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SCIENTIFIC METHOD, HISTORY, DARWINISM AND LAICISM:
A GIOVANNI JERVIS'S INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

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SUMMARY

Some authors marked a change of perspective from the early to the late Jervis's thought, in terms of a supposed turn towards conservatism. That laid him open to criticism from some Leftist Italian intellectuals. The aim of this paper is to show that conservatism never was a Jervis's thought feature. Mainly, subjects and methods leading the development of his philosophical views suggest a continuity between earlier writings and later ones. All over his thought, in fact, the idea of preeminence of scientific method and historical contextualization convinced him about naturalistic approaches to human behavior, which came to support his Darwinism and laicism in approaching socio-psychological and socio-political issues.

Introduction

The Italian psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and essayist Giovanni Jervis devoted part of his late work to defend the achievements of modernity. He made it by a severe and systematic criticism against the culturally senseless and politically “toxic” nature of relativism and irrationalism in Continental and Postmodern Philosophies. Some authors marked a change of perspective from the early to the late Jervis¹. That laid his work open to unjustified misinterpretations and ideological criticism. Because he was representative of the Italian Left culture of the 1960s and 1970s, his later views were wrongly conceived as evi-

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dence of a conservative turn. As much as his criticism against relativism was wrongly associated to Benedict XVI's one². Even the days following his death, his later thought was object of an impolite revenge by the Post-modernist Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo as being defined "dull", or worse still a "rise and fall" and "conservative reflux"³.

The "*weak thought*" theorist⁴ likely remembered that since 1984 Jervis⁵ had drawn attention to the outdated character of such controversial notion in the history of philosophy. As a matter of fact, the notion of *weak thought* ("pensiero debole") rests on a subterfuge, as Jervis highlighted, that is presuming the existence of an imaginary *strong* thought. In 1997 Jervis compared the Post-modernist ideology and its typically "critical language of modernity" to the reactionary or religious thought, whose ethical and political contents changed into "aesthetic rhetoric"⁶. He then⁷ identified the weak thought as an exemplary paradigm for the subjectivist, antirealist and anti-scientist drift in contemporary Post-modernism (namely, Hermeneutics, Nihilistic existentialism and Constructivism).

In this paper we won't be concerned with defending Jervis's arguments against Post-modernism. Rather we will assess whether Jervis actually became a conservative, as some Italian Leftist intellectuals have been stating. That means showing that he wasn't in any way a different person in his early life.

According to Italian Post-modernists, a "reactionary thought" assumes the controllability of facts, or better still that an objective knowledge is attainable through scientific investigation. Therefore we will discuss whether or not Jervis's early writings argued against knowledge based on scientific methods, defended a relativist position, criticized psychiatric medicalization (i.e. an empirical clinical approach to mental illness), or still accepted the widespread anti-naturalistic approach to psychological research derived from psychoanalytic continental tradition. And we will in the negative.

So the aim of this paper is to show subjects and methods leading the intellectual development of Jervis's philosophical thought in a continuity between earlier writings and later ones. We will defend the thesis of the continuity showing that the main feature in Jervis's work was the unification of scientific method with history which came to support his Darwinism and laicism.

Naturalism and anti-dogmatism: the main pillars of Jervis's thought

None who maintains the Jervis's turn into a reactionary or in a sort of paleo-illuminist has given evidence of it. Apart from the abandonment of Marxist approach to social dynamics, Jervis had never changed mind about the epistemological status of human sciences and medicine nor, to say it more precisely, about the nature of Psychoanalysis, mental disorders, human psychological identity and so on. The abandoning of the Marxist approach was *not* an outcome of an epistemological turn. Rather he recognized that traditional theoretical assumptions from Marxism could not well meet with the evolutionary origins and contextual functioning of human psychological and social natural dispositions. That involved two key conceptions he maintained all over his thought: naturalism and anti-dogmatism.

Jervis's work guidelines were the regular reference to empirical research for theorizing and arguing about any issue in terms of weight of evidence. That was the reason of his prudence and openmind disposition. Anti-dogmatism was in fact the core of Jervis's epistemological approach to all topics he dealt with. His early ethno-psychiatric studies had already shown this, as well as his writings on Psychoanalysis conceived as both a developing doctrine and therapy, without forgetting his interest for Social Psychology or for conceptual assumptions in psychological theories. The misunderstanding about the commonly recognized two or more stages of Jervis's thought arose from overlooking his belief in the validity

or utility of theoretical and practical tools. On the grounds of their logical coherence and methodological consistence, Jervis suggested to explaining and controlling phenomena or processes. However, he was very prudent and never ideological in adhering to any even quite plausible explanation or description of a phenomenon.

