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**God, Evil, Freedom. Reception and Interpretation
of Dostoevsky in Luigi Pareyson and his Heirs**

Abstract

The essay aims to focus on reception and interpretation of Dostoevsky in the thought of Luigi Pareyson (1918-1991) and his heirs, who have developed a deep and original theoretical reading of Dostoevsky's work, able to bring out not only its ethical stance, but most of the essential aspects of his thought, and to investigate its current relevance. The reflection of Pareyson – who promoted the introduction of Dostoevsky's thought into the academic circles of Turin, being convinced that philosophy cannot avoid confronting the issues it explores – consists of three main moments: the experience of good and evil, the experience of freedom and the experience of God. Starting from consideration of Dostoevsky's characters as ideas, Pareyson proposes a new and coherent philosophical interpretation of his work, which can undoubtedly be compared to those of Ivanov, Berdjaev, Evdomikov, Šestov. His observations around the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor and the "refutation of Ivan" – which, according to him, constitute the most significant and theoretically prolific moments of Dostoevsky's production – seem unaffected by the flow of time and could still represent a valuable and indispensable contribution to the understanding not only of the great Russian author, but of human nature itself.

Keywords: Dostoevsky, Luigi Pareyson, philosophy, ontology, freedom, hermeneutics

Introduction

Luigi Pareyson (1918 - 1991) was one of the major Italian philosophers of the twentieth century, the greatest interpreter of existentialist philosophy, and in particular of Karl Jaspers, who he met on a regular basis during his studies in Heidelberg in the second half of the thirties. Author of a vigorous reinterpretation of classical German philosophy, his original methodological approach was able, through reference to authors such as Pascal, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and Heidegger, to draw new interpretative paths and new insights into the analysis and understanding of the philosophical contribution offered by authors like Fichte and especially Schelling, who he considered as a kind of ante litteram antihegelian.

With Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, with whom he had continuous and intense intellectual relationships, Pareyson can be counted among the fathers of contemporary

hermeneutics, of which he developed a personal and autonomous conception, imbued with an existentialism of ontological matrix. His posthumous *Ontologia della libertà* (1995) probably represents the main contribution brought by the post-Second World War Italian philosophy to the history of thought.

As Paolo Diego Bubbio points out in his introduction to the first English-language collection of pareysonian essays, most of Pareyson's work is still not translated into English: we only have the translation of his *Truth and Interpretation* (2013) and the above-mentioned anthology of writings *Existence, Interpretation, Freedom* (2009). For this reason, his thought is still scarcely known outside Italy, and as Bubbio observes, "an English-speaking reader might be surprised to discover that Pareyson was the principal mentor of, for example, Umberto Eco e Gianni Vattimo" (Pareyson 2009, 1). This undoubtedly constitutes a significant loss not only for the field of Dostoevsky criticism, which could only be enriched through the reflections of the Turin philosopher, but also for contemporary English-speaking philosophy.

1. Dostoevsky philosopher

One of the main common denominators of Pareyson's entire philosophical itinerary was precisely his interest in Dostoevsky's work, to which he never ceased to devote his passionate studies, analyses and comments. He used to consider Dostoevsky as a real philosopher, more than a literary man. The characters he created, according to Pareyson, can be considered as philosophers who, through their dialogues and their reflections, provide sketches of real philosophical thoughts, expressing a coherence and a lucidity that he considered, in some respects, higher than that of Nietzsche. This applies, particularly, to Ivan Karamazov, who according to Pareyson merits inclusion in any philosophy textbook and anthology (Pareyson 1993). The thought and contribution of Pareyson, in this sense, were doubly original insofar as, on the one hand, they proposed new hermeneutic paths in the interpretation of Dostoevsky's work, and on the other hand, they were effectively introduced into Turin and Italian academic philosophical communities, allowing Dostoevsky to be recognized as a real philosopher.

