**MAN WITHOUT FOUNDATION IN PIETRO PIOVANI**

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**ABSTRACT**

Pietro Piovani is a philosopher who is still, unjustly, little known. Here we set out to investigate the absence of foundation as a crossroads in contemporary philosophy and to evaluate the new contribution of Piovani’s reflection. In our study, we analysed mainly the works of the past twenty years and especially *Principi di una filosofia della morale* (1972) and *Oggettivazione etica e assenzialismo*(1980). The basic option in Piovani’s thinking is that, given the finite nature of the individual, as the willing who was not self-willed, man no longer needs any foundation. In fact, the contemporary individual is more unfounded than ever, having to constantly base himself on and interact with a reality that is ever changing. Piovani reaches the height of his critical foundation by stating that, forced to stabilise his own instability, man must base his existence on an absence. Here, Piovani, through the "non self-willed willing", eradicates the assumptions of modern thought, and captures the beginning of existence in the experience of limitation and finiteness. Man, who is based on de-ontology, on *de-esse*, is a sign of a dissatisfaction that asks to be satisfied, of an inadequacy. This study highlights how Piovani’s thinking, having abandoned the perspectives of Western ontology, proposes a new reflection on the positivity of the inadequate where absence is heralded as the greatest energy force of life. Philosophy, therefore, has a future only as negative philosophy.

**Keywords:**  foundation, ontology, absence, negative philosophy

**INTRODUCTION**

The Piovani’s mind had a rational vocation, without a religious perspective, and was marked by a passion for history, law and morality. The attraction for the philosophical aspects, however, led him to get out the specific interests in legal problems and to re-examine the issues from a philosophical point of view, especially ethics. The fruits were *Normatività e società* (Napoli, 1949), *Linee di una filosofia del diritto* (Padova, 1958), *Giusnaturalismo ed etica moderna* (Bari, 1961) and *La filosofia del diritto come scienza filosofica* (Milano, 1963). The last, really original phase of Piovani’s thought , refers to the general problems of ethics: *Filosofia e storia delle idee* (Bari, 1965) and *Conoscenza storica e coscienza morale* (Napoli, 1966). Last two works, however - *Principi di una filosofia della morale* of 1972 and *Oggettivazione etica e assenzialismo*, published posthumous in 1981- are his apex.

This study wants to investigate the new contribution of Piovani’s reflection about the absence of foundation in contemporary philosophy.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In our study, we analyse mainly the works of the past twenty years of Piovani’s live and especially *Principi di una filosofia della morale* (1972) and *Oggettivazione etica e assenzialismo* (1980), which represent, in our opinion, his most innovative aspect.

**RESULTS**

The departure point of Piovani’s thought is the refusal of all essentialist ontology. The individual whose foundation does not exist because he founds himself, is the basic option of his thought. The theme appears as early as in *Normatività etica e società* (1949) and is developed in *Linee di una filosofia del diritto* (1958).

“As much as I attempt to get to know myself in the nudity of my feelings and thoughts, as much as I try to trace things back to my first act of awareness, as much as I try to reconstruct, in hypotheses, one by one, the story of my volitions, I must stop myself when faced with a statement which presents a piece of data to me, which presents myself to me as a piece of data: I who want did not want myself […] Whatever I may want today or have wanted yesterday, I, at my origin, did not want myself: others […] wanted for me”[[1]](#footnote-1).

When man begins to search for himself and for his origins, he cannot fail to acknowledge that the original existence of the self is not subjective but objective, that his existence is a *given fact*. The individual’s desire finds its own limit at the beginning of his existence, and it is unable to go beyond this. At the very beginning, the subjectivity of the individual hosts its objectivity, the limit that crosses it at the root and which contradicts all possible claims of absolute subjectivity. In this implicitly anti-idealist perspective, the individual carries within himself the mystery of his identification, of his having been wanted. These considerations are not developed until later in the 1972 work, *Principi di una filosofia della morale*, in which Piovani affirms that, given the finite character of the individual, as a wanting being which did not want itself, man no longer needs any foundation.

