

ASPECTS OF POVERTY

EDITORIAL

The essays collected in this issue examine two aspects of poverty: the obscure side of indigence and the luminous side of Franciscan poverty. More than a mere editorial choice, the matter is that of an objective complexity of the term “poverty.” It is hard to think that the relation between the two forms of poverty is simple univocity; that is, that the word “poverty” means the same thing in the two cases. Such an affirmation of univocity would amount to placing despair (indigence) and joy (“the highest poverty”) on an equal level. It is easy to think, on the contrary, that the relation between the two senses of “poverty” is simple equivocity; that is, that spiritual poverty has nothing to do with material poverty. It is plausible to think that the two aspects of poverty (its ugliness and beauty) historically enter a relation of analogy, which would be neither pure univocity nor pure equivocity, according to ways that are not easy to define.

That ugly poverty and beautiful poverty in some way refer to each other does not imply a reduced commitment to fight against the effects and causes of poverty-indigence. What might ensue from an intersectional reading of the two senses of the term “poverty” is the idea that the struggle for emancipation from poverty may aim at a higher goal than simply overturning the indigence of many into a benefit for all. Such an overturning is necessary, yet it is perhaps not the ultimate goal but rather an intermediate objective.

In other words, poverty is not necessarily poor with respect to truth. It contains something that ought to be preserved, that does not deserve being simply destroyed or eliminated. Poverty ought to be the object of an overcoming rather than of a mere cancellation.

Marx’s idea that the proletariat is the universal class, whose emancipation coincides with the emancipation of the entire human kind, identifies poverty as the site of historical truth – an objective site, which does not necessarily mean the subjective possession of truth because truth as such transcends all mere subjectivity.

That joy is called with the same term (“poverty”) that is used for suffering may be cause of irritation; nevertheless, such a linguistic polysemy (the thickness of the concept of “poverty” as it is handed down to us by the tradition) may perhaps be understood as some sort of a *caveat*: what we long for, even perhaps through a revolution, is not simply the *opposite* of what we currently are. This is the direction toward which the variations that the concept “poverty” (*Armut*) has taken up in German literature and philosophy (to which the last essay in this issue on Rilke and Benjamin is devoted) seem to invite us to think.

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(English Translation by Silvia Benso)