His medical-scientific education marked his working method. A mentioned event of his biography was the teaching of Lucio Bini, co-inventor of the ECT with Ugo Cerletti, during the specialization course in Rome. Bini taught him to appropriately interview patients and to objectively assess clinical data⁸. Jervis had never questioned facts and explanations based on reliable empirical and experimental methods. He had never turned empirical sciences into a myth nor justified inappropriate inferences from theoretical models coming from empirical research to studies on human social dynamics. It was thanks to De Martino that he could identify the historical dimension of human experience as an important empirical dimension for social and cultural knowledge. Jervis conceived history as an essential lens to critically and heuristically look through facts and theories pertaining human sciences. History was shown to relevantly deal with both the individual, with his psychological development, and culture. It was the idea of preeminence of scientific method and historical contextualization that convinced Jervis about the usefulness and validity of naturalistic approaches to human behavior.

Late reflections on Marxism respected the course of his naturalistic approach. In his late life, Jervis came to admit that traditional Marxist theoretical assumptions had failed in assuming an almost complete plasticity or social modifiability of human behavior. Comparative Psychology or Ethology and Sociobiology debate in the Seventies convinced him to embrace an evolutionary or Darwinian perspective as an operative heuristic strategy to reflect on psychological dimensions of individual and social behavior.

He stated the impossibility for human beings to individually learn any behavior at will, even if such a behavior would be proved to be better than another for the whole society. Accordingly, such a conclusion was inferred by considering environmental, social and relational factors influencing human behavior and absolutely not intended as a “return to order”. He examined context-based group cooperation and intended to identify cognitive and emotional development of psychological resources as essential to appreciate and respect rules of democracy.

As far as his studies in the history and theory of psychoanalysis were concerned, he always pointed that Freud's Psychoanalysis was nothing but an attempt to get naturalistic knowledge on normal and pathological human mind functioning. Jervis provided a historical comparative interpretation of the development and spreading of Psychoanalysis in Europe and United States in terms of looking for naturalistic rests of the origins into contemporary psychodynamic theories.

Given recent empirical findings in Neuropsychology and Anthropology, new ideas on psychological concepts (like identity or consciousness) coming from Cognitive Science were subject to Jervis's detailed investigation as well. According to those findings he faced the problem of political behavior and criticized the ideological (i.e. unrealistic) social reform projects in Italy. His arguments for laicism in social and political approaches contain methodological coherence and data from empirical psychological research and evolutionary models. In other words, in Jervis's opinion, Evolutionary and Experimental Psychology evidences that laic views and sentiments from Liberal-democracies are necessary requirements for democratic human social government as well as for the development of modern values. In the next paragraph we will examine Jervis's published and unpublished works in order to demonstrate the arguments in depth.

Jervis's intellectual background: scientific method as an epistemological compass

According to Jervis, science as well as scientific method and education are the best instruments for the acquisition of knowledge and for problem-solving. His later writings (especially *Le paranoie della modernità*⁹, *Contro il relativismo*¹⁰, *Individualismo e cooperazione*¹¹ and *Pensare dritto e pensare storto*¹²) deal with the incapability of humanist intellectuals, mainly those known as “progressives”, in understanding the worth of civil emancipation provided by scientific knowledge and its method. So the late Jervis's thought, whose intolerance of commonplaces, superficial investigations and attacks against science and technology seemed like new to most authors, was nothing more than an evolution from his early anti-dogmatic and anti-ideological positions about some contents of the anthropological and psychiatric debate that was taking place during the 1950s and 1960s. The young Jervis working with Ernesto De Martino in southern Italy or with Franco Basaglia in Gorizia, writing the introduction to Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* or to the Italian translation of *Psychoanalysis and scientific method*, respected facts and undoubtedly preferred hypotheses supported by empirical data. In his writings on tarantism, reflecting on the work experience with De Martino, he defended an objectivist approach.

*Di fronte a un tarantato in preda a ciò che sembra uno stato dissociativo isterico – Jervis wrote – il primo problema è [...] di sapere se si tratti veramente di uno stato dissociativo isterico, e non di sapere se lo stato dissociativo isterico sia da considerarsi normale o meno in rapporto a quel contesto culturale. Il sapere se lo stato dissociativo isterico venga considerato anormale in quell'ambiente culturale sarà uno degli elementi essenziali per poterne studiare le cause, ma non cambierà nulla nel fatto che uno stato dissociativo isterico rappresenta una condizione patologica*¹³.

The quotation is from the 1962 book after a criticism about the relativist conception of illness coming from anthropological and socio-

logical studies. A few paragraphs before, Jervis had defended epistemological grounds of the medical model for mental illness:

La definizione di malattia [implica uno] squilibrio di funzioni vitali [e questo concetto] deve mantenere una sua validità anche in psichiatria, se si desidera che la psichiatria non divenga qualcosa di totalmente avulso dalle scienze mediche¹⁴.