Pareyson's philosophy, which he could only conceive as a hermeneutic of religious experience, can be defined as a research of that divine dimension inscribed in the intrinsic nature of man, a dimension that cannot be attributed to the mundane sphere. Pareyson, moreover, was firmly convinced that "the proper character of interpretation is [...] to be *at the same time* revelatory and historical, and the nature of interpretation will not be fully comprehended if one does not understand completely the *coessentiality* of these two aspects, namely, how in interpretation the revelatory aspect is *inseparable* from the historical aspect" (Pareyson 2013, 48). Man, in Pareyson's vision, is self-relation and hetero-relation: he refers to himself, but his

proper humanity lies in his constant relation to that dimension of truth and transcendence, which is present within man but leads him outside himself; that light spreading from some external dimension and breaking into the necessary initial passivity of the human person. For these reasons, Dostoevsky's work cannot but represent for him an inexhaustible source of existential and intimately religious material.

The summa of Pareyson's studies and analyses of Dostoevsky's work was collected in the volume *Dostoevskij. Filosofia, romanzo ed esperienza religiosa* (1993), published posthumously on the basis of an outline and documents left by Pareyson at his death, which consists of a collection of essays and lessons arranged in an almost definitive form. Here, he develops his own philosophical hermeneutics of religious experience starting from Dostoevsky's characters, which results in a refutation of both the reason-destroying nihilism and the socialist utopia based on scientific positivism.

Pareyson's philosophical aim was to detect the presence of the good and evil dimensions as characterizing the whole work of Dostoevsky, whom Pareyson considered the greatest psychologist ever met. On the other hand, he was nevertheless deeply persuaded that it is not possible to find Dostoevsky's philosophical conception within his characters, since each of them represents a *different vision of the world* (*Weltanschauung*), each of which certainly represents a vision of the author, but none of which is able to exhaust it: "I pensieri dei suoi eroi non sono opinioni, ma irradiazioni di idee viventi" (Pareyson 1993, 17). For this reason, Pareyson declares since the beginning to want to grasp and develop Dostoevsky's thought not drawing it from his characters – which distinguishes him from Dostoevsky's other great interpreters – but making it flow out from the complexity of his art, that art that Berdjajev used to call *superior realism* (Pareyson 1993).

Pareyson believes that within the work of Dostoevsky two fundamental periods can be identified: the first – which would include *Poor Folks*, *The House of the Dead*, *Humiliated and Insulted* – might be characterized by a secular and "Europeanist" vision of life, by philanthropic humanitarianism, by utopian socialism, by a general optimism derived from human brotherhood. The second – *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *Demons*, *The Adolescent* and *The Brothers Karamazov* – reveals, on the contrary, a tragic conception of existence and constitutes a synthesis of profound religiosity, of a *vivid sense of the earth*, that is, of a vigorous awareness of the reality of evil and the redeeming force of pain: a human being is fully realized only when he does not attempt to replace God but recognizes his transcendence (Pareyson 1993).

This turning point, according to Pareyson, should not be sought and traced in the biography of Dostoevsky - since nothing of his life could explain in a comprehensive way the violent crisis of his thought - but rather constitutes a philosophical and spiritual evolution of the author. *The Double*, in some respects, represents in this sense a moment of significant

caesura between these two periods. Certainly, the arrest and deportation he suffered and the subsequent four years of imprisonment, as well as the death sentence imposed and spectacularly suspended at the last minute, lead him to *see life from the side of death*. His experience of life in a penal colony then assumes a revelatory character of death, of pain, of crime: Dostoevsky, writes Pareyson, tried to forget the prison, but the prison never forgot him; he tried to reconcile with life, but life never reconciled with him. In this way, the tragic became part of his existence (Pareyson 1993). His whole work, Pareyson writes, turns around the *homo absconditus* (*kriptos ànthropos*).

