

Introduction

Thinking the Inexhaustible

Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder

What if the *inexhaustible*, the concept invoked by the title of this volume, were the only mode of self-revelation of truth—beyond all conceptions that reduce truth and being to either truth without evidence (as in subjectivism, relativism, perspectivism, and ideologies) or evidence without truth (as in objectivism, positivism, dogmatism, and scientism), but also beyond all ontologies of presence, meontologies, ontologies of the ineffable, the obscure, and the mystery that preclude human beings from any possibility of a meaningful access to the truth? The question of the inexhaustibility of truth, and its relation to being and interpretation, is the challenge posed by the philosophy of the prominent Italian thinker Luigi Pareyson (1918–1991). “That which is not possessed as *inexhaustible*,” writes Pareyson, “and that is explicated in a definitive enunciation is not truth; and that which, in order to possess truth, thinks that it must eliminate every unsaid, completing the discourse with a perfect and complete totality, is not interpretation. As a sign of its presence, truth points out precisely the unending and always ulterior nature of discourse; the enunciation of truth in a complete exposition would be the very sign of the inability to grasp it. *Only as inexhaustible does truth give itself to its formulations.*”¹ Within the perspective of the inexhaustibility of truth, art, religion, history, philosophy, and various other sociocultural manifestations including politics become modes of such formulations, which presuppose freedom—both human and divine—as that which initiates and gives form to all possible interpretations.

This volume comprises a collection of essays devoted to Pareyson's hermeneutic philosophy. In Europe and South America, the figure of this remarkable Italian thinker is often aligned with the more renowned German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer and the equally famous French thinker Paul Ricoeur; as Dennis J. Schmidt notes in his foreword to the present volume, though, Pareyson's philosophical position has remained largely unknown to the Anglophone readership. This collection aims to remedy such neglect and oversight through a critical engagement and, at times, an overview of the most salient aspects of Pareyson's philosophical proposal.

Art, the interpretation of truth, and the theory of being as ontology of both inexhaustibility and freedom constitute the main themes of Pareyson's distinctive form of philosophical hermeneutics. This volume explores these (and other) themes in the complexity of their interpretation as provided by Pareyson on the basis of another fundamental concept operative in his philosophy, namely, that of personhood understood in the radically existentialist sense of the human being. In the end, Pareyson's philosophy proves to be a philosophy of the inexhaustibility of truth, being, and the human being alike. While establishing itself as such a mode of thinking, Pareyson's philosophy of inexhaustibility engages in a conversation with major figures in Western intellectual history—from Croce to Valéry, Dostoevsky, and Berdyaev; from Kant to Fichte, Hegel, and German Romanticism; and from Pascal to Schelling, Kierkegaard, Marcel, Jaspers, and Heidegger.

Of the twelve essays collected here, six (by the well-known Italian thinkers Paolo D'Angelo, Umberto Eco, Massimo Cacciari, Federico Vercellone, Gianni Vattimo, and Sergio Givone) were initially presented as invited lectures at a conference commemorating the twentieth anniversary of Pareyson's death. They appear here for the first time in their English translation.² The essay by Silvia Benso is a slightly revised version of a previously published essay under the same title.³ The other five essays have been written specifically for this volume. The twelve contributions have been organized to follow the unfolding of the various stages of Pareyson's position. Altogether they provide a superb, extensive overview of the philosophy of a thinker whose activity spans well over half a century and has been highly influential for world-renowned philosophers such as Umberto Eco, Mario Perniola, and Gianni Vattimo, among others.

The volume opens with Benso's essay, "Luigi Pareyson: A Master in Italian Hermeneutics," which serves as a general introduction to the work of Luigi Pareyson and to which, to avoid unnecessary repetition here, the reader should refer for a general overview of Pareyson's philosophy.

