

Rosmini put to the Phenomenology Test. And vice versa.

A persistent tension between the profession of perfection and the temptation of the absolute pervades a large part of modern and contemporary thought. A brief reference may prove illustrative. In Descartes, the perception of the crisis of the traditional orders of knowing provokes the systematic exercise of doubt, which, if radicalised, provides the 'ego' with the incontrovertible reality of its thinking, without, however, deriving for this reason only, the guarantee that such thinking is conducted according to the truth. To the French philosopher, who arrived thus far, it is nevertheless not adequate that the ego may be able to monitor its own fallibility – a witness to the limit –, relying on the self-correction resources it has at its disposal. On the contrary, he finds it necessary, as ego of the mind, to know with absolute certainty what is beyond the boundary that separates it from the abyss of utter falsehood; and therefore to discover amongst his own thoughts as a finished ego, the “evident” proof of the presence in him, just as in nature, of the order of reasoning of a perfect and truthful God. To the point that even the capacity for self-emendation may appear, at last, as facultas a Deo tributa (Meditatio VI, ed. Adam-Tannery VII, 101). Natural perfection is not removed, but, in as far as it is finiteness, it is most certainly weakened thanks to the restoration of the continuum of rationality that now, with reassuring certainty, firmly consolidates nature and God: «[P]er naturam enim, generaliter spectatam, nihil nunc aliud quam vel Deum ipsum vel rerum creaturarum coordinationem a Deo institutam intelligo». We seem to already be listening to Spinoza, but it still Descartes. Who, moreover, precisely for having credited the assumption of the knowability

of the infinite, will purposely open up the way to great variations around the motif of the metaphysical ascension of the finite, which will indeed be put forward not only by Spinoza, but also by Malebranche and Leibniz. In Kant, the consummation of trust in the transcendent guarantees of truth commits reason to the task of circumscribing one's possibilities according to one's limitations. But, as noted, not even the self-critical option is able to free the transcendental subject from the metaphysical bewilderment of the un-conditioned, even if reabsorbed, with a regulatory value or, as postulated, in the economy of reason itself. In Hegel, philosophy comes back, in no uncertain terms, to be a slave to the need to overcome the divide that threatens to leave the finite deprived of redemption in the Absolute, now thought of as a subject, or rather, as a spirit; and hence the gap, still alive in Descartes, between the finite and infinite spirit, is posed by Hegel only so that thought may recognise it as already removed in its truth: «It is therefore an empty expression – he in fact writes – that stated by he who says: there are finite spirits. The spirit as a spirit is not finite, it has finitude within itself, but only as something to overcome and be overcome» (Enzykl. 1830, ed. 1840-45, III, § 386, Zusatz, tr. Bosi). This – explains Hegel – because in the dimension of the spirit, «the very fact that we know that there is a limit, is proof of the fact that we are already beyond that: it is proof of our own infinity» (ibid.). With a similar argument, but with reversed intention, in other words, anti-metaphysical, the theme returns almost a century later in Wittgenstein's Tractatus: «The book – we read in the Preface – aims, therefore, to trace a limit to thought, or, rather – not to thought itself, but to the expression of thoughts: Since, in order to draw a limit to thought, we should be able to contemplate both sides of this limit (we should, therefore, be able to think that which cannot be thought). The limit cannot, therefore, be traced but in language, and that which is beyond the limit will be nothing but nonsense» (tr. Conte). The work, therefore, aims to mark from within the limits of what is sensibly left to say and think: and yet, in meantime, in so doing, it clearly represents what is expressible, and does not refrain from explaining the inexpressible (cf. Tractatus, 4.115), that hereafter of the world in which the sense of the world, if there is such a thing, has to be ineffably hosted (ibid., 6.41).

