

Aion. Journal of Philosophy & Science

Editorial

2024-03-12

The choice of the concept of “resistance” to the inaugural issue of *Aion. Journal of Philosophy and Science* is no accident. It comes in line with *Aion*’s commitment to developing its critical activity and presence in the public space.

It also matches *Aion*’s aim at focusing on concepts and topics of critical importance in the present time. Our current situation is such that, on the one hand, the conditions for thinking differently and for putting in practice new forms of life are being dramatically reduced, and yet, on the other hand, we witness an increase of active resistance in diversified forms, cultural contexts and geographies (in civil and political realms as well as in artistic and scientific practises). This situation creates the urgency of revisiting the concept of resistance, its possible meanings, its differences face to similar terms, not exactly synonyms, such as dissidence, contestation, protest campaign, social movement, civil disobedience, insurrection, revolt, rebellion, rejection, and resilience, adaptability, flexibility, reaction, opposition, reluctance, etc. Terms that are repeatedly used to designate the varied forms of resistance put forward by individuals (Nelson Mandela), restricted groups of activists (Greenpeace) and large social movements (MeToo) against the control devices, the abuses, the injustices, the discriminations present in the societies we live in, that is, terms that require urgent philosophical inquiry.

Further, *Aion* being a *Journal of Philosophy and Science*, the openness to concepts that comprehend important uses both in Philosophy and in Science makes part of its promise. That is the case of the concept of resistance which has its roots in Physics (referring to the endurance of materials facing shock and deformation). Following the very movement of history of science towards a less mechanistic approach to nature, to life and to mankind, the concept of resistance acquired a more dynamic meaning in electricity (referring to a body’s ability to oppose the passage of electric current), in medicine (referring to a body’s ability to resist disease), immunology (the strength of the immune system), athletic studies (the body’s aerobic and anaerobic struggle against fatigue during prolonged effort), gets a defective place in psychology and psychoanalysis (an individual’s capacity to resist adversity or anx-



icity-inducing situations, or to resist the analysis of the unconscious), and finally it reaches a central role in social sciences, namely in the so-called “resistance studies”, a recently constituted yet rapidly growing inter-field of research in the social sciences (James Scott, Couzens Hoy). In parallel to its instrumental use in the scientific discourse, the concept of resistance also holds a very positive meaning, not only in the popular image of science and in science communication (the inventor and the discoverer are praised as non-conformists dissidents and the idea of scientific revolution is indisputably respected) but, above all, in epistemology (for instance, the key innovative value of refutation in Karl Popper’s falsificationist philosophy of science or Thomas Kuhn’s theory of science that simultaneously acclaims scientific revolutions and pays tribute to the constructive role of the normal scientist as the one who resists change). Also, we’re thinking of the resistance of disciplines face to the generalized interdisciplinary appeal, and of the resistance of human intelligence face to artificial intelligence.

But it is in philosophy that the concept of resistance has been most thematized, mainly in the context of political philosophy. In the ancient and modern jus-naturalism, the act of (political) resistance is clearly condemned because human laws are thought out, either as the expression of the divine order that governs the entire cosmos (from Aristotle to St. Thomas), or as people’s norms grounded in the universal, ethical imperatives of human reason (from Hugo Grotius to Adam Smith). On the contrary, classical contractualism will explore diverse paths in order to affirm the legitimacy of an act of resistance towards the power of the sovereign. The main difficulty concerns the fact that, if, by the very contract, the power of the sovereign is constituted as legitimate, then any act of resistance to the authority of the sovereign would be equivalent to a break of the contract. Contractualism will provide diversified answers to this question by consecrating a “right of resistance” which, although dependent upon individual’s private judgment, is based on the greatest of all natural laws, the inviolability of individual’s fundamental right to self-protection and preservation of life.

Thomas Hobbes is perhaps the first to explicitly sustain a “right of resistance” which, in his view, assists the subject whenever the will of the sovereign clashes with the preservation of one’s life. Locke, Rousseau and Kant will propose different foundations for the “right of resistance”: Locke, basing it in the defense of the inalienable right of property (understood in a wide sense, from life, liberty, equality and things); Rousseau, legitimating it in the inequalities that remain when the social contract proves ineffective; Kant, grounding it in the inviolability of freedom that implies the legitimacy of the subject in not consenting to unjust laws, in demanding for reforms, in public pressure for change. Likewise, in the puzzled *spectrum* of XIX and XX century political philosophy, the concept of resistance will be claimed by diverse theoretical perspectives: from Marxist tradition to Henry David Thoreau, but also

Bertrand Russell, Erich Fromm, Hannah Arendt, Norberto Bobbio, Jurgen Habermas and John Rawls, all offer paramount insights to this debate.

Common to all these positions is the construal of resistance as an act of opposition, non-acceptance, rejection, insurgency or revolt face an extreme situation of bad government. That is, in contractualist theories, as well as in all the diversified frameworks of XX century political philosophy that have discussed its forms, valid procedures and legitimate aims, each one proposing its own vocabulary and modes of realization (from civil disobedience to insurrection and revolution), the concept of resistance comes always as a second, a subsequent, a possible response to the misrule of the sovereign power.

