

modello humboldtiano del seminario, e dalla sua attività di organizzatore di seminari al Warburg Institute di Londra (1967–1983). Da quei seminari e da altri, tenuti da Momigliano in tutto il mondo, nascono la serie dei suoi *Contributi* (1955–1992) e la maggior parte delle sue pubblicazioni, che conservano lo stile orale e discorsivo dell'occasione in cui videro la luce non per pigrizia del suo autore, ma per una precisa scelta ideologica sullo strumento con cui comunicare il proprio pensiero.

Nel suo contributo *Giorgio Colli. Lo stile come laboratorio ermeneutico* (pp. 92–108), l'altro curatore, Angelo Giavatto, si dedica allo stile, personalissimo, con cui Colli ha trasmesso il suo sapere sulla filosofia presocratica e platonica: lo studio è partito dalla tesi di laurea di Colli (1939), di cui sono stati recentemente pubblicati dal figlio Enrico il capitolo su *Platone politico* (Milano: Adelphi, 2007) e quello sui presocratici (*Filosofi sovrumani*, Milano: Adelphi, 2009). Tra la stesura del capitolo platonico e quello sui Presocratici si inserisce la lettura de *La nascita della tragedia* di F. Nietzsche, avvenuta intorno al 1937: un evento che avrebbe radicalmente influenzato sia gli interessi di Colli, spostandoli da Platone ai Presocratici, sia lo stile. È noto che Colli proponeva una lettura dei Presocratici in termini di tensione tra misticismo (tendenza al *ritiro*, all'ineffabilità e all'incomunicabilità) e politica (la volontà di dare forma pubblica al pensiero per renderlo fruttifero nelle realtà politiche in cui i Presocratici vissero). Nel linguaggio, questo dualismo si manifesta nelle forme dell'*enigma*, proprio di un sapere ineffabile, e del *problema*, che è alla base del dialogo, la forma di trasmissione "politica" della sapienza filosofica. Questo approccio produce conseguenze anche sullo stile di Colli, che dal *Platone politico*, in cui ancora persegue una chiarezza espositiva, giunge nei *Filosofi sovrumani* a due forme espressive, una più posata per le parti "politiche" e una che riprende aspetti dello stile di Nietzsche, lapidario e aforistico, per descrivere la mistica.

Chiude il volume, generalmente ben curato a parte qualche refuso di troppo nel lavoro di Mucignat (brutto "un unità" a p. 74), un utile indice dei personaggi e degli episodi citati.

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Lynda Walsh, *Scientists as Prophets: A Rhetorical Genealogy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 264. ISBN: 978-01-99-85709-8 (HB)

We all know the old truism that art is best when the artist is not seen. This poses a particularly steep challenge for rhetoric since it moves in public spaces where personal motives abound. Scientists, by contrast, since they deal with the world of things rather than persons, wear nature as a kind of rhetorical camouflage. Customarily we attribute this to their abiding positivism, but Walsh sees in it a role identity that emulates and in fact descends from the prophetic traditions of old. Superficially this may seem

fanciful, but not when we consider the kind of ethos science needs in order to thrive. Its appropriation of a prophetic identity created within its modern host cultures (p. 4) “a coherent set of expectations” and thus a role and identity that drew it out from the margins. That fell into place four centuries ago as the Reformation gave opportunity to various extensions of the prophetic role, but similar symbolic patterns persist due to the mimetic character of cultural development and to a persisting set of situational constraints or *kairoi*. Like its ancestral counterparts, science’s prophetic ethos enables it to “manufacture certainty” (p. 2) for polities, the certainty of conviction that powers action.

This perspective explains the persistent failure of what Walsh calls the “deficit model” of scientific communication. Scientists struggle against public ignorance and resistance, but the obvious solution, more and better scientific education, never seems to help. The deficit models cannot account for the “upward pull of stases” (pp. 88–9). Consumers of science and certainly many scientific practitioners (at least when they are not speaking *ex officio*) are spontaneously drawn off the technical backroads of fact and definition and onto the highways of value and action. This “upward pull” cannot be explained either by scientific understanding or its opposite. Rather it reflects the latent value expectations that come with the prophetic role.

Walsh’s explorations of ancient prophecy, augury, oracles and the like illustrate why such roles have so much civic vitality and why they prevailed in a classical culture that also brought rhetoric to the forefront of public life. Prophecy shares with rhetoric a propensity for enabling conviction to operate where definitive knowledge cannot, and so public actors are perennially disposed to wear its ethos. In the early period of modern science this became overt as Walsh shows in her detailed and insightful treatment of Francis Bacon’s formative influence. The crisis of the Reformation magnified the prophetic role as Protestants maneuvered to destabilize civic traditions, and this opened up creative pathways of ethos formation that Bacon could exploit. This role identity became institutionalized at the end of the seventeenth century and then carried forward as a cultural meme. Bacon authorized science as the naturalistic counterpart to the biblical revelation, but he also mystified it by associating it with occult knowledge. Here we see another pattern that carries down to the present. We think of experimental demonstrations as signaling science’s empirical rigor, but it also signals something magic-like—science’s unique access to realities otherwise incapable of being seen or communicated. This Walsh explores in great detail in her fourth chapter on the early Royal Society’s campaign for public recognition and authority.

The genealogical work done in the first half of the book is followed by more contemporary case studies. Walsh shows why the same prophetic expectations that enlarged public receptivity to Rachel Carson’s message also fated Robert Oppenheimer’s fall from grace. This prophetic ethos gives opportunity to some scientific messages while making others untenable, and this turns upon the vicissitudes of *kairos*, that is to say upon how well this ethos harmonizes at any given time with competing role expectations that

come from without. An emerging alliance between Big Science and a government struggling through the Cold War doomed Oppenheimer to be victimized by the very prophetic celebrity that he had gained from his part in developing and interpreting the advent of atomic weapons. Prophecy worked for Carson, on the other hand, because the concerns she voiced as a scientist harmonized with the values and interests of a large array of emerging groups in the public and government sectors. Carson's success foreshadows that of popularizers like Carl Sagan, Stephen Hawking, and Stephen Jay Gould who parlayed powerful scientific metaphors into remarkable celebrity. But this cuts both ways. Political pushback against the IPCC reports on climate change reveals the risks that come from playing the prophet. Tacitly at least, publics recognize science's formal adherence to a Humean is/ought divide, and this enables them to turn this against science when they do not like what it happens to prophesy.

Walsh concludes by considering how scientists and the publics they serve might better adapt their communication practices in light of this symbolic legacy. Perhaps one might say, though I am taking some liberty with what Walsh has offered, that science to date has had only one foot in the public realm and needs to be all in. It remains ambivalent about the pull toward value and action and so pretends not to speak to such matters when in fact it must—if for no other reason because rhetoric is always a partnership of speaker and audience. Because this ethos arose from many centuries of cultural co-evolution, it cannot be abandoned—only reworked. We desire that science should prophesy, and so these prophets are honored, except in their own land—which is to say whenever we cannot stomach their messages.

Some time had passed since my first reading of Walsh's book. The volume impressed me the first time, but as with any significant work of scholarship, the second reading rewarded me so much more. Its insights burn brightly and persistently. Like many other books that I turn to again and again, this one brings thematic order to a broad and rich array of previous work, and it applies what the author has learned to contemporary struggles in insightful and promising ways.

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