

# THE CITY OF THE SUN AND THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SOCIAL PERFORMANCE

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**Abstract.** This paper proposes a new contextual interpretation of *The City of the Sun* as a pattern for social performance in a systematic, well organized society. I will explore the foundations of some interesting concepts and aspects developed by Campanella in *The City of the Sun*, such as an economic system based on social distribution, the emphasis on technology as a strong basis for social development, and the administrative system of justice. I will argue that Campanella's perfect society is, in fact, a response to his attempt to find a possibility of constraining social and institutional order so that the human beings can live together in perfect harmony.

**Keywords:** Tommaso Campanella, *The City of the Sun*, social performance, communal interest, administration of justice

## Introduction

Although this paper focuses on Campanella's political outlook, best illustrated in *Civitas Solis*, the wider philosophic plane of his thought cannot be totally ignored. Works as *Philosophia sensibus demonstrata*, *De sensu rerum et magia libri quator* ("Four books on the sense of things and magic"), published in 1620, *Apologia pro Galileo* (1623), *Atheismus triumphatus* ("Atheism conquered") – 1630, *Universalis philosophiae* (1638) qualified Campanella as an important figure amongst the last great Italian creators of metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> In his own personal manner, Campanella evaluated "the role of science, the role of sensations and experience in the process of knowledge, by placing nature and man in the centre of philosophic preoccupations." With such a philosophic strategy elements of scholastic and modern philosophy are combined in a *sui generis* form.<sup>2</sup>

Campanella established a hierarchy of relations among science, philosophy and theology, surpassing the speculations specific to medieval scholastic. For him, sciences involve a reflection of reality. In fact, for Campanella, knowledge is authentic only if it is based on experience. Although subservient to theology (*ancilla theologiae*), the philosophical knowledge rises above experience, to a more general plane. A desired reformation of philosophy was not to be achieved and imposed by

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Campanella, even if Hegel stated that “elaborations as those of Campanella exerted an infinite influence and gave impetus, but for themselves they yielded no fruit.”<sup>3</sup>

Tommaso Campanella developed the Pantheistic outlook, following the line of thought imposed by Cusanus and Bruno. Thus, in his opinion, the great theological and philosophical truth is the existence of God – the infinite synthesis of power, wisdom and love. God lives and works inside, and not outside, of nature and things. Nature, through God, is an autonomous subject, expressing a consummate, peerless splendor. Nature is the object of contemplation and revelation. By knowing nature, man will know God. Consequently, the human life must be led in compliance with nature, oriented by a “religion of nature.”<sup>4</sup>

Evidently, Campanella’s pantheism was reflected in his political philosophy. Thus, the ideal state, the Solarian society, did not originate in divine will and commandments; it did not evolve as a God-given gift, but as an organizing effort made by people governed by reason, as a human discovery in constant agreement with nature, and implicitly in agreement with divine will and power. Temples are more like places of knowledge and the citizens rather worship the splendor of perfect nature than performing rituals of prayer. Campanella even believed that the most appropriate name for the leader of the ideal society would be Metaphysicus. The society as the subject of its own transformation contains, in itself, the same synthesis that was attributed to God - of Power, Wisdom and Love - represented by leaders who are close collaborators of Metaphysicus.

Referring to *The City of the Sun*, Campanella wrote that its inhabitants admitted two metaphysical principles: supreme existence – God, and nothingness. In a metaphysical plane, the finite existence emerges from nothingness and existence. “Evil and sin,” Campanella continued, “come of the propensity to nothingness; the sin having its cause not efficient, but in deficiency.” By deficient cause, they (Solarians – n.n.) referred to the lack of power, wisdom or will. Sin is regarded as a defect of will, for he who knows what is good and who can do good must also want to do it, as it is will that is born of power and wisdom, and not the other way around.<sup>5</sup>

My approach tries to argue that *The City of the Sun* is a work meant to design a political and social framework able to compel human beings to adopt a type of conduct which makes them live together in social harmony and morality. I will show that what places Campanella’s work among other utopias of modernity is its attempt to reconstruct political and social circumstances in the new society by reconciling the private and communal interests. In addition, I will also argue that the institutional and legal pattern developed in *The City of the Sun* is carefully designed in order to assure better social performances. Although I take these elements to be essential, my intent is neither to say that this interpretation explains the whole of the work nor that it is the unique way of reading Campanella’s *City of the Sun*.

In order to do this, I will first try to provide an interpretation of the *City of the Sun* on the basis that one of the most important aspects of the Solarian society is to promote social performance as a result of a collective process based on the

reconciliation of private and communal interests. Next, I will try to prove that the emphasis on the technology is the result of Campanella's attempt to provide the foundations for social development. And, finally, I will focus on the well organized administration of justice system, a condition for the very existence of the city.

