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Tommaso Campanella, *The City of the Sun* and the Protective Celestial Bodies¹

Maurizio Cambi

They [the inhabitants of the City of the Sun] believe that first the whole of life should be examined and then its respective parts. Therefore, when they founded their city, they set the fixed signs at the four corners of the world – the sun in the ascendant in Leo; Jupiter in Leo oriental to the sun; Mercury and Venus in Cancer, but so close as to produce satellite influence; Mars in the ninth house in Aries looking out with benefic aspect upon the ascendant and the apheta; the moon in Taurus looking upon Mercury and Venus with benefic aspect, but not at right angles to the sun; Saturn entering the fourth house without casting a malefic aspect upon Mars and the sun; Fortune with the Head of Medusa almost in the tenth house – from which circumstances they augur dominion, stability, and greatness for themselves. Being in a benefic aspect of Virgo, in the triplicity of its apsis and illuminated by the moon, Mercury could not be harmful; but since their science is jovial and not beggarly, they were not concerned about Mercury's entering Virgo and the conjunction.²

In the sixth of the *Astrologicorum libri*, Tommaso Campanella recommended the founders of new cities to consult the stars in order to ascertain with precision the most propitious moment to begin their construction, when the heavens reveal the most benevolent astral conjunction which would thereafter exert its positive influence over the cities (and over the life of their inhabitants). This process is similar to the one applied by astrologers to determine a human being's astral horoscope (singling out the celestial bodies' positions in conjunction with the zodiacal houses at the moment of conception or birth) in order to foretell the subject's temperament, talents, natural inclinations and destiny. Yet individuals cannot choose at which moment (and under which stars) they are to be born, whereas the founders of a city can decide to build it, for instance, under *Leo in Medium coeli* (with the coincidence of the Sun and the Moon in a favourable aspect), so as to favourably determine its future.

In addition to setting the propitious point in time, the city builder or *Aedificator* can also plan the urban map of the city in such a way so that, like a talisman in its shape, it would be capable of attracting the beneficial influence

exerted by Jupiter and so neutralize the nefarious influence brought on by the 'cold' Saturn. With this as its celestial map, the city would enjoy long life, wealth, honours and whatever might be needed for the well-being of its inhabitants.³

In 1602, a few years after the failure of the anti-Spanish plot he had inspired (encouraged by the extraordinary omens he had seen in the heavens announcing the world's renewal, as he would later confess), Campanella found himself in the role of the *Aedificator* – albeit only in literary fiction – entirely absorbed in the drafting of an ideal city's outline in the Naples prison cell where he was held. In those circumstances, Campanella created the most perfect city possible under the most favourable celestial conjunction and fully in keeping with his astrological beliefs.

A Genoese character – Columbus's helmsman and for us the narrator of a journey in which he happened to come across the community of the Solari – described the principles followed by the inhabitants of the City of the Sun when they began to build that city 'divided into seven large circuits, named after the seven planets'. In its urban plan, the city was laid out with the cardinal points clearly in mind – exactly as prescribed by the Philosopher in the *Astrologicorum libri*. As a result, entry into the city was gained through 'four gates facing the four points of the compass' (27). The text thoroughly analyses such details and reveals the reasons why and when the solar city's inhabitants decided to build the city. It is, however, difficult to understand by anyone not well versed in the science of astrology.

Thanks to their discerning choice when founding the solar city, the community would be looked after by the protective care provided by the celestial bodies in every single aspect of its life. It would, however, be naïve to believe that the horoscope on its own could completely determine 'the basic traits' (of a human being as well as of a city) or direct good or bad luck or that it could be fully relied upon 'to foretell coming events'.⁴ This position had already been made clear in the *Tetrabiblos* by Claudio Tolomeo – the main authority in this supposed science, without whom, as Girolamo Cardano wrote, astrology would not have existed.

Campanella often disagrees with Tolomeo, but nonetheless agrees with him that the horoscope cast at birth does not determine anyone's destiny. The moment of birth is no more than an indicator of an individual's natural bent. Understanding the position of the stars and the figures drawn by the constellations at the moment of birth represents an invaluable resource by means of which the course of imminent events can be advantageously modified.

It therefore seems that the Calabrian friar behaves with regard to his imaginary city in exactly the same way as he would have done when drawing up one of the many horoscopes he had been required to make for over a decade by the most famous and powerful people of his time, ranging from Pope Urban VIII to Anne of Austria for her son (who would later become the Sun King, Louis XIV), along with Francesco Caracciolo and Tobia Adami.

The City of the Sun, written in 1602 and published in 1623, is generously endowed with astrological references and recalls the close relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm. By observing the city's layout, one can readily see how the predominant role played by astrology lies behind the sites where its symbols are placed.