In these words, and in others that could easily sit side-by-side, so a formal theme returns insistently. On the one hand, something (the Ego, the created monad, the transcendental reason, the finite spirit, the language) is observed, starting from the limit that exposes it as an originally self-referenced instance. On the other hand, the limit, once it has become thematic, refers beyond itself, and, in doing so, now implies the possibility (far less contemplated) that beyond the finite there is only more finite all over again or, if anything, the boundless world;

or the other possibility (historically more practised), that, furthermore, there is an Absolute or an Otherness capable of emancipating the finite from the need to insist on its own finitude.

This speculative issue, we can disclose, is maybe at the core of the contributions that the reader will find collected together in the Focus column of the present issue of Rosmini Studies. They constitute the outcome of the second phase of the research project on Rosmini and phenomenology launched in 2015 by the “Antonio Rosmini” Study and Research Centre, established at the Department of Humanities and Philosophy of Trento University.

As a matter of fact, the project has been developing over a longer period. Back in 2012, a *Lectio magistralis* was published by Roberta De Monticelli, presented in Rovereto on behalf of the Centre and was built around the comparison between Husserl and Scheler on one side, and Rosmini on the other, on the subject of personality, conceptually articulated by the author as ‘personhood,’ or being a person by reason of the sharing of certain universal traits, and ‘personality,’ or being this person because of one’s individual singularity and unrepeatability.¹ In 2014, as evidence of the Centre’s interests in comparing recent developments in phenomenology, Jean-Luc Marion was invited to hold three lectures at Rovereto on God and the ambivalence of being, Donation and hermeneutics and The dispensing donation of the world, now published as a book,² followed by a similar initiative that, in 2015, saw the involvement of Emmanuel Falque.³ Then finally, new ideas of a more historic nature, emerged from Fulvio De Giorgi who reconstructed, with great patience and precision, the matter of Rosminianism in Italy in the early nineteenth hundreds, in an article which was then published in RS, adding a further proposal to select «the most proper collocation of Rosmini [...] (after Bolzano and before Brentano) to the origins of the phenomenological movement in its various forms».⁴

In short, the idea of opening a space for investigation in which to bring together and compare Rosminian thoughts and the phenomenological tradition began to take shape. It only

¹ R. DE MONTICELLI, *Personhood e Personality. I due volti dell’idea di persona*, in M. NICOLETTI – F. GHIA (eds.), «Conservare l’intelligenza». *Lezioni Rosminiane*, Trento University, Trento 2012.

² Cf. J.L. MARION – É. TARDIVEL, *Fenomenologia del dono*, edited by C. BRENTARI, Morcelliana, Brescia 2018.

³ Cf. E. FALQUE, *Passare il Rubicone. Alle frontiere della filosofia e della teologia*, preface by C. CANULLO, Morcelliana, Brescia 2017.

⁴ F. DE GIORGI, *Rosmini e il rosminianismo nel primo Novecento. Tra rosminiani e rosministi*, «Rosmini Studies», III 2016, pp. 111-139, see p. 139.

remained to formalise it and give it plausible articulation. Key to this was the editorial of Carla Canullo who, introducing the 3rd issue of RS (2016) provides the basic indications of the Rosmini and phenomenology project, which, as the reader will know, provides the first results. As can be verified, the essays published at that time only partially cover the wide range of issues that were programmatically profiled back then. Hence the need, as we have said, to follow on with a second phase of elaboration that, on the one hand, allowed for the exploration of reasons for comparison not yet investigated; on the other, however, it continued with the intention of not limiting the investigation to the search for potential and yet fruitful assonance, but to test the conditions, so that, more radically, phenomenology was put to the Rosmini test, just as Rosmini was put to the phenomenology test. It would be more correct to say the various Rosminis and the various phenomenologies.