### **The socio-political project of Campanella**

The impression left by Campanella on the generations that succeeded him is due not so much to his philosophical ideas, as to the socio-political outlook he expressed, in essence, in *The City of the Sun*. The poetical idea of a philosophical republic, *Civitas Solis*, was published in the German city of Frankfurt, in 1623 as a consequence of the fact that the work in manuscript had been enthusiastically received by the intellectual circles. The novel ideas and the visionary, daring spirit that the text incorporated were reasons for this enthusiasm. The manuscript was taken over from the author, imprisoned at that time in Naples, by the Lutheran Tobias Adami, who had visited Campanella on his way back from a pilgrimage to Palestine. Following the publication of a series of works, the author became well-known and liked in certain intellectual milieus, not only for his ideas, the model of society he proposed or the values for which he found application in politics, justice, education, nature protection etc., but also for the elegant, precise and charming style of *Civitas Solis*. The work contains the literary – philosophical portrait of an ideal government and society. Following the conventions of utopian literature as established by Thomas More a century before, and perhaps also fearing the Inquisition and the Spanish authority, Campanella preferred to place his utopian society not in his native country, but in an imaginary world, on an island located somewhere in the Pacific Ocean.

The work was written in the form of a dialogue between a Genoese sea-captain (a *guest*) and a member of a monastic order (*the Grandmaster of the Knights Hospitallers*). The sea-captain, having returned from a voyage, describes the ideal society that he had visited on one of the islands of the Pacific. The success of the book was immense; being one of the most widely read utopian works of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This was due not only to its literary qualities, not only to that psychosocial need of the human individual to relate to an ideal, to a perfect standard, but mainly to the popular curiosity, constantly nurtured by geographical discoveries, which, at that time, rendered even the most phantasmagorical of descriptions credible. The interest in reading *The City of the Sun* was permanent throughout the four centuries that have elapsed since its publication, despite having, of course, a circuitous evolution.

The political project of Campanella represents an ideal, communitarian and egalitarian alternative to the real society of Italy, Naples in particular – a society imbued with injustice, selfishness, unlawfulness, squalor at one pole, and idleness and corruption at the other pole of society. “In Naples,” Campanella remarked “there exist 70,000 souls, and out of these scarcely 10,000 or 15,000 do any work, and they are always lean from overwork and are getting weaker every day. The rest

become a prey to idleness, avarice, ill-health, lasciviousness, usury, and other vices, and contaminate and corrupt very many families by holding them in servitude for their own use, by keeping them in poverty and slavishness, and by imparting to them their own vices. Therefore public slavery ruins them; useful works, in the field, in military service, and in arts, except those which are debasing, are not cultivated, the few who do practise them doing so with much aversion.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, laden with vices and inequities, the existing society was irrationally managed.

On his quest to identify the source of evil, vice and injustice pervading the society in which he lived, Campanella would find it in the very existence of private property. Squalor and poverty, „renders men worthless, cunning, sulky, thievish, insidious, vagabonds, liars, false witnesses etc.,” and wealth “makes them insolent, proud, ignorant, traitors, assumers of what they know not, deceivers, boasters, wanting in affection, slanderers, etc.”<sup>77</sup> Consequently, the construction of a just, ideal society, of a democratic republic, presupposes the necessary removal of private property and its replacement with common property over wealth, since the community „all the rich and poor together . . . They are rich because they want nothing, poor because they possess nothing.”<sup>78</sup> What Campanella was trying to do, was actually to imagine a possibility to reconstruct the society so as to reconcile private and communal interests, by abolishing the private property (considered to be the source for all the troubles in the world) and by emphasizing the idea of common property.

That is why Campanella proposes an economic system based on social distribution. The idea of social distribution is widespread in the utopian literature. Thomas More also pleaded for social distribution, while Francis Bacon proposed a distribution of labor similar to that of a research institute. But Campanella’s interpretation of what social distribution meant was different. He connected social distribution with common property and with a system of allocation based on merits.

In *Civitas Solis* all goods belong to the community, to the state. In consequence, humans are equal, none of them being either rich or poor. Individual interests are harmoniously integrated in the general interest of the society and, since all Solarians work 4 hours per day, and any concrete subdivision of social labor is useful, valuable for the community and bestows dignity upon the human being, work becomes a pleasure. He who performs a work, whatever it may be, takes it to be the noblest of works. There are no servants to corrupt the habits. As equal proprietors, all Solarians receive as much as they need, wanting nothing of what is not necessary, including entertainment, garments, education. Differentiation results, on a moral plane, from the fact that the republic has the habit of granting honor awards to heroes and heroines.