Benso retraces the biographical and theoretical unfolding of Pareyson's lines of thought from existentialism to hermeneutics to ontology of freedom and exposes the lived, incarnated, deep hermeneutic character of his philosophical stance. Demonstrating how his hermeneutic attitude affects both his biography and his theory, Benso situates Pareyson's status as an original thinker in Italian hermeneutics, one whose work stands in clear distinction to that of more familiar hermeneuticians such as Gadamer and Ricoeur.

Examining Pareyson's claims about the person, a concept that appears most prominently in Pareyson's initially existentialist stage but that runs continuously throughout his thinking, Antonio Calcagno argues in "When Transcendence Is Finite: Pareyson, the Person, and the Limits of Being" that the being revealed by the relations that constitute personhood cannot possibly manifest the broad, unified sense of being with which human beings are in solidarity, as Pareyson maintains. Rather, what we find, maintains Calcagno, is a more limited, finite form of being constituted by the collective dwelling of persons with one another, other nonhuman living beings, and the world. Determinations of the being of the person need not necessarily be absolutized or totalized, thereby resulting in a finite and reductive understanding of human persons. Determinations can instead be understood as Kantian limits that ultimately generate possibilities of further determinations, which can lead to greater self-understanding and collective well-being. Pareyson correctly understands determination and situatedness as important for the being of persons, but the open-ended nature of determination he advocates, which must be understood as the possibility of nondetermination or transcendence, runs the risk of undermining his view of the singularity of the person. Specific determinations that condition and shape singularity must not be read therefore simply as limiting or conditioning, but as creating possibilities for initiative (*iniziativa*) and being without recourse to infinite transcendence. Instead of viewing personal determinations as pointing to transcendence, Calcagno contends that we need to see them as operating within a situation, intensely complexifying and differentiating it and ultimately producing layers of meaningful determination.

Paolo D'Angelo's contribution, "Pareyson's Role in Twentieth-Century Italian Aesthetics," follows Pareyson's theoretical move from personhood to art by focusing on the fundamental role that his aesthetics played in twentieth-century Italian philosophy. Pareyson's main work in this field, *Estetica. Teoria della Formatività* [*Aesthetics: Theory of Formativity*], represents the first systematic aesthetic theory written in Italy from a non-Crocean standpoint and marks a notable turning

point in twentieth-century Italian philosophy, which had been deeply influenced in the first fifty years by Croce's new idealism and historicism. The first part of D'Angelo's essay gives an account of the main differences between Pareyson's and Croce's views on aesthetics, emphasizing the different solutions concerning the nature of aesthetic activity and the different views concerning the role of emotions in art, the function of interpretation, and the relation between philosophical aesthetics and poetics. The second part of D'Angelo's essay reconstructs the influence of Pareyson's aesthetics on Italian philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century and discusses the reasons why, despite the great international success of hermeneutics, the importance of Pareyson's aesthetics (an important constituent of his interpretation theory) is not entirely acknowledged, even if several significant Italian philosophers such as Vattimo and Eco receive substantial inspiration from it.

Aesthetic themes are taken up also by Umberto Eco in his posthumous contribution, "Pareyson vs. Croce: The Novelties of Pareyson's 1954 *Estetica*." Eco describes the main innovations of Pareyson's aesthetics in comparison with Croce's theory of art. Eco emphasizes the separation that Croce establishes between the moment of intuition-expression and the moment of technical-material manifestation as well as the attention Pareyson pays to the concrete experiences of the artist and the importance of matter and pointers implied in his aesthetic formativity. This new concept of formativity introduced by Pareyson considers the nexus (ingrained in all artworks) between *forming* form and *formed* form in light of the notions of process and attempt. Whereas Croce views execution as the faithful realization of a work or the expression of the executor's personality, Eco points out that for Pareyson an essential dialectics is at work between faithfulness to the work and freedom of interpretation. Finally, with regard to Croce's question of "structure," Eco stresses that not only does Pareyson consider structure as an essential moment of the formative project, but he also pays close attention to the associated fillers or wedges [*zeppa*], regarding them as fundamental joints that enable each part to connect with the others. Thinking of wedges not only as failed attempts, but also as something that the interpretation sets aside as a latent stimulus for further interpretations, Eco concludes by drawing a connection, in light of the wedge, between Pareyson's aesthetics and his ontology of freedom with its related theme of a God who overcomes the negative but, at the same time, preserves it within himself as a trace.

