

**First meeting of
the Jury for the Senator
Giovanni Agnelli
International Award**

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Fondazione
Agnelli

The tradition of great international awards, which often risks looking like no more than a particularly noble variety of worldliness, is actually rooted in an intuition that is worth revisiting today.

In fact, awards stem from the need to influence advanced societies' cultural dynamics, through the symbolic dimension they take on (by identifying people or activities that embody certain guiding values) and through the more tangible dimension of resources made available for activities that are deemed worthy. Awards, in other words, are complex incentive mechanisms born out of utility analyses, in a broad sense: they pinpoint exemplary problems and help point society, and cultures, in the direction of desirable solutions.

In the beginning of this century, their main goal was to develop basic scientific research; it later extended to identifying excellence standards in the various scientific and technological disciplines and in professional activities. Even today, most of the major awards revolve around these aspects.

But we must ask, today: it is still truly indispensable to intervene in these fields, to orient societies and cultures of the advanced West towards these priorities? Would one more award in this same direction be useful?

We asked ourselves this question, as well as a more general one about the suitability of the "award" tool, when we decided to launch an initiative destined to celebrate Fiat's founder. In fact, if we had acted in a way that was not careful about the requirements of social and cultural utility, we would have poorly conformed to the spirit of the person we wanted to honour, Senator Giovanni Agnelli, who was enlightened and open, but always aware of the requirements of practice.

So we gave two distinct answers to these questions. Awards can still be a useful tool, because few other comparable forms of action have such an impact on the collective conscience. However, we must set ourselves apart from the model of professional and school awards, because today the technical-scientific world, the world of research, does not need any further legitimisation, and in fact represents a strong dimension in our societies – so strong, it is the main driver in their transformations.

Today, there are other dimensions of human reflection and action that need more space, in terms of attention from our societies' public opinion, and of individual and collective behaviours it informs.

Amongst them, the first one is the ethical dimension.

To clarify the reasons behind this working hypothesis, which inspires the award, let's take a step back to look at how certain classic spheres of human action relate to each other today, in the advanced western society. With an intentional simplification, we can see that in the past few decades, at least in advanced democracies, the socio-economic system and scientific system have basically completed their long process of emancipation from great ideological, metaphysical and religious constructs. It was a great process towards freedom, which allowed us to mobilize resources to which we owe the extraordinary levels of power and wellbeing contemporary humanity has reached.

However, this process may also bring undesired and uncontrollable consequences. A society dominated by the autonomous forces that emerge when science, technology and economy intertwine risks losing the ability to answer questions about the goals of human actions. It is a society that risks becoming unable to offer any criterion for action that is not the mere, instant satisfaction of individual desires.

We must admit that scientific advances and economic transformation today are achieving the highest levels in a society that has been emptied of its ethical dimension. Science and economy bring up pre-existent problematic dimensions, or completely redefine the traditional issue of human coexistence, just as the spheres of human action and thinking, and first and foremost the ethical dimension – which could provide answers, orientations and criteria – have lost much of their ability to give direction. They merely survive, compared to the economic and technical-scientific dimensions' hegemonic momentum. To this we may add that the contemporary age, through an extraordinary power to influence the world and the future, imposes on individuals and the community bigger responsibilities over the past, with heightened uncertainty about criteria – exactly at a time when solid references are instead needed to face the consequences of transformation.

The collective decisions of one generation have always influenced the destiny of the following one, but today these causal bonds are deeper and more numerous.

In essence, we could say humanity seems to limp in its race towards the future: science and economy move on, with no adequately structured or intense relation to the value systems that originated them and, in different reinterpretations, are at the basis of our societies.

Different highly relevant problems – such as those regarding ethics in finance, or ethical conflicts sparked by the practice of scientific research – are instances of this general issue.

The problem of what ends scientific progress and economic transformations should pursue must again attract the attention of culture and operative practice, to introduce critical and self-correcting skills in our societies' race towards the future.

To avoid the risk of feeling like strangers in our own home – that is, in our societies – we must take care to rebuild a more intense relationship between science, economy and our value system: a relationship made of closer bonds, more awareness, more critical thinking. This is the only way that we can achieve practical results, cultural consequences and social organizational forms that are coherent with the ethical culture and history that are at the foundation of our society and, therefore, also at the origin of current scientific and economic successes.

The first step to recreate this relationship is to reaffirm our need for it, suggesting the ethical dimension can once again become a central hinge in culture and operative practice, first and foremost in the economic community.

The Senator Giovanni Agnelli International Award is born from this conclusion: firstly, to bring back to the cultural world's attention the need to reflect, with newfound interest, on the

coherence between transformations underway in the contemporary world and fundamental ethical principles; and secondly, to showcase the value of practical behaviours that are in line with an ethical dimension.

Thus, the Award's utility is based on the idea not to reward players that are strong already – science and economy – but one that is weaker: reflection on ethical principles. Furthermore, its intention is to reward contributions, i.e. behaviours and lines of action that are able to incorporate high moral standards, and offer answers to the new problematic dimensions of western society that we can consider exemplary, starting with how we act in the economic world.