

**REMARKS ON THE RELEVANCE OF
GREGORY OF NYSSA'S TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE
FOR THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF
20th CENTURY PSYCHOANALYSIS**

Giulio Maspero*

Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Piazza Sant'Apollinare, 49 – 00186, Rome, Italy

(Received 14 December 2008)

Abstract

The 4th century is theologically characterised by an effort to fully acknowledge man's freedom, based on the new understanding of filiation initiated in Sacred Scripture. During their discussions with the Arians and the Neo-Arians, the Fathers of the Church came to identify the Son's free obedience as a proper personal characteristic. In the heretics' view, on the contrary, the obedience of the Logos was a proof of His inferiority with respect to the Father, whereas for the Orthodox authors it was the expression of that love which is the Trinity itself.

This demanded a new epistemology and the radical overcoming of the Platonic conception of *image* - essentially marked by passivity and degeneration - through a true Trinitarian understanding, freshly moulded on the fact that the Son is the perfect and eternal Image of the Father. This implies that through *Genesis* 1.26 man is recognised as image of the Image, i.e., at the same time as a determined and free being. Man's mystery is thus qualified by both passivity and activity - and filiation must be the primary approach to it.

The psychoanalytical studies of the 20th century pointed out the relevance of filiation itself in order to describe man and cure him of his illnesses and alienations. Some authors, such as R. Girard and V. Frankl even highlighted the religious dimension of this phenomenon. The connection with the theology of the Fathers of the Church of the 4th century, and specifically with Gregory of Nyssa's thought, may be in position to cast a new light on the deep reason of the essential role played by filiation even at the medical level, manifesting the perennial value of the Fathers' writings, and offering at the same time useful suggestions to develop a new epistemology proper to cope with man's mystery and with his relational structure.

Keywords: Trinity, Fathers of the Church, Epistemology, Psychoanalysis, filiation

* E-mail: maspero@pusc.it

1. Introduction

The 20th century is marked by the birth of Psychoanalysis: after Freud, it has undergone an extraordinary development, with a great variety of different currents, trends and approaches, characterised by mutual dialectical relationships. Nonetheless, the fundamental statement that man can be healed only if he is considered in the light of his filiation remained a constant trait. This was not an *a priori* assumption, but was rather the result of a phenomenological study. Nowadays psychoanalytic practise is widespread and it is evident that present-day society stands in grave need of its service and its approach. The importance of this relatively new science is also proved by the interdisciplinary attention that it awakens: in some cases, it has even become the meeting point of some disciplines which, according to the modern understanding, should be completely kept apart, for example natural sciences, Philosophy and Theology.

At the same time, the 20th century was characterised by a vivid discussion internal to the psychoanalytical movement itself, which is still lively now. The point is essentially epistemological, since it is evident that the Cartesian dichotomy suffers a severe crisis facing the phenomena treated by Psychoanalysis. In this way, a tension rises between the clear results obtained through the scientific method and through phenomenological analysis, on one hand, and the inefficiencies of an epistemology based on Cartesian philosophy, on the other.

It is worthwhile studying, from this point of view, another moment in the history of human thought, when a similar situation arose. The 4th century, indeed, was characterised by two traits that recall the picture just depicted. Those years were marked by fierce theological discussions connected with the divine filiation of Jesus. The disagreement between the orthodox Fathers of the Church and the Arians was essentially about the meaning of Christ's filiation. But that implied the construction of a new, proper epistemology in order to resolve the problem.

2. Philosophy and apophatism

The Trinitarian dogma got its complete formulation in the 4th century, when the Church Fathers had to face the objections of those who tried to reduce the novelty of the events of Christ's life to some philosophical schemes typical of their age. From this point of view, one could say that the Fathers had to develop a phenomenology *ante litteram*, as they were driven by Revelation and the History of Salvation to affirm the priority of events over ideas, i.e. over the conceptualisation process. They had to radically cope with reality and history, with that openness which characterises precisely a true Son, who feels free and safe in his exploration of world and life, since he knows that the Universe belongs to his Father, who offers him the world itself as a gift, constituting him as his heir.

In the 4th century the essential difference between heresy and orthodoxy became apophatism, i.e. the assertion that it is impossible to know God's essence (οὐσία). Against Arian and Neo-Arian belief that the divine essence could be reduced to a name and known as such, the Orthodox thought stated that man can only get access to God through His action (ἐνέργεια) in history (from this point of view, Gregory of Nyssa can be considered a precursor of the palamitic distinction) [1, 2]. For this reason, knowledge of God can be attained only through judgements, i.e. true relations discovered by the human which cannot capture the metaphysical depths of reality, as being always keeping its fundamental primacy over knowledge.