For his medical conception of psychiatry Jervis disagrees with De Martino on the functional interpretation of tarantism. On the basis of his methodological “positivist” approach, Jervis distrusts the presumed helping function for Salento women which De Martino attributes to tarantism. In a conference delivered in Potenza in 2003, entitled *Psicopatologia e apocalissi*, Jervis compares his own position to De Martino’s one:

...fin dall’inizio della sua ricerca io avvertii De Martino circa la difficoltà di trovare nella patologia mentale [...] una tematica esistenziale che fosse coerente e avesse, per così dire, una faccia riconoscibile. Questa tematica, in realtà – così gli feci notare – non era omogenea come poteva sembrare¹⁵.

Those who think that Jervis adhered to the sociological and cultural approach to mental illness should read his introduction to the Italian edition of Augus B. Hollingshead and Frederick C. Redlich’s book *Classi sociali e malattie mentali*¹⁶. Jervis himself told to be reading again that book while writing *La razionalità negata*¹⁷ where he mentions it with reference to the early Sixties, a time when empirical data were already able to discourage from any conception or treatment based on partial clinical observations or on remarks of critical sociology. According to the sources, ever since his work experience with Franco Basaglia, Jervis had disagreed with the Italian psychiatrist concerning methods and theories. The thesis of Jervis’s infidelity and intellectual turn is thus clearly indefensible. In Jervis’s contribution to Basaglia’s *L’istituzione negata*, Jervis worried that Gorizia experience could be

affected by a twofold limit: too much “practice” confronted with unverified abstract generalizations. Jervis deplored an “extremist and inaccurate denounce” to the cruelty in psychiatric hospital as a solution by itself, like that suggested by those who accepted “a superficial conception on the myth of mental illness”. He sadly claimed:

*Ciò che colpisce nei clinici dell'Ottocento è lo straordinario rispetto per i fatti*¹⁸.

Even his ideas about Psychoanalysis testify the continuity between the early and the late Jervis. As a matter of fact he always avoided passing off Psychoanalysis as a medical science or an effective remedy. In advance of the times, in the Preface to the volume *Psicoanalisi e metodo scientifico*¹⁹, Jervis pointed the artificiality of the distinction between psychoanalysis as a therapeutic method and as a research instrument referring to the impossibility of establishing what “being recovered by psychoanalysis” corresponds to.

In *L'artigianato della memoria, ovvero la psicoanalisi difesa contro i suoi stessi difensori*, Jervis wrote that psychoanalysis

*non è una terapia. Ma un' esplorazione che permette all'analista di costruire delle ipotesi su alcune modalità di funzionamento della mente umana*²⁰.

And then:

*L'evoluzione delle scuole psicoanalitiche, soprattutto americane, ha incoraggiato l'equivoco di una psicoanalisi professionalmente rispettabile in quanto legata alla medicina, e scientificamente accettabile in quanto legata al metodo scientifico. In realtà, così come la pratica psicoanalitica non ha nulla a che fare con la medicina, anche la costruzione delle teorie psicoanalitiche non ha nulla a che fare con i metodi della ricerca sperimentale*²¹.

Admittedly at the time Jervis put psychoanalysis failure down to the “epistemological status of the concept of interpretation” against what he defined the “scientific self-misunderstanding of psychoanalysis”²².

As his work in the Seventies and Eighties testifies, there had never been the Jervis who preferred socio-cultural factors to biological ones in the etiopathogenesis of mental illness nor one who opposed to scientific knowledge. In *La psicoanalisi demitologizzata*²³, he denounced the absence of clinical education and scientific culture in dynamic psychologists in terms of the disappointment toward the intellectual élite suggesting a speculative-literary reading of the Freudian message²⁴.

Besides he affirms that:

*In Francia e in Italia, non sempre gli intellettuali più colti hanno saputo mantenere le necessarie demarcazioni rispetto a quel pubblico semi-colto che, a forza di orecchiare ciò che è 'interessante', 'trasgressivo', 'creativo' (e naturalmente, 'nuovo', anche se nuovo non è), finisce per crearsi una serie di stereotipi ideologici, e vivere in un universo concettuale approssimativo. I nomi correnti degli autori di moda, infatti, sono utilizzabili nelle conversazioni, ma possono nascondere vuoti di competenza; nel dialogo più brillante la compiacenza reciproca può ottundere lo spirito critico*²⁵.

Apart from psychology, he denounced the half-cultured public always mentioning the same recurring names of superficial intellectuals who rise unspecific and questionable, though suggestive subjects. So Paul Feyerabend is conferred of the title of best epistemologist as well as Edgar Morin for Sociology. The Nobel prize for chemistry, Ilya Prigogine, used to be considered an important thinker and Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela get mentioned for inexistent scientific discoveries. All looks much more like hurriedly thrown together rather than expression of considered thought. He accused the half-educated people with shallow knowledge and indifference for competence and specialization.

