

First Global Governance Interdisciplinary Symposium

A conversation with Hansmichael Hohenegger

Thinking and sharing: two words automatically linked to Philosophy. They are the same ones with which I would describe our conversation with Prof. Hansmichael Hohenegger, who took part to the First GG Interdisciplinary Symposium, held in Villa Mondragone on July, 13th.

After the graduation in Philosophy reached in 1986, Mr. Hansmichael Hohenegger carried on his activity of research in Italy, thanks to a series of PHD and Post Doc's scholarships; he committed his studies to the "Enlightenment" tradition and, in particular, to Kant. Since January 15, 2010 he is a researcher at the "Institute for European Intellectual Lecture and the History of Ideas" of the CNR.

While debating, we embraced a lot of topics, going from the role of Philosophy in Italy until passing through the main issue of the relationship between the individual and the Web.

At the beginning of our talk, Prof. Hohenegger does not hesitate to spend some words of gratitude for the Italian tradition of History of Philosophy: "Italy - he says - can be considered as a leading power in this field of studies."

Indeed, he showed us that in our country the number of university chairs in "History of Philosophy" are much more than in any other nation. Here, the schooling approach to Philosophy is different in respect to other European countries. In every Italian High School, students are believed to engage with it for at least three years. In fact, in Italy, to study Philosophy in the High-School is mandatory; everywhere else, it is optional and often students can choose whether to do it or not.

According to Prof Hohenegger, this situation is due to historical reasons: Giovanni Gentile, who reformed the Italian educational system, was convinced that Philosophy was History of Philosophy its own, and viceversa.

Then, we asked him what should motivate young students to pursue a "humanistic" education at the University. Prof. Hohenegger seemed to be quite pessimistic about it. "Today, in respect to 20/30 years ago - he expresses - to find a job, both in firms and academics, having a degree in philosophy, is much less likely." The main problem rests within universities: indeed they are kind of "blocked", in the sense that year by year humanities' professors are fewer. How can the number of scholars increase if at the same time the number of students dramatically decrease?

Taking into account this pretty sad scenario, Prof. Hohenegger proposes to work on the university system, since "in a changing society - he believes - universities must be the first that adapt to this changes." Global Governance, in his opinion, constitutes a perfect example of a university course that does this job well. And we are really glad to hear this words.

After having discussed a lot about current events, we asked him to say some words about the main topic of the conference, which is the relationship between the individual and the Web and all the risks linked with it. Prof Hohenegger strongly criticizes the bad usage of Internet that people, especially the younger ones, usually do. "Internet - he affirms - is like a jungle. You can get lost, if you are not equipped as you should". Then, he goes on by describing 'Wikipedia' as a more and more accurate source. "If Wikipedia, as it is highly probable, becomes free of errors - Prof. Hohenegger states - users will substitute the reading

of a book with the search on the Web.” Unfortunately, many of them are already into this process. “And what about the books? - he wonders - why should people keep on reading them?” Who suffers the most from the predominance of the Web, he believes, is the “book” itself: “Mankind took centuries to learn how to understand long handbooks - Prof. Hohenegger says - but today we are putting aside the act of reading.” To give the book again the importance it deserves. According to him, that is what every institution, starting from the universities, must do.

Before running away, Prof. Hohenegger left us a quote to reflect on: “Everybody must have the possibility to accede to the Web, but not everyone should feel forced to do that.”

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