The point is essentially epistemological, because heresy is not conceived of as the negation of an officially predetermined dogma, but it is rather a mistake in the methodological approach to the studied object. So, the problem was not the excess of critical spirit of the heretics, but quite the contrary: they were unable to get rid of the philosophical and ideological prejudices of their philosophical tradition. We could say that they approached the newness of Revelation in a 'dogmatic' way, according to the modern pejorative meaning of the word. They lacked phenomenological sensitivity.

On the contrary, the Fathers developed a new epistemology, capable of coping with the specificity of an object that is at the same time also a subject, even more, that is a communion of subjects. Because of that, they devised a new epistemology proper to the study of objects with free will.

In fact, for the Greek world, God was intellect, i.e. λόγος; at the same time, man was ontologically connected with the first Principle according to a necessary law that in the Pythagorean circle was called precisely λόγος. From this point of view, being and knowing were automatically linked together, as man was part of a world governed by an absolute causality and ordered according to a hierarchy of ontological degrees, which the human mind could climb up to the Unmoved Mover. It is the conception that enabled Plato to get to the First Friend (*prôton philon*) in the *Lysid* [Plato, *Lysid*, 219.d], ascending along the necessary chain of desire, up to the eternal source of any desire. Again, this idea is at the basis of the analysis of movement in *Leges* [Plato, *Leges*, 893.b-896.a], through which soul is discovered as the first motor of life. Movement, friendship and desire are here read from the perspective of necessity. The same conception marks the highest point of the reflection of Aristotle, who in book Lambda of the *Metaphysics* goes through the chain of motors, which are moved by another motor, up to the Unmoved Mover, which moves without being moved and is identified with intellect and life [Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 1072.b.24-30].

From this brief sketch, it is clear that Greek thought was based on proportion, as expressed by the term λόγος itself [3].

On the contrary, the Judeo-Christian understanding had to distinguish between being and knowing, as God is not only λόγος, but also will. Abraham's God creates with His word, wishes the world, comes towards man, desires him, and accepts him as a partner, even to the point of struggling with Jacob or

showing Himself as a jealous spouse. Two elements join here: the statement of the infinite gap which separates the Creator from His creatures and, at the same time, the experience of a true personal relation with the Divinity. This combination of infinite distance and astonishing proximity forced Israel to think of God not only in terms of intellect, but also in terms of will. Aristotle's God could not have any relationship with man [Aristotle, *Pol.* 3, 1325b; *Met.* 7, 1974b, 21-35], whereas Abraham's God wanted to be in relation with His people, and not in a generic relation, but in a personal and loving one. Because of that, will is perceived through the relations established by the initiative of God Himself.

From these statements a new epistemology arose, one which imperiously manifested itself in the discussion about apophatism, since the discovery of the role of will excluded the possibility for human reason to climb the ontological chain up to the Divinity through a series of necessary causal connections. Because of that, the Fathers had to firmly assert that being cannot be reduced to knowledge: the source of knowledge is being, but at the same time the latter infinitely exceeds the possibilities of human intellect.

The topic of will and of its relation with λόγος is essential in order to understand the originality of the 4th century Trinitarian doctrine and the epistemology connected to it.

3. Filiation and Creation

The core of the Trinitarian discussions was the correct understanding of what Jesus meant when he spoke of His Filiation, i.e. of His relation to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The very motive of His death was the claim to be the Only Begotten of God, in a new and exclusive sense, never heard before of in the Judaic history. It was a scandal for human reason, which does not know how it is possible to keep together the Trinity and the Uniqueness of God. This scandal manifested itself on the Cross. One is always faced with the same two temptations: the tendency to reduce trinity to unity, presenting the three Persons as mere appearances, masks of a unique God; or the reduction of unity to trinity, through the subordination of the Spirit to the Son and of the Son to the Father. The latter was a scheme typical of Neoplatonism, which knew a trinity of principles hierarchically ordained, settled at the top of the ontological ladder that linked world and divinity through a necessary proportion (λόγος).

