Luigi Pareyson's *evolution* can be divided into three stages, as he himself indicated in the *Introduction* to the fourth edition of *Esistenza e persona* [Existence and person]. First of all, he develops a “personalistic existentialism” (or “ontological personalism”): after coming into contact with dialectical theology and German existentialism, he immediately becomes one of its first proponents in Italy, in a climate dominated by a rethinking of Hegelian philosophy on the part of Croce and Gentile's idealism. The turn to existentialism, therefore, becomes a quest for an alternative philosophical, religious, and historiographic model to Hegel and to the dissolution of his system. In fact, Pareyson interprets contemporary philosophy in terms of “the dissolution of Hegelianism”. Pareyson conceives of existence as an “ontological relation”, or the coincidence of self-relation and hetero-relation: to be in relation with the self means to be in relation with the Being, with transcendence, with God. According to Karl Barth, God is the irrelative that forms an impossible and paradoxical relationship with man: in this first phase of his thought, however, Pareyson wants to preserve an ontologically and morally positive concept of God and the person, in opposition to Karl Barth and the German philosophy of existence. German existentialism sees man as negative and sinful (thus positing itself as a secularization of protestant theology); conversely, Pareyson argues that man is deficient, and God is the irrelative that relativizes itself and gives itself to man, not by invalidating him but by securing him, compensating for his deficiency and allowing him to be a “person”. In this stage of Pareyson’s thought, his Christian spiritualism clashes with the strong influence of dialectical and Protestant theology; indeed, he is very careful to “spare” the person from a conceptualization that he sees as invalidating and undermining.

Secondly, Pareyson develops a theory of hermeneutics that culminates in an “ontology of the inexhaustible”, developed in critical contact with the philosophy of Schelling and Heidegger: the being is conceived as an inexhaustible source, an infinite wellspring of meaning, which (even in its irrelativity and ontological difference) relativizes itself by entrusting itself to the work of art, to the artist, or to the interpreter as infinitely interpretable. The truth is unobjectifiable and irrelative, but it is not ineffable; it can be grasped and it gives itself to the interpreter, who nonetheless cannot possess it like an object. The person can choose to reject the being and deny the ontological relationship by expressing and absolutizing the self and its history, or it can choose to interpret the being and bear witness to the ontological relationship. The former is “expressive thought”, which according to Pareyson should be stripped of its mythical qualities to discover its true origin and hidden meaning; the latter is “revealing thought”, which expresses and reveals the person and the truth simultaneously and thus can only be infinitely interpreted.

In the third and last phase of his thought, again in contact with Barth, Schelling, and Heidegger, Pareyson develops the “ontology of freedom”, or a “tragic thought” which translates as a “philosophical rethinking of Christianity”: according to Pareyson, philosophy can and must rethink the problem of freedom and evil only by interpreting the myth. As far as it keeps looking inward, philosophy cannot overcome the problem of the relationship between freedom and necessity; and, if it tackles the problem of evil, it minimizes it as a facade, as unreality, and as dialectically necessary for the success of the good. Evil, however, is a negatively positive reality, a revolt against God and a profanation of the being. Only in religious myth do evil and freedom manifest themselves in their reality and inseparability, with no camouflage or conceptual distortion. Therefore, the inexhaustible being of the second phase gives way to God, understood as dialectically ambiguous and absolute freedom, as the “reality of chosen good and possibility of rejected evil” (hence the famous “Discorso Temerario" [Temerarious Discourse] on the “evil in God”). God, as the eternal and original freedom, is to be conceived as "beginning and choice”: He had an "atemporal beginning”, that is, He could begin only by choosing its very existence instead of the possibility of nothingness and non-existence, by choosing good instead of evil, which lies within Him as an eternally rejected possibility. The alternative between good and evil does not predate nor does it follow God: it coincides with Him, who is the resolved choice. It is precisely toward the possibility of evil rejected by God that man turns to; therefore, man is not the creator, but the author of evil, as he translates the rejected, never actualized evil into a chosen and actualized reality.

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