The ideal society sketched by Campanella is composed of cultured, well-instructed, multilateral people, who promote the cult for sciences. The outer and inner walls of the fortress of the City of the Sun are covered in drawings and writings of geometry, astronomy, geography, medicine etc., with paintings depicting species of plants and animals, accompanied by written explanations from all

mechanic arts etc. Solarians place a great deal of importance on the knowledge of foreign languages, of the Earth, the other civilizations and of the history of all nations. The children's education starts at a very young age. To facilitate learning and to make it seem as natural as possible, sciences are taught to children almost like in play. Solarian life is led exclusively in the community, according to philosophical and moral precepts. Even the common possession of women is regarded as normal. Self-love and egotism are unknown to them. Love for one's self is replaced by the love for one's community, by arduous patriotic sentiments. The rationale of their social organization is: "all things are common with them."<sup>9</sup> Thus, since the general interest is the ultimate priority, self-love has to be entirely abandoned for the love of people, and the individual must constantly allow his life to be directed by the magistrates of each domain in a rigorous social mechanism, that only ideally can be thought of as harmonious. With the comunization of women, the human species' reproduction is subject to mating rules strictly monitored by the leaders, so that vigorous offspring would result. All these make the functioning of the bizarre Campanellian utopian construction seem like a totalitarian society, with all its attributes of hostility to human dignity and freedom. The only love expressed by Solarians is for the social body to which they belong, a wrong and unrealistic premise of the entire construct with harmful implications for the internal harmony.<sup>10</sup> People develop a sort of mathematical or mechanical relationship, voluntarily regulated. By stripping the individual of his fundamental characteristics, Campanella goes beyond the values promoted by Renaissance humanism which is not surprising since his intention was to design a social construct able to compel human beings to live together in perfect harmony.

Campanella presents the political organization of the ideal society thus: the supreme prince is a priest – Metaphysicus, ruler of both the transient and spiritual, who decides in all public matters and trials, and "three princes of equal power – viz., Pon, Sin, and Mor – assist him, and these in our tongue we should call Power, Wisdom, and Love."<sup>11</sup> Power is in charge of peace and war affairs, and the military arts. Wisdom is in charge of sciences, medicine, education, and the liberal and mechanical arts. Love is primarily in charge of perpetuating the species, mating men and women so that healthy and vigorous offspring result, and, in general, of all that pertains to securing life.

All state-related matters are discussed among the four men, and whatever direction the Metaphysic might favor, the others will adhere to it, in full consensus. An important part is played by magistrates, specialized according to functions corresponding to all virtues (such as Bravery, Truth, Benefaction, Criminal Justice, Civil Justice, Moderation etc.). To such functions are elected those who have demonstrated, since childhood, appropriate inclinations and skills. The magistrate will be the one most capable in the science or trade on which he will exert leadership. This function is occupied through election by the general assembly. The rank of Metaphysicus will be obtained by the most cultured, capable and organized. He must know, above all things, theology and metaphysics, he must master all

sciences, laws, methods of the arts etc. The supreme dignity can only be assumed after the age of 35. Exertion of the supreme function occurs over an indefinite period of time, and is interrupted only when a wiser, more government-capable personality emerges – which will be established by vote.

Thus, in the City of the Sun there is a hierarchical organization, there are “noblemen and leaders” positioned, indeed, in a poetical, philosophical republic. Those who reach the “top” have do so as a result of personal merit and not because of their social origin. This is a very interesting idea which places Campanella rather at the beginning of the modernity than to the end of the Renaissance. A society which promotes personal merits, knowledge and the ability to work is an idea which places Campanella among the seventeenth century political philosophers. “Nobility” is granted, in the new social organization, on the basis of spiritual criteria, aptitudes, competence, and merit. Thus, all work is honorable, useful, and none of them destroys the human being. “They who are skilful in more arts than these they consider still nobler, and they set that one apart for teaching the art in which he is most skilful.”<sup>12</sup> It results, from the above-said, that Campanella was the partisan of the republican form of state, surpassing the model of the Platonic republic.

As a visionary spirit and philosopher of history, Campanella intuited the acceleration of social-economic progress, driven by the development of sciences and technology. The progress of technology increases the strengths of man in all respects. In fact, Campanella seems to consider technology as the foundation for development in the Solarian society. Everything in the Solarian society is made according to a well organized plan and the inhabitants of the City of the Sun seem to be always in reach of better or improved ways of living. Solarians know everything that has been discovered and done by other nations. They know and cherish the culture of all the other nations, they learn all languages, diversify their interdependences and connections with the peoples, aspiring to “a civilization of the universal.”