In this context, there was the danger of interpreting the Son, whom John's prologue had identified with the λόγος itself, from the perspective of necessity, influenced by the Pythagorean usage of the term, understood as *proportion* in a parallel way to the Latin *ratio*. Arius's interpretation of the Biblical texts followed this kind of reasoning: he and his school quoted the Gospel passages connected to Christ's obedience as proofs of His inferiority with respect to the Father. In this way, God had not always been Father, but He had begun to be Father with the generation of the Son, conceived as the first of His creatures, and through Him He had later on created everything.

The Trinitarian discussions of the 4th century can be read as the clash between an interpretation of the Prologue carried out from the point of view of Neoplatonic philosophy and an interpretation that sprang from a new theology of filiation, founded on the belief that God is Father from all eternity and, because of that, on the belief that Christ is the incarnate eternal Son. Here an absolutely new conception of God comes into play, because His Being is conceived through the category of eternal relation and definitively distinguished from His creation: λόγος is here understood as *relatio*, i.e. relation to the Father, as His Intellect and His Knowledge. Because of that, God's λόγος is divine and is God Himself.

In this way, there is no intermediate ontological degree which, in its own nature, could stand halfway between Heaven and Earth. But at the same time, this distinction shows that all created reality is willed by God through a free act of donation, which founds the goodness of everything that exists.

The change is radical, compared with the hesitations of the 3rd century, when Origen still conceived man Platonically as a spirit fallen through original sin and mixed with matter as punishment. (It should be pointed out that the notion of sin and the perception of the necessity of a purification are a constant of every culture previous to Judaism and Christianity.) If it was previously believed that matter itself and history should be overcome, because they were marked by evil, whereas only spiritual and intellectual realities were considered as truly real, now the clear-cut distinction between God and world implies that the latter must be recognized as good, since God created it out of nothing. God's Will is recognized as the metaphysical principle and true foundation of human freedom.

So, for Athanasius and the Cappadocians, the Son is of the same nature as the Father, i.e. He is God, eternal as the One from whom He proceeds: but this also means that the Father is Father for ever and precisely because He eternally fathers the Son. In this way, Father and Son cannot be conceived but in their reciprocal relationship, since the Father is God in His eternal giving of Himself to the Son. This amounts to a complete revolution: self-giving is discovered as a divine attribute, and consequently relation becomes the key to access the Absolute. Even more, from the perspective of the Son, one can say that 'being from' in itself, i.e. the very procession from someone, is revealed as divine. But this means that relationship can be divine.

The divinity of this eternal 'being from' implies its perfect goodness. It is the first time that God is described metaphysically according to the radically new category of relation. This striking step is also connected with the assertion of the goodness of creation: even if its relation to the Creator is a true relation of dependence and ontological inferiority, its existence can no longer be explained as mere corruption. In fact, if in the deepest intimacy of God there is the eternal gift of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father, then the overflowing of this gift outside God's intimacy cannot be considered as a consequence of a necessary corrupting emanation as in Neoplatonism. God's absolute freedom and goodness become the foundation of the created 'being from' of the world. In this way, the Son Himself is recognised as the centre of the whole Universe,

according to Pauline theology (Colossians 1.15-20): the world is good, since its meaning is precisely the Son, and the world itself can be seen as a gift of the Father to the Son. The created *being from* is read in the light of the intra divine *being from*, and the relation of creaturely dependence is no more considered only from the perspective of passivity and negativity, but also in the light of Divine Filiation.

4. Gregory of Nyssa

The same thought pattern can be verified in Gregory of Nyssa's theology, whose core is filiation. In order to face Eunomius' heresy, he had to develop an epistemology capable of purifying Platonic language and adapting it to express the essential newness of Christianity. One example is the concept of image: "The Son is in the Father as the Beauty of the image is in the form of its model, and the Father is in the Son, as the exemplary Beauty is in its image. But, whereas in the case of human-made images there is always a temporal distance between the communicated image and the model, in this case they cannot be separated each one from the other." [*Eun I*, GNO I, 209, 8-14] The text speaks of a way of being image radically different from the Platonic conception: it is no more a decay and a material corruption of the ideal prototype, as it was in that kind of thinking that was at the basis of the subordinate reading. On the contrary, the Nyssian goes so far as to assert that the Son not only possesses all that is owned by the Father, but that the Son possesses the Father Himself [*Eun II*, GNO I 288, 19-23]. Even more, to pronounce the word 'Father' means to talk of two Persons, since from the idea of Son follows immediately the idea of Father and vice versa, so that, when we say Father, we have to think also of the Son [*Eun III*, GNO II, 81, 3-4 e *Eun*, GNO I, 208, 11-14]. Everything is read through the category of relation, in the attempt to purify the conception of filiation, freeing it from the temporal and material limitations which characterise human generation. Here the new epistemology is clearly at work.