Now, among the political theorists who do not recognize themselves within these realms, it is possible to find a radically different formulation, such as that put forward by Michel Foucault when he understands the act of resistance, not as second, a response to an external force, but as first, original in relation to power. Since, for Foucault, power always means the submission of will, then resistance, as a primordial, an internal, vital force, although manifests itself chronologically as secondary, arises as the first given, as the ontological foundation of any will; otherwise – he argues that, were resistance not inherent in any will, we could only talk about obedience. This is also the understanding that authors such as Toni Negri and Michael Hardt have of what it means to resist, which they call “the will to be against”, that is, the constant overcoming of the obstacles and limits that repress us. Resisting would thus involve the production of a will against authority, the strategies that validate and reproduce the structures of domination.

The fundamental question of the politics would therefore be the one already raised by Spinoza: why do men fight for their servitude as if it was their freedom? This being a very strong imperative that should inhabit the heart of any questioning of politics, it was in ontology that Spinoza foresaw, interestingly in line of Hobbes’ metaphysics, an answer to this question when he refers to the *conatus* as the will to persevere in one’s essence. *Conatus* would then be a force of resistance that would be at the bottom of all that exists, a force of self-preservation face to all that comes from outside. With this step, the concept of resistance exceeds the domain of politics, reaches ontology and announces the science of a future time.

In this sense, one could ask, is it not this conviction that Nietzsche stressed when he proposed a *will to power*, not as a will to have (to conquer, to get) power or what the particular will wants, but a will of will, that is, a will that refuses to bow down before any power except that of its self-affirmation? This also seems to be the ultimate meaning that Bergson attributes to *duration*, the key concept of his ontology, in which being means to last, to endure, to resist change while maintaining the integrity of its being. Although these authors do not explicitly thematize the concept of resistance, it can be argued that it constitutes the true unsaid transversal to their ontologies.

Moreover, the concept of resistance still finds its home in the field of aesthetics. This is the intention of Jacques Rancière when, in his effort to think the porosity of the relationship between politics and aesthetic, he elaborates the concept of “dissent” to designate the urgency in the production of ruptures in the sensitive tissue of perceptions and in the dynamics of affects. Insofar as each body must take its own destiny into its own hands, resisting the installed processes of subjectivation, the dissent is at the heart of politics. But, equally, insofar as it resists the installed configurations of the visible, of the sayable and of the thinkable, the dissent becomes an act of resistance that runs through the entire nature of aesthetics, understood as producer of new landscapes of the possible.

Furthermore, there seems to be an eloquent complicity between philosophy and the act of resistance, even to the extent that philosophy itself can be defined as an act of resistance. Already in the question related to its autochthony, philosophy - which is inseparable from its Hellenic origin - appears itself as an act of resistance. Is it not true that philosophy has in the *Sage*, coming from the deep and the dark world of orality, or from the enigmatic East, its external rival?! A tutelary character, the *Sage* is the holder of knowledge, which he transmits to his disciples through an unequal, vertical and asymmetrical relationship. As the figure of the greatest authority, of the indisputable master, the inaugurator of obedience, the *Sage* personifies transcendence. But philosophy, as the etymology of *Philos* [Friend] confirms, gives birth to a new personage of thought totally distinct from the *Sage*: the Friend, the one who seeks knowledge without ever formally detaining it. Daughter of the democratic space, philosophy is an activity carried out between peers who treat each other as equals. That is why it can only think horizontally, refuting the relationship of power where thought, as an inheritance of the distant past of the mysterious east, was imprisoned.

Philosophy is thus immanence, as, unlike the *Sage* who imposed his order coming from the past or from the heights, the *Philosopher* finds herself immersed in the symmetrical, horizontal tissue of public space, from where he emerges as both an ingredient and a product of democracy. However, despite its libertarian potential, democratic life has several dangers. From the outset, *opinion*, which erupts freely and spontaneously within the *agora*, this new place of association between friends that quickly begins to serve as an emulatory arena where all kinds of rivalries arise, space of a generalized *âgon*. But the spontaneity of opinion, beyond giving an account of a subjective whim, at the same time dangerously reflects a dead point of thought, the place where thought is deactivated and, in its place, common sense - *doxa* - crystallizes. To this internal rival, philosophy opposes the *concept*, which is not confused with simple opinion or even comparable with the good chaining of opinions. On the other hand, the concept, which can only work in a network with other concepts, functions as a transcendental, that is, it induces a vision of the world: it draws a territory

to come proposed by the philosopher as an alternative to the commonplaces where opinion is housed. That is why - as Deleuze & Guattari argue in *What is Philosophy?* - the philosopher's job, as a creator of concepts, always consists in resisting the present, striving to offer new possibilities that are beyond the *clichés* of common sense.

In short, we could say: philosophy is born as an act of resistance and it is through resistance that its history is written: resistance to all relations of power, to begin with that fundamental one led by the *Sage*, resistance to the hollow superficiality of opinion, and resistance to the common sense that determines the *status quo* that empties each epoch from its own possibilities. At one time, resistance to power and resistance to present.

Without the ambition to provide a complete picture of the various theoretical traditions within which the idea and practice of resistance have been thought throughout the history of philosophy, of science, and the arts, we nevertheless opened the pages of *Aion* to all those who might be interested in the theoretical complexity surrounding the concept of resistance as well as in the novel challenges that the old concept of resistance may currently require.

The editors