What, according to Pareyson, clearly emerges from Dostoevsky's work is that truth is not and could never be a rational meaning project, built up from nothing: first of all, there is a revelatory dimension of truth, which man must choose to grasp; his rationality is nothing but a reflection of that light. Dostoevsky achieves an awareness that great ideas can be monstrous lies, and that the lowest instincts can assume the most beautiful forms, which is so restful and reassuring for idealists, but constitutes an insurmountable wall. He understands and expounds that any truth, whatever it may be, is better than a lie, that real life horrors are less frightening than the ideals hypocritically imagined by universal reason and moral conscience. Thus, his work can be defined as a restless seeking of truth without any veils, of absolute sincerity, of honest and even brutal acknowledgement of the reality of evil and of the pettiness of men (Pareyson 1993).

Notes from Underground, in this respect, represent an extraordinary reclamation of the freedom and personality of the individual against the necessary order of nature or reason, the unmasking of the hypocrisy of the great ideals and a frank denunciation of reality. But it is *The Brothers Karamazov*, for the grandeur of its conception, its penetrating power, its vigor of thought and its fullness of humanity, and in spite of its disorder, incoherence and prolixity – or perhaps precisely because of these – that, according to Pareyson, is Dostoevsky's absolute masterpiece (Pareyson 1993; 1995; 2009).

2. The experience of Evil, the human suffering and God

According to Pareyson, the acknowledgement of the positive (i.e. existing, concrete) reality of evil constitutes one of the most important experiences of Dostoevsky. The greatest contribution of his work, Pareyson affirms, would be precisely to have reminded us that human beings do not necessarily pursue good, that they can even prefer destruction and chaos to the harmonious order of the universe and that they can deliberately choose to commit evil. Far from being determined by the good and predestined to progress, the world of men is rather made up of countless *underground men*, of evil, cruel, perverse and unreasonable people, and these are precisely the ones who arouse the literary, philosophical and even anthropological

interest of Dostoevsky. According to Pareyson, the analysis developed by the writer in *Notes from Underground* reveals, on the one hand, the will to claim and preserve the singularity of man; on the other ~~one~~, the wish to emphasize the reality of evil, stripping man of any idealistic cover, wanting to highlight, rather, the harsh wickedness of his desires and instincts (Pareyson 1993), as well as "the ambiguous and contradictory nature of the human being" (Pareyson 2013, 125).

The originality of Pareyson's approach and hermeneutics, in this sense, emerges clearly also in his substantial rejection of the purely pessimistic interpretations of Dostoevsky's work, then and still dominant, which assumed the experience of evil as the fundamental core of his thought. He, on the contrary, strongly supports the idea that in the author's novels, particularly those referring to the second period of his production, the eschatological aspect, in the last instance, prevails over the gnostic one: "The revelatory character of suffering lies in its mystery" (Pareyson 2009, 256). Suffering, according to Pareyson, "is the central concept of tragic thought, because it is distressing to think that evil can be defeated only by something with such a negative appearance, that only something so negative can reach the heights of positivity, that one cannot reach joy but through a *Schmerzenseweg*" (Pareyson 2009, 256).

Dostoevsky, Pareyson states, does not consider evil as an insuperable element and proclaims, rather, the final, eschatological victory of good. His conception is undoubtedly tragic, but to the extent that it arrives at a total awareness of the positive reality of evil, instead of minimizing or naturalizing it, laying bare that struggle between good and evil that constitutes the deepest essence of humans (Pareyson 1993).

Without the tragic experience of evil – which has been, after all, the belief underlying most of Pareyson's research and output and that of several of his students, such as Giuseppe Riconda, who continued to explore and pursue some of the paths he had traced – man would stay grounded in a lower degree of morality, giving up his highest possibilities. This is what Pareyson called "the essentially tragic character of the human condition" (Pareyson 2013, 125). Dostoevsky has masterfully highlighted such a co-presence of good and evil in the heart of man. The fact that he linked his reflections on evil and freedom to the problem of God as decisive for man's destiny, according to Pareyson, makes Dostoevsky a proper *philosopher of the human tragedy* (Pareyson 1993, 140).