Since his early writings Jervis showed good knowledge of the epistemological character of empirical sciences. In *La psicoanalisi come esercizio critico*, he highlighted the problem of the foundations of

Psychoanalysis as established by Freud, or better still “to take its place as a natural science like any other” (like Freud wrote in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*²⁶). The issue illustrates the strictly experimental and a-historical nature of Freud’s epistemology. Freud was trained as a neurologist and knew the late XIX Century’s neurophysiological debate. He decided, like any other psychoanalysts, to leave it for a pre-scientific model of physicians as craftsmen, or still in terms of experience and individual abilities. Jervis noticed that validity and effectiveness of a treatment must not depend on personal opinions. Clinical epistemology accounts for objective criteria for the validation of etiologic hypothesis and clinical choices²⁷.

According to Jervis, recent developments of biological and psychological studies must be taken into account since today data are richer and more accurate than those Freud referred to. This was the reason why Jervis held that the lack of biological education and scientific interests in authors like Melanie Klein favored some imprudence in both theoretical and clinical-interpretative work. Although the medicalization of Psychoanalysis had faults, the lack of a scientific *forma mentis* was even much more dangerous in the contemporary psychoanalytic perspective.

Jervis and the heuristic role of History

In the first chapter of *La razionalità negata*, Jervis and one of the authors of this paper, Gilberto Corbellini, developed an argumentation and maybe left it unclear. They had never discussed that problem again. Therefore no interpretation will be given here except for clarifying the question. In that book, the Sixties Jervis’s writings are supposed to emphasize historical dynamics in line with contemporary terms, namely context-based data and experiences. Let’s see what the aim was.

The mentioning of “historicizing” in Jervis’s early writings did not refer to any philosophical idea of history. Rather it referred to the

ineluctable historical nature of present life, always informed by past experiences and memories stored in the functional anatomy of our brain. Jervis had never spoken explicitly about it. In *Psicopatologia e apocalissi* (2003) he wrote about De Martino:

il richiamo alla storicità del vivere, richiamo che è centrale in tutto il suo pensiero, lo metteva al riparo – almeno in parte – dalla tentazione di unificare i molteplici vissuti di crisi secondo costanti antropologiche ipostatizzate²⁸.

Definitely Jervis kept in mind De Martino's considerations on the cultural function of "de-historicising"²⁹. At first Jervis recognized the problem of the a-historical character of natural sciences³⁰, which he then solved thanks to Darwinism.

After the time dedicated to his professional activity as clinical psychiatrists and some attempt to politicize the mental health issues, while facing the problem of a theoretical context for his psychiatric research, Jervis spent seven years, after the middle 1970s investigating historical-cultural and anthropological roots of categorization strategies in the modern subjectivity. The outcome was the book *Presenza e identità*³¹, which evidenced precariousness of conceptions like those of subjectivity and self-consciousness as foundations of Western culture and civilization.

Historical contextualization of problems and thought traditions let him to strengthen his intellectual autonomy. Already in his Sixties and Seventies writings, including introductions to Italian translation of books written by antimodernist authors, one may however find efforts to appreciate the empirical significance and the historical genealogy of several politically oriented criticisms of capitalistic society. Even concerning Psychoanalysis he paid attention both to historical links and theoretical articulation of different doctrines. A paradigmatic exemplar is his Introduction to *Il secolo della psicoanalisi*. He is likely to rehabilitate Psychoanalysis from being much more

a literary knowledge than an empirical one. As a conclusion for his introduction he writes:

L'idea che le teorie freudiane non siano state semplici credenze pseudo-scientifiche ma, ben diversamente, il tentativo di elaborare una psicologia empirica di estremo interesse per la storia della nostra cultura, viene tuttora largamente sottovalutata³².

According to Jervis, history is not a store where to put the past away. Nor it is a means to rhetorically read the present as necessary in a dialectic process. Rather, history is a set of cognitive practices and strategies to solve and better analyze present problems. Jervis uses historical case studies to appreciate the primacy of scientific approaches, which can support better strategies even if not coming to solutions. For example, he never blamed Behavioral Psychology which introduced quantitative methods proved to be useful afterwards by cognitivists³³. Because of his conception of history as a means for understanding the present, he analyzed the history of clinical psychiatry of the second half of the XX century. A key role in improving the management of mentally disabled people was ascribed to psychotropic medications thanks to which physicians could first communicate with severely affected patients. Furthermore, he believed that the major attention of public opinion and unspecialized culture towards psychic disorders met the general requirement of humanizing the discipline, or better still that technical-scientific tools are better employed when human sensibility is applied to all stages in the assessment and treatment³⁴. Jervis maintained that psychiatry increased its “credibility as a medical discipline” as a consequence of combining the discovery and use of psycho-pharmaceuticals with the acquisition of scientific method. On scientific method he again writes:

il metodo scientifico, nei suoi aspetti generalizzanti e talora impersonali, non ci aiuta tanto a ottimizzare le possibilità di rapporto e di cura, quanto

a stabilire canoni di diagnosi e di valutazione, e schemi generali d'intervento. Esso ci fa acquisire non tanto sensibilità nuove quanto conoscenze nuove. Qui ciò che progredisce non è tanto l'utilizzazione ottimale delle risorse umane quanto la nostra conoscenza della realtà psichica di tutti³⁵.

