

Towards a Universalism of Man

*Lecture held by Brunello Cucinelli upon the award of the **Global Economy Prize 2017** for the Business category from the **Kiel Institute for the World Economy***

Introduction

My esteemed German people, I feel very honoured and considerably moved.

You have given me a kind and noble gift, my father will be proud of it.

You are a people from whom I have learnt and absorbed a lot to nourish my mind and my soul.

My business activity started here, with you.

It was you who timely paid me my first earnings.

My heart preserves the memory of the generosity with which you instilled your wisdom in me.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

A special thanks to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy for having honoured me with the title of "Honourable Merchant".

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The great dream of my life has always been to work for the moral and economic dignity of the human being.

I did want my business to make a profit, but I wanted this profit to be achieved with ethics and dignity, manufacturing products without harming the Creation, or at least damaging it as little as possible.

I live and work with my family in a small Umbrian hamlet dating back to the 14th century called Solomeo, where my wife was born. Here, carefully listening to the “genius loci” (the spirit of the place) and the wise words of my inspiring masters, I have completed a restoration work that lasted for 30 years, pursuing my dream to be a temporary guardian of this place.

Just as my great teacher Hadrian the Emperor imagined when he stated: «I feel responsible for the beauty in the world».

I spent the first part of my life in the countryside; we were farmers, worked the land with the animals, had no electricity in our house but were a large and joyful family: just figure that I have never seen my parents argue. We worked; we prayed and felt the concept of hope very strongly.

I can still see the shapes and smell the scents of that “land, the mother of all things”.

My grandfather would raise his eyes to the sky and often say something fascinating: “May God send us a fair amount of rain, snow, wind”. That is when I understood the universal principle guiding my life, a fair balance that must also exist between “profit” and “giving back”.

When I turned fifteen, we moved close to the city, to Perugia, and my father took up a job in a factory, where he would however be subject to frequent offence and humiliation. He would often say: «What have I done to God to be humiliated like this»?

I have not yet grasped the reason why someone would humiliate another human being.

Therefore, I drew inspiration from my father's tearful eyes and decided that in my life I would pursue one single purpose: the "moral and economic dignity of the human being".

When I was about seventeen I discovered an amazing, great statement by Kant: «You should act considering mankind – both for yourself and for your neighbour – not as a simple means but as a noble end».

That's when I rediscovered the moral law that my father had always spoken to me about.

On these foundations I have built my entire life.

Between fifteen and twenty-five years of age I attended school, but to be honest I didn't really study anything. Those were the years of the cultural revolution, around 1968, and I attended the faculty of Engineering and took one single exam. At the same time I was hanging out in a typical Italian bar all the time, and this kind of life lasted for 10 years. There were only male patrons in the cafe and we would discuss many different topics: politics, women, economics, philosophy, theology, i.e. the sort of *polemos* that Heraclitus was so fond of.

Polemos: mother and master of mankind.

In the cafe there is always someone willing to listen to your sorrows.

Undoubtedly that important part of my personal life has been somehow my "university of life".

I wanted to work with cashmere because I figured it could be passed on. I wanted it to be an Italian handcrafted product epitomizing top-notch quality, craftsmanship, manual skills and, hopefully, creativity.

To make this happen I needed skilled hands that perceived "moral and economic dignity at work"

I wanted people to work in welcoming places also from the aesthetic point of view; a workplace where they could breathe in humanity, respect, tolerance, spirituality and somehow also mysticism; a place where to find serenity, respect, esteem and understanding when coming to work every morning, perhaps carrying with us that aching of the soul, that *malaise* that accompanies

us from birth and today is exacerbated by some sort of widespread IT noise; a place where people worked a fair number of hours. We all start at 8:00 sharp and it is forbidden to work after 5.30 pm, with a long lunch break in-between. Nobody clocks in or out, but everyone turns up at 8.00 on time. It is forbidden to be online for business reason after 5.30 pm, as well as on Saturdays and Sundays. Emails are sent only when strictly necessary, as we prefer to make phone calls. If I make you work too long, it is as if I had stolen your soul.