Far from proposing a Manichaean vision of the good-evil dialectic as a cosmic affair, Dostoevsky ascribes it to the innermost being of man, defining it as the human tragedy itself. In this sense, as we said, Pareyson is firmly convinced that the fundamental experience of Dostoevsky was not that of evil, but the experience of freedom: good and evil are not necessary but are the result of our freedom. Without freedom there would be no evil, but neither good (Pareyson 1993).

Every single action of Dostoevsky's characters is somehow related to the redemptive nature of good or to the dark dimension of evil, which is considered and exposed in all its demonic power as so catastrophic and corrosive for the human soul: not only for those who undergo and suffer it, but also for those who commit and procure it. Nonetheless, according to Pareyson, the evil analyzed and described by Dostoevsky has nothing in common with the scholastic evil of Augustinian tradition, considered as a mere privation. It is not a matter of a *deficit*, as for Leibniz, but of an active and disruptive principle, of a real dynamic presence – this is the meaning of Pareyson's idea of a *positive reality of evil* – which constantly operates in reality and which cannot be ignored by whoever intends to analyze that reality. Certainly, evil can also exist as mere privation, but this, as Pareyson writes, is nothing but a derivation: it is necessary to recognize, instead, that human beings may develop a precise will to evil, whose essence transcends that of a failed act of good (Pareyson 1993; 1995).

Man, then, can also be bad and evil: his world is not harmony and rationality, but a continuous demonic presence and his conduct is ruled by pure and unlimited will, which sometimes can culminate in a sinister and deliberate desire to commit evil. Here, it is not only a matter of man's constitutive weakness or of his persistent inclination to yield to temptations, but of a force which operates in a much more disruptive way on the world of men outlined by Dostoevsky, which appears dominated by a positive will to evil.

Evil, therefore, is nothing but a product of the will and freedom of the man who consciously performs the evil action and takes pleasure in it. Consequently, continues Pareyson, the choice of evil always assumes the form of the infraction and of the rebel act, as refusal of the original condition. The malicious act of Raskol'nikov – as a titanic gesture that should raise him up over the ruling law, but that leads to an aporetic amorality – can be seen, in this sense, as a totally gratuitous act of rebellion (Pareyson 1993).

Evil, writes Pareyson, can assume the shape of rebellion and of conscious transgression of the norm, which turns into a titanic but unsuccessful exaltation of self: this is the story of Raskol'nikov, the main character in *Crime and Punishment*, who, pervaded by pride, claims an unlimited and arbitrary freedom, but this ~~one~~ can only lead him to deny himself. His total indifference and his amorality, after all, bring about the death of his soul and the inertia of his heart. Raskol'nikov's behavior, Pareyson continues, becomes a kind of aesthetic experiment, in which other people can only exist as witnesses of the experiment, and certainly not as beloved ones. Nevertheless, evil can show itself as *perversion*, which Pareyson defines as the unspeakable pleasure in profaning innocence, which holds an irresistible fascination and attraction for perverts; or as *cruelty*, which emerges when the fascination for innocence turns into hate for it.

Notes from Underground appears, in this regard, as an analysis of the solitary and dreaming conscience. In the dark depths of its characters' minds, Pareyson writes, the over-

whelming fascination of the negative acts, sublimating into an obscure desire for negation. But instead of achieving the aspired universal destruction, they only obtain the annihilation of themselves.