In his "On Pareyson's Interpretation of Kant's Third Critique," Massimo Cacciari points to the disclosure, which Pareyson realizes, of the theoretical and systematic pregnancy and significance of Kant's *Critique*

of *Judgment* for critical philosophy as a whole. Such relevance appears quite evidently on the basis of at least two basic themes: First, on the basis of the teleological principle, on which the aesthetic judgment is based (this principle is in fact operative also as a general condition of all intellectual judgments); and second, on the basis of the concept of the imagination, which retains a not merely aesthetic value. Imagination as considered from the point of view of the third *Critique* must be read and understood in unity with the imagination that is operative in the construction of schemas of transcendental schematism, which may be said to represent the main problem of the first *Critique*. It is the same faculty that in the *Critique of Pure Reason* images (in the sense of putting-into-images) the concepts and in the *Critique of Judgment* images the ideas of reason. These two dimensions of the faculty of imagination cannot be separated. This is precisely what allows one to understand the great level of immanence that the “a-logical” (that is, *pathos*, feeling or sentiment) has in the constitution of the faculty of judgment as a whole.

The move from art to hermeneutics in the evolution of Pareyson’s philosophy is approached by Federico Vercellone in his essay “Pareyson’s Aesthetics as Hermeneutics of Art.” Pareyson’s long engagement with aesthetics mainly concerns the first phase of his work even if he never abandons art as the object of his theoretical reflections. If the trajectory of Pareyson’s thought within aesthetics were to be traced, it could be described, albeit with a certain degree of uncertainty, as the move from a hermeneutics of art to a hermeneutics of myth. In his *Estetica*, Pareyson proposes a conception that stands outside the classic structure of the philosophy of art and establishes instead a close connection between aesthetics and hermeneutics. Here Pareyson develops a dynamic idea of form that allows him to articulate a critical comparison with Croce. By rejecting Croce’s idea of immediate identity, that is, a relation between intuition and expression that is not process based, Pareyson makes the move that allows him to closely approach contemporary art. On the basis of this approach, Pareyson is also able to advance the concept of the indeterminateness of form, which anticipates the idea of “open work” later developed by Eco.

Robert T. Valgenti explores the social and political possibilities of Pareyson’s aesthetic concepts by offering an examination of the concept of “kindredness” [*congenialità*] in Pareyson’s work in his essay “The Unfamiliarity of Kindredness: Toward a Hermeneutics of Community.” Valgenti reflects on the possibilities for this concept to work as the basis for a hermeneutics of community, a community that understands its formation and identity as an act of interpretation. Valgenti begins

by tracing the development of community starting with the concept of “exemplarity” in Pareyson’s earliest works on aesthetics and proceeding to the development of his aesthetics of formativity as the model for interpretative human activity. In the course of this development, it becomes clear that the shared element in human production—as exemplified in the work of art—is the very ability to undertake an activity that forms its own rules of development and value. Through an analysis of this development and of the idea of “kindredness” that finally emerges in *Truth and Interpretation*, Valgenti argues that the basis for community can be found in the tension between the subjectivity of individual taste and the consensual recognition of the kindred element that brings together human production and interpretation.