The relation between the Father and the Son is explained according to the idea of the impression of an image. Gregory has recourse to the example of a mirror, to show that the two divine Persons have one single action, which springs from the oneness of their will [*Eun II*, GNO I, 288]: the Son's will follow the one movement begun by the Father, as the image in a mirror. The radical dependence that is expressed by this metaphorical expression seems to be in keeping with a subordinate conception of the relation of the Father with the Son. But the Nyssian stresses at the same time that the Son is not passive in this movement: "The Father willed something and the Son, Who is in the Father, willed the same will of the Father: better, He made Himself the will of the Father" [*ibidem*, 288, 17-19]. And for Gregory, this is precisely Filiation.

In his reflections the Nyssian boldly joins *λόγος* and will, so that, with Schönborn's words, "precisely the aspect that for the Arians was the proof of the subordination of the Son to the Father, i.e. His acting in obedience to the Father, His instrumental role in relation with Him, that very aspect is revealed as the

mystery itself of the communion of Divine Persons” [4]. It is precisely the free obedience that becomes for us image of the Father, since the Son does exactly what the Father does, by donating back the donated gift, that is Himself. The relation of origin is absolute donation, which is mirrored in the free return of Himself to the Father: the ‘being from’ can be read in the ‘being for’, since the Son is truly God from God, by His freely donating Himself, as the Father does. So the Son recognises Himself as gift in His ‘being from’ the Father and is image of the Father in the eternal donating of Himself back to Him.

In the 4th century, this becomes the key of interpretation of Revelation. As Schönborn wrote: “what the Son Himself revealed to us is deeply paradoxical, i.e. that He is at the same time in everything obedient to the Father and perfectly united to Him. In God there is no domination of the superior over the inferior: obedience is identical to freedom, the perfect self giving is identical to the full possession of oneself.” [4, p. 53]

In this way, it became possible to respond to the Neoplatonic contamination that hindered the Christian thinking. Creation and each man, regardless of wisdom and race, has an infinite value [5], since God is recognised as author of everything and since the Divine will operated in the foundation of the world. In fact, with the same absolute freedom that joins the first two Persons of the Holy Trinity in the one movement of divine action, through the Son's eternal making Himself the will of the Father, “God has created everything by His will and without any difficulty and pain the divine will became nature” [Gregory of Nyssa, Eun II, GNO I, 293, 28-30. See also *De An* PG 46, 124B and *In Hex*, PG 44, 69A]. In this way, Gregory explains that the divine action does not admit any mediator. God's being and acting, i.e. immanence and economy are immediately connected to each other. Because of that, in the creative act there is no pre-existing matter, but: “Divine will has become matter and essence of the created realities” [Idem, *In Illud*, GNO III/2, 11, 4-6]. In this way, nature is God's will, and most of all human nature, since man was created in God's image as image of the Image.

Through the acknowledgement of divine Filiation as a relation of eternal mutual self giving, the theological conception of Divinity influenced anthropology. If in God there is a Son who is truly divine and who is one God with the Father and in the Father, then also the filial structure of every human existence can be recognised as a gift, since it is work of God and image of Him in Christ. Being man becomes a manifestation and an affirmation of God's glory, where ‘glory’ should here be understood in the Trinitarian and relational way. The following text explains it: “Do you see the circulation of glory through the same cyclical movements? The Son is glorified by the Spirit; the Father is glorified by the Son. And mutually, the Son receives His glory from the Father and the Only Begotten becomes the Spirit's glory. In fact, in what will be glorified the Father, but in the true glory of the Only Begotten? And again, in what will be glorified the Son, but in the greatness of the Spirit? So also reason, entering this circular movement, gives glory to the Son through the Spirit and to the Father through the Son”. [*Maced*, GNO III/1, 109, 7-15]

The life of the three divine Persons exists as an eternal being in itself by giving glory to the Other: for the oneness of God, this giving glory coincides with the communication of Himself, through a gift which becomes foundation and affirmation of one's own infinite and absolute value in and through the Other.