Carefully following the city's description, one notes that in the very centre of the city (thus within the smallest of the seven rings) there rises a temple which is 'perfectly circular ... [an] astonishing design'. Inside this temple, which is also the highest building (in other words, the closest to heaven), there are no sacred statues or paintings of traditional images, but only symbols of a higher natural religion. Within the place of worship,

nothing rests on the altar but a huge celestial globe, upon which all the heavens are described, with a terrestrial globe beside it. On the vault of the dome overhead appear all the larger stars with their names and the influences they each have upon earthly things set down in three verses ... Seven lamps, each named for one of the seven planets, are always kept burning. (31)

One detail of the temple's structure is highly significant: 'The large dome has a cupola at its center with an aperture directly above the single altar in the middle of the temple.'⁵ Through this opening, the Solari can gaze at the starry sky from the inside. In symbolic terms, it maintains open 'contact' between the stars and the community of men. Deciphering the signs of the heavens is the task of 'the clergy, who are forty in number', and who live in the cells located 'around the cupola at the top of the temple ... and above the cloister' (31). Another twenty-four priests stand quietly above the temple's dome. Their duty is 'to gaze at the stars and, using astrolabes, note all their movements and the effects these produce. In this manner, they learn what changes have taken place or are to take place in every country' (103).

The Sun – the city's main political and religious authority – discusses all the information received from the heavens with the priests. Through such news, he obtains a universal overview, allowing him to take the most effective decisions for the community over which he rules.

He has been appointed as the Prince-Priest because he is acknowledged to possess superior competence. Well read in metaphysics, an acute theologian, well-versed in 'the theory and practice of every art and every science', the Sun – like Campanella – 'must study astrology and the prophets carefully' and therefore will be in a position to differentiate 'the degrees of being and their correspondence to celestial, terrestrial, and marine things' (45).

However, not only the most diligent visitors to the temple (the Sun, the religious authorities and the priests) have knowledge of the celestial language, but all the City's inhabitants know this very useful ancient science whose main principles are available to everybody – as for any other discipline – by means of an extraordinary illustrated encyclopaedia entirely written in images drawn on the inner walls of the seven circles which defend the city, making it

impregnable. Unlike the religious men, the population learn about these occult sciences derived from the heavens, but not its predictive aspects (for which calculation and advanced technical skills would be required). They learn, however, the means to take practical advantage of the correlation between the *res naturales* and the bodies which animate the celestial spheres in accordance with the fascinating procedures of astral medicine set out by Marsilio Ficino in the third volume of *De vita*.

‘On the inner wall of the third circuit every kind of herb and tree to be found in the world is represented ... with explanations as to where they were first discovered, what their specific powers are, what their relation is to the stars, to metals, to parts of the body, and how they are used in medicine’ – uses also authorized for all Roman Catholics by the Council of Trent (35).

The Solari read the stars even when they have to make relatively unimportant decisions. Before any agricultural task, ‘the winds and propitious stars are consulted’,⁶ and before providing any kind of medical treatment, they previously ‘observe the stars, inspect herbs’ (83, 93).

All of them have chosen their occupation ‘because the particular inclination of each person is seen in his birth, and in the division of labor no one is assigned to things that are destructive to his individuality but rather to things that preserve it’ (81). They would thus form an entire people who are laborious, kind and inclined to virtue; in a word, a population of well-tempered human beings. The reason for their attitude, very different from the real world’s inhabitants, can once more be found in the heavenly bodies.

As with the city in the act of its foundation, arrangements are made so that everyone is born under a favourable star. According to the criteria of a ‘rudimentary’ eugenics, an experiment is conducted in Campanella’s city to enhance the race over the generations. The Solari ask ‘the Astrologist and the Physician’ to set the right time to have sex. Together they choose favourable alignments and above all avoid adverse ones:

‘Most frequently they seek a time when Virgo is in the ascendant, but they take great care to see that Saturn and Mars are not in the angles, because all four angles, with oppositions and quadratures, are harmful; and from these springs the root of vital power and of fate, which are dependent upon the harmony of the whole in relation to its parts’ (55–6).

Thus protected by the stars, children will be born fit in body and strong in spirit. The aim of choosing with whom (and when) to copulate is intended to produce the most robust physical constitution in coming generations. This is the main reason why only a harmonious body can generate virtues. ‘The Solarians say that a pure nature wherein virtues thrive cannot be acquired through study and application, that moral virtue is fostered only with difficulty where there is no natural disposition to favor it ... Care in mating, is a matter of major concern’ (57).

The application of these measures will lead to compatibility of character, by engendering a generation of newly born without any great differences and with a similar bent for the good ('since those of the same age are all born under the same constellation, they tend to be alike in ability, habits, and appearance. This accounts for the concord and stability in the state and encourages the citizens to love and help each other' (59)).

To sum up, the people of the City of the Sun are inclined to obedience, solidarity and cohesion. They are a population that is easy to rule. Insubordination and rebelliousness, due to an excess of passion, are unlikely to manifest themselves among these people. They are built similar to one another, sound in mind and body, because they were born under the same stars.