For 25 years, as from 1975 to 2000, the increasing knowledge about human brain and cognitive processes – in addition to Darwinian studies – provided a radical revision of traditional hypotheses. Classical problems on consciousness and subconscious, altruism and aggressive behavior, emotion and reasoning were stolen to philosophers. Even moral feelings and religious experiences became objects of experimental verification providing unexpected findings. The revisionist movement criticized intellectuals' subjective beliefs as illusions. So that, at present, subjectivism and its linguistic expressions (“I'm sure that”, “My experience shows that”, and so on) are luckily about to disappear in international debates.

Jervis' Darwinism

By means of both scientific rationality and historical knowledge Jervis did not suffer, like many others did, any state of disorientation when social and political theories like Marxism collapsed at the court of empirical facts. During the final decades of his life, his scientific approach gave him two new subjects to account for cultural, social and political transformations with methods and findings coming from scientific psychology. He introduced the empirical naturalistic knowledge of evolutionary studies on human nature and a naturalized pragmatic idea of laicism. However the first time Jervis referred to Darwinian Evolutionism is in the Introduction to *Eros and civilization*³⁶.

In several writings Jervis insists on the period between 1975 and 1985 as a time of change for human sciences, an actual “paradigm shift”³⁷. Eighties and Nineties were decades of the consolidation of neo-Dar-

winian perspectives. Middle culture registered much more closeness and involvement between human historical fate and natural events.

Up to the 80s the most complex problems in Psychology had not been studied in depth nor submitted to empirical research. Since then it all changed. Scientific research involved new field of competence and provided new findings, and of course new perspectives.

Basic Anthropology changed as well. The image of human nature had been changing in order to account for a new naturalism. Two disciplinary directions were involved: on the one hand, Ethology and Sociobiology; on the other hand, Neuroscience with the localization of higher cognitive functions.

The reason why Jervis assumed Darwinian Evolutionism in his philosophical approach to naturalistic and materialistic explanation for origin, potentials and limits of individual human capacity was to account adaptively for context-driven changes. That is, he adopted a conception according to which behavioral human dispositions and preferences are not indefinitely plastic, nor malleable at ease by environmental and cultural contexts. Rather they involve a group of genetically inherited expectations who helped ancient hunter-gatherers to survive in African savannas. Psychological and social-political doctrines, which assumed scientifically implausible conceptions like idealistic ideas, produced tragic and dangerous effects.

Human sciences, especially Psychology, Sociology and Economy, are not like they were twenty years ago. Concerning psychological disciplines, the main change from their traditional formulation was the conclusion of the process of decentralization of subjectivity which took place historically in Galileo and Copernico, Darwin and Freud. The presumed self-evident methodological assumption of absolute diversity of human and animal nature, which founded the Western philosophy from Aristotle and Heidegger, collapsed.

In order to reply to anti-reductionists who saw naturalistic approaches as threats to human liberty and dignity, Jervis made clear that

philosophical reflection on epistemological status of reductionist explanations in biology had shown what follows:

Anziché svalutare la società e l'ambiente storico a favore del tradizionale determinismo biologistico, i nuovi indirizzi scientifici dimostrano che il comportamento umano e le vicende della soggettività emergono come un mondo complesso, non linearmente deterministico ma legato a fattori fluidamente probabilistici, dove le stesse predisposizioni genetiche, anziché essere segnali di meccanica fatalità, manifestano i loro effetti sulla vita concreta in via strettamente subordinata a variabili ambientali³⁸.

Jervis and the nature of laicism

Jervis's scientific and intellectual research cannot be divided by his personal ethical and political strain. He thought that “*it's typical of laic thought to be based not on a faith but on the dialogue about the applicability of trends on civil society problems*”³⁹. He was against the process of sacralization of these new trends in a series of fixed principles, which do not provide successful outcomes.

Compared to the international debate, Italian scientific culture appears subordinated. Our country exhibits lack of elsewhere widespread scientific culture, marginal character of universities and institutions in the worldwide scenario, philosophical traditions not accustomed to epistemological problems and informed by idealism, rhetorical literary tradition, as well as ethical debate dominated by catholic spiritualism.