And since the world has been created by the Holy Trinity, at the same time this conception becomes an affirmation of the value of reality itself, i.e. of everything as willed by God: “*So that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us*” (John 17.21). And the bond of this unity is glory (τὸ δὲ συνδετικὸν τῆς ἐνότητος ταύτης ἡ δόξα ἐστίν). But no well-minded person could disagree that the Holy Spirit is called *glory*, if he thinks of the Lord's words. In fact, He says: *I have given them the glory you gave me* (John 17.22). He gave, indeed, such a glory to His disciples, saying *receive the Holy Spirit* (John 17.22). He embraced human nature and received this glory that He already owned since before the world was (cfr. John 17.5). And this human nature was glorified by the Spirit, so that the communication of the glory of the Spirit is brought out on everything belonging to human nature, starting from the disciples. For that reason He says: *And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they be brought to perfection as one* (John 17.22-23) [*Cant*, VI, 467, 2-17].

5. What a Father!

Looking at these conclusions from the point of view of the history of ideas, it is striking that Gregory of Nyssa developed such a conception of filiation and of fatherhood, not to be found in the natural domain. He speaks of a relationship that gives at the same time an (infinite) value to the Father and to the Son. The Greek conception was subject to the category of necessity, in whose view any relation implied imperfection and corruption. On the contrary the Trinitarian doctrine presents a Father who freely gives Himself to the Son, who is freely image of the Father, in a mutual affirmation of each Person in the Other and through the Other. In fact the anti-Arian theology had to highlight that not only is the Son in relation with the Father, but also that the Father is Father precisely because He has the Son. And He is God only in this way.

This extraordinary result is due to Revelation and to the development of an epistemology conceived to cope with it: the communion of the three divine Persons had been revealed as the deepest core of Being and, because of that, relation and specifically filial relation became the key to access and interpret the world.

It is important to stress that in this (revealed) case obedience is completely free, because generation implies that the Image, i.e. the Son, has the very same freedom as the Father. In this way, the act of obeying, as it is voluntary and not compulsory, becomes an affirmation of the goodness of the Father himself. In the creation of man, this also founds the dignity of each human being and his relation with his Creator. The picture is completely different from the Big

Brother's slogan in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: “War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength”. This perverse sentence is meaningfully proposed by a Big Brother and not by a Big Father, as a totalitarian authority cannot be a true father. On the contrary, the Trinitarian foundation of creation implies that man's freedom gives glory to God: the more free, i.e. the more he himself is man, the more glory he gives to his Creator, freely choosing the relationship with Him.

In different words, what Trinitarian doctrine shows is that the Father does not impose an external law on the Son. On the contrary, He fathers the Son giving Himself to Him, as internal law. And this internal law is very peculiar, as it implies freedom. Because of that, the Son is Himself through the relationship to the Father and the Father is Himself through the relationship to the Son. As the world comes from this mutual relationship, it is clear that the Universe itself can be a home for man, because it has its meaning in the relationship with a Father, who is not imperative, but oblationary.

This seems extremely important, because, in Meletiadis' words at the beginning of his contribution: “when we talk about *the sunset of the Father*, we shall ask ourselves, which is the image of the father we are referring to” [6]. Nowadays, more than an imperative father, there is an absent father, i.e. a father met by his children only during resting times, at the end of the day, and never seen at work. This makes it difficult for the children to hold their father in esteem and to discover in him a guide in their relationship with the world. And also the relationship between the two parents is in many cases weak and exposed to the risk of becoming a necessary relationship and not a free one. In fact, when fears and disappointment overcome the couple, their thought can fall back to some fixed and ill behavioural patterns, that exclude mutual glorification and, because of that, cannot be free. The dynamics become dialectic and tend towards a static contraposition.

With Olivier Clément's words, “the time has come, when we have to reinvent fatherhood in the light of Revelation, which discloses the mystery of the Father who does not kill the Son, the sons, but who brings them to life communicating to them the Spirit of Life, and therefore creative freedom”[7]. This author points out that someone can be a father only if he is a witness of a meaning, a true meaning that explains also death. In this way, he speaks of separation, but of a separation that introduces into the world: the mother without the father could say only fusion, whereas the father without the mother could speak only of separation, but together the parents can open to their children the path to communion [7, p. 67]. In this way, the relationship between both parents is the foundation of the child's possibility to think and to get to know and enjoy the world, a foundation that seems to point towards an oblationary and not an oedipal father. J. Kristeva's reading of Freud seems to confirm this result, even if in a different context and from an atheistic point of view: she speaks of the father as a third essential element that is present in the relationship between the mother and the child, recognizing the latter through his love and introducing him into being [8].