The aim of all this is to try and implement on a daily basis the recommendation issued by one of my great teachers, Saint Benedict, who once stated: «Every day, you should take care of your mind with your studies, of your soul with your prayers, and work».

I was born in a village and I have always loved to live in a village, because there is usually no loneliness there, no economic or spiritual poverty.

For centuries Solomeo has produced olive oil, wheat and wine, and today it produces cashmere.

I did not want to disrupt its identity: I wanted to preserve it.

With this in mind, we have restored more than built. The only new buildings in Solomeo are a theatre, a Forum of the Arts and a Neohumanistic Academy.

After completing our restoration work in the village, we have turned to its outskirts in order to embellish them.

It is believed that seventy per cent of people live in the outskirts, so this will be our task for the coming centuries.

I have always thought that it is our duty to plan for the next three years, certainly, but also for the next thirty and three hundred years. This Theatre is a secular temple of the arts designed to last 3 centuries.

I have always argued that we cannot rule mankind with science only, but we must redress the balance between science and soul: just think of Voltaire and Rousseau, Apollo and Dionysus.

I believe that we have just come out of three decades of civilization crisis, but now we are experiencing a great awakening of humanity from the moral, ethical, spiritual,

civil, religious point of view...

We are rediscovering the great ideals:
the beautiful politics;
the beautiful family;
religion or spirituality.

I have the impression that half of mankind does not need anything, but the whole of mankind is looking for something.

I feel that mankind has a universal wish to be treated with decency, honesty and respect.

We have embarked upon a promising path, featuring the decline of violence.

Epicurus would be very pleased to witness this decline of consumerism in favour of a proper use of resources, as implemented by our youth.

We should tell young people to not feel obliged to be fearful, to not turn their back on poverty, to rediscover the art of endearing themselves to others, to respect the law like their parents do, to not chase the cult of impatience and to always believe that art is the seed of civilization.

I think that us, fathers have made a big mistake with our children: we have said to them: "If you don't want to study you will go to work". We have therefore pictured work as a punishment for them, thus depriving it of its moral and economic dignity.

I believe that the expression "globalization" should be replaced with "universalism" of the world, with a lot of respect for all civilizations and envisaging some sort of "positive integration" of all human beings.
Mankind needs good, respectable people.

History has seen various forms of immense universalism: among them, I think of the Persian Empires, of Alexander the Great and of Rome. These forms lasted centuries and millennia, and have incisively written our past; but regardless of their differences, all of them had a term, because despite being noble, they were imposed by few and subjected on many. In Persia the imposing figure was the divine emperor; Alexander the Great exported the amazing culture of the Greeks worldwide, Rome imposed the idea of a divine and sovereign city. Instead the Universalism that I dream of comes directly

from all those men who want it for themselves, and as such it can be progressively modified and adopted, but has the requisites to be permanent. It is new in history for its grandiose ideals, and because it is transmitted with extraordinarily powerful means that had never been imagined before now: the internet.

Mankind needs good, respectable people.

We are going back to looking for a healthy balance between a fair growth and a fair profit

It is therefore possible to envisage a new form of “contemporary humanistic capitalism”.

Internet is a great gift whose purpose is the human being; it has also changed our way of living.

I now have an appeal for you, since the whole world sees you as the greatest technological innovators of the 21st century.

Get together, discuss, try to tell us which is the best way to use contemporary technology so that our daily life and the daily life of future generations do not lose that humanity that the Creation bestowed upon us.

At this point in my life, having turned 63, I have looked inside my soul – as my highly esteemed Saint Augustine put it. I would like to envisage a golden century in which mind and soul combine together to help us treat that *malaise* in our soul we have always suffered from and rediscover the great value of hope. And as my “thought mate” Marcus Aurelius the Emperor taught me «You should live according to nature and go with the stream of mankind».

“May the Creation enlighten our path”

“I am grateful to you and the whole of mankind”