In the light of scientific method, history and Darwinian perspective Jervis had been radically revising the question of laicism over the last years of his life. He elaborated an idea of non-ideological and functional laicism. His position was intransigent regarding a set of “non-negotiable” values and principles, essential to civil society. His suspiciousness about a-historical functionalist theories of consciousness, his criticism to cultural and moral relativism, his

analysis of the debate regarding the functional dialectic *individual/society* and his recall to evolutionary and physiological conditioning of decision-making were elements of a well-calculated dynamical economy of thought. Admittedly criticism he was laid open to was the outcome of a misunderstanding.

His coherence, clearness and critical ability about scientific and cultural innovations were unacknowledged by the backward Italian conformist culture. Jervis left an important lesson to all of us, older and younger generations of intellectuals against the idea of a cultural debate as a fight among gangs suppressing civil values and liberal-democratic quality of institutions. That is, the importance of updating theoretical features of the progressive political thought in the light of scientific developments in Social Psychology. He did it at the end of his life in three influential but misunderstood books: *Contro il relativismo*, *Individualismo e cooperazione* e *Pensare dritto e pensare storto*. The former is a preliminary work to refund a certain branch of the political thought of the Seventies Italian Left out of its biases, ambiguity, and generally nonsense. Instead the other books offer the use of empirical knowledge for political and moral one. They are dedicated to the psychobiological bases of human social behavior.

Before the Pope's attack on the same subject, Jervis had already written *Contro il relativismo*. Nevertheless the Pope's intervention in the debate had much more press coverage in Western culture. Since what unfortunately happened was that anti-papists came naively to espouse a relativist position just to oppose the Pope, Jervis could have helped laic positions. A first reading of *Contro il relativismo* can make clear that the book has nothing to do with Pope's argumentations. Admittedly such anti-relativist attack provided by Pope Ratzinger, Marcello Pera and Giuliano Ferrara was nothing more than an intellectual trick. As Cardinal Martini noticed⁴⁰, Ratzinger's argumentations translated intellectual disappointment to diversity. Incredibly worrying was the fact that the defense of realism was mi-

sunderstood as being combined to a wave of illiberal obscurantism in Western world. Jervis gave rise to this misunderstanding by explaining that actually relativism was not the extremists nor Neo-/Theo-Cons' target. Relativism does not oppose to dogmatism. Unfortunately relativism became a fashionable philosophy of the Italian intellectual Left. Jervis followed the history of academic and media success of relativism in Western culture. The idea was that ethical-philosophical, epistemological, psychological, and anthropological views which do not recognize the objectivity of empirical evidences defend an idealized subjectivity and an indefinite humanism. The main point was that relativism and extremism threaten the civil progress of humanity.

I sacerdoti, da sempre competenti in formule ireniche, oggi fanno leva sulla moda del multiculturalismo per invitare i popoli a rispettare in ogni caso le religioni. Ma è legittimo sospettare che attraverso l'accettazione aprioristica di tutte le credenze altrui passi il progetto di rendere inattaccabili le proprie⁴¹.

Besides:

il multiculturalismo relativista concede spazio alla crescita dei settarismi. Paradossalmente, esso incoraggia e giustifica l'anti-relativismo dei fanatici e dei dogmatici di tutte le religioni. Questo non dovrebbe meravigliare: le più accese convinzioni di fede hanno in comune con il relativismo l'appello alla soggettività e il disprezzo per la realtà empirica⁴².

According to Jervis, moralism and moral disengagement shape Italian relativism. The common ground consists of science deprecation, the idea that science and technology – or “technique”, like popular Continental philosophers call it expressing intellectual disdain – represent a threat and involve a “civilization crisis”. The latter expression is used by many historians and humanists who had better

remind the worse quality of human existence in past societies. As a matter of fact this is showed just by a surface comparison between past life conditions and contemporary ones. Today even such forgetful historians and humanists come into possession of heated houses with energy equipments, foodful home refrigerators, confections of analgesics and antibiotics in their medicine cabinet and recur to telephone medical consultations.

Jervis stated that Darwinian approach is “materialist as well as mechanistic”. Insomuch as we are induced to “the worrying doubt of lack of authorship of our intelligence, and perhaps of our morality”⁴³. The Italian psychiatrist showed how neuroscience and experimental psychology findings have importantly changed our traditional ideas on nature. We are not completely moral, nor as much intelligent as reached results make us believe to. Nor we are rational animal in some special way as shown by daily decision-making. Emotions play an important role and education is essential, although not sufficient, to control egoistic and antisocial impulses. All these theories are well-known but ignored by most intellectuals and political experts. Jervis’s last books deal with implications of such new findings about human bounded rationality and naturalistic moral foundations for political theory and action. Mainly he argued about the unstable balance on which democracy survival depends on. Political commands about certainties and absolute values can destabilize such a balance.