Furthermore, if Ivan's polemic can be summarized, but certainly not exhausted, in the famous formula, *everything is lawful*, Raskol'nikov wonders what meaning has a world in which a stingy old woman dies leaving nothing to anyone. In both cases, we are dealing with a form of nihilism imbued with atheism that rejects God in the name of the world itself: the world must be preserved as such, but from it must be purged the elements of evil, and the suffering of children, animals and other unwitting subjects. The atheism of Ivan-Dostoevsky, in this way, reveals, according to Pareyson, an evident nostalgia for religiosity:

For Dostoevsky, divine ideas are originary and profound truths, suited to be a constant inspiration for a human being and constitute the task of that individual's whole life, able to provoke a devotion to which a person dedicates oneself constructively affirming oneself in one's own coherence and vigor. Conversely, demoniacal ideas are illusions of an errant and decayed human being, artificial constructions that would more aptly be called 'ideologies' than 'ideas', scattered and scattering opinions in which the personality of the human being dissolves and is annihilated or solidifies into a stubborn and arrogant individuality. (Pareyson 2013, 118-119).

Nonetheless, Pareyson continues,

[T]he use of the term *idea* in Dostoevsky provides a vivid example of how one and the same word can serve to indicate both a negative and positive reality. In fact, for Dostoevsky, ideas can be either divine or demoniacal, that is, either they can be those 'seeds of other worlds' that 'God has sown on this earth while tending his garden', as the elder Zosima says in *The Brothers Karamazov*, or they can be ideas that take possession of human beings, similar to demons who when exiting from the possessed enter into pigs such that the whole herd throws itself into the lake and drowns there, as one reads in the passage from the Gospel that serves as the motto for *Demons* and on which Stepan Trofimovic remarks before dying. (Pareyson 2009, 119).

3. Freedom of God and freedom of Man: *The legend of the Grand Inquisitor*

In the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, Dostoevsky "represented human beings as being unable to bear the terrible weight of the freedom given to them by Christ. The point is that the freedom of Christ is like that of the demons: unlimited" (Pareyson 2009, 242). The provocation provided by the poem composed and narrated by Ivan Karamazov, according to Pareyson, concerns the idea by which even if Jesus returned to Earth, he would solve nothing, he would be judged by a Grand Inquisitor who would become humanity's greatest philanthropist, humanity's protector against suffering and against the non-imposition of good, who would

blame Christ for having not dared to build an empire on earth by imposing good by force. Christ, who left a feeble mark on the earth, by leaving the choice between good and evil to the free will of man made his worst mistake. According to Pareyson, "three elements contribute to humanity's fall: the possibility of evil hidden in God, the energy of freedom which is as powerful in God as in a human being, and a store of negativity which assumes a blasphemous attitude towards Divinity" (Pareyson 2009, 250).

What rises up against God in Ivan's profoundest depths is precisely what of the Divine dwells in man. Ivan's atheism denies God in the name of God himself. His, writes Pareyson, is not a revolt against a cruel God, but the denial and rejection of an unfair God: "It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return Him the ticket" (Dostoevsky 1952, 126).

Dostoevsky here takes sides against the easy optimism of idealism and scientific positivism that reduced evil to a dialectical element destined to be overcome, a temporary but necessary moment. On the contrary, he considers the reality of evil, pain and suffering, the reality of crime and punishment, as an unavoidable element of the human condition, such as to give it a substantially and deeply tragic character. To the idea of evil as deprivation – as in the well-known tradition of Augustine – and evil as banality – as Hannah Arendt will argue a century later – Dostoevsky, on the basis of a Kantian ethics – adds here the idea of evil as a lie, of evil which appears as good. Indeed, there is no worse evil – as Dostoevsky's literary universe seems constantly to suggest to readers – than the one which wears the mask of good and justifies itself through its illusory promise to eradicate conflict and violence.

