the most intimate and highest entity capable of aspiring to moral goodness and truth known to humankind (Crito).

In Maeve Cooke’s opinion, civil disobedience is a “transgressive ethical act” carried out in a political setting. In addition to violating the law, it occasionally also involves transgressing accepted norms and deeply held values, which makes it transgressive (Cooke, 2021).

The intricate interaction of the moral concepts of freedom, equality, and human

⁷However, it seems clear that we cannot assume, as Rawls seemed to do, that civil disobedience must be nonviolent, that it must be done openly, or that it presupposes the existence of a moral obligation to obey the law.

connection defines the normativity unique to the contemporary democratic setting. Cooke argues that leading a morally upright life requires people to adopt a reflective attitude toward their conceptions of good, with such contemplation being driven by a concern for ethical truth. Therefore, ethical behavior includes acts of civil disobedience (Cooke, 2021).

In contrast to liberal theorists, Celikates (2022) contends that a system-distorted perception can affect and manipulate society's sense of what is right or wrong.

While nonviolent civil disobedience is ideal, Celikates demonstrates the difficulty in distinguishing between civil disobedience and violence. He defines civil disobedience as a connected but different form of citizenship, a type of civic engagement that is a component of James Tully's toolkit of democratic activities (Tully, 2008).

Civil disobedience possesses revolutionary potential as it can overthrow an entire political structure. Indeed, Bertrand Russell (1961) sees civil disobedience as a mode of communication that reveals new horizons of possibilities.

6. The Concept of Revolution

"Revolution" is a term akin to the Greek "*metabolé*" (change) and "*stasis*" (cause of change). The causes of the change relate to factions and divisions, or rather to splits in the political body. To Pellicani (1974: p. 81), a change can be considered revolutionary only if it possesses a certain degree of depth and only if it occurs in a relatively short time.

Revolution can also refer to the transition from the dominance of one class to the dominance of another. For instance, with the French Revolution, we witnessed the birth of the Third Estate. Similarly, the English Revolution marked the shift from the power of the king and aristocracy to that of the bourgeoisie.

Revolutio is a term from the late Roman Empire, meaning: "upheaval"/"return". It comes from "*revolvere*", which means "to go back". Tacitus, for example, speaks of "*revolutus amnis*", representing the movement of a river encountering an obstacle, such as a dam, and reversing its course. Even Montesquieu refers to "revolution" as a return to primordial institutions, and therefore a change that occurs to correct a negative trend of a State.

Precisely, only in the Augustan age did the term "*revolvere*" come to mean "to repeat" or "to return". The Indo-European origin of the term is linked to the word "*que*", which means "to twist", "to roll" or "to turn". The word "revolution" was adopted by early Christian writers, especially St. Augustine, to describe the drama of salvation⁸.

Antonio Villari, in his *Chronica* of 1355, used it to describe the factional intrigues of early Renaissance Rome. In the time of Guicciardini and Macchiavelli, the word was designated to describe any unforeseen change in life. Even Hobbes, in his "*Behemoth*", and Clarendon, in his "*History of the Rebellion*," employed

⁸Furthermore, it appeared in a vernacular language, as "*rivoluzione*".

the term “revolution”.

In astronomical matters, towards the end of the 12th century, the term “*revolutio*” referred not to a sudden change in the political and social order, but rather to the regular movement of the planets returning to their starting point. This movement represented a cycle (*anakyklosis*).

The concept of “catastrophe”, from the ancient Greek “*kata*” (down) and “*stréphein*” (to turn/turn)—hence, the meaning of “overthrow”/“turn over”—is, in some ways, similar to the modern notion of revolution. It denotes a transformation profoundly affecting the development of human civilization, so much so as to reverse it, thus it can lead to freedom and become a guarantee of rights.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines revolutions as “a complete overthrow of the established government in any country or state by those who were previously subject to it: a forcible substitution of a new ruler or form of government”.

From an axiological point of view, the concept of revolution can be examined in positive or negative terms. If viewed through the lens of the “revolutionary”, it will certainly have a positive meaning. Conversely, from the point of view of the anti-revolutionary, it is undoubtedly negative. Besides, various concepts are capable of being interpreted in multiple senses: for instance, the concept of “despotism” takes on a negative connotation, but when combined with an attribute like “enlightened”, it assumes a different meaning. Particularly with the French Revolution, the concept of revolution acquired a positive connotation. Regardless of its positivity or negativity, fighting abuses of power and injustices remains a civic duty, even if it demands courage.

Not all revolutions are alike. **Cesare Balbo (1855)** delineated three types of revolutions based on their causes and effects. The first type concerns revolutions that occur due to riots. The second type pertains to revolutions arising from conspiracies, and the third to those emanating from institutional reform. **Carl Joachim Friedrich (1966: p. 5)** states that “revolutions are successful rebellions”. However, it is also true that not all rebellions amount to revolutions.

Within this scenario, the vision of **Giuseppe Ferrari (1851)** also seems intriguing, suggesting that revolution is nothing but the triumph of philosophy, governing humanity. Outside of philosophy, therefore, there would be no revolution, since reason would not be free and science would not be master. The principles of revolution, for Ferrari, entail the reigns of science and equality.

According to **Eva von Redecker (2021)**⁹, the idea of revolution denotes the limit of modern politics. It is embodied by places that evoke both terror and hope.

Revolution can be interpreted as an “impetuous wind”. In “*Ode to the West Wind*” (1820), Percy Shelley compares the west wind to revolution (specifically, the French Revolution). It symbolises spiritual forces striving to regenerate decadent life for its rebirth. It sows the seeds of a social rebirth. In this scenario, the poet is a prophet of social change, who counteracts social injustices and oppression.

⁹She reexamines radical change in critical theory.

Imagination, therefore, is the power to overcome both human limits and the limits of a materialistic reality. It is the power to revolutionize the world. After all, the use of moral imagery of the world is a concept that was advocated by Hilary Putnam, who underscored the necessity of integrating ethics and metaphysics. Indeed, metaphysics without ethics might appear “blind” (Putnam, 1975). Reasoning by moral images can certainly aid philosophers in categorising various theoretical concepts through deeper analysis.

Imagination can be revolutionary, if it is supported by collective trust. In fact, if we think of a better world, we imagine it, hoping in the sense of humanity that should distinguish the human being, trusting in mutual love and true respect. There are various epistemic forms of imagination: I recall for example the philosophy of the imagination in Giambattista Vico and Nicolas Malebranche, the phenomenological imagination in Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl, the ontological imagination in Martin Heidegger, the existential imagination in Jean-Paul Sartre, and the hermeneutical imagination in Paul Ricœur.

7. Revolution as Progress or Regression?

Progress has not always coincided with moral advancement. “*What We Did to Father London: Hutchinson*” (1960), by Roy Lewis, is an ironic illustration of this thesis. The progress so desired by Edward, the protagonist of the book, has set in motion the perverse mechanisms of power.

Kant asks whether mankind is constantly progressing for the better. Indeed, revolution can be interpreted as both progress and regression. It is not easy to qualify progress, as well as regression¹⁰. According to Hegel, history does not progress linearly but through affirmations, negations, and negations of negations, which are affirmations at a higher level.

Plato, for his part, holds a regressive view of history, one in which it is constantly deteriorating. Therefore, change (*metabasis*) always carries a negative character. Consequently, revolution arises from factions, that is, from the discord that leads to the breakdown of unity and the unleashing of passions and violence. From an ontological point of view, according to Plato, change is necessary, as it represents the passage from one form of government to another. It is intended as a generational transition.

In Aristotle’s opinion, however, change is not necessary, and not inherently negative. Only by knowing the causes of the change can we find the remedies. Aristotle, in his “*Politics*” (*Τά πολιτικά*), analyzes the causes of seditions, which can be external or internal. What determines the change is the aspiration for equality. “*Hybris*” (i.e. supremacy, excess power, exceeding imposed limits) is a cause of change contrasted with revolution, which aims to strive for equity

¹⁰Although it is not easy to qualify progress and regression, we can still state that if progress acquires a positive meaning, as it concerns the development of society, regression certainly refers to going backward. Regression can be defined as a disaster in dealing with and handling crises (“*eine Krise der Krisenbewältigung*”). Regressive illiteracy, in effect, is the incapability to cope with new issues within the problem-fixing attempts. Therefore, regression is a complex unlearning technique. It is primarily based on a negation that is characterized by compensating functions.

(*epieikeia*). We can also say that change, with Aristotle, concerns the overall order (Πολιτεία).

Aristotle spoke of “*stasis*” with “*metaboli politeias*” (a sudden take-over, with a change of Constitution). In ancient Greece, however, revolutions never radically changed the social or economic structure of city-states. Plato, in “*The Republic*” contemplated a model of change in city-states, which degenerated into timocracy, then led to oligarchy, democracy, and then eventually to tyranny.

It is challenging to determine whether revolutions always bring progress¹¹. Indeed, they are a liberation from the previous state of oppression and rights violation. The “terror” that Robespierre’s policy inflicted certainly makes us think of an outcome that, on the one hand, tended towards progress, on the other, however, undoubtedly led to regression.

