

Michał Drożdż

"Sulla libertà Prospettive di teologia trinitaria tra neuroscienze e filosofia", Leonardo Paris, Roma [b.r.] : [recenzja]

Ecumeny and Law 2, 327-334

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Leonardo Paris: *Sulla libertà*
Prospettive di teologia trinitaria tra neuroscienze e filosofia
Città Nuova. Roma, 401 pp.

The contemporary cultural context of discussing human freedom is both broad and intricate. There are many methodological ways of researching this phenomenon, starting from anthropological studies, through analysis of the social sciences, ending with, sometimes awkward, political presentations concerning freedom or the lack thereof. That is because freedom is one the greatest gifts of God to human being. Without it we cannot speak either of a real and full human development, or a personal dignity, valid sacramental marriage, social development, or true human excellence and improvement of society, etc.

The author of the discussed extensive monograph which has won numerous academic and media prizes — Leonardo Paris, begins his analyses with the definition of human freedom and the idea of what “it ought to be” according to the theological anthropology (namely the trinitarian one). Much attention is being paid to the meaning of “the Other” in human life. The Other is, in the first place, God himself — God of the Revelation. Then, there is “the other,” meaning every person “created in the image and likeness of God.” This thought, as the author himself explains, is “confronted with a reflection of neurological sciences, especially of C.M. Edelman and A. Lurija and the message of freedom by H. Jonas and L. Pareyson” (pp. 16—17). But all this can be done in the perspective of the anthropological assumptions elaborated primarily by Hans Urs von Balthasar and E. Jungel (p. 1).

Analysing the content of *Sulla libertà...*, we can see that the author understands human freedom as one of the greatest gifts of God. It is something inherent to the human dignity and, even though the author

does not state it explicitly, throughout his entire work he remains faithful to the personalism's assumptions in speaking of the mindfulness and human freedom. For this purpose he needs the aforementioned trinitarian perspective that is theological at the same time. It is in this perspective in which he assesses very different "proposals" from the point of view of philosophical ethics and even some achievements in medicine, particularly neurology.

The expected research

In the Introduction, the author speaks quite extensively of freedom in a monistically neurological understanding of the idea ("Confronto at Le neuroscienze"). While describing a materialistic understanding of reality in the 19th century, also according to the Soviet propaganda, he shows reductionist treatment of human life (p. 17). The second part is entitled "Philosophical Mediation" (pp. 18ff.). The author sketches in it most of all the input of two philosophers to understanding of responsibility for life, namely H. Jonas and his lecture on "the philosophy of naturalised freedom" (p. 18). In this philosophical part the author broadens the horizon of thinking by the proposals of reflection on "philosophical perspective on human and Divine freedom" as understood by L. Pareyson. He needs all of this to introduce us to, as he says, "*taxis* of goodness," toward which human freedom directs us.

Thoughts of Eberhard Jungel are presented by the author to explain the perspective of "freedom in the theological sense." In this part of the lecture, the author brings us closer to excellent reflections of Balthasar (pp. 21ff.). The author deplores the fact that a significant part of the secularised philosophy does not reach the theological anthropology. "Naturalization of human freedom" is one of the worst effects of the civilisation of death. However "freedom is to be found where there are various possibilities of human actions, in which an individual may fulfill his/her vocation as an individual and when the criterion of freedom is not limited only to individual human resolutions" (p. 25). It is also about a phenomenon manifesting itself in the fact that nowadays a man is "epistemologically confused" so deeply that it distorts his own understanding of identity. And if it so, it deeply affects understanding of not only one's own humanity, but also of family and marriage. This is for the philosophy of law of a fundamental importance.

“The map of the neurological world”

The above is the title of the first chapter of the reviewed monograph. Actually, it is a map of what the author describes as *neuroscienze*. His starting point is a short presentation of “questions concerning consciousness” as understood by S. Benzoni, S. Coppola and classical lecture by H. Garnier (pp. 29ff.). The author presents views of biologists and neurologists in an interesting way stating that we live in the times of bioprophets. In the first part the author confronts us with the fact that today “talking about freedom is both easy and difficult” (pp. 30ff.). This refers to the *Tractatus* by Wittgenstein, according to whom “what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.” He follows, however, the reasoning of Chalmers, who distinguishes between “problems that are easy and hard to clarify” (p. 31). With this in view, he develops a theme according to which “especially today, we are asked to resolve issues of not only perception of reality, but an attempt to its final resolution” (pp. 31ff.).

While sketching “the neurological map” of perceiving reality the author assumes that a human brain has been tested to the satisfaction. A person needs it to discover his/her own awareness. In a long analysis he dwells upon the issues of functioning of the human brain. However, he concludes after Baars that “awareness of human identity, although dependent on the brain, however, transgresses the understanding of humanity as the whole” (p. 33).