Evil, Pareyson claims, denies everything it can destroy, and then destroys itself: Raskol'nikov does not have an evil soul as such, but shows himself to be generous and altruistic towards the weakest and most suffering, whom he would like to help and redeem. Nonetheless, he can no longer bear the suffering condition of mankind, nor the injustice that afflicts the world. Therefore, he deliberately chooses murder to prove to himself and to the rest of the world that he belongs to that restricted and upper elite of exceptional men who can act over and above the law, beyond good and evil, to restore justice and impose goodness. His crime, meticulously premeditated, should have revealed his unlimited freedom, but it proved to be a failure: he was able to kill the old usurer, but he could not transcend the law. The attempt to impose his own arbitrary and unlimited freedom can only lead to the denial of that freedom and the annihilation of himself (Pareyson 1993). Rebellion, in fact, "might like to annul divinity, but it destroys its own advocates – desperation wants to annul the meaning of life but creates the need and the desire for it" (Pareyson 2009, 256).

Ultimately, Pareyson's whole philosophy is permeated by the conviction that freedom is the main concept at the heart of the definition of the human person. His ontological personalism gathers around the two essential concepts of passivity and freedom: the *initiality* of

freedom always presents itself as a choice for or against freedom, that is, as a choice for or against being (Pareyson 1995; Riconda 2017). He believes that the main core of Dostoevsky's entire work can be identified in his conception of the experience of freedom as the deepest experience of man. Essential to the realization of good and of any possible salvation, says Pareyson, is not the experience of evil, but that ~~one~~ of freedom: primary freedom to choose between good and evil. Dostoevsky, according to Pareyson, knew how to probe this abyssal nature of freedom like no one else, posing the problem of evil in all its depth, and like no one else he developed the problem of relations between human freedom and divine freedom, rooting human autonomy itself in theonomy. This is for Pareyson the deepest meaning that can be inferred from the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*: as he states in the mentioned *Ontologia della libertà*, there is no difference between the demons' freedom and the Christian's freedom, since both are purely boundless (Pareyson 1995).

According to this perspective, which disproves the hypocritical theory according to which good action springs directly from the mere knowledge of it, it might well be, on the contrary, that man chooses quite arbitrarily to commit evil, and may even derive pleasure and relish from doing so. The world outlined and described by Dostoevsky, indeed, appears to be dominated by pure arbitrariness and by a positive will for evil. On this point, Pareyson has no doubt: the writer is convinced that evil is a result of the will and freedom of man. Human nature is ambiguous in itself, since it is "able to hide the good under the appearance of evil and to camouflage evil with the features of good, and indeed to mix good and evil in the motivations of the very same act, which is therefore neither less good than evil nor less evil than good, according to the point of view (Pareyson 2013, 125).

One of the most profound lessons that can be drawn from Dostoevsky's work, in this sense, is that bad freedom and good necessity are equally and symmetrically harmful, since both of them suppress not only what they intended to suppress, but also what they hoped to achieve or preserve. To repudiate primary freedom because it contains the very possibility of evil, Pareyson insists, is to commit the specular error of those who consider evil as inevitable and necessary in the process of achieving good.

Indeed, Pareyson insists, "the fact that Dostoevsky designates with a single word two very different realities of the spiritual and historic life is not due to carelessness or absent-mindedness; rather, it is in order to demonstrate the very ambiguous and contradictory nature of all human things, in which opposing realities are often hidden under one appearance, and anything can assume the aspect of its opposite. This is an expression of Dostoevsky's most profound conceptions regarding the dialectical nature of reality, the antinomic nature of human beings, and the human exercise of freedom" (Pareyson 2013, 119).

The assumption that there is no original act of freedom which is not intimately related to good and evil, thus, appears as the main keystone not only of Dostoevsky's work, but of

Pareyson's philosophy itself. In fact, he conceives freedom as the perpetual source capable of giving rise to ever different acts, to ever new developments: actions of redemption and penitence can be ascribed to it, but also vice versa (Pareyson 1995). It is this original freedom which confers value on man's actions: it is not possible to investigate good and evil without considering man's free choice. In this sense, the deepest meaning of the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* was for Pareyson to be found entirely in the discovery of the abyssal nature of freedom.