To Hegel, the French Revolution was a positive historical event, an exemplary moment relevant to the evolution of the Spirit. According to him, the revolution is the only great change that is not conceivable without a preponderance of the subjective factor. The revolutionary is a unique figure in the development of the human spirit. The Revolution would therefore be a leap towards a new world.

Regardless of how we interpret revolution (whether progress or regression), in any case, it is considered the breaking of continuity. Marx talks about “*Umwälzende Praxis*” (subverting practice), which indicates the contrast between productive forces and relations of production. To Marx, revolution is the transition from one form of production to another. A part of the “*Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*” is dedicated to the examination of the different forms of socialism, culminating in a new kind of socialism, which Engels will call “scientific socialism”. It contrasts with “utopian socialism” (Marx & Engels, 1848).

The proletariat, fighting against the bourgeoisie through the revolution, becomes the dominant class and destroys the old relations of production. According to Marx, revolutions and counter-revolutions reveal the autonomy of politics. In his opinion, proletarian revolutions continually criticize themselves, interrupting their course and starting again from scratch.

8. Disobedience and the Right to Resist

Previously, I have already considered the relationship between vulnerability and resistance, as well as the link between disobedience and resilience.

¹¹The “revolution” can be qualified as an “evolution” or even an “involution”, depending on its outcome. The so-called “technological revolution” or rather the “artificial revolution” (which refers to the development of artificial intelligence) can be considered a ‘progressive-evolutionary’ revolution, in the event that this revolution does not change individual and social dignity for the worse. Conversely, this revolution is to be considered as ‘involutionary-regressive’, in the case in which it degenerates the sense of the human, thus negatively affecting dignity.

My vision regarding A.I. does not welcome either a fanatically opposing vision, nor even a favorable vision at all costs. The greatest risk of A.I. is connected to the loss of jobs, as well as to the effects of possible power choices linked to public services. For example, if to access a postal service, I needed an App, it would be unfair towards those who by choice (perhaps related to age, but not only) cannot or do not want to access to that App. Without to mention the immense utilitarian interests behind the A.I. market, which raise the suspicion that the “artificial” choice is not so disinterested.

The theory of revolution has its roots in political theories that support the “right of resistance”, the right held by the people to rebel against an unjust order; that is, the right not to obey laws when they are unjust. Machiavelli, in “Il Principe” (“*The Prince*”), claims that the prince may consider advice but ultimately, he must decide by himself.

The principle of the “right to resist” has very ancient origins. The ancient Greeks and Romans, for example, knew about tyrannicide. Typical traits of the representation of the tyrant, already present in archaic Roman tragedy, are: *furor* (fury), *ira* (anger), and *impatientia* (impatience).

Even the medieval Germanic and Anglo-Saxon peoples, as well as the medieval Catholic natural law doctrine, knew forms of the right of resistance (Cattaneo, 1960).

Kant (1797) urged philosophers to criticize but also to obey. In other words, philosophers have the right to criticize, in the same way that those in power have the right to impose their will. For Kant, the right of revolution or insurrection is contradictory, as it implies that the sovereign admits the loss of his sovereignty based on an act outside the Constitution. Assuming that we can consider the right to revolution as a real right, it still differs from other rights, as these are usually protected by the State. If a right is violated, the individual generally has the power to appeal to state bodies to enforce it.

In his “*Die Metaphysik der Sitten*”, Kant (1797) asserted that the subject had the obligation to obey in any case and criticized the contractual theory. He believed that the foundations of power for the people were inscrutable. According to Kant, the revolution itself is illegitimate. Only reforms are legitimate and, while recognizing the principle of effectiveness, he admits that the sovereign has the right to continue working to regain his power (Kant, 1797).

To Kant, the sovereign cannot act unjustly; therefore, the people cannot disobey him, much less rebel, or even kill him. The sovereign always acts as if there were an original contract that he must somehow respect. According to him, there are different degrees of civil disobedience, although they are prohibited, because the subject must obey. Only exceptionally, could people remove the sovereign.

Could we assert that the right of insurrection/revolution is a natural one? A provision of law aimed at safeguarding the right to insurrection certainly has the merit of warning the heads of state about respect for the same laws that they intend the citizens to respect. Otherwise, the people would have the right to rebel, in order to obtain justice that would otherwise not be guaranteed by state bodies.

According to Locke (1689), the right of resistance is a natural right; therefore, it could not be contemplated in a Constitution.

To Hobbes (1651), however, the right to command is a right by definition. Thanks to the social contract (Rousseau), the general will is indisputable. Ideological theories can be dangerous, as they can lead subjects to rebel against the state.

During times of civil wars, it began to be asserted that the subject had the right to disobey. Disobedience therefore coincides with resistance, which arises from

conflicts between rulers and the governed. When does the prince become a tyrant? Since political power is considered “legitimate”, as the sovereign receives his power directly from God, it is difficult for the subject to express a judgment on the presumed goodness or wickedness of the sovereign.

In the “*Vindiciae contra tyrannos*”, Stephanus Junius Brutus argues that the prince’s power was born not from a superior power, not from pure and simple brute force, but from a contract between the prince and his subjects.

In this case, the sovereign’s power is power based on consensus (attributed by the subjects themselves). If one of the parties breaches the agreements, the contractual relationship can be dissolved; leading to the “right of resistance”.

While those who support the right of resistance are contractualists, it is also true that not all contractualists are supporters of the right of resistance, such as Hobbes, who was in favor of absolute monarchy.

Unlike Hobbes, Locke can be considered the first inspirer for revolutionary movements. While Hobbes is the theorist of unity of power and therefore of the subjects’ duty to obey, Locke, on the contrary, is the theorist of resistance.

The theoretical assumption from which the two philosophers start is the same one. Given that the state of nature is the state from which men must emerge to constitute the civil state, for both philosophers, the transition from the state of nature to the civil state is precisely the social contract. In Locke’s opinion, however, the fundamental function of the state is to protect the fundamental natural rights that man has in the state of nature. If the State does not protect them, people resume to be the defenders of their rights. Hobbes, on the contrary, presupposes that in the transition from the state of nature to the civil state, individuals renounce all the rights they had in the state of nature and attribute them to the sovereign¹².

With Locke, resistance is an active moment of change. It is a change that starts from the bottom, involving the majority of the people. Resistance is legitimized only if it is collective. Locke identifies three cases in which the right of resistance exists: conquest, usurpation, and tyranny.

Anselm Feuerbach (1798) wrote “*Anti-Hobbes*”, in which he supports the right of resistance, unlike Hobbes and Kant. The sovereign who has obtained power illegitimately is called a usurper. The one who exercises power illegitimately, instead, is called a tyrant (“*tyrannus absque titulo*” must be distinguished from “*tyrannus quoad exercitium*”), while that who demands unconditional obedience is called a despot.

In the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” (1789), among the declared rights, it is also possible to find the right to resist oppression, which was definitively recognized, through a solemn declaration, with the French Revolution. In Art. 2 of the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen”, the natural rights of man are enumerated: freedom, property, security, and resistance to oppression.

¹²However, the right to rebel is not a “retained right” as individuals must give up other rights in order to exercise the right to rebel. For this consideration, see Susanne Sreedhar (2010).

The draft Girondin Constitution (1793) postulates that men united in society should have legal means to resist oppression (art. 31). While the art. 35 states that, if the government violates the rights of the people, the insurrection for the people represents the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties.

9. Revolution as Counter-Revolution and as a Vehicle for a New Dictatorship?

The revolution can be viewed as a form of “counter-revolution”, considering the pre-existing totalitarian regime as a real revolution. The totalitarian system presents itself as a permanent revolution since it seeks to dismantle the existing order and establish a new one.

Furthermore, the totalitarian regime requires the unconditional adhesion of the subjects of the totalitarian regime. As Pellicani (2020) reminds us, cultivating a belief in its legitimacy among its subjects is a constant concern of every State. *Apologia* (“apology”, the defense of the system against enemies) and *propaganda* (the diffusion of a positive image of the new regime’s achievements) are combined with indoctrination, which aims at producing a “new man”, who radically breaks with tradition and alters his identity. In totalitarian regimes, individuals who question the ideology lose their rights and dignity. Therefore, for most, all that remains is to be subjugated by the “kingdom of fear”, which Guglielmo Ferrero defined as “the soul of the universe” (Ferrero, 1981: p. 36).

Within this scenario, the “counter-revolution” becomes a moral regeneration opposing the previous period of moral corruption (Pellicani, 2020). While the revolution may be considered a counter-revolution if compared to the previous authoritarian regime, it can also foster an authoritarian atmosphere.

Popular consensus confers legitimacy to the newly established revolutionary power. This legitimacy becomes a guarantee regarding the consolidation of this power which, if overly centralized, may result in the establishment of a real dictatorship.

To build a state founded on freedom, the French Revolution was forced to exercise a form of dictatorship over the enemies of freedom. Unlike what happens in Marxism, a theory of dictatorship is missing in the French Enlightenment, as well as in revolutionary political doctrine. The reference model is that of the Roman “*dictator*”.

Robespierre himself will declare that the theory of revolutionary governments is new, and cannot be sought in the books of writers who preceded the revolution. Marat considered dictatorship as a necessary means of government to complete the revolution, to definitively overcome the resistance of the privileged classes (Cattaneo, 1968: p. 198). Interpreting revolutions as a decisive stage of modernity and progress does not mean however idealizing them (Cattaneo, 1960).