In light of theoretical constraints coming from scientific methods, history and Darwinian thought, Giovanni Jervis made finality of lay action and the psychology of laity the main subjects of his later reflection. Jervis conceived an idea of non-ideological functional laicism as well as an uncompromising conception about “non-negotiable” liberal values and principles essential to civil society. His thought was characterized by doubts on a-historical functionalist approaches to epistemology, criticism to cultural and moral relativism, interpretation of the functional dialectic individual/society and a recall to evo-

lutionary and physiological constraints in decision-making emerging by the dynamic character of human mind. Maybe most misunderstandings were due to the incommensurability between the multidimensional articulation of his heuristic thought and the simplistic monodimensional character of several cultural constructs and reflections in Italian philosophical, psychological, sociological and political debate.

Conclusions

The coherence, clearness and open-minded nature of Jervis's thought about scientific and cultural innovations, which were main features of his intellectual research, were unacknowledged by an ideological Italian simplicistic culture which continues to show a conformist disposition towards empirical and materialistic approaches to human natural. Jervis left us, Italian younger and older generations of scholars, an important lesson. That is, he motivated all of us to go beyond tribal and outdated controversies, and to promote a scientifically grounded debate about civic values aimed at revitalizing the democratic and liberal quality of modern political institutions.

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1. As Antonio Gnoli testifies after Jervis's death, this change is a real commonplace in the Italian debate: "*Eppure egli non nacque 'rivoluzionario' per finire conservatore. Negli anni che ha vissuto e che lo hanno visto spesso protagonista, Jervis si portò dietro il peso della ragione e le responsabilità che essa innesca, sotto forma di controllo e verifica dei fatti. Egli fu il risultato tardivo di un illuminismo alleggerito dalla fede per il progresso e dall'esaltazione dell'uomo*". [Rather he wasn't born "revolutionary" so as to die conservatory. In the prime of life, Jervis gave weight to reason and its following responsibilities in terms of control and verification of facts. He was the late outcome of the Enlightenment without the faith in progress and the glorification of human being]. GNOLI A., *Addio a Jervis, l'antimaestro*. La Repubblica, August 3rd, 2009, p. 33.

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3. VATTIMO G., *Impegno e ritorno all'ordine*. La Stampa, August 3rd 2009.
4. VATTIMO G. & ROVATTI P. A. (eds.), *Il pensiero debole*. Milano, Feltrinelli, 1983.
5. JERVIS G., *Le vecchie debolezze*. Alfabetà, 1984; 64: 25-26.
6. See G. JERVIS, *La conquista dell'identità*. Milano, Feltrinelli, 1997, p. 148.
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9. JERVIS G., *Paranoie della modernità*. Rivista sperimentale di Freniatria, 2008; 3.
10. JERVIS G., *Contro il relativismo*. Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2005.
11. JERVIS G., *Individualismo e cooperazione. Psicologia della politica*. Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2002.
12. JERVIS G., *Pensare dritto pensare storto*, Torino, Bollati-Boringhieri, 2007.
13. "Confronted with a patient affected with tarantism, in fit of a supposed dissociative hysteria state, the first problem is [...] to know whether this state is actually dissociative hysteria, and not to know whether the dissociative hysteria has to be considered normal or abnormal with regard to the cultural context. Knowing whether a dissociative hysteria state has to be considered abnormal in a cultural environment will be one of the essential elements in order to identify causes, but it will not change the fact that a dissociative hysteria state represents a pathological condition". JERVIS G., *Il tarantismo pugliese*. Il lavoro neuropsichiatrico 1962; XXX, III: 341.
14. "The definition of illness [implies a] deficit in vital functions [and this concept] must maintain its validity in psychiatry as well, if one wants psychiatry not to become something completely out of medical sciences". *Idem*, p. 340.
15. "...Since the beginning of his research, I advised De Martino about the difficulty of finding within mental pathology [...] an existential theme that was consistent and had, so to speak, a recognizable character. This theme, in fact - as I pointed out - was not as homogeneous as it might seem" JERVIS G., *Psicopatologia e apocalissi*. In BALDACCONI B. & DI LUCCHIO P. (eds.), *Dell'Apocalisse. Antropologia e psicopatologia in Ernesto De Martino*. Napoli, Guida, 2005, pp. 37-53: 45.
16. HOLLINGSHEAD A. & REDLICH F., *Classi sociali e malattie mentali*. Torino, Einaudi, 1965.
17. JERVIS G. & CORBELLINI G., *La razionalità negata, Psichiatria ed antipsichiatria in Italia*. Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2008, pp. 69-70.