The being has no foundation because it founds itself. In particular, the contemporary individual is more unfounded than ever, as it continuously has to found itself and interact with a reality that is continually transforming, and is forced to “accept that it exists in a state of perennial extremely noble, conscious precariousness, in which every conquered stability belongs to the unstable equilibrium of the human condition”[[2]](#footnote-2). In Og*gettivazione etica e assenzialismo,* Piovani reaches the peak of his criticism of foundation affirming that “nothing is stable for man. Man establishes himself precisely because he is not stable and non-established. And his reason is not his foundation either: all that lies within his existence is his precarious *founding himself* “[[3]](#footnote-3). Forced to make his own instability stable, man recognises himself without being and founds his existence on an absence. Here Piovani overturns the concepts taken for granted by modern thought, which is built on absolute subjectivity, and identifies in the experience of the limit and of finiteness the departure point of the being. However, he rejects both the subjective and the objective solution. The existential decision is the refusal of non-existence and its nature is ambivalence. If a being wants to exist, and belong to reality, it must, with great anxiety, stay in contact with the contrasts of the stable. Ambivalence is the structure of existence itself. The being who wants, and who perceives himself as not having wanted himself, exists, although he could certainly fail to exist. And once again it is the idealistic perception that Piovani criticises, as early as in his 1966 work, *Conoscenza storica e coscienza morale*, in which the absolute Spirit is seen as a rhetorical way of disguising traditional metaphysics and a complete refusal of all forms of consciousness. The ambivalence of Piovani of the being that is not founded in ontology, instead transforms man into a being who, by wanting adds value:

“the examined structures of existence prove that existential wills are completely different from immediate volitions. Existing is not achieved in the simplicity of the volition, but in the complexity of the addition of value”[[4]](#footnote-4).

The result is a very strict set of ethics which, encountering and going beyond the Kantian perspective, requires each being to be tense, busy affirming and defending his role as man in an all-human world. It is an ethical vision that is so severe that it even seems to peak in the form of ruthless cruelty, concludes Piovani: “the awareness of the shipwrecked when navigating existentially towards infinity, converts into an ethical reawakening of the subject”[[5]](#footnote-5). The being that is not founded in ontology is founded in deontology, which, however, is not the doctrine of duties, but instead, according to Greek etymology – where δεῖ indicates a shortcoming – designates a lack of satisfaction that needs to be fulfilled, an absence.

“The being […] can, unequivocally, even as far as terminology is concerned, recognise itself in an existence dominated by absence: it only exists to become that which it is not, and to change into that which it is not yet”[[6]](#footnote-6).

**DISCUSSION**

It is not a new form of nihilism, which Piovani rightly considers only to be a refined ontology, and it is not the *favor vacui* of a new-ontological negativity, but instead a new reflection on the positivity of the inadequate.

“Man is not created in *nothing*, but in a plus. To become himself he must be more than himself, he must make himself more than that which he already is. His former state of existence is not a stasis, but a transition.[…]. Human existence, in its dominant characteristic, is a futurology.[…]. The essential element is not what one is *not* but that which *still does not exist.* What is truly essential for man is that which is *in* *absentia*”[[7]](#footnote-7)*.* As opposed to the static monistic mentality, ethical objectification is therefore the ability of the subject to objectify itself while transforming, so creating in his existential experience his subjectivity, the true essence of the subject. This is the revolutionary task that contemporary philosophy is facing, according to Piovani: exploring this dynamic vision of rationality, founded on absence.

Ethical objectification is a system of choices that is part of rationality as a process: it does not apply the dictates of reason, but confirms them, testing and retesting them, checking their intimate rational being. In rationality as effective *fieri*, the being can size itself up to the supremacy of the negative and consider, in the end: *quod deest* *me constituit.* It gives up seeking a *foundation* because it knows that it only exists if, dynamically, it is not stable, but makes itself stable. Its foundation is not a reason, it is a *lack.*

“But the being which has left the orbit of all universalism, and has been left to its own devices […] by now knows […] that it is not part of being, and that it is not created from being either; it remains, or wants to remain anchored to historicity considered as situationality, in a history that is not transformed into a cosmos of universal history, but remains an inter-relational weave of needs, hopes, aspirations, pleasures, pains, difficulties, successes, failures, disappointments[[8]](#footnote-8).