### **Administration of justice**

Order and harmony in the ideal society entail the involvement of justice, the state’s repressive body. Campanella’s aim was to construct a constraining social and institutional order which would make common people to act in moral and harmonious ways. The point was to reconstruct social circumstances so as to reconcile private and communal interests.<sup>13</sup> Life in common, based on generalized common property, determines interpersonal relations of solidarity and love to the scale of the entire city. Thus, “all those of the same age call one another brothers. They call all over twenty-two years of age, fathers; those that are less than twenty-two are named sons.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the repressive function of the state is marginal, of lesser strength than those relating to planning, organization of labor and production, repartition of goods created in order to meet the needs of each person, the management of general and compulsory education, procreation relations etc. Solarians are not acquainted with thievery, violent murders, prostitution, incest,

adultery or other serious crimes, because the members of the city are guided by moral, philosophical, and religious precepts, and the management of all categories of social relations is done by magistrates (that is, the most competent and capable people in each social activity) according to the supremacy of the principle of community love. Magistrates carefully see to it that each citizen receives what he needs depending on his merit, and that no harm is done to anyone. Those who infringe upon these rules (through lies, slander, sloth, wrath or other vices) are deprived of the common meal, the right to frequent women or other honors, as the judge sees fit.

In the ideal society, those who fail to abide by the rules are first judged by the magistrate of their art (trade). Sentences may fall into a wide range: admonishment, exile, deprivation of the common meal, interdiction on the religious service etc. In the event that, nevertheless, crimes or various forms of intentional slandering do occur, the talion law is applied: death is punished by the death sentence. The gravest unlawful acts are directed against the Republic, the supreme magistrates, or God. In such cases, the judgment is held at once, and those found guilty are always sentenced to death. There are neither executioners, nor lictors in the city. For this reason, the convicts are stoned to death by the people. Solarians pity death convicts, and talk to them until they accept or even desire the capital sentence. The right of pardon pertains exclusively to the Metaphysic. If a perpetrator turns to the magistrate on his own initiative, confessing his crime and begging for forgiveness, he is forgiven because it is believed that he was not publicly accused.

Solarians know their laws because there are relatively few in number, concise and clear, written on all entrances to the temple. The assurance of legality in the ideal city is facilitated by the education process and by the efforts of priests and superior magistrates, who are all in charge of purifying consciences. The magistrates know all the sins within the City, due to the secret confessions made by the Solarians, and can take appropriate measures.

Even if the *City of the Sun* proposes a system of justice which combines judicial and religious power, the emphasis on strict hierarchy makes the Solarian justice system to be rather administrative. Campanella's work contains advanced ideas on civil and criminal procedure, the drafting of juridical rules, as well as the form and language of the latter. Thus, for instance, during a trial, accusers and witnesses put forth their accusation before the judge, and the defendant sustains his defense, being absolved or condemned by the judge on spot.<sup>15</sup> Five witnesses are required in order to prove the infringement – which is possible, since Solarians are always in a group. Otherwise, the defendant will be released under oath, being given a simple warning. In the case of repeat offenders, two or three witnesses are enough, and sentences are doubled. The judges of all virtues are placed on a tribune that has, on one column, an inscription defining the virtues for which one is the judge. When judging, the magistrate says: “O son, thou hast sinned against this

sacred definition,” after which the sentence is pronounced. Punishment, is seen as an efficient cure against the ills of the community.

## Conclusion

Some exegetes have discovered fissures, contradictions, naive and unscientific ideas in the works of Campanella. Others reproached the communist attitude, the artificial and abstract character of the theoretical construct, the metaphysical and speculative dominance of his elaborations, the attempt to “reconcile fire with water and honor” by promoting the principles of social equality and the ample development of human personality and happiness as the purpose of life. Still others reproached Campanella for having been a promoter of the total state. If the focus is kept only on the social aspect of *The City of the Sun*, however, one can credit Campanella with a visionary message. The social construct he speaks about reconciles private and communal interests by presenting a social pattern founded on common property and on a social distribution system based on merits. The emphasis on technology as the foundation for social development and almost a Weberian view of administration and justice were also conditions for the new social construct.

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## References

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- <sup>5</sup> Campanella, T., *The City of the Sun* (The Floating Press, 2009), 70.
- <sup>6</sup> Campanella, T., (2009), 34. The number of 70000 of inhabitants living in Naples was questioned by some scholars such as Benedetto Croce who considered that, during that time, in Naples must had lived approximately 250000 inhabitants. See Croce, B., *L’intorno al comunismo di Tommaso Campanella* (Bari, 1921), 191.
- <sup>7</sup> Campanella, T., (2009), 35.
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