Regarding the possibility of eliminating error and evil by turning them into necessary dialectic moments of truth and good, we should observe, first of all, that the positive outcome that they can have is completely external to their character of falsehood and wickedness and is in no way either the result of some internal process or the coherence of a logic immanent to them. This is so much so that, in transcendentalistic conceptions, the possibility of deriving good from evil is not only completely outside human beings' abilities, but moreover is, in God, an absolutely eloquent demonstration of God's omnipotence. In the second place, we should observe that one cannot mistake as dialectic integration the fact that the human formulation of the true always contains the possibility of error and that the human practice of the good always presupposes the possibility of evil. This fact belongs to that situation of *insecuritas* [uncertainty], precariousness, and risk that comprises the essentially tragic nature of the human condition, which realizes the positive only within an act that contains the constant and effective possibility of the negative, to the point that the suppression of the possibility of evil would not be possible if not as the suppression of freedom itself, that is, as the suppression of the unique source through which human beings are capable of realizing the good and being worthy of praise. (Pareyson 2013, 124-125).

From Pareyson's point of view, the focus on the idea of freedom marks the transition from the hermeneutic thought of the ontological personalism to tragic thought: "By its own exercise, freedom attests to the originary presence that solicits freedom in the very act in which such a presence entrusts itself to freedom, and that governs freedom in the very act in which such a presence accepts becoming the object of freedom's choice" (Pareyson 2013, 43). He was perfectly aware he was philosophising on the background of a mystery: that of the positive reality of evil in its negativity and of the solidarity of men in guilt and suffering, which not by chance constitute the two cardinal principles of tragic thought. The tragedy, here, is the fact that there is no redemption except through freedom and suffering.

Dostoevsky, in this way, not only elaborates the idea of an atheistic moment of theism, but even that of an atheistic moment of divinity itself: God, in the climax of his tragic history, denies himself. In the enigmatic crucifixion itself, a dark and tragic drama of self-destruction and death is concealed (Pareyson 1993, 213). In this way, he introduces contradiction, opposition, dissent and conflict into God himself. His writing, therefore, can be seen as a constant exercise in *enantiodromy*, capable of sailing across the ocean of creature-

ly ambivalence, throwing masterful probes into the psychological depths of a wide variety of human types. This is why, Pareyson says, it is not possible to talk *about* Dostoevsky without talking *to* him: he is able to be so intrusive to his readers, involving them in his issues with such an overwhelming force, that they can only react with as much philosophical critique of it, but more of an attempt – through a sincere and engaged confrontation with the psychological and anthropological traits of his characters – to probe intrusiveness, intervening directly in his own debate.

4. Dostoevsky, Evil and Freedom in Pareyson's scholars

Since the method and the theoretical style of Pareyson, and of the *Turin School* in general¹, implied a permanent hermeneutic reference to historical reality and to present, the study and interpretation of Dostoevsky's work were not so much aimed at providing a literary and historical and understand the real, the person, the being.

The consideration of evil and suffering, not only as constituents of human experience, but as fundamental problems of philosophy, will thus influence and characterize, more or less directly, most Pareyson scholars, including for example Sergio Givone – who, in addition to being author of *Dostoevskij e la filosofia* (1984), has devoted his research to aesthetics and tragic thought –, or Francesco Tomatis – who, in many of his works, including *Ontologia del male* (1995), has conducted further exploration of most of the theoretical paths traced by Pareyson. It is however especially Giuseppe Riconda, whom his pupil Gianluca Cuozzo not by chance describes as *the fifth Karamazov brother* (Riconda 2017, 11), who has developed with great depth the concept of evil and good being the result of a free and voluntary choice, and made these issues the focus of his entire philosophy: the ambiguity of the universe, with its perennial coexistence of good and evil, constantly requires us to make a choice, but since there is no guarantee that good will be the victor, this choice can only take the form of the Pascalian bet.