Even “momentary powers” could cause authoritarian abuses capable of generating pre-revolutionary feelings and giving rise, for example, to demonstrations of civil disobedience. This is why I will be briefly discussing “emergency powers”.

In general terms, we could say that during emergency periods, the rule of law can be preserved if politicians use “good sense”. Emergency powers, often, are passively welcomed by citizens, which unknowingly contribute to forging a new “normality”, thought *ad hoc* and strongly wanted by power lobbies.

Who benefits from emergencies? For example, pharmaceutical companies profit during health crises, while the war industry gains during armed conflicts. Nowadays, the most powerful lobbies are directly or indirectly connected to these corporates. The utilitarian interest is always looming in such emergencies, so what if these very interests are leading us toward an emergency condition? Sometimes, creating a problem like the very emergency can be useful to benefit from the problem itself.

“Emergency law” should never harm human dignity, and should be configured as a limit to emergency power. If it would seem equally legitimate for such power to compress the content of human rights by virtue of an emergency, it would not at all seem legitimate to allow this power to harm human dignity (Grasso, 2022a).

10. Revolution and Legal Qualification

The phenomenon of revolution has often been considered as a cause of disturbance and disorder. Beling, for example, compares the revolution to an earthquake and even to the eruption of a volcano (Beling, 1923: p. 12).

From the point of view of a possible legal qualification, Laserson (1929) defines revolution as a phenomenon that cannot be legally qualified, producing an “empty” space of law between preceding and subsequent legal systems.

Despite this, many scholars have confirmed the legal relevance of the revolutionary phenomenon. For example, Santi Romano (1947: p. 224) considers this phenomenon as having intrinsic legality, since the revolution is an embryonic state organization. It replaces the State and therefore has powers similar to those of the State. The revolution is legally organized violence and thus an original legal system, so much so that we can speak of the “law of the revolution”.

Tosi (1953: p. 394) emphasizes the importance of organization, viewing the right to revolution as a means to reconcile ancient and new legal systems.

Similarly, Paresce (1947: p. 136) believes that the revolution should be considered juridical due to the character of the organization. In this regard, in Leon Trotsky’s opinion, revolutions have their own internal “law”, which regulates their development and to which the action of the masses conforms.

Often, to describe the revolution, some figures have been created, such as that of “spontaneous law”, which is used for example by Gurvitch (1957: p. 276) to describe a law that conflicts with “organized law”, as well as that of “intuitive law”. The latter is based on different living conditions and used by Petrazhitskii (1955: p. 225) to describe law conflicting with “positive law”. To Merkl (1926: p. 513), an authoritative representative of the Vienna school, however, revolution is a “transcendent” anti-juridical change (and not “immanent”, that is, a change that occurs through juridical means).

According to Carnelutti (1951), it is a way of transforming the law, despite op-

posing the existing law, it creates new legal norms. It constitutes a culminating point of the tendency of the legal system towards justice and is the demonstration of the fact that the law is not exhausted in itself, since beyond positive law there is a *lex superior*, which is a meta-rational order.

For his part, Kelsen (1925) defines revolution as a valid way of transforming law. In the *General Theory of Law and State* (Kelsen, 1945), he states that we can speak of revolution whenever the legal order of a community is abolished and replaced with a new order illegitimately, that is, in a way that is not prescribed by the first law. Furthermore, Kelsen is very critical of the concept of “revolutionary legality”, as it constitutes a “*contradictio in adjecto*”, since the revolution is the breaking of legality. In other words, with the revolution, there is a change in the fundamental norm (*Grundnorm*).

The doctrines inspired by natural law believe that the system arising from the revolution is legitimate when the principles incorporated into it conform to the value of justice and the principles of natural law.

When violence ceases and revolutionary power continues to be exercised, popular consensus follows, which gives legitimacy to the new power established.

To Cattaneo (1960), the revolution in itself is illicit, because it is contrary to the legal system. From a social profile, however, or rather from a sociology of law point of view (which considers social phenomena from a particular legal perspective), the revolution would express the need for a new legal order, which at a given moment explodes violently and suddenly.

In his opinion, we must obey only the rules of a system that guarantees political and civil liberties, referring to natural law and respect for the human person. The revolution involves the overthrow of a legal system and the establishment of a new one, through a procedure not foreseen by the previous system (Cattaneo, 1960: p. 44).

However, I think that, for this purpose, a procedure that is not provided for by the legal system is not always fundamental. Let’s think for example of the Roman emperor Augustus, who made use of the constitutional bodies to overthrow the ancient system. Each modification was implemented using *leges comitiales* (comitial laws) and senate consultations, which were regularly approved by the people and the senate.

According to Enzo Traverso (2021), riots can evolve into revolutions, moving from indignation to a conscious transformation of the state of things. Furthermore, in the thought of Antonio Negri (2012), the ontological power of revolts can annihilate their liberating potential.

11. Some Critical-Moral Perspectives on Revolution

I will now be considering some particular aspects such as the phenomenological foundation of limit and its relationship with revolution. The sense of the limit, within the scenario I am describing, can concern two fronts: 1) on the one hand,

the limit affects authoritarianism and the abuse of power, i.e. the use of a disproportionate domain in the ways and effects; 2) on the other hand, the limit pertains to the revolutionary power itself. From this point of view, the limit should be vigilant, so that this power does not turn into terror.

In this regard, I will be dealing with some virtues such as temperance and moral conscience. If the main goal of a revolution is to foster a peaceful and free existence, then what role should love, hope and honesty play? How could awareness of the sense of limits reduce both oppressive power and revolutionary anger and how could this awareness lead to new forms of justice?

Confronted with a principle of “epistemic difference” that permeates our everyday life and which generates differences and inequalities of various kinds, what value do we attribute to equality? The following paragraphs will also underscore the concepts of trust, compassion, and empathy, which are fundamental within this conceptual framework.

11.1. Limit and Philosophy

Generally, the concept of “limit” carries a negative connotation. However, in reality, the limit is intrinsic to human existence, as humans are essentially defined by their limits. Life itself, not just individual knowledge, is a limit.

In Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (Book V), the philosopher speaks of “*peras*” (perimeter). In Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he argues that our human and mortal nature, shouldn’t limit ourselves to human or mortal thoughts. Rather, we should do everything in our power to live according to our highest potential.

The philosophy of limits is inherent in the very notion of “philosophy” itself, configured as an unattainable pursuit. The sense of impotence that derives from this “unrealization”, however, should not diminish the desire for perfection, the infinite and the absolute.

In this regard, [Fermani \(2005: p. 17\)](#) invokes an “ineradicable need and the incessant movement of a thought that needs to reach beyond itself, that recognizes that it can never reach perfection and embrace the absolute, but that cannot stop loving and desiring it”.

In the ancient world, transgressing divine boundaries led to *hybris*, which was invariably punished. In the modern world, however, pushing beyond limits, and therefore towards the unknown, is not only permitted but considered a duty.

Montesquieu and Hannah Arendt also explored the concept of limits. They posited that political good, like moral good, always lies between two limits, which we could also exemplify in birth and death. In particular, [Montesquieu \(1748\)](#) states that all human things have an end and therefore a limit (*De l’Esprit des Lois*, XI, 4, 6).

According to [Sergio Cotta \(1953\)](#), the philosophy of limits is the only philosophy that truly is “human”. Contrasting it, there would only be a limitless philosophy of Hobbesian origin, which sees existence germinating from fear.

In the text “*Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre*”, Fichte (1794) discusses the concept of “limit” several times as the “borderline” (*Grenzlinie*) between different forms of knowledge.

In effect, philosophy should return to challenge the limits of our reality. Leibniz and Spinoza dared to bend the limits of credibility and challenge them. Ludwig Wittgenstein associated the limits of his language with the limits of his world.

The philosophy of the limit has recently given rise to an expression, such as “limitarianism”, which is nothing other than a specific view of distributive justice. It is a state that occurs when one has more resources than needed for maximal flourishing in life. “Limitarianism” is only a partial account of distributive justice. It can be deemed as agnostic towards distributive justice requirements for those who are not maximally flourishing (Robeyns, 2023: p. 15).

The limit may concern conceptual differences that oppose each other. From this perspective, overcoming the limit could legitimately occur on the condition that the opposing elements are harmoniously merged into a single conceptual plot.

In this regard, I would like to recall a model that I proposed in my recent work. In my last monograph—“The Ontological Maze. Ethics, Dignity, and the Critical Essences of Identity and Sustainability” (Grasso, 2024)—I have been presenting a new transformative-emancipatory ethical path, which aims to reconcile dimensions that cross several cultural boundaries. The current society shows ever more traits of inequality. I believe that ethics should seek the creation of constructivist bridges.

In the aforementioned book, I spoke about “Tunefully Comprehensive Ethics”. Its constitutive elements blend melodiously with each other, despite the differences and the various “otherness” that compose it. Within this view, even several theoretical contradictions could be recomposed, such as the antinomian relationship between “regression” and “progress” (Grasso, 2024).

