

Book Review
Ambivalence. A Philosophical Exploration

Hili Razinsky
Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016

Elena Sbaragli
elenasbaragli@libero.it

“A person is ambivalent if she holds two opposed mental attitudes toward one and the same object”. Hili Razinsky, in *Ambivalence. A Philosophical Exploration*, gives us an antireductionist image which belongs to a philosophical current that has rarely understood in the occidental world. According to the author, the ambivalence cannot be reduced to a single mental attitude but is always perceived as intrinsically double. Finally, it cannot be attributed to one of the two poles which are opposed, even if it is conscious or unconscious, rational or irrational, intentional or not intentional. What Razinsky underlines is that the subject is a unity in plurality. “It may seem as there is a more concrete level in which people are not ambivalent. Yet ambivalence is by no means the sum of non-ambivalent behavior and consciousness, and, indeed, our momentary behaviour and consciousness can be ambivalent trough and trough”. Without dividing the psyche into conscious, preconscious and unconscious, the subject, as in psychoanalysis, is unique because of its oppositions. Despite the human being is unique, emotions, beliefs, judgements, desires are all ambivalent, and mental attitude is a disposition to behaviour and consciousness. What must be noticed is that the connection with consciousness should be understood very weakly because the attitudes are not necessarily acknowledged or reflected.

Ambivalence has often been opposed and strongly penalized in the history of the occidental philosophy by authors such as Plato, Descartes, Kierkegaard and Heidegger who had a negative opinion about it, saying that it is a wrong way to live human life. Even in the old testament and in “Arabian nights” we have a reference of it. Rationalism, idealism, existentialism and last but not least positivism, have dogmatically deprived ambivalence of its own philosophical identity because it was considered “inconvenient”, incomprehensible by human mind. For this reason, ambivalence has been reduced to a logic contradiction, an opposition of two instances, an either/or.

Razinsky points out that the logical contradiction is not a proper ambivalence because in the former, we can have a solution: the reduction to one of the two poles, A OR NOT A. What emerges from the book is that not only the subject cannot be able to leave the ambivalence out of consideration which in my opinion is closer to the Deleuzian conception of the difference, but it is also a winning tool in the field of the moral behaviour. In fact, each decision presumes a previous moment of ambivalence from the subject. Describing this category as a wrong way of living the human life is, in this view, extremely demanding, even without bringing psychoanalysis into it

Razinsky's thesis convince the readers and they are based on firm foundations. Perhaps, what should be analyse better is the ambivalence determined by two mental attitudes such as hate and love against the same object. The author not only describes a single entity with different pluralities, but also an idea of love which is strictly linked to the Eros. When she states that "the Freudian person is ordinarily ambivalent, and emotional ambivalence – in particular, the love and the hate toward one person – is one of the more explicit examples of ambivalence in Freud's writings", she should focus more her attention on this "love". The love as "agape" is not linked to the possession but it is much more linked to the Freud's love. It would be interesting to know deeper the author's thoughts because if this "love" is linked to "agape", we should also consider the ethical relativism. On the other hand, if we must emphasize the eros, in this case we are not thinking about the proper love, because the Eros, as we said, is much more linked to possession than to the fact that another person is more important than ourselves.

It would be worth knowing the author's opinion about it because it is undeniable the contribution of the research which is carried out in "ambivalence" could give to the knowledge. In fact, even if it is irreducible to quantifiable criteria, such as ethics, it can be considered as fundamental support for the scientific progress.