Having placed their trust in the stars' protection and the messages from the planets, which are 'translated' into political choices, the Solari are very different from the inhabitants of Thomas More's *Utopia*. Although the Utopians have 'learned to plot expertly the courses of the stars and the movement of heavenly bodies' and have even 'devised a number of different instruments by which they compute with the greatest exactness the course of the sun, the moon and the other stars that are visible in their area of the sky', 'as for the friendly and hostile influence of the planets and that whole deceitful business of divination of stars, they have never so much as dreamed of it'.⁷

It should be emphasized that Campanella's thinking did not tend towards a strict astral determinism (as asserted by Arabian astrologers), which would have denied the free will of man and entered into a direct conflict with the Christian religion. If Campanella had supported the theory of the planets' tyranny, he would have undermined the meaning set out in the descriptive relevance of his utopia, leaving the quality of life of the entire community in the hands of the stars rather than in the hands of a human political project.

In *The City of the Sun*, the Italian philosopher also coherently confirms his belief, previously expressed elsewhere in his work, that heavenly bodies can only produce tendencies in individuals, who are by no means bound by them and can, on the contrary, always correct the course of events by means of the arts and science, or by praying to God, who is above all things (fate included). Knowing how to read the language of the heavens thus becomes a skill which cannot be renounced in order to remedy the misfortunes which the stars foretell.

Summoned by an anxious Urban VIII, Campanella reassured the worried Pope, whose death had been foretold as imminent in various predictions made from 1628 to 1630, that even the most fatal of predictions could be avoided as 'God allows no evil to mankind without proper remedy'.⁸

The repeated astral consultations conducted by the solar city's inhabitants to foretell the future, however, were legitimate and in line with Christian orthodoxy and even within the limits set by Sixtus V in his Papal Bull *Consitutio coeli et terrae* (1586).

No trace of superstition can be found in the Solari's attitude. On the contrary, God is the one and only supreme ruler and mankind has but to read the signs that can be found in Nature, which reveal God's plan (as he states in *Senso delle cose e la magia*, 'onto the stars God wrote the laws and orders ruling over corporeal creatures'). The optimum regimen for the people governed by the Sun arises from the continuing effort to make human prospects conform to the divine plan.

Looking at the living universe, in which every single being bears messages from God, the inhabitants of the ideal city search for signs and symbols to guide their choices and to prepare them for imminent events ('after the appearance of the new star in Cassiopeia, there will be a great new monarchy, reformation of laws and of arts, new prophets, and a general renewal' (123)). From this perspective, the stars only constitute privileged signs foretelling what is likely to happen (*probabiliter*). In this regard, Campanella writes,

the earth is a great beast and we live within it as worms live within us. As a consequence we stand under the providence of God and not that of the world and of the stars because, with respect to these, we exist by chance; but with respect to God, Whose instruments they are, we are foreknown and foreordained. Hence we are under obligation to Him alone as Lord, Father, and all. (113)

This interpretation of the natural universe allows us to purge astrological beliefs from any heretical connotations. As a matter of fact, celestial bodies do not have within themselves any independent powers. They are merely instruments used by God to manifest his might in connection with humankind. Is it not written in the Holy Scriptures (Gen. I: 14) that God 'made celestial bodies and stars to be signs over the seasons, the days and the years'? Moreover, did not Luke (21: 25) state that there would be 'signs in the sun, in the moon and in the stars' to foretell the coming of the 'Son of man'?

Those priests who constantly scrutinize the skies on top of the dome actually 'serve as mediators between God and humanity'. God's message reveals itself through the stars; the solar priests interpret it and pass it on to the Sun who can then decide whether and how to use it for political purposes. In an explanatory passage (containing Thomistic hints) the philosopher does away with any doubts and makes clear the appropriate correspondence between the cause (God), the instruments (celestial bodies) and the inhabitants of the ideal city. He states how the latter had understood better than anyone else the role played by the celestial bodies in the grand scheme of things.

They honor the sun and the stars as living things, as images of God, and as celestial temples; but they do not worship them, though they honor the sun above the rest. No creature but God do they deem worthy of *latría*, and Him they serve under the sign of the sun which is the symbol and visage of God from Whom comes light and warmth and every other thing. For this reason their altar is shaped like a sun, and their priests pray to God in the sun and in the stars as

though these were His altars, and they pray to Him in the sky as though that were His temple. They say that angels, who dwell in the stars which are their living abodes, are reliable intercessors, and they declare that God most clearly revealed His beauty in the sky and in the sun, His trophy and His image. (109)

What in some passages could have seemed to portray the excessive power of the celestial bodies reveals itself, upon a deeper analysis, to be a mild and indirect influence of distant bodies made powerful only by the use God makes of them. They do nothing to diminish the final responsibility of man.¹⁰ The stars, as Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas stated, can exercise an influence over the body, the animal spirit and its moods, and only incidentally on an individual's free will.

Campanella underlines this point further in the last part of his work, recalling the dramatic personal experience he suffered when, under torture, he pretended to be mad in order to escape the stake. 'Know this: that these people believe in the freedom of the will; and they say that if a man, after forty hours of torture, will not reveal what he has resolved to keep secret, then not even the stars working so far off can force him to do so' (127).