This new ethical branch enhances concepts such as those of “dignity”, “vulnerability” and “identity”. Using a “centripetal” perspective, it is capable of melodiously integrating the different social instances. It seems to constitute a theoretical background useful to the transformative-emancipatory social climate that is required for revolutionary sentiment.

11.2. Limit and Revolution

If we aim to investigate the relationship between limit and revolution, we should focus on two specific aspects. First of all, the concept of limit intersects with the abuse of power that characterizes the pre-revolutionary regime.

Secondly, it also interfaces with revolutionary anger, or rather with the feeling that we could identify in resentment and which could also lead, as in the case of the French Revolution, towards an authoritarian regime of terror.

In examining the first aspect, social indignation may arise in response to the abuse of public power. It can lead to civil disobedience, or even to revolution.

The sense of social injustice can lead to desperation, but also to that desire for

social redemption aimed at restoring a regime of justice.

Assessing the degree of injustice characterizing a pre-revolutionary regime can be complex, as determining the boundary between abuse of power and revolutionary action. So, when can people be legitimized for revolutionary action? What criteria can determine whether the limit is exceeded?

After all, social anger, indignation, and resentment are inherently subjective and challenging to quantify. Predicting when these emotions will translate into revolutionary action to counter the abuse of power is difficult.

These feelings would aim to limit such abuse. At the same time, however, they could generate a “disproportionate” reaction. In this case, the limit would also have to deal with the extent and quality of the revolutionary response.

This response could result in a new form of abuse. On the comparison between this possible post-revolutionary “abuse of power” and the sense of limit, we could say that the French Revolution warns us about how revolutionary justice can transform and regress even in an authoritarian regime, like that of Robespierre.

Determining the limit at which revolutionary justice, intended to rectify past injustices, becomes itself unjust or compromised by authoritarianism is not a simple task.

The limit constitutes a turning point, not only a temporal and spatial one but also a transversal one. It stands between justice and injustice, as well as between resentment/indignation and previous and subsequent authoritarianism. By “previous authoritarianism”, I mean the abuse of power that manifests itself in a pre-revolutionary situation, while “subsequent authoritarianism”, refers to the potential outcome under the new revolutionary regime.

Within the phenomenological scenario context of the concept of limit, we should appeal to the virtue of temperance. The latter tends towards a sense of measure, necessary to limit the negative aspects of power. Therefore, below I will now delve into this virtue further.

11.3. Temperance

The philosophy of limits finds a fitting representation in the virtue of temperance, which ontologically embraces the concept of limit.

The Latin term “*temperantia*” means “to mix”, but also “to measure”, so it deals with equilibrium/equity.

One may also view temperance as asceticism, derived from the Latin “*ascesis*” (from the Greek “*askesis*”), meaning “to exercise”. From a spiritual standpoint, it is an activity meant to accomplish self-denial as a means of achieving spiritual purity.

To Socrates, temperance was self-domination, but also freedom from impulses. According to Plato, temperance is a kind of continence towards certain pleasures and desires. In “*Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*”, Lucius Annaeus Seneca deals with the temperance topic, discussing that temperance exercises a function of control over the passions.

When individuals experience desire, Seneca advises them to satisfy their needs rather than their desires, as it is the most sensible course of action.

One of the cardinal virtues is temperance, which controls one's sensitivity by tempering the craving for pleasure. It therefore relates to the art of moderation.

At times, maintaining balance requires resisting impulses and relinquishing certain indulgences while tempering others. For example, if a plant is not trimmed, it will not reach its full potential.

Consequently, if we do not rid ourselves of the excess that would cause our focus to be diverted, we will never be able to grow morally and become authentic humans. In essence, trimming away the excessive and potentially harmful aspects of our lives allows for authentic moral development.

The most obvious application of temperance is abstinence. Through its ability to embrace the sense of limit, temperance moderates it: "it is worth losing a small piece of "me" to save my life". Stated differently, to accomplish one goal, other goals must be sacrificed. From this point of view, even humility, as Saint Thomas stated, is a corollary of temperance.

Within a theoretical framework, this temperance could be referred to as "readily measured ethics" (Grasso, 2022b). In effect, tracing the boundaries of this ethical form, in my work "From the Emergency Crisis to Resilient and Transfigurative Ethics" (Grasso, 2022b), I examined two particular virtues, instrumental in the pursuit of successful resilience: vigilance and temperance. While "measure" refers to the virtue of temperance, "readiness" is particularly relevant to the virtue of vigilance. Without measure/balance and readiness there can be no true form of resilience.

11.4. Limit and Moral Consciousness

A deeper comprehension of limits can be attained through the appeal of moral conscience. When moral conscience and critical thinking are neglected, the banality of evil emerges. Hannah Arendt adeptly grasped this notion, elucidating the banality inherent in individuals who suppress critical thought and moral awareness.

The tendency to scatter human self-awareness powers—from the sense of dignity to moral conscience, from compassion to memory and imagination—results in psychic, moral, and spiritual entropy. This leads to collective stupidity, marked by a loss of sense of reality, affective freezing, and ethical dullness. According to Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, it is imperative to support the growth of a "planetary consciousness" that can direct the bio-economy's establishment and foster harmony with life.

In his *Sein und Zeit* ("Being and Time"), Heidegger (1927) emphasizes the wider meaning and purposes of the term "consciousness", highlighting how it is more than just a "cautionary tale". In actuality, the call of conscience precedes our recognition of the moral dichotomy of "good/evil". Heidegger's moral awareness helps us see what's lacking. Perhaps, we should seek silence, distancing ourselves

from the noise, to hear its message (Grasso, 2022b). In this regard, silence can aid in the search for truth and help heal certain wounds. It, however, is not passive resignation, but rather involves critical awareness of thought. In this regard, I would like to recall the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922) which emphasizes the concept of philosophy as a ‘disease’. The cessation of philosophizing represents the cure for this disease: mystical silence represents care for philosophical problems. Indeed, silence often enables internalization and interpretation of external reality, thereby facilitating the pursuit of truth.

Conscience guides the understanding of limits and thus directs civil disobedience or revolution most effectively. However, do revolutionaries always act in accordance with their conscience? Or do they allow themselves to be overtaken by anger and resentment, disproportionate to the injustice endured?

It is not easy, even in this case, to filter injustice through the correct use of conscience and the risk for justice demand to turn into a new social injustice is palpable. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to act by meditating not only on the injustice suffered but also, for example regarding the moral-spiritual risks that can weigh on us and others. Moreover, mechanisms of violence (see the “guillotine”) can generate violent actions in posterity, which would find justification for the injustice suffered.

A judicious and sensible use of conscience can certainly have “tempering” effects, namely, effects that imbue a “sense of limit” in the pursuit of justice.

12. Equality, Difference and Revolution

A revolution always originates from forms of social inequality, denoting differences that cannot be reconciled on equal terms. Therefore, as resentment often stems from social disparities, I will illustrate the concept of equality, as well as that of difference.

The principle of equality presupposes the existence of some differences that require substantial intervention to be nullified. Only in light of “differences” can equality be claimed.

In line with Marx’s philosophy, the concept of “difference” concerns the way capitalism engenders identity by encompassing several groups based on production criteria.

It has been demonstrated by critical theorists that apparent distinctions conceal similarities, from the creation of value itself to the inclinations of the cultural industry and consumer society (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972).

Capitalism, however, can exacerbate distinctions and exploit them for its benefit. According to Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), borders have not vanished but rather, they tend to increase in size under capitalist globalization.

Equality embraces diversity. Individuals can be equal even in their diversity: different, yet equal. “Difference” itself is a source of richness. For example, diversity of thought enriches human culture.

In this regard, Don Lorenzo Milani and the students of the Barbiana school

published an essay entitled “*Letter to a Teacher*” (1967). The monographic essay was welcomed as a manual of democratic pedagogy and a revolutionary manifesto for an alternative school.

Don Milani had no doubts: language makes us equal. Without it, there is no dignity and thus no freedom. School and culture are the foundations for a real path to emancipation and freedom¹³. However, we must contemplate how to cultivate culture inclusively, involving everyone without exclusion. Don Milani affirmed to all his students: “You are my school and I consider myself fortunate to have you”.

The challenge of valorizing differences leads towards pluralistic ontological boundaries. Within this scenario, in the era of the plurality of intelligences, we must ponder the genesis of the principle of equality and, hence, the concept of difference. So, would the difference between human intelligence and artificial intelligence produce equality or inequality?

The concept of difference also encompasses various forms of knowledge: the unity and diversity of knowledge render a complex specialist fragmentation that tends towards a comprehensive ethic. In this sense, it is pertinent to recall the concept of “Tunefully Comprehensive Ethics” (Grasso, 2024).

Difference requires “empathetic solidarity”—not solely institutional—aimed at dismantling barriers that hinder the freedom and equality of citizens. Equality presupposes that citizens have equal social dignity, and thus, the same value as individuals¹⁴.

Equality of citizens before the law entails the obligation of non-discrimination. Hence, similar circumstances must be treated equally, while dissimilar circumstances should be regulated in a reasonably different manner (consider, for instance, laws benefiting disabled citizens).

Technically, the concept of equality differs from that of equity. While the first one would give to three children of different heights a chair of the same height to study at the same desk, equity, acknowledging the differences in height, would assign chairs of different sizes to ensure that all three are seated at the same height.