As a whole, in fact, the essays contained in this new issue – emerging mainly from the talks given at the conference on Rosmini and phenomenology which took place in Rovereto in May 2017 – present, primarily, a significant increase in the number of authors oriented towards phenomenology, both in the German area (Husserl, obviously, but also Scheler and Stein), and even more so in the French area (Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur, Marion, Henry, Chrétien, Falque, Barbaras). Secondly, they register a noteworthy thematic broadening: from the description of the forms of experience, with particular reference here to the corporeal openness to the world and to the interweaving of will and passivity; to the constitution of man as a moral subject, both as a person and also in his intersubjective bonds; to the theme of being, and, hence, to the possible re-opening of the God question, in a manner not purely ontotheological. And the impression is that, conversely, a more articulated consideration of the phenomenological galaxy, together with the various thematic emphases that derive from it, has not only contributed to a more lively reconstruction, sometimes in a critical sense, of Rosmini's thinking, but has also made it possible, with all due attention, to make a more analytical consideration of the links in the strictly historical sense, between Rosminianism and the Brentanian-Husserlian matrix tradition, including mutual ancestry. Judgment is, of course, up to the reader on the hermeneutical outcomes of a juxtaposition between two lines of thought, at first sight not free from risk; risks towards which, it must be said, an attitude of wise caution has always been adopted, as we can see, on the part of the interpreters.

As we draw to a conclusion, for this reason too, we can perhaps grant a more problematic starting point for reflection, which, as already mentioned, is linked to the considerations made at the beginning. In the essays presented here, one cannot fail to be struck by the fact that the comparison between Rosmini and phenomenology is predominantly carried out with reference

to the concerns raised within that which, according to Janicaud, is normally labelled as the “tournant théologique” of French phenomenology; but also evoking positions taken previously by Scheler and Stern, in which the need to open the phenomenological attitude towards the exploration of the religious was clearly evident, in line, moreover, as we know, with similar anxieties which did not fail to torment the mind of Husserl himself. One could then wonder about the reason for such an outcome and ask oneself if this was the inevitable consequence of the simple fact of having decided to draw a parallel between phenomenology and a line of thought such as that of Rosmini. Or, if this does not lead to a more subterranean reason, that the contributions presented here, whether they wish to or not, invite us to think. That is, to a deeper joint belonging, beyond the obvious distances, and of Rosmini and of many of the phenomenologists in question, (Husserl included), marked by the need to react to the long and wholly modern shadow of the subject as a self-centred principle of determination and conferment of meaning to the indeterminate otherness that, with that same movement, that principle confines outside of itself. Two opposing versions of solipsism stand out against this backdrop: that of the subject who, in the dissension between sense and non-sense, advances self-sufficiency claims; and that of the subject, who experiences the loneliness of insignificance when faced with putting those same claims in check. In both cases, for opposite, yet recurring reasons, it is not surprising to see the question of others and the question of the Other re-emerge together. The philosophies of the subject, philosophies of the need for certain answers to the instance of meaning, are in fact struggling to recognise a plurality that is given as irreducible. So much so that, where this happens, the very logic of the subject often leads to the search for super-subjective sources of composition of meaning. In the tension between immanence and transcendence, horizontal and vertical, which is thus established, attention then converges not by accident into configurations that, even at the price of the paradox, allow one to speak of transcendence in immanence. This is, according to Rosmini, the function assigned to the idea of being (objective and subjective genitive!) as the torsion point of ideology in theosophy. This is often, in the phenomenological tradition, the one that now especially seeks leave from the philosophical primacy of the question of being, the function assigned to the experiences of passivity (Ricoeur) as points of irruption of otherness and the Other – in the dynamics of self-declaration of the Ego.

If this is true, the interest encountered towards the experiences of passivity in Rosmini, and that for the reopening of the theological discourse in phenomenology, testified in various ways by the essays collected here, can be said to draw, in a way that at this point is by no means casual, a chiasm that finds its point of intersection in the modern question of meaning.

Does this not indicate, at least in the terms so posed, a certain solidarity despite everything enduring within the metaphysics of subjectivity? And thus, the task of shedding light on this looming question must be left to other, future investigations.

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