As what I have said about will implies that we can get to a true knowledge of the world and of ourselves only through history, I would beg the reader to allow me to tell a personal experience. In fact, I made my travel to the congress in Athens with my father, who wanted to visit our Greek relatives. Just after landing, our cousins picked us up at the airport and drove us to the hotel, but my father asked them to make a stop at the graveyard, where my dead uncle, aunt and cousins rest. It was almost nightfall, and we entered a long and dusky room very similar to a library, but full of metal boxes instead of books. These boxes contained the bones of the persons whose names were written outside. But they were not alphabetically ordered and one could find a name only thanks to a number written on them. My father asked me to give a blessing and to pray a little bit in front of the box of each of our beloved. Because of that, he led me along the corridors, holding a small piece of paper with the correct numbers on it. Following him in the dim light of that evening, I had a clear vision of what it means to be a father and I understood also more deeply my priestly ministry: a true father always goes ahead and crosses life before his children, showing that the journey is worthwhile even in bad times, and finally he explores death to attract us to life. It is not necessary that he disappear to make room for us, as in an oedipical view based on a pure material concept of life, but he becomes truly and perfectly father just helping us to find the meaning of life in the perception of its qualitative and quantitative limitations. This is the only true initiation that a son needs to become a man and what we most of all lack nowadays.

Without this gift, man is alone in front of the sphinx, like Oedipus, and feels obliged to choose between only two possibilities, according to the dyadic law that unleashes the mechanism of the Greek tragedies and of every tragedy. Only the oblique relation, which can be found in God beyond all the limitations of the human parents, frees man and enables him to become a true son, letting him at the same time to become a father. From this point of view, Meletiadis' presentation of the blessing and the curse of the father is specially inspiring, as well as his insight of the relationship between Telemachus and Penelope, that makes Odysseus present even if he is far away [6].

6. Pleasure beyond pleasure

All these considerations are based on the impossibility from the Christian perspective to identify everything with thought, since the *λόγος* is the Son, i.e. the second Person of the Holy Trinity, Who is from the Father and Who reveals the Father. He is Thought, but at the same time He is will, and will for the Good, since He is God, Who is identical with the Highest Goodness. In this way, the goodness of Creation and of each man gets its foundation, along with desire, that is the will of man, who is good because he also is from the Father. History is read in this way in the light of Christ's *being from* and *being for*, i.e. in the light of His Filiation, that is His Person [9]: time and creation flow between the principle (*ἀρχή*) and the end (*τέλος*), *which coincide with Trinity Itself*.

Everything is understood from the perspective of a motion and a thought which are no longer necessary, but from the perspective of a thought that freely tends towards a goal: that Goodness which is the meaning of every human being and of the universe. And *meaning* in Greek is expressed again by the word λόγος: from λόγος as proportional ratio one moves to λόγος as filial relation and finally gets to λόγος as the meaning of everything.

It is evident that the Fathers had to move from a *static* epistemology to a *dynamic* one: they had to purify the philosophical concepts of their time to express something that could not be completely expressed, as it is beyond the possibility of man's intellect. In fact Cartesian epistemology is based on the possibility of isolating the analysed object and of reducing it to its quantitative aspects. But, both in God's and man's case that is impossible, as the object is a dynamic free subject, which is essentially communal and relational. It implies that objects of this kind can be approached only through the observer's freedom and entering in relation with them.

It may be interesting to point out that an analogous problem is present even in physics, where a serious epistemological problem is posed by Quantum Mechanics, as the observer can study the object only interacting with it and, because of that, modifying it. From the theological point of view, this epistemological *impasse* is not surprising, as the meaning of the material world is just filiation, i.e. relation. This is linked also to chaos theory, that shows how deeply and widely the whole reality is interconnected through internal relationships, and to Goedel's theorem, that makes it impossible to think of a formal system without an explicit reference to the reality one is trying to describe.

This is much more essential in the study of man's freedom and interaction with reality, study which is an unorthodox but maybe a fitting definition of the proper object of psychoanalysis.

In the 20th century, indeed, Freud proposed filiation as the key to understanding the human being and the source of psycho-pathologies. His results were striking, but his interpretation was widely criticised, as it is clear from the great number of different schools that were born after his death.

One could say, perhaps, that Freud's work clearly explained the problematic side of the Ancient Greek tendency to see the world from the perspective of the necessity of intellect. But at the same time, in this reaction, Freud was unconsciously driven by his old epistemology towards a symmetric necessity of will. It seems that man's will is subjected to certain drives that have nothing to do with true λόγος.