According to Plato, injustice manifests itself in the pursuit of possessions greater than the majority. Equity can be oriented between the sense of limit and the desire for excess.

13. Revolution: What Aims and Tools? Peaceful Life and Meekness

If we were to consider the objectives that a revolution ought to pursue, we should

¹³According to Don Milani, the word gives dignity to man. The human being has dignity when he can understand the context in which he is inserted and knows how to respond to it. Thanks to school, you can decode reality and have the ability to improve it for yourself and others.

¹⁴As Vincent W. Lloyd’s recent book “Black Dignity: The Struggle Against Domination” states, the notion of “dignity” has long been at the core of “Black politics”. When Martin Luther King Jr. received the Nobel Peace Prize, he described the civil rights movement as an attempt to find a new sense of dignity. Even Stokely Carmichael spoke of forming a coalition of Black power advocates, united by their steadfast determination to restore their dignity. From the point of view of a “feminist dignity”, see the recent book by K. Hessler, *Feminist Human Rights: A Political Approach*”.

start with the premise that a revolution must lead to a serene social climate; a peaceful life that benefits the common good. Moreover, a revolution that instigates “terror” would not be successful, as the profound change it aims to establish should lead towards an improved social condition, which tends towards general welfare and possible social happiness.

In this regard, Lucius Annaeus Seneca’s work “*De Vita Beata*” (58 AD) comes to mind, wherein he posits that the supreme good lies in virtue, which is intrinsically tied to benefiting others. Humans’ tranquillity must have the capacity to benefit others, whether through commitment or, at least, through examples or words. Life’s adversities, in reality, are trials aimed at moral refinement (*De Tranquillitate Animi*).

The revolution could also be interpreted as a means to pursue virtue and a peaceful existence. In other words, it can be seen as a necessary “evil” (upheaval) aimed at enhancing life’s conditions. Peaceful life (including peaceful existence and coexistence) also requires an attitude of meekness.

A biblical passage prophesies that after the tyrant is vanquished, and destruction is over, then a throne of meekness will be established (Isaiah, 16, 1 - 5). This image of a throne, erected upon meekness, on which a judge will sit following the death of the tyrant, embodies “revolutionary justice”.

In the Gospel, it is said that the meek are blessed and shall inherit the earth. Furthermore, it is written: “Learn from me, who am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find refreshment for your life” (Matthew, 11, 29).

The term “*anawim*” is often used in the Bible to refer to the meek, as well as the poor. This term indicates ‘those who are bent’ under oppression, but above all, it denotes humility in adoration towards God.

In the Apostolic Exhortation “*Gaudete et Exsultate*”, n. 74, meekness is seen as an expression of inner poverty, belonging to those who place their trust solely in God.

According to Norberto Bobbio (2018), the meek are neither arrogant nor submissive, as they do not give up their struggle out of weakness or resignation. Moreover, the meek reject competition as it culminates in a destructive race.

Meekness is a weak virtue, a disposition of mind that shines only in the presence of the other: the meek is the one others require to overcome the evil within themselves.

Bobbio cites the philosopher Carlo Mazzantini, according to whom meekness is the only supreme power, which consists in letting others be themselves.

Freedom

A second objective a revolution should pursue is tied to liberation from the oppression of power. In this case, a philosophy of freedom emerges. “Freedom” shares etymological roots with “*friend*” and the German “*freiheit*”, which bears resemblance to “*friede*” (peace).

The concept of freedom pertains to that intimate friendly bond that strives for

the inner tranquillity of souls.

It is the greatest universal value of culture, an ability to opt for an alternative as an opportunity, an inalienable human right to realize one's human will. It is linked to the concepts of responsibility and autonomy. Freedom presupposes free choice without constraints.

In Greek culture, the concept of freedom is related above all to politics, with particular regard to the power and autonomy of the State. If to Spinoza, there is no freedom for man, to Rousseau, instead, freedom is the natural state of humanity, destroyed by oppressive civilization: "man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains".

Immanuel Kant spoke of the universal idea of freedom, in his work "*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*". Freedom mainly concerns experience, the metaphysical world of the noumenon, whereas for Hegel, it is the very essence of the "Absolute Spirit", which manifests itself through its estrangement in nature and history.

According to Marx, freedom is an instrument of economic, social, and political liberation. Conversely, Saint Thomas, in his *Summa Theologica*, asserts that man, by virtue of his free will, determines his actions.

In Goethe's opinion, "from the forces that all creatures bind, who overcomes himself his freedom finds". Isaiah Berlin, for his part, distinguishes between positive liberty and negative liberty. The latter minimizes constraints on action; while positive liberty is linked to self-mastery.

Liberté (1942) is a work written by Paul Éluard. It is a hymn to hope that invites humans to lead authentic and responsible lives, mindful of each moment we are allowed to live. Through the continuous repetition of the word "freedom", the author keeps hope in the future alive, through the power of poetry.

In Maeve Cooke's opinion (Cooke, 2023), the ecological crisis calls for a reconceptualization of human freedom, also through the redefinition of a particular concept of human agency. A non-authoritarian transformative force, which resides in its capacity for disclosure, invites contemplation and alternative modes of existence, which are necessary. Without a self-transforming component, in fact, freedom would not be potentially transformative.

According to Ralph Waldo Emerson, freedom can be achieved through nature and derives from loneliness, which liberates the individual from societal constraints and conflicts. Meanwhile, self-confidence generates freedom as an individual, by believing in himself, attains the power to realize his will in a self-sufficient way.

In Thoreau's view, freedom can be lost in possessing things that require attention. Furthermore, he posits that individuals need to live in nature, as it allows them to experience a kind of solitude suitable for the attainment of freedom from society and conflicts.

The concept of freedom could also intersect with the concept of alterity (otherness). In other words, by freeing the heart from worries and societal norms, one

becomes free and draws closer to others.

There is a work by the poet Goffredo Parise, “*Altri*”, which we could consider a small manifesto of otherness, where the innocent amazement at the discovery of the other breaks the monotony of a life dictated by rules, prohibitions, and obligations.

“*Altri*” tells the story of a wealthy child who, in August 1938, spent his day on the exclusive beach of the Grand Hotel Des Bains on the Lido of Venice. His mother was busy sunbathing, while the stern German governess was dozing. From the story, we perceive the boredom of the child, forced to live in a world made up of prohibitions and social labels. Suddenly, the child sees a poor man who asks him to look out for his clothes as he wants to swim in the sea, which he has never seen before. The child, scared but curious at the same time, agrees and contemplates the man as if for the first time he had encountered the world of otherness.

The contemplation along the moment itself does not last long. The governess wakes up and asks about what is happening. The lifeguards stopped the man who had invaded the rich people’s beach, but eventually let him go.

During that evening, in his bedroom, the child thought back to that meeting on the beach, which broke the monotony of his days. He thus realizes that he has discovered the existence of “others”. In the knowledge of otherness, in the absence of imposed strict rules, the child becomes free for the first time. He frees himself from the weight of rigidity and begins his path to encounter himself and the surrounding world¹⁵.

According to me, freedom is the breath of the soul, it is contact with the sky and with the deepest part of us, which interacts in harmony with the cosmos. When this harmony is undermined by power, freedom begins to wane, to the point where it disappears in the hypothesis of complete enslavement and subjugation; a condition, the latter, which erodes trust in oneself and others.

However, there are negative powers, rather “hidden” compared to the more obvious ones, whose paths to freedom are not so simple. For example, they can conceal themselves within technocratic aspirations. Contemporary technology’s pervasive influence fosters dependency, impeding genuine human connections and relationships.

We, humans, don’t even notice a character of authoritarianism in implicit (and so “occult”) technological power, as we usually see technology as our ally and to which we entrust the most varied tasks.

Confronted with hidden negative forces like technological dominance, critical reflection leading to liberation becomes challenging, particularly if embraced by the majority as societal norms.

According to Kant, the right to civil freedom is grounded in our shared humanity. The principle of equality before the law entails the right to equal access to freedom. The concept of justice, for Kant, encompasses a body of regulations capable of protecting individual freedoms, which cannot infringe upon those of oth-

¹⁵By the same author (Parise), and on the theme of freedom of choice, understood as a choice of liberation, read “*Allegria*” (I Sillabari).

ers and *vice versa*.

Furthermore, Kant accepts the assumption under which individuals witnessing their freedom violated, by acquiescing to such violations, cannot deem them unjust.

To Kant, freedom not only constitutes one of the cornerstones of a just society but also measures the very degree of justice in a given social order. Consequently, the concept of freedom aligns with that of justice.

Isaiah Berlin distinguishes between two forms of freedom: negative freedom and positive freedom. Negative freedom pertains to the freedom to do or to be: freedom from interference from other people. Positive freedom involves self-determination and self-mastery and refers to the source of control or interference, which can induce someone to do something rather than another.

Given its fundamentality in Berlin's thought, it is irreconcilable with the existence of autocratic regimes. Freedom concerns the realm of control rather than its origin. According to him, a despot, for example, could grant many more freedoms than exist in a democratic society.