Pareyson’s refusal to take up the standard epistemic trope for truth, namely, as the goal or aim of inquiry, is the starting point of Lauren Swayne Barthold’s “Truth as the Origin (Rather Than Goal) of Inquiry.” Accordingly, if truth is not our goal, then it does not make sense to attempt to articulate a method or criteria that secure it, as is the aim of traditional analytic approaches to truth. Pareyson insists rather that truth is fundamentally our starting point, our origin. His general hermeneutic commitment can be seen in the way he defines interpretation as the human expression, indeed revelation, of our fundamental relation with being and truth. Yet Barthold argues that this general hermeneutic approach, which defines truth in terms of human “being” rather than human “doings” (that is, formulating beliefs and propositions), goes further than either Heidegger’s or Gadamer’s positions insofar as Pareyson defends the human being’s origin in truth as the condition for freedom. Pareyson’s explication of truth is unique within the hermeneutic tradition because of its ability to demonstrate how the instrumentalization of human reason as a means to achieve truth-as-end leads to domination and oppression. If, as Pareyson insists, our only interest is to reduce truth to its criterion for measuring human doings, then we miss something more fundamental about truth and human existence, namely, its ability to promote human freedom. To unpack and demonstrate the significance of Pareyson’s change of metaphor regarding truth and its connection to freedom that distinguishes him from other hermeneutic thinkers, Barthold focuses on Pareyson’s comments in *Truth and Interpretation* regarding truth’s relation to interpretation, being, and ideology.

According to Paolo Diego Bubbio, Pareyson’s work features a deep understanding of the issues and problems of Hegel’s philosophy as well as a critical proximity with Heidegger’s existential and hermeneutic project. In his essay “Pareyson’s Conception of the Self Between Hegel

and Heidegger,” Bubbio argues that one of the reasons for Pareyson’s interest in these philosophical traditions, sometimes hidden and yet very prominent in his work, is the centrality of the notion of the “I.” Cartesian philosophy led to a conception of the “I” marked with subjectivism. Bubbio contends that Pareyson captures the attempts made by Hegel to overcome a *subjectivist* account of the self. In the first section, Bubbio considers Pareyson’s interpretation of Hegel, paying close attention to the notion of the self. In the second section, he focuses on Pareyson’s interpretation of Heidegger and shows that Pareyson considers Heidegger as being similarly concerned with the subjectivism of the “I,” but also critical of the “solitary self” emerging from the German philosopher’s analysis of *Dasein*. Bubbio concludes with the claim that Pareyson develops a mode of philosophizing about the “I” that goes beyond the traditional notion of subjectivity, avoids the regression of Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein* to a solitary self, and eventually contributes to a richer understanding of the self.

Gianni Vattimo highlights the deep continuity between Pareyson’s “aesthetics of formativity” and the later religious developments of his philosophy in his contribution, “From Aesthetics to Ontology of Freedom.” According to Vattimo, from the very start Pareyson’s aesthetics involves a theory of interpretation in which the expression of the artist’s personal creativity and the presence of a transcendent “legality” coincide completely. Such identification makes understandable the nonarbitrariness of both creation and critical approach to the work. It is on this basis, Vattimo contends, that Pareyson later develops his “ontology of freedom.”

The theme of the ontology of freedom, which constitutes one of the arrival points of Pareyson’s intellectual trajectory, is further explored by Martin G. Weiss in “Evil in God: Pareyson’s Ontology of Freedom.” According to Weiss, in addition to being a hermeneutic thinker, Pareyson is also the author of an intriguing modern theodicy. The first part of Weiss’ essay is focused on this aspect. Pareyson refutes the classical Christian definition of evil as mere lack of being or goodness and tries to combine the Manichean insight into the violent reality of evil and suffering with the Christian (but still Aristotelian) doctrine that there can be only one first principle or cause of reality, namely, God. If God, however, is the first principle and evil is real, then God must be considered the principle of evil. Following Schelling, Pareyson emphasizes that the concepts of both good and evil are intrinsically connected to the concept of freedom because when we speak of evil, we in fact mean chosen evil (that is, bad in the presence of a good alternative), and when we speak of good, we actually mean a chosen good (that is, good in the

presence of a bad alternative). Neither necessity nor contingency but rather freedom is associated with good and bad. God is therefore good not because this is God's necessary nature, as traditional onto-theology claims, but because God chose, in an absolute past that was never present, to be good (that is, to exist) by rejecting the possibility of being bad (that is, not to exist). Thus evil is truly in God, although only as mere possibility. This possibility was however realized by the human being, as Pareyson states in line with the Christian tradition. The second part of Weiss' essay attends to the question of how this Christian narration, according to Pareyson's peculiar *thelogia crucis*, may assist one to understand (and perhaps even to accept) real evil, and therefore overcome what Pareyson terms "modern consolatory atheism."