Perhaps fidelity to Freud's epistemological and scientific spirit demands a purification of his thought from that ballast, through the development of a new epistemology adequate to cope with will and relation, according to the discovery of the essential structure of man in filiation. S. Coakley has pointed out in a very original and deep article that Freud's later thought shows a more dynamic character, partially overcoming the previous negative evaluation of sublimation [10].

And this work has already been started. In fact, in his anthropological analysis, R. Girard has shown that pathological effects can be ascribed to the conflict between reason and will [11]. It can be connected to that first loss of the judging capacity, that is religiously known as original sin, and that can explain Freud's dialectic understanding of man's unconscious depths: the relation with the Father, who is the Creator, is the foundation of the capacity of man to interact with reality, and every wound in these fields produces a disorder in the harmony between reason (link to the world) and will (expression of the self). From this point of view, filiation as revealed by Christ presents itself as the original healthy state, which should be the aim of every cure.

This explains why V. Frankl criticised S. Freud's epistemology: according to this author, the thought of the founder of psychoanalysis is marked by certain premises, which brought him to conceive the *Es* as an ensemble of conflicting instincts. On the contrary, following an epistemology proper for an object, which is a subject, i.e. which has his own will, V. Frankl has gone beyond the *leisure principle*, showing that man is driven fundamentally by the 'will to meaning'. This is an expression incredibly rich from the Trinitarian point of view, as it combines will and meaning, which in the 4th century are both related to the λόγος, as we have seen.

Frankl's line of reasoning is the following: first of all, the possibility of forming a determined and closed concept both of man and of God is denied from the epistemological point of view. It always remains an element of essential irreducibility due exactly to will, which radically distinguishes creation from the Creator, i.e. the Holy Trinity. Therefore, man cannot be reduced to *Es*, even if he has an *Es*. This is also interesting from the point of view of Eastern religions, which do not fully recognize the value of the individual person, as it is proved by the constant violation of the human rights, which are accepted as natural in a religious context that has not been enriched by the Trinitarian Revelation, that affirms at the same time the communal and the personal principle.

Moreover, as the whole Universe is explained in the light of eternal Filiation, the *Es* itself should depend on a divine You (*Du*), according to the link between the *being from* outside God and the *being from* inside God: "Truly it is not God Who is an image of the father, but is the father an image of God. For us, it is not the father who is the archetype of the divinity, but is God the archetype of every fatherhood. Only from the ontogenical, biological and biographical point of view, the father is the *primum*. From the ontological point of view the *primum* is God. Therefore, even if according to the psychological perspective the relation 'father-son' comes before that 'man-God', from the ontological perspective the first is not primary, but is moulded on the latter. From the ontological point of view, indeed, the father who fathers me according to the flesh is, so to say, the representative – only accidentally primary – of the One Who has created everything. Ontologically he is only the first symbol, the image, in a certain way, of the supernatural Creator of nature." [12]

In other words, if the *Ich* can be put in connection with will, the λόγος in its relational meaning makes the *Super-Ich* known as a *Du*, revealing at the same time that the *Es* is not necessarily dialectic, but it is rather founded on a meaning which already evokes relationality. Relation, indeed, is from this point of view absolutely previous to man himself, enabling him to have a filial unconscious, just as the meaning of creation, of matter and for that even of man's unconscious forces is divine Filiation.

From this perspective, it can be appreciated how theologically deep is Frankl's formula 'will to meaning', that in his mind should substitute Nietzsche's will of power and the Freudian leisure principle: recalling that in Greek *meaning* is λόγος, one can read the 'will to meaning' as an 'unconscious' expression of Filiation, as it is proposed by the Trinitarian dogma. In fact, as an oblativ father is essentially a witness of the meaning of life, this expression can be reread as a desire of relationship with a father, or, better still, with the Father.

The same can be said of what Frankl says about human existence understood as gift and as task: "Being-man means being continually put before situations which simultaneously are a gift and a task: a *gift*, as they demand the accomplishment of their meaning; a *task*, as they give the possibility to find one's fulfilment by putting into effect such meaning" [12, p. 111]. The *being from* that characterizes every son is founded by gift, a gift that is real only if it is accompanied by the perception of the task, i.e. of the *being for*: the two dimensions of the Trinitarian Filiation reappear as foundation and meaning – λόγος - of every man's life, as he is a son.