The author presents in the first chapter “phenomenic awareness” (F) and “awareness of access” (A) to reality. The both types of awareness may co-form “co-awareness” with other people. For the author it is the “phenomenological awareness” that is important. It is widely presented by neurological sciences. “In our experience, writes the author, we perceive colours, sounds, sensations, feelings and emotions, we are experiencing fatigue and boredom. All this can be scientifically and neurologically explained. These are the mechanisms involved in origination of our problems (‘easy problem’). We know how our eyes, optic nerves and various cerebral fields work allowing us to see properly. The same applies to sounds, smells, experiencing pain, temperature, etc. We know how endocrines work, and based on the analysis of brain, we are able to talk broadly about transfer of humour, feeling hunger, sexual excitement, etc. All of this, however, in spite of being dependent on good functioning of human brain, opens us, as J.R. Searle claims, to a true ‘mystery of humanity’” (pp. 34—35). In this way the neurological map takes us into the world of deeper anthropological needs.

In the third part of “the neurological map,” Paris, the author of the reviewed monograph, presents us with “three issue orders” (pp. 44ff.). The first order is a criticism of reductionist neurological approaches of a materialistic kind. This is a fierce criticism of narrowing neurology to extremely “physical” approaches. Using the example of pain, the author claims that a person cannot be reduced solely to the sphere of a physical world. He believes, analysing “human nature” (cf. Grassi and A. Aguti — *Neuroscienze e filosofia a confronto*), that a person cannot be perceived in a monistic, or even dual, way. A man should be perceived holistically. The statement is very close to what H. Jonas says in his *Organismo e libertà. Verso una biologia filosofica* (p. 45). Therefore, the author concludes that the situation today is so that to a large extent in mass culture the dominant approaches are of a monistic and materialistic kind. Following “liberal naturalism,” an individual claims that the said approaches are sufficient for a human. However, a person — from the ontological point of view — is a mystery. What is more, one needs the Revelation, because he/she is not able to explain what the one’s identity, vocation, or the ultimate goal of life are.

In the introductory chapter the author presents what he describes as “the archipelago of neurological problems” (pp. 49ff.). He claims that everything evolves around several variations of human consciousness, starting with the “awareness of banalities,” “awareness of recollecting the past,” to “sufficient knowledge of reasons of facts” (pp. 49ff.). All this leads the author to the conclusion that a person goes beyond crude determinism of neurological conditions (pp. 52ff.). He or she is a free person.

Around the “Artificial Intelligence”

It is not without a cultural significance that we are surrounded by “cyberspace.” The world of Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes in a sense, as the author puts it, a part of a human nature (pp. 56ff.). Some 50 years ago one was happy to own a calculator. Today, the cyberspace to a large extent decides upon human cognitive abilities and — more often than not — restricting human freedom. Artificial Intelligence is the domain of knowledge comprising “fuzzy logic,” “speed of neural calculation,” “neural networks,” “artificial life” and robotics. Artificial Intelligence is also a section of computer science dealing with intelligence, that is creation of models of intelligent behaviour and computer programs simulating the said behaviour. It can also be defined as a section of computer

science dealing with solving problems that are not effectively presentable in a form of algorithms. The term itself was invented by John MacCarthy. Artificial Intelligence has two basic meanings. First, it is a hypothetical intelligence implemented in engineering (not natural) process. In the second sense, it is a name of a technology and domain of scientific research on the border of neurology, psychology, and lately cognitivism as well as systematics understood philosophically. The main task of Artificial Intelligence in the second sense is to construct machines and computer programs that are able to execute certain functions of mind and human senses that do not follow simple numeric orders. It is primarily visible in the speed of games. All of this is of fundamental importance not only for personal culture of a man today, for his morality, but also for family life. One can say that today human lives in a double reality: the actual and the virtual one

To complete our critical analysis it would be sensible to remind that the forerunner of virtual reality is Myron Krueger, American scientist and artist, the author of works related to creation of artistic installations initiated at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research and installations, implemented in real spaces, paved the way for studies in virtual reality (VR). The creator of the concept is Jaron Lanier, a futurist and a computer scientist who has been working at Columbia University in New York for several years. Computer technologies are applied to create three-dimensional effects, interactive images (world), in which objects seem to be spatially present. This world may be re-created in such a true-to-life manner by computer hardware and software that it will seem real. All this, as Leonardo Paris claims, contributes to the fact that “things that are actual mix with illusionary ones” (p. 57). The digital world includes not only the Net. At first, it expanded to mobile phone space, and then to environment of the so-called smartphones and tablets. Communication, which takes place in this ever growing digital space, went far beyond the three-part “broadcaster — message — receiver” pattern. Now, in the Internet age — each receiver may become a broadcaster. Thanks to the Internet one or many participants of the communication act can communicate with a large group of the Net users. In the case of religious and family communication, two additional levels are taken into account: horizontal, which is interpersonal one, and vertical, which is Divine-human one.