Riconda's philosophy can in fact be defined as an attempt to find a convergence between ontologism, existentialism, and non-reductionist empiricism, and as a tenacious and rigorous theoretical battle against nihilistic and atheistic relativism and against every degeneration of rationalism – including metaphysical rationalism – which, by asserting the primacy of philosophy over religion and postulating the absolute negativity of the infinite, ends up betraying God and denying all transcendence; in other words, a battle for the de-

¹ The so-called *Turin School* refers to that particular branch of Italian philosophy which, begun by Augusto Guzzo and followed by Luigi Pareyson and Giuseppe Riconda, developed at Turin University after the Second World War.

fence of philosophy as a safeguard of this metaphysical dimension of man (Riconda 2017; 2013). In fact, if metaphysical rationalism necessarily leads to atheism, to the abolition of all transcendence and all openness to the Other, the reassuring and air-conditioned nihilism of opulent society, by annihilating all values – except, of course, economic ones – and scotomizing the sense of tragic, ends up removing that positive reality of evil and human suffering, reduced today to live performance, a rhetorical tool or a literary genre. On the contrary, according to Riconda, interpreter of Kierkegaard and reader of Dostoevsky, the problem of evil is the essential problem not only of philosophy, but of the whole of human history, whose chronography is that of an eternal struggle between good and evil. Only through the vivid experience of evil and tragedy – only to those whom James defines as twice-born – is it possible to transcend the finite and to discern in the Totally Other an eschatological horizon of salvation (Riconda 2017).

Moreover, if positivistic and idealistic philosophies, including Marxism, have failed also and above all by having considered evil as a constitutive and historically necessary moment for the progressive affirmation of an earthly good, the current instrumental rationalism (or *instrumentalism*) can be blamed, according to Riconda, for its naturalization of evil and for its implication in man's destiny, in his innermost nature. The author warns that enshrining the idea that the seeds of evil dwell in human nature rather than in human will implies that this nature must somehow be contained, smoothed out and, if necessary, repressed, something that technocratic totalitarianism does not fail to do (Riconda 2017; 2013).

The myth of progress that is the founding archetype of our technocratic society – which presents itself as the earthly and worldly realization of the heavenly utopia –, actually conceals the drama of the triumph of a nihilistic and bioclastic acosmism: that ~~one~~ of the Grand Inquisitor, who diabolically wishes to deny freedom, while Christ comes to reawaken and exalt it. Riconda, in these respects, considers the Inquisitor as an *ante litteram* exponent of today's nihilism: after all, he argues that man must accept his own finiteness by renouncing any idea of transcendence, whereas Christ's anthropology is an anthropology of engagement and transcendence. In this sense, according to Pareyson's pupil, the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* represents a true antinichilist manifesto (Riconda 2017, 119-120).

If God is dead, thundered Ivan Karamazov, frightened by the outcomes of his theodicy, then "everything is lawful" (Dostoevsky 1952, 136) although on the other side, as Riconda says, it is not possible to achieve good without fighting evil, both real and potential, maintaining that antinomy, typical of ontological personalism, between being and sin; an antinomy that can only be resolved within an eschatological horizon. Riconda, as well as Pareyson, is firmly persuaded that the eschaton is not a mere form of restoration of good through the repression of existing evil, but rather concerns the suppression of the possibility

of evil itself. It is pure triumph of the good. As stated by Pareyson, "human nature can even turn not only good into evil, thus degrading even the originally authentic and generous impulses, but also evil into good, as when the overwhelming power of conversion reveals and announces itself right in the soul of the most obstinate sinner, or as when, speaking in Barth's terms, one finds ecstasy in the trivial" (Pareyson 2013, 125).

5. Conclusion

Far from having exhausted the themes, the arguments and the complexity of Luigi Pareyson's philosophical reading of Dostoevsky's work, or its influence on the Turin-based theoretical tradition he started, this short essay will hopefully have at least been able to introduce his thought to a wider audience and perhaps stimulate a deeper examination of his writings and of the problem, still largely disregarded, of evil as the fundamental question of philosophy.

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