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18. "What surprises about the XIX century clinicians is their unbelievable reference to facts". BASAGLIA F., *L'istituzione negata*. Torino, Einaudi, 1968, p. 307.
19. JERVIS G., *Prefazione*. In HOOK S. (ed.) *Psicoanalisi e metodo scientifico*. Torino, Einaudi, 1967.
20. "It is not a therapy. But an exploration allowing the analyst to formulate hypotheses on some functioning performances of human mind". JERVIS G., *L'artigianato della memoria, ovvero la psicoanalisi difesa contro i suoi stessi difensori*. In REPETTI P. (ed.) *L'anima e il compasso*. Roma, Theoria, 1985, p. 25.
21. "The evolution of psychoanalytic schools, especially American ones, encourages the misunderstanding of a professionally respectful psychoanalysis as linked to medicine, and scientifically acceptable as linked to scientific method. Actually, as well as psychoanalytic practice has nothing to do with medicine, psychoanalytic theory construction has nothing to do with experimental research methods". *Ibidem*.
22. JERVIS G., *Psicologia e filosofia*. Paradigmi, 1986; 4,10: 69-79.
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24. *Idem*, p. 14.
25. "In France and Italy, even the best intellectuals were not able to keep the distance from an uncultured public who accepted an approximate conceptual universe of ideological stereotypes on behalf of the fact they sound 'interesting', 'unconventional', 'creative' (and of course 'new', even though they were not). As a matter of fact popular authors' names recur inadequately in conversations; in the most brilliant speech mutual pride can hide critical ability". *Ibidem*.
26. FREUD S., *An Outline of Psyschoanalysis SE*. 1940, 23: 158.
27. JERVIS G., *La psicoanalisi come esercizio critico*. Milano, Garzanti, 1989, p. 30. See also, JERVIS G., *La medicina basata sulle prove e i problemi psicologici relativi alla decisionalità terapeutica*. Kéiron 1999; 9: 42-49
28. "The reference to the historicity of living, a key notion all over his thought, prevented him – at least partly - from unifying the lived crises in accordance with hypostatized anthropological features". JERVIS G., *Psicopatologia e apocalissi*. In: BALDACCONI B. & DI LUCCHIO P. (eds.), *Dell'Apocalisse. Antropologia e psicopatologia in Ernesto De Martino*. Napoli, Guida, 2005, p. 47.
29. *Ib.*
30. Cfr. JERVIS G., *Presenza e identità*. Milano, Garzanti, 1984.
31. *Ib.*

32. *"The idea that Freudian theories were not simply pseudo-scientific beliefs but rather the attempt to elaborate an empirical psychology of great interest for the history of our culture is still largely underestimated"*. JERVIS G., *Introduzione*. In: JERVIS, G. (ed.), *Il secolo della psicoanalisi*. Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 1999, p. 90.
33. JERVIS G., *Le discipline psicologiche*. Relazione al Convegno *Le scienze umane in Italia*. Accademia dei Lincei, Roma, 26 ottobre 2006.
34. JERVIS G., *Complessità e ricerca in cinquant'anni di psichiatria in Italia*. *Epidemiologia e Psichiatria sociale*. 2007; 16, 2: 139-143.
35. *"Scientific method with its generalizing and impersonal features does not improve our potentials for relation and treatment, rather it establishes diagnosis and assessment constraints and general patterns of intervention. It gives us no new sensibilities but new knowledge. What advances here is not the optimal use of human resources but our knowledge about everyone's psychic reality"*. Ibidem.
36. JERVIS G., *Introduzione*. In: MARCUSE H., *Eros e Civiltà*. Torino, Einaudi, 1964, pp. 9-31.
37. JERVIS G., *Le discipline psicologiche*. Op. cit. nota 33.
38. *"Instead of devaluing society and historical environment in favor of traditional biological determinism, new scientific trends show that human behavior and subjectivity vicissitudes arise as a complex world, not linearly deterministic but related to fluidly probabilistic factors, where the same genetic predispositions, instead of being cues of mechanical fate, manifest their effects on concrete life in a strictly subordinated way to environmental variables"*Ib.
39. Jervis G., *Pensare dritto pensare storto*. Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2007, p. 70.
40. Foschini P., *L'omelia in Duomo a Milano. Relativismo, dopo il Papa il manifesto di Martini*. Corriere della sera, 9 maggio 2005.
41. *"Always accustomed to irenic formulas, today priests play on the fangled multiculturalism where people are requested to respect religions at any rate. Nevertheless it has been legitimized to suspect that through the aprioristic acceptance of others' beliefs is passing the project of getting one's own beliefs indisputable"*. JERVIS G., *Contro il relativismo*. Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2005, p. 114.
42. *"The relativist multiculturalism makes room for the increase of sectarianisms. Paradoxically, it encourages and justifies religion fanatics' and dogmatists' anti-relativism. This might not surprise: what the most heated faith*

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opinions have in common with relativism is the appeal to subjectivity and the disregard for empirical reality”. Ibidem, p. 115.

43. JERVIS G., *Pensare dritto pensare storto*. Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2007, p. 70. Cfr. anche JERVIS G., *Individualismo e cooperazione. Psicologia della politica*. Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2002.

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