The spread of psycho-pathologies in contemporary society is a sufficient proof that leisure cannot be a meaning in itself: the λόγος is not leisure, but man asks for a λόγος of leisure. From the point of view of the 4th century theology of filiation, this can be explained with the principle that man is essentially a son, who received the world from his Father and who knows himself as good as a result of this gift, i.e. from this relation. Because of this, leisure is the leisure of relation with reality, as an expression of one's filiation, which is of one's identity. In this framework, the *Es* is perceived by the subject through the relation with a *Du*, in such a way to be able to be an *Ich*. But, if there is a parallelism between the father image and the epistemology used, we can reexpress this essential step towards a relational conception as the change from an epistemology of necessity to an epistemology of freedom.

7. Conclusion

At the end of this study, one can observe, on the background of the history of human thought, the singularity of the Father described by the 4th century Orthodox theology and specifically by Gregory of Nyssa: a Father that is father only in the relation to the free self giving of Himself to the Son: Freud's analysis itself enables us to understand the radical novelty of this discovery and, in some way, points out its transcendence.

Through a critical examination of the positivistically biased epistemology that characterized the birth of psychoanalysis, some authors succeed in identifying the possibility of a relation with a nonpathological father. In fact, it seems that Freud's work holds on to a positivist epistemology that his very results demand to overcome. Specifically, it seems that the epistemology developed in the theological domain during the 4th century offers a way to study an object that is, at the same time, a subject with his own will. It is necessary to move the focus from concept to judgement, since God and the true depths of reality remain always beyond the possibilities of human comprehension, whereas man's λόγος can discover relations and join in affirmations and negations elements which in themselves cannot be truly possessed. In this sense, human reason cannot be separated from will, in a connection of objective and subjective dimensions. For that, human thought cannot be reduced to mere necessity. This is proved by the fact that human thought can be predicted only when it is ill. The healthy man is, therefore, at the same time, passive and active, and does not see his condition as negative, since acknowledging this passivity is the condition of his acting as son. Man, indeed, is conceived as relation. Moreover, God the Father, Creator of everything, is thinkable only as relation and through relation. Happiness and leisure sought by man breathlessly and 'always beyond' find here their root, as true leisure is the leisure offered by the relation, in which will plays an essential role.

The connection between filiation and creation that characterizes the 4th century Patristic thought prevents a conception of man as mere determination of conflictive and opposite forces, nor does it allow an affirmation of his absolute capacity of self-determination: on the contrary, in man a two-sided dimension of dependence and of actual freedom is recognised, which mutually call and found themselves, as the *being from* and the *being for*, since the true meaning of man and of the world is recognised in filiation, in the filiation which springs from the eternal dialogue of the Son's *I* with the Father's *You*, in God the Creator of Heaven and of Earth.

References

- [1] E.D. Moutsoulas, *Studia Patristica*, **18** (1983) 517-528.
- [2] M. Mira, *Eunomio*, in *Dizionario Gregorio di Nissa*, L.F. Mateo-Seco and G. Maspero (eds.), Città Nuova, Roma 2007, 274.
- [3] G. Maspero, *Religio viva, il cristianesimo e la dimensione trinitaria della religione*, in *La verità della religione*, G. Tanzella-Nitti and G. Maspero (eds.), Cantagalli, Siena, 2007, 237.
- [4] C. Schönborn, *L' Icône du Christ*, Cerf, Paris 1986, 49.
- [5] G. Maspero, *La dimensione trinitaria della dignità dell'uomo. L'Ad Ablabium e l'analogia sociale di Gregorio di Nissa*, in *Teologia ed Etica Politica*, A. Rodríguez Luño and E. Colom (Eds.), LEV, Città del Vaticano, 2005, 149.
- [6] M. Meletiadias, *Eur. J. Sci. Theol.*, **6(1)** (2010) 3.
- [7] O. Clément, *Riflessioni sul Natale*, Lipa, Roma, 2004, 66.
- [8] J. Kristeva, *Bisogno di credere*, Donzelli Editore, Roma, 2006, 14.
- [9] J. Ratzinger, *Introduzione al Cristianesimo*, Queriniana, Brescia, 2005, 143.

Remarks on the relevance of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian doctrine

- [10] S. Coakley, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, **33** (2005) 20.
- [11] R. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1987.
- [12] V. Frankl, *Dio nell'inconscio*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 2002, 68.