Critiquing oppressive societal structures necessitates individuals' commitment to forging a society where personal and collective freedoms coexist with justice, even if everything seems to prevent it (Mancini, 2019a: p. 241).

Engaging in criticism enables us to defeat the oppression caused by ignorance and arrogance, and fosters individual and communal freedom, which entails the construction of a society suited to our dignity and dedicated to nurturing the world entrusted to us (Mancini, 2021: p. 198).

14. Utopian Revolution?

Revolution represents a hypothesis of social change due to its inherently uncertain outcome. It should guarantee conditions that enable radical transformations of the political and social structure. Numerous philosophers, including Thomas Paine, De Condorcet, Immanuel Kant, Hegel, Karl Marx, Bakunin, Friedrich Engels, Hannah Arendt, and Michel Foucault, have expressed their views on this matter.

Whether a revolution can truly bring about significant changes in a social context remains unknown beforehand. If it fails to make this contribution, could it, in some way, be considered a result of utopian thinking? It is possible that believing in the potential for societal improvement reflects a utopian illusion, where the hope for justice emerges from the ashes of oppressive power. However, the enduring hope for a better world should never be extinguished.

Therefore, I believe that a revolution that sets itself the goal of a new era of peace and justice, however utopian it may seem, must always be accompanied by optimistic feelings, aimed at fostering a better humanity. In considering these optimistic sentiments, Francis Bacon's utopian work "Nova Atlantis" comes to mind, as it embodies optimism towards a progressive revolution aimed at improving the cultural and social conditions of future humanity.

Simon Weil states that revolution is often not considered as a solution to the problems posed by the current moment. Rather, it is a miraculous intervention that bypasses the need to address them directly. In essence, we expect the revolution to be carried out, without considering who will carry it out (Weil, 1955).

Weil elaborates on this utopian perspective by highlighting that the existing regime is built on inequality, yet the masses express disparate demands. The regime, Weil states, rests on constraint, and the masses, from the moment they have the right to speak, exercise the same constraint within their ranks. Weil expresses skepticism about the possibility of the spontaneous emergence of an alternative to the existing regime from the masses, suggesting that the pursuit of power enslaves everyone (Weil, 1955).

15. Love, Hope and Revolution

Revolution should lead to a climate of love¹⁶. In this regard, I believe that the greatest revolution that history can give us is the revolution that love can bring about.

If we don't love and only let ourselves be overcome by anger or other negative feelings, we won't be able to change the world for the better. Indeed, anger presupposes a fight against ourselves, which requires an iron will: "*Pugna tecum ipse; si vis vincere iram, non potest te illa*". To overcome anger, Seneca proposes strategies such as softening one's countenance and modulating one's voice with sweetness and slowness. Through this practice, the soul gradually comes into harmony with the external appearance: "*vultus remittatur, vox lenior sit, gradus lentior; Paulatim cum exterioribus interiora formantur*" (Seneca, *De ira*, V, 13,1-4).

Love towards ourselves, towards others, towards God, and the natural world around us, in my opinion, should serve as the guiding compass for any change, even of a revolutionary nature. True love, however, originates from the act of self-giving. This certainly recalls the philosophy of the gift (I am thinking in this regard of Seneca's *De Beneficiis*, which highlights the ethic of *beneficium*). This philosophy requires deep self-awareness.

Christianity teaches us to love and extend kindness even to those who do not reciprocate. This principle could be summarized in the following maxim: "Since it has been given to you, give in turn" (the logic of superabundance, following the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur) and "forgive even those who do not love you". Thus saying, the gift becomes a moral obligation. Dependence, which is captured in the injunction to love one's enemies, transforms into ethics. Ricoeur (1990) further suggests that the highest ideal of justice is a society where the sense of mutual dependence remains subordinate to mutual disinterest.

Considering another biblical injunction to treat others as we would like to be treated, justice can be seen as corresponding to this principle of equivalence. In

¹⁶On revolutionary justice without anger, I recommend Martha Nussbaum's lectures on "Anger and Revolutionary Justice" and on "Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice". As Martha Nussbaum reminds us in her lessons, the three biggest movements for freedom in the past 100 years were done without anger. Gandhi's independence movement, Nelson Mandela's freedom movement in South Africa, and the role of Martin Luther King, Jr. in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (Nussbaum, 2016).

this scenario, overabundance could be seen as a corrective to this equivalence. Love, therefore, needs justice in the same way that justice needs love.

I believe that revolution begins with self-transformation. For this to happen, we need to be equipped with a strong critical spirit, which allows us to carry out a self-critical examination. Reading our souls with truth, critical consciousness, and authenticity is fundamental to making a change in our lives. The revolution, in this sense, starts within ourselves. Let's think for example of the revolutionary desire for peace in the world. Can we truly achieve world peace if there is no peace within our own hearts and lives? If we do not revolutionize ourselves—endeavoring to improve ourselves as humans and members of society—how can we expect the world to change for the better?

Many people in the world fight for freedom and independence, or even to affirm the basic right to water and food. Is the revolution they lead perhaps not our concern? I think that any revolution conducted for legitimate reasons must necessarily concern us all.

Indeed, how can we claim a peaceful and free world if we fail to empathize with the reasons and feelings of people who lead a revolution for legitimate reasons? Ultimately, the inhabitants of the earth constitute a single people. Empathy, therefore, serves as a critical tool for revolution. Let us think, for example, of the outcome of a revolution led by individuals who fail to empathize with one another's motivations. Such a revolution would likely yield negative outcomes, as they would be fragmented and disconnected from each other.

Moreover, for a revolution to succeed, those who participate (directly or indirectly) must maintain unwavering hope, a virtue often scarce in times of crisis. Without hope, in fact, how could the French revolutionaries have seen their revolution through?

Hope is precisely the revolutionary engine of change, encompassing the aspiration for a new world, the cessation of oppressive power, and the prevention of corruption and abuse in the new order. The negative power that characterizes an authoritarian regime, in effect, is often characterized by corruption and lies.

Motivation is also essential alongside hope. Every human action requires motivation for it to be successful. Whatever we choose to undertake, motivation is fundamental. Genuine motivation grounded in ethical principles is indispensable for realizing the ideals of revolution.

16. Honesty and Revolution

Revolution should instill a spirit of "honesty", which we could define as the moral integrity that manifests itself in upright and virtuous behavior that eschews alibis, exploitations, or falsehoods, aimed at advancing or consolidating authoritarian powers. According to Cicero, the *honestus* is worthy of honor. *Honestum* translates the Greek "*kalon*", signifying the set of virtues that should characterize the new revolutionary structure.

In "*De Finibus*", Cicero reports that honest individuals merit praise in them-

selves, irrespective of utility or gain. Benedetto Croce expands on the concept of honesty in the political realm, suggesting that the failure of a politician's honesty compromises their capacity, as it diverges from their duty to mediate between utilitarian volition and universal ethical volition.

Seneca, in the *Epistulae ad Lucilium* (XLIII, 2-5), contends that honesty requires a good use of conscience: "*si honesta sunt quae facis, omnes sciant; si turpia, quid refert neminem scire cum tu scias?*" (if the things you do are honest, let everyone know them; if you are dishonest, what does it matter if no one knows them, since you know them?).

In Aristotle's virtue ethics, honesty is intrinsic to many other virtues, such as friendship, but it is also a virtue that reduces boastfulness. The virtue of honesty is linked to authenticity, according to Plato, Kierkegaard and David Hume. It promotes trust and good relationships. Paradoxically, however, telling the truth does not always seem to appear virtuous. Aristotle believed that if in a given context, truth was inappropriate, virtue would transform into vice. Nietzsche, for his part, describes honesty as the youngest virtue (see "Daybreak" and "Thus Spoke Zarathustra").

Honesty recalls the concept of truth, which has been examined since ancient times. Indeed, ancient philosophers, closely connected the concept of "truth" to that of "knowledge". Heraclitus and Parmenides contrast sensible knowledge with opinion ("*doxa*") and rational knowledge ("*the logos*").

Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and the Sophists attributed to knowledge a foundation that was no longer rational, but empirical. Plato stated that "true knowledge" exists only in the absolute reality of ideas. According to Socrates, truth resides within man.

Medieval philosophy, on the other hand, viewed truth as "divine illumination". St. Augustine attributed the source of truth to God, while St. Thomas saw sensible experience as the basis of knowledge, resulting in truth being the adaptation of the intellect to reality. In line with the Cartesian school, evidence becomes the criterion of truth when interpreted by the mind, with God necessary in the deductive procedure.

Hegel asserted that truth was subjective and thereby denied the existence of any truth above or beyond human reason. Nietzsche similarly denied the existence of disinterested knowledge of the world, as science represents dominion over things. Heidegger emphasized the relationship between man and truth, insisting on the etymological meaning of the Greek term "*aletheia*" ("non-concealment"). It involves a "self-revelation" of "Being" that is never fully realized.

In Simone Weil's thought, truth is the only good humans need to stay alive, often pursued through *Hypomoné*, a Greek word that designates redemption through attention; hence, the meanings of care and vigilance.