The subject of this historical future is the individual and history is not that which it has been as much as that which it has still to become. *Absence*. “The essence of each phenomenal reality is absence “[[9]](#footnote-9) sustains Piovani in the chapter of his last work, entitled *Desum ergo sum*. Man is created because of what he is missing and the cycle of existence continues in the process of the negative from which it has been generated. The *not-yet* is destitution, but also opportunity, space in which to move forward towards an achievement, but which must never lose its sense of insufficiency. Indeed, if the achievement was achieved, it would become a new claim of achievement, the proposal of a new positive metaphysics. Infinity is unreachable except through death, which is a possibility to rediscover the state of non-existence, the ultimate possibility of contact with the negative of non-existence.

“Knowing death is the highest knowledge. Only the living being that lives his existential experience to the full knows death.[…]Knowledge has been revealed, in all its existentialism, as a process of gaining awareness that comes from afar, from a distance, that comes from where the conscious and the unconscious may touch, also accompanying from darkness to darkness, in crossing the dim light available“[[10]](#footnote-10).

Non-existence – clearly – is not only death. If existing is a type of resistance, not existing relates to existence. It is the possibility of never having existed, it is the torment thanks to which existence exists and therefore, is not only found at the end of existence, but also before it occurs.

Because only the lack of existence and not the *being*, is relative to non-existence.And so here too we are faced with a radical rethinking of the concept of perfection. “Perfection can be found in everything that does not exist“[[11]](#footnote-11). Following Kant’s lesson, Piovani is sure that perfection can only be rationally perceived if perfection cannot exist. If the idea of absolute perfection included existing, the idea would be impure. Instead, for Piovani, *perfectum* can no longer avenge any record in relation to *imperfectum*

**CONCLUSION**

For man, learning to look at oneself from a negative perspective is not easy, because traditionally, our thoughts are not used to dealing with what is missing; and yet philosophy only has a future as negative philosophy[[12]](#footnote-12).

The approach of philosophy to negativity is a slow, difficult pathway, because it implies changing the trend displayed by the stratifications of the thought, which tends to preserve and repeat, all taken up by the torment of “being’. The crisis of the objectivity of the values of the moral philosophy of the twentieth century is not in itself a *diminutio*, which, on the contrary, finding itself obliged to acknowledge itself, places itself at the centre of the theoretical argument. In the new perspective of Piovani’s “historicism of absence” a value already exists in its tension, “because its aspiration, pursuit, perseverance is an existence that leaves traces and creates relationships with unpredictable and invisible consequences (the invisible also exists)”[[13]](#footnote-13). No longer deducing and applying, but understanding that, usually, thought and action are not unconnected. Reality does not exist, but is created. Piovani, who opposes any concept of stability, is convinced that the truth is a continuous verification process: knowing reality means understanding its mobile functions, because defining that which is stable is meaningless and in all fields “that which exists is either mobile or fails to exist“[[14]](#footnote-14) . This is why the truth of each thing cannot be found in possession but in research. To possess his reality the subject must not have it, but instead acquire it, through the struggle for death, perennial *polemos*, through an act that expands itself, consisting of unpredictable improvisations, through a process that is continuously changing. The distancing of thought and being derives from the doubt that the subject of the *cogito* has about its being the departure point of the thought. The identity of *cogito* and *sum* is flawed and it is rationality itself that drives the subject to become familiar with insecurity and precariousness, which requires a courageous approach to risk. “The system of morality is not a kingdom of securities to be preserved but a complex collection of risks to be run […]. It is not a solid order but a precarious acquisition“[[15]](#footnote-15).

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[13] Pietro Piovani, *Oggettivazione etica e assenzialismo,* Milano*,* 2010*,* p. 1031

[14] Pietro Piovani, *Oggettivazione etica e assenzialismo,* Milano, 2010, p. 1033

[15] Pietro Piovani, *Oggettivazione etica e assenzialismo,* Milano, 2010, p. 962

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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