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Beyond the loneliness of the I

Abstract by Clemente Sparaco

In the years immediately after the First World War, two works, *The Pneumatologische Fragmente* by F. Ebner and *The Star of Redemption* by F. Rosenzweig, both published in 1921, outlined a new thought: the *philosophy of dialogue*.

The philosophy of dialogue develops in the theoretical context of the crisis of the reason and the Nietzschean destructuring of the *cogito*. The man knows his intimate suffering, which concerns the awareness that he has of himself. You can't have naive certainties anymore after the failure of history and the history of the failure of the various ideal visions. However, the difference between the dialogists and Nietzsche is the direct experience of the end of a world. Nietzsche had predicted that, but the dialogists experienced it. According to them, the tragical events of the war mark the exit from the world of certainties, from all-embracing learnings, from crucial ideology. Rosenzweig writes that “*one thousand real deaths of thousands of real dead*”, which are “*one thousand real nothing*” and not a unique abstract nothing, take the place of the universal nothing.

In the light of the factuality, the nothing is more than its idea, but an intense question of sense comes out in front of *these thousands of real nothings*. Ebner writes that for the dialogists the question of sense already contains an answer which can't be found in an idea or system, but rather in a direction towards the *You*. The thought of the I, of which idealism is the greatest expression, takes into consideration the idea of *I* that refers to itself; in this way the I has thought that it would find its own sufficiency and absoluteness in itself. It has stopped at the *I* and its loneliness. Nihilism has tested its limit and has abandoned it without going any further.

Ebner, on the contrary, means to go *beyond the loneliness of the I*.

What he rejects from the beginning is that the *I* isn't autarkic and it can't become so. Its non-self-sufficiency is structural. The statement *I am* isn't and can't be understood as a self-assertiveness. In fact, the comparison with the existence shows that the subject asserts himself in a derived way. *I am*, not in an absolute way, but because *I am given to myself*. The original meaning of the statement *I am* has got a value of expression which goes beyond the I *in direction of the You*. It is an

invocation and cry for help. The I is constitutively directed and it is said in the presence of a You, in front of a You. The forgetfulness of that is the common trait of the western thought. Therefore, its isn't a story of oblivion, like for Heidegger, but that of the *You*. The *You* is the absent of modernity!

The core of this story of oblivion is identifiable with the fact that the modern thought concentrates on the centrality of the I. The I has become basic both under the theoretical aspect and the ethic one. Simultaneously, it has got lost the real features linked to the *first person* and it has been set as absolute and impersonal. It has just been referred to the *first person*. Its extreme consequence is the intolerance of the reason, which has stood out both in the idealistic system, where the particular has been absorbed in the universal and in the scientific determinism.

According to Ebner this rediscovery of the You is equivalent to repropose the *spiritual*. He writes: “*The spiritual in the man, the I, to live need the relationship with the You*” but “*the real You of the I in the man*” is only God. Therefore, the man is basically a *seeker after God*.

In regard to God, he can't be mistaken for an idea or an abstract identity at all. God can't be conveyed in *third person*, because he is a *You*, and not a *He*. Consequently, “*God isn't, but You are*”.

In this connection we also find an astonishing agreement with Rosenzweig, according to whom the religious constituent abandons its classical, “*confessional*” role, in order to assume a central or even an ontological role. It is considered as *connective tissue of the being*, which coincides with the deep beats of life. In the name of that Rosenzweig organizes his proposal of a *strong truth* and he dares to indicate a religious exit from the irreversible crisis of modernity.

Ebner doesn't enunciate the spiritual constituent only in abstract terms, but he also strives to verify it *phenomenologically*, in its giving itself, in its *fulfilling itself* in that *spiritual facts* that, not by chance, we already find in the title of the work (“*The Word and The Spiritual Facts. Pneumatological Fragments*”). He undoubtedly considers the risk that the spiritual constituent can vanish into pithiness or sentimentality without pragmatism. So he finds *the manifestation* of the relationship of the I with God *in the word and in love*. He writes: “*The I and the You – that is the man and God – these facts of the spiritual life find their «objective» existence in the «word», and in love the «subjective one»*”. *Word and love “go together”*. They both clear the mind from impediments. Both of them take beyond the loneliness of the I. In fact there is complementarity between them, because what is “*objectively-given-in the-word*”, receives its “*subjective» subsistence in love*”. The word establishes a medium, a relationship which joins man and God and the man to another man. Love makes the word true. It gives depth to the word, because the word, freed from each possible misunderstanding, is love. Its last meaning is the Word-Logos who “*was with God in the beginning and he was God*” and that “*he became flesh and he lived among us*”, so

John writes in the Prologo of his Gospel.

Love is the reason of God and the meaning of everything. It fulfils the deepest form of communication in full respect for the real man, in this way it overcomes the distance that separates from another man, by expanding the I beyond his own closed world. By means of love the other becomes our neighbour, who calls us to go out of our *selfishness*, to get over the barriers of the incommunicability and the mistrust and to break the captivity of the individuality.

Rosenzweig similarly identifies the word with love, as basic elements of the revelation and redemption. With the revelation God makes the man his You, giving him the speech as a present and making him person, or *individual not immersed in the species*. Thanks to redemption love expands and it involves and includes every man and every being. Finally love indicates "*the eternal victory over death*".

The "*fear for death*" is what moves philosophy. It expects to defeat death with the knowledge, but it isn't able, since the man is destined "*to remain in this fear*" until he lives in this world. In fact, everything happens under the mark of death, like every new birth, which increase "*the number of what has to die*". Nevertheless death has got neither the last word nor it is the last reality. In fact, "*love declares war*" on death. And if death is "*the keystone of the dark volute of the creation*", love is "*the basic stone of the bright dwelling of Revelation*". "*The creation, which death completes and concludes, can't stand up to love and it has to surrender to love every second and, therefore, in the end, even in the fullness of time, forever*".

Ebner, as Christian, argues that all this has already fulfilled in Christ. On the cross the Kenosis of God, his implication in the world, reached its climax. It doesn't only indicate the assumption of suffering and death from God in the person of the Son, but it also and exactly indicates the victory of love over death, the enthronement of such a love, which managed to defeat death.