17. Trust, Compassion and Empathy

Without trust in others, without empathy and compassion, how can the inhabitants

of a nation triumph over the oppression of power? If we transition from a climate of empathetic and supportive trust to one characterized by selfishness, where some fall into the abyss of corruption and compromise with power, solely pursuing their own interests—then, the revolution would not probably yield positive outcomes. Now, I will endeavour to briefly define trust, empathy, and compassion.

Trust is indispensable in the present era, particularly characterized by a “crisis of hope”. It is the harmonious synthesis of all the virtues associated with love, exemplified by the simplicity and purity of children. Trust is not merely a concept but a lifestyle—a way of authentically living love.

Empathy is a term deriving from the Greek ἐν (in) and πάθεια (to suffer), it recalls the German term “Einfühlung”, which means “entering into” the emotions of others. The Greek word “*Empateia*” is made up of “En” (inside) and “pathos” (feeling). To Husserl, empathy is the way in which a subject experiences the existence of other subjects. It is the key to emotionally access the experiential reality of another person. Empathy manifests itself as the need to share with others a common universalistic destiny, aimed at changing lifestyles and developing the sensitivity of individuals; hence, it leads us towards mutual recognition. For instance, we can think of the common destiny shared by people tired of the oppression of power.

Jeremy Rifkin introduced the concept of “global empathy”, which is considered as a sub-text of the history of man since the increase in the dynamism in interpersonal exchanges constitutes a fundamental aspect of civilization.

Compassion, derived from the Latin expression “*cum patior*” denotes the ability to suffer alongside another person. It implicitly recalls the concept of “empathy”. If compassion is the equivalent of “feeling for” and “with another person”, empathy involves “feeling as another person”. Compassion presupposes empathy and requires a connection based on how we perceive others. Compassion presupposes a learning process regarding human vulnerability, which is undertaken by compassionate people. It necessitates a learning process regarding human vulnerability, fostering imaginative understanding to empathetically transpose oneself into another’s situation. As suggested by Lévinas, compassion is grounded in an “epiphany of the face”, representing a spiritual response to human commonality.

18. Which Justice?

As Rawls teaches us, justifiable inequalities and unjustifiable or arbitrary inequalities exist and only the latter determine social injustice. From my point of view, the unjustifiability of social inequalities can be determined by one criterion in particular: the injury to human dignity (Grasso, 2022b; Grasso, 2024). When the injury to human dignity becomes too unsustainable from a moral-identitarian perspective, and it embraces society or a narrow social context, then a given inequality becomes unjustifiable and opens the doors to the most revolutionary feel-

ings/emotions¹⁷.

“True democracy” can only occur through justice. Indeed, without justice, there is no democracy. Scholars delving into the philosophy of democracies cannot fail to come to terms with the concept of justice, which has been examined since ancient times. What idea of justice, however, would be inclined toward a democratic horizon? Are care and justice inseparable components? This work hypothesizes that justice should tend toward care. “Caring justice” embodies justice that assumes care as the fundamental criterion of epistemic justice, characterized by specific requirements such as love, compassion, and equity.

Given these considerations, I ponder which concept of justice best suits our fragile and vulnerable reality.

When faced with grave and intolerable injustices that assail human dignity, revolution can serve as the epistemic foundation for “reconstructing” new conceptions of justice.

Revolution itself, however, could give rise to a “misguided justice”, if it degenerates into new forms of injustice.

In light of this, I am about to delineate what characteristics ideal justice should have in these labile times that we are living in, marked by injustices and inequalities of all sorts, while also elucidating its relationship with revolution.

In particular, this work proposes a new type of justice, which considers both the reasons for ‘caring justice’ and those of ‘critical-identitarian justice of otherness’ (regarding this last form of justice, which I will briefly illustrate later, see: [Grasso, 2024](#)).

18.1. Caring Justice

I believe that justice, while maintaining unequivocal traits of equity, pertains to order and harmony, as in line with the teaching of the Pythagorean school. Justice is also a social virtue *par excellence*, placing unity in diversity and preventing disorder among men (Plato). At the same time, it assumes a dimension of mediumship, as articulated by Aristotle, and it is intertwined with a spiritual dimension (see e.g. St. Thomas).

“True” justice, however, must never lose sight of human dignity, as well as non-human dignity, and therefore the dignity of the entire cosmos. It is no coincidence that I have argued in favor of “dignitary justice” in my recent book: “From the Emergency Crisis to Resilient and Transfigurative Ethics” ([Grasso, 2022b](#)).

In a “post-complex” context, this justice should pursue the healing of ‘wounds to dignity’, especially those caused by abuses of power, which silently try to invade every sphere of society. In a world wounded in dignity—a concept that encompasses both human and non-human beings—philosophy should endeavor to address these wounds in the most varied ways available.

Different definitions of care¹⁸ exist in scientific literature, including those of

¹⁷Consider for example if the cost of living became unsustainable overall and if a dignified future for the young generations was denied.

¹⁸For example, see: [Fabienne Brugère \(2011\), *L'éthique du care*, 2011.](#)

Seneca and Heidegger. According to Lucius Annaeus Seneca (*Epistulae ad Lucilium*, vol III), care pertains to the power inherent in human beings to perfect the good. Only through care, can man become ‘human’. In Seneca’s thought, care relates to solicitude, conscientiousness, attention and devotion (Burdach, 1923).

In the analysis of the concept of care, in my opinion, Heidegger’s philosophy appears to be highly fruitful. According to this philosopher, the human self tends to reject its authentic being, in favour of living safely within society. The anxiety-inducing path that lies in the escape from the self (*Dasein*) is admonished by care (*Sorge*), preventing one from staying off the path, thus leading to the authentic rediscovery of one’s self.

Care is intricately linked to the choices that arise from the various possibilities of action. In Heidegger’s opinion, anxiety and concern intersect in the philosophy of taking care (*Fürsorge*), which concerns the care of both the Earth as a whole and our fellow human beings (Olafson, 1987).

Ultimately, it falls upon individuals to choose between succumbing to lifeless conformity or cultivating the seed of real freedom through caring for the common good. While individualism may deceive individuals into believing they are the center of the universe, a critical understanding of society encourages them to find within the profound desire for true life. It is therefore worth embarking on a journey with the desire for a different life, for oneself and all (Mancini, 2019b: p. 241).

From a formal-conceptual perspective, different forms of justice (transformative, transitional, ecological, restorative, distributive, and so on) seem to have been conceived by the scientific literature. From a moral-substantial perspective, these different forms reflect the most varied ways of living reality. Nevertheless, I think justice is much more than the mere sum of the different types of justice.

The different claims of justice should be examined according to a “comprehensive” style (Grasso, 2024), which attempts to reconcile the pluralistic dimension with the monist, relativist, and subjectivist ones, in line with a principle, that moves from plurality to unity and vice versa, from the universal to the particular and from the particular to the universal, but also from the material to the symbolic, as well as from the symbolic to the material. However, if I were to think of a model of justice that aligns with a real democratic rebirth, in line with a comprehensive dimension, I would immediately think of a justice “that cares”, which I name: “Caring Justice”.

Although we often talk about “healing justice”, I prefer the expression “caring justice” as it more directly references the ethics of care, which underpins this type of justice. Nonetheless, I will be using the two expressions interchangeably in the text below.

Since the time of Aristotle, justice (ὁ νόμος ὁ ὀρθός) has held a fundamental caring power for both individuals and communities (Fermani, 2021).

According to Christopher D. Marshall, care constitutes a fundamental human need and social right, operating on both active and passive fronts: through giving and receiving care.

Presently, we speak of care as something abstract, since indeed we are witnessing a crisis of care. In this respect, [Jonathan Herring \(2013\)](#), in his “Caring and the Law”, asserts that the West is facing a crisis of care. While care ethics emphasises empathy, trust, obligation, mutuality, and responsiveness to need, justice ethics focuses on rights, equity, freedom, and impartiality. By comparing these ethical paradigms, we realise that care should not be arbitrary but should adhere to precise criteria of justice.

In my view, institutions can adopt caring attitudes only if care is genuinely internalised in society as a way of life. In “Compassionate Justice”, for instance, [Marshall \(2012\)](#) argues that as public institutions can be cruel, they similarly can also be compassionate or caring, by striving to observe the obligations of care in the way they operate ([Unwin, 2018](#)).

Restorative justice should be a “relational justice of care” and, therefore, a “caring transformative justice”. A relational justice of care sees care, not only as a feeling but, using Joan Tronto’s words, as a “species of activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world, so that we may live in it as well as possible” ([Tronto, 1993](#)).

Even [Liz Elliot \(2010: pp. 48-65\)](#) appeals to care ethics to elucidate why restorative justice, which is predicated on care values, is “ill-suited to operate within a corrections system predicated on detachment, separation and mistrust” ([Marshall, 2019: p. 180](#)).

Since 1998, [Masters and Smith \(1998: pp. 15-16, 20\)](#) argued that by forging a connection between restorative processes and the feminist ethics of care, “we can think of relational justice as caring justice, or even (...) “loving justice”.

Indeed, love is an essential requirement of care. Without it, even care would become something mechanistic. Love, however, is not the only requirement for authentic “caring justice”. Virtues, such as compassion and equity, are also essential within this scenario.

According to [Loretta Pyles \(2020\)](#), for example, a transformative approach to “healing” could be supported by enhancing the capabilities of “mindfulness, compassion, curiosity, critical inquiry, effort, and equanimity”.