The volume concludes with Sergio Givone's "Philosophy and Novel in the Later Pareyson," which offers an analysis of the themes that interest Pareyson in his later years, namely, the narrative character of truth as disclosed in myths and narrations. Pareyson leaves his readers with important suggestions for a philosophical theory of the novel and of the narrative essence of truth that are not present in his earlier existentialist writings or in his *Estetica*, but rather in his later works *Dostoevskij: Filosofia, romanzo ed esperienza religiosa* [*Dostoevsky: Philosophy, Fiction, and Religious Experience*] and *Ontologia della libertà* [*Ontology of Freedom*]. According to Pareyson, interpretation (and philosophy is for him essentially interpretation) has no other object than truth. Emerging through the interpretation of tales and stories because reality is not a chain of facts, truth is an eventful horizon where freedom is more significant than necessity. When searching for truth—not truth in itself, but truth for us, truth that reveals to us a possible meaning of the human life and world—we find it in that original form of revelation that is the myth. Novels are nothing else than myths, Pareyson claims; secularized myths, we could add, for modern times. Moving from this conviction, Pareyson engages Dostoevsky's novels and discloses in them not only a variety of philosophical problems, but also a real chance for a new philosophy of freedom and the sense of being.

"Being inexhaustible," writes Pareyson in *Truth and Interpretation*, "truth resides in words without being identified with them, but always holding itself in reserve. . . . It is a presence that does not identify itself with explication and thus opens the possibility of an ulterior and always new discourse. . . . Inexhaustibility is that thanks to which, instead of presenting itself under the false appearance of concealment, absence, or obscurity, ulteriority shows its true origin, that is, its richness, fullness, and excess, through its inexhaustibility: not nothingness, but Being;

not *steresis* [lack], but *hyperoche* [pre-eminence]; not *Abgrund* [abyss], but *Ungrund* [ungrounded ground]; not the *mystikos gnophos tes agnosias* [mystical darkness of the lack of knowledge], but the *anexichniaston ploutos* [unsearchable richness]; not the mysticism of the ineffable, but the ontology of the inexhaustible.⁴ We editors think that the inexhaustibility of truth shines forth in the works of Luigi Pareyson, and that the scholarly contributions contained in this volume respond to and continue the work of such inexhaustible truth. If the reader takes up some of the suggestions contained in Pareyson's philosophy and highlighted in such contributions, then the inexhaustibility of truth will have made a step forward—not toward its own dissolution but toward dialogical enrichment. Philosophy, says Pareyson, "creates dialogue because, in the very act in which it endlessly multiplies the personal interpretations of truth, it unites all of them in the common awareness of their possessing truth without exhausting it but rather nourishing themselves on it continually."⁵ The specific dialogue that philosophy forms and embraces is precisely what this volume wishes to foster by reflecting on the thought of Luigi Pareyson.

NOTES

1. Luigi Pareyson, *Truth and Interpretation*, trans. Robert Valgenti (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 67, emphasis added.

2. The 2011 conference *Luigi Pareyson e l'estetica* [*Luigi Pareyson and Aesthetics*] was organized in Turin by the Centro di Studi Filosofico-Religiosi Luigi Pareyson. These lectures were published in *Annuario Filosofico* 27 (2011). *Annuario Filosofico* is the yearly journal published by Mursia, founded by Pareyson in 1985 with a group of scholars close to his philosophical position, and is currently edited by Claudio Ciancio. We wish to thank Mursia for the permission to publish these essays in this volume.

3. In *Philosophy Today* 49, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 381–90; republished here by kind permission.

4. Pareyson, *Truth and Interpretation*, 19–24.

5. *Ibid.*, 182.