Let us be remembered that the term “communication” is derived from Latin *communio*. As a verb, it means ‘to strengthen, to enhance, to reinforce’, and as a noun, it means ‘a community, unity, connectivity’. The adjective *communis* means ‘common, universal, public’, and thus *communico*: ‘to make something common, to share in something, to co-operate’ (especially in this last sense it is present and used by the Church Fathers)

and *communicatio* together with *communitas*, which is a ‘mutual exchange of something, including conversation, community’, ‘communing’, as well as participation in the life of the Church.

Leonardo Paris concludes the urgent need to draw attention to “rationality of actions.” He believes that in mass culture what dominates is *psicologia del senso comune* (PSC), according to which “the whole human reality is centred around what is unconscious and conscious momentarily.” It looks as if there is no longer good and evil, truth and falsehood, freedom and captivity (pp. 59ff.). This comment, however, is not developed further by Leonardo Paris, which is a pity.

The body and emotions

The first philosophical-neurological chapter is concluded by Leonardo Paris by presentation of an issue of “the body and emotions.” He believes that today’s science, dominated by a naturalistic approach (i.e. materialistic *neuroscienze*) seems to reduce all human experience, not only emotions, to bodily functions. Speaking of interrelations between awareness, freedom and cerebral operations, Paris maintains that brain, as biological and organic *datum* is necessary for earthly life. “The brain is always something that is fundamental to the functioning of corporeality, it is *nucleum* of corporeality, but it does not determine fully a personal identity” (p. 61).

It is unfortunate that in this chapter the author does not develop the thread according to which a brain is something more than merely a habitat of emotions. It has to be said critically that in today’s culture, instead of speaking of awareness and freedom also in the ethical dimension, most psychologists reduce human behaviour to functioning of emotions. Emotions are to express the whole humanity of a given person.

It is true that emotions are important in human life, but the reality of a person is much richer. This fact is shown by Leonardo Paris in the subsequent chapters of his monograph. In the second chapter he presents “freedom in the biological perspective of G.M. Edelman” (pp. 62—110). What is more, in the third chapter he shows “freedom as biological-social datum as perceived by A. Lureja and L.S. Vygotski” (pp. 111—146). It is good that the fourth chapter presents “a critical philosophy of naturalistic freedom.” The latter is shown by H. Jonas (pp. 147—189). Consequences of this reasoning lead Leonardo Paris to “a philosophical confrontation between human freedom and the freedom of God as

understood by L. Pareyson” (pp. 190—293). The conclusion drawn from the entire reasoning is clear, namely: Human freedom can be discovered only in truth about the entire humanity. Human choices between good and evil are ultimately justified in eschatology. Assuming responsibility for the gift of freedom has its consequences of not only earthly, but eternal character.

To sum up, one has to say that the monograph by Leonardo Paris is an example of searching for answers to questions concerning human identity. Undoubtedly it is exactly human who is most interested in understanding oneself. Sole existence or a valid, but extremely isolated, neurological explanation seem insufficient. He or she demands explanation of his existence. He or she is looking for the reason and his/her identity: who or what am I? Looking for one’s identity is most of all trying to understand oneself in relation to someone else. As if in search of oneself a man is of course trying to understand oneself on the basis of oneself: the famous Cartesian *cogito* is neither improper nor rude. We do have a certain autonomy in which every man, either believer or non-believer, is fully entitled to understand himself. However, one may ask whether search for identity on the basis of oneself jeopardises awareness of distinctness and therefore exposes to danger of tautology. *Et ego feci memetipsum* (Ez 29: 3). Narcissus tried to capture himself, but got lost in his own reflection. To understand each other and find our identity, we need some *vis-à-vis*, some sort of a distance.

Today, a man often looks for this distinctness in the other, in “the sacrament of a brother.” This is fully justified. Another man is not the mean, but the goal (Kant), and his otherness, as Levinas says, summons our identity. And here we are, as it were, obliged to ask a question, whether this otherness does not sometimes prove to be short-lived. Whether in the long term, it does not wear off, whether it is not too similar to me (since the other is also my neighbour), so the danger is, that once again I am confronted with my own reflection. And this is the problem that is not tackled by Leonardo Paris in his monograph.

It is good that Leonardo Paris, in his award-winning book that has been praised by academic and media circles for two years, in the last theological chapter develops a theme according to which a man has always tried to understand himself not only in relation to cosmos, but even stronger in his relation to God. “Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature, but he is a thinking reed” says Pascal rightly. God revealed himself not only as the idea (Descartes), but also as someone friendly to man. The issue of God is not foreign to our search for identity. Even if this refer-

ence can be a challenge (a contemporary man is horrified by the fact that he might be annihilated by some sort of a transcendence!). However, the issue deserves our attention. To find his true and deepest identity, to find out, who he is, to “prove himself,” a man is not satisfied with discovering his greatness in what in him/her goes beyond an animal, a reed or a stone. In man there is an initial search for oneself, which is made in relation to gods. In Christian categories, these are not merely “cerebral operations,” but also *itinerarium ad Deum*. Briefly put, a man should look for the proof of himself in God. One is wanted and accepted by God.

Michał Drożdż