[Jarem Sawatsky’s \(2018\)](#) work offers an original perspective on “healing justice”. According to Senator Murray Sinclair (Former Chair of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada), Sawatsky shows us that “if we take the time to learn about our own humanness, justice can be transformative. In this time of reconciliation, he would demonstrate how communities do not need to wait for governments to create communities rooted in healing, justice, truth, and reconciliation”.

Care presupposes a state of vulnerability, which can itself be a source of care. Thomas Moore (New York Times, bestselling author of “Care for the Soul”), in this regard, appreciating the aforementioned Sawatsky’s work, remarks that injustice itself can be a source of care: “You heal yourself and your world by means of your illness and injustices”.

To Luigina Mortari, care is a necessary ontological action, because the human condition is characterized by inconsistency, lack, and dependence (Mortari, 2018). She recalls the fact that the Greeks used three different words to describe the term “care”: “*merimna*”, interpreting care as concern for preserving life; “*therapeia*”, understood as the treatment of wounds, both in the body and in the soul; “*epimeleia*”, indicating the responsibility of existence aimed at supporting the care.

Caring for others, therefore, also means taking into consideration the responsibility towards and for others. It is also appropriate to urge others to take care of themselves and therefore of their soul. Thus, Socrates, in the “*Apology*” suggests the task of the educator.

“Healing justice” is an expression used above all by social movements, which have made “healing” a real motto. “Dignity and Power Now”, for instance, is a Los Angeles-based grassroots organization that fights for the dignity and power of all incarcerated people, their families, and communities. Founded in 2012, its mission is to achieve transformative justice and healing justice for all incarcerated individuals (Justice Teams Network, 2019). Within this framework, “healing” is defined as “an ongoing process of mending as well as building power resilience, and resistance to transform systems of oppression” (Justice Teams Network, 2019: p. 5).

Cara Page, speaking of “healing justice”, asserted that this type of justice is “a framework that identifies how we can holistically respond to and intervene on intergenerational trauma and violence, and to bring collective practices that can impact and transform the consequences of oppression on our collective bodies, hearts, and minds” (Justice Teams Network, 2019: p. 6).

“Care” and “justice” are logically compatible terms (Hay, 2017). Nevertheless, scholars of justice have paid little attention to the care topic. For example, according to Margaret Moore (1999) the link between liberal justice and care has been inaccurately conceptualized (Moore, 1999). Care theorists, such as Carol Gilligan, have recognized that the language of care tends to be ignored by justice theorists.

Simone Weil argues that care is the center of justice, transcending not only divisions but also reconciliations that, in any event, keep disparate spheres of endeavor apart. In “justice-charity”, the other’s need, not the law, governs our commitment.

Within the “caring justice” scenario, caring for dignity is the essential condition for justice to be realized. Consequently, I posit that the study of the concept of “dignity” goes hand in hand with the study of the concept of “justice” (Grasso, 2022b; Grasso, 2024).

Dignity encompasses the entire natural world and is best understood in the context of the interhuman tie and the interactions that exist between humans and the natural world. According to Hans Jonas, all living things have a right to respect their struggle for survival, and as a result, so does the natural environment (Jonas, 1990).

There is little doubt that vulnerability and dignity are closely related to one another. Indeed, dignity frequently seems to vanish when someone is very vulnerable. Dignity often appears to vanish in situations involving extreme vulnerability, such as unemployment or precarious living conditions without access to basic amenities like clean drinking water. Human dignity is enhanced when one contributes to the material or spiritual growth of society.

Hobbes' *Leviathan* makes it clear that a man's value is based on the cost associated with using his power (Hobbes, 1651).

For her part, Hannah Arendt (2006) believes that the "right to have rights" forms the core of dignity. In the face of dire circumstances, losing one's dignity would entail losing one's individuality. To Roberto Mancini (Mancini, 2014: pp. 97-134), uniqueness, relationality, openness, integrity, and responsibility form the foundation of human identity and its unalienable dignity.

As I have already had the opportunity to underline in my monograph (Grasso, 2024), the concept of "dignity", linked to that of identity, requires a new critical concept of "nature", as well as the ability to provide care. Indeed, "liberative" sustainability can only pursue the goal of liberation from necro-economic abuse through the epistemological enhancement of these concepts (Grasso, 2024).

18.2. Some Concluding Remarks about "Caring Justice"

"Caring justice" is not solely a restorative or transformative justice, it is also a justice that, in addition to being compassionate, strives towards the ultimate goal of justice itself: that is, in my opinion, to create a peaceful and democratic coexistence with respect for the different dignities (human and non-human).

"Caring justice" always bears in mind that caring for oneself, others, and the entire cosmos does not pertain only to a precise "civic duty", but rather to a virtuous assumption concerning a coherent lifestyle. Care presupposes respect, love, and trust and tends to care for wounds of dignity.

Through "caring justice", it is possible to listen to each other's consciences and valorize "otherness", viewing differences as a blessing and an asset, rather than a burden.

However, care should not only be directed towards the other but also towards oneself. According to Heidegger, indeed, it would not be correct to take the place of the other in taking care of oneself. In effect, self-care is a spiritual exercise aimed at transforming the self.

"Caring justice" also requires attention and discernment. For Simone Weil (1985), for example, one must be attentive in order to be just. In her opinion, we should be intermediaries between the uncultivated land and the tilled field, between the data of the problem and the solution, between the blank page and the poem, and between the unfortunate who is hungry and the unfortunate who is full.

To conclude, I believe that "caring justice" is a necessary prerequisite for realizing a real "democratic renaissance". As I said before, "caring justice" is also

linked to the valorization of otherness. Hence, it is useful to delve deeper into the concepts of “otherness” and, consequently, “respect”.

18.3. Otherness and Respect

If the concept of “otherness” were internalized and understood by the community, and above all by the representatives of power, many abuses of power would not exist in the world. Respect for others is the prerequisite for an ethical life. In my book “The Ontological Maze. Ethics, Dignity, and the Critical Essences of Identity and Sustainability” (Grasso, 2024), I discussed ‘Critical-Identitarian Justice of Otherness’.

By “otherness”, I mean anything other than us. We are social beings, and we need the cooperative presence of other people to live. “Otherness” and “identity” should be in tune with each other. If through a compassionate process, we can empathically understand the reasons of the other and make them our own, then the world would reveal itself through the gaze of the other.

“Otherness” is a term often used in opposition to the concept of “identity”. It shows how two entities differ from each other. Identity is imbued with the condition of personal vulnerability, leading to a conscious state of redemption.

“Identity” and “otherness” convey a certain cultural tension. The “self-other” relationship should be viewed in terms of fairness rather than “supremacy”. An individual can recognize himself as such through interaction with others.

Identity often struggles to accept otherness, especially from an epistemic perspective. Precisely for this reason, the concept of “justice” emerges. This concept claims the critical focus on identity within the topic of otherness, in line with empathic and responsible care. Given that identification with the other requires empathy actually, the “critical-identitarian justice of otherness” should tend – at least in its ontological connotations – towards an empathetic path that transfigures various vulnerabilities.

Such a perspective transcends human consciences through the ethical and philosophical-anthropological examination of vulnerabilities and the spiritual bond that unites “the other” to the surrounding environment.

It is a justice aimed at recovering the lost dignity, understanding within the term “dignity” an “inter-human link” between the cosmos and various vital entities, as well as a critical knowledge (Grasso, 2024).

19. Revolution as “Caring Critical-Identitarian Justice”?

We now need to understand the connection between caring justice, critical-identitarian justice of otherness, and revolution.

Firstly, justice becomes even more thoughtful and attentive as it grapples with injustice and oppression, gaining a more incisive meaning through the mentioned tools.

In light of the considerations above and considering the definition of justice that I previously related to the concept of care—the “caring justice”, as well as the

“critical-identitarian justice of otherness”—we could ask ourselves whether the revolution is a form of critical-identitarian justice that takes care.

My answer varies depending on the nature of the power that precedes the revolution. When faced with a particularly authoritarian power, I believe revolution becomes a form of justice that heals the wounds caused by oppressive power. Indeed, there should be a certain proportion between the revolutionary strength and the oppression of power; hence, the sense of limit.

Substantial change doesn't require the use of force. Indeed, I also discussed love, and therefore, positive relationships. I believe that there are several forms of revolutions, some more silent¹⁹. These forms are associated with virtues such as perseverance and meekness, as well as respect for everyone, despite differences.

Only individual and collective consciences can understand which strategies to be used in the face of negative authoritarian power. Dignity and the moral duty of care should always be at the center of social and individual choices. The concept of limit, in its most varied interpretations, can significantly influence revolutionary action.

Respect for otherness, supported by empathic compassion, along with hope, love, freedom, temperance, meekness, honesty, peace, awareness, care and dignity, constellates the path towards a new justice, which, liberated from oppression, seeks to embark on a shared journey, aiming for epistemic proximity.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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¹⁹Such as the use of moral virtues or, for instance, the confident prayer which, if practiced with true trust, can become a reason for living and can actually change destiny of things. Only those who pray from the heart could testify the prayer revolutionary strength.

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