

The Need for Resurrection in Philosophical Practice

Guido Giacomo Gattai*

Abstract: Lev Nikolajevic Tolstoj is one of the preeminent Russian novel writers. But not everyone nowadays still knows the importance of the philosophical path he paced during the last years of his life. While "Anna Karenina" or "War and Peace" are well known and appreciated books all over the planet, still only a little public read "the Confession", "Resurrection" or his numerous and rich moral essays. In this article I would like to follow his footprints helping me with the novel "Resurrection" where, in my opinion, he draws a complex and detailed map of what and how a working client-practitioner philosophical practice works usually. The love between practitioner and client and for knowledge, the cage of malfunctioning logics, the journey through experience and analysis and the unavoidable altruistic farewell at the end.

Key words: Tolstoj, Philosophical Consulting, Resurrection, Philosophical Practice, Method.

As everyone knows, Lev Nikolajevic Tolstoj is one of the preeminent Russian novel writers. But not everyone nowadays still knows the importance of the philosophical path he paced during the last years of his life. While "Anna Karenina" or "War and Peace" are well known and appreciated books all over the planet, still only a little public read "the Confession", "Resurrection" or his numerous and rich moral essays. In my opinion that's very sad thing because Tolstoj haven't been just one of those old famous

* Institut de Pratiques Philosophiques, Italy
E-mail: guidogiacom@gmail.com

people getting interested in philosophy when they had nothing more to do, not one of those people messing with philosophical quotes to look smarter, but he reached one of the deepest philosophical analysis levels of his times, placing himself between the unavoidable European philosophers and discovering new and fresh ideas to explain the relation between philosophy and faith, about the origin of philosophy and even about the main question of philosophy; the one about the sense of life.

The word "resurrection" itself brings a crucial concept of our job under the light: before any path you are a thing and after you are another one. You can't stay the same thought a serious philosophical work. If you are the same person, your consultant missed the target. It could be obvious but it's not. A lot of us put the accent on provoking and others on helping, sometimes we said we need to be aside of our clients and sometimes we said we have to drive them. But entering this new perspective, I affirm that we have to kill them. Step back from that knife, it was a metaphor of course, but in my opinion it's quite an appropriate one. We have to kill the reckless prince Nehljudov to give birth to a new man. Wise and thoughtful. That will be maybe able to live the same life as before, but for sure, if that will happen, still people around him will be asking all the time: "Is it you? You look so different. I don't recognize you. There is something new in your eyes".

That's our job, in my perspective: to kill and resurrect. And I will propose you the main points of this procedure following, as said, one of the most amazing and uncanny books by Lev Tolstoj.

1. Love

The first movement of every philosophical path is always - and it can nothing but be - love. For the very simple reason that cause for any human behavior is love as Marsilio Ficino said. Attraction is behind our moves even when we don't see it. When we fear death, for example, aren't we in reality expressing our attachment to life? Of course we can say that we don't care about life and that

we just fear the idea of not being there anymore, that we are just scared of the unknown things and that death is THE most possible unknown thing ever possible to meet. Yes. But if I dislike pizza I don't run after the waiter when he tries to bring it away from me. I wait. Maybe he will bring me something better. I must WANT this pizza somehow to run after that mischievous waiter. Tolstoj himself, in his "Confession", affirms indeed that even when he was about to commit suicide he was always attached to life unexplainably. There was "something" keeping him from committing this obscure feat. When you stop having this "something" keeping yourself alive you do not only accept death but you search for it too. This "something" is love, the energy that keeps together, keeps working and spin everything we know.

Being love the principle and motor of all things, the first thing we meet in Tolstoj's novel is love. Affection maybe, to be more precise. The prince Nehljudov discovers the life problems that are affecting him only in the very moment when he faces the risk of the complete perdition of the only woman in his life that he really loved from deep within. He started her perdition abandoning her with a child in her body and now - many years after - he founds her in tribunal, accused of a murder she clearly didn't committed.

He is meant to judge her but he's just a part of the jury, not the judge, so he can't manage to avoid her to be condemned in spite of all his efforts. Therefore he start running all over Russia to find a way out to her not to be buried in Siberia, bending her back to forced labor and maybe dying under this unfair doom.

Despite what we can think at first sight, the "consultant" is not the prince helping the poor Katjuša but exactly the opposite in a lot of cases. It is indeed the poor girl that, completely unintentionally, becomes sometimes the consultant of the tired, bored and recklessly profligate Russian prince. Or maybe, in a sense, are all the circumstances around him to "consult" him and bringing him to his "resurrection". But of course even the prince helps the former prostitute to comeback to a satisfying and full way of living.

Unfortunately we can't always expect our clients to be in love with us and I don't even know if that would be desirable. I am

pretty sure that my wife would have some issue about that. But of course we have to make ourselves a bit intriguing to attract clients as every freelance professional, and there is even more about that: philosophy is a need that a lot people don't know to have. For example: everybody knows to need bread, water and rest. But not everyone knows that we have to avoid asbestos to not get a cancer. So we all *need* to avoid asbestos but *not all of us know* that we need it. And philosophy looks the same. That's why Alcibiades in Plato's Symposium says that Socrates always "attracts" people before to start philosophizing with them. Otherwise youngsters would just run away. They feel the need for sex and quest but not for philosophy. Primarily, ostensive, because they don't know that philosophy is the sole and unavoidable precondition to really enjoy any kind of adventure and life experience.

So we need to be loved to be able to start a good philosophical practice path. Because even if you are able to start it without being loved, it would be unfruitful. The client will start doubting about us, about the way we carry on the game, and he will be completely unable to grow any better in any direction.

We have to make ourselves lovable. And that's not just about advertising.

2. Cage

The first thing that prince Nehljudov has to face is the prison. In prison is pent Katjuša, but Katjuša is the object and the source of his emotions, therefore are the emotions of the prince itself being pent-up in jail. Once again we are in front of a precise and meticulous metaphor.

Indeed the first thing we have to face in a philosophical consulting path is the cage which keeps our client apart from full life. If he were already free he wouldn't search our professional help. And, furthermore, the "cage" of emotions has always open jaws. We have like a tendency to come back to it all the time, that's why we find ourselves being like repeat offenders: it takes a huge

everyday effort to us to stay away from emotional and logic slammer.

To break through the first time is the most difficult thing to do, and a simple runaway is not a good idea. They would catch us back in a flash or we would pass the rest of our life wanted.

So the metaphor goes on: prince Nehljudov goes to visit a lot of high officers to find a way to set free the woman he silly ruined and he has to be patient, stand a lot of boring and irritating people and circumstances to get the rescuing papers he need.

In philosophical practice it's the same: we don't always have fun, it's not every time easy to deal with this "cage" to open. But we have to. And we know that shortcuts would not work at all. So we take charge of this responsibility and our clients have to take charge of this work too. It's an unavoidable burden we have to share if we want to exit the cage.

Why do I say that the client has to take his part too? Waiting all the time for the prince, Katjuša feels very bad. She doesn't understand why he makes her wait, ask for signatures, details of the crime scene and information about her private life. Driving sometimes is lighter than being driven, because the driver must be skillful but he knows exactly where and how the travel is going while the "passenger" doesn't. He must be faithful. And being faithful is one of the most difficult things to be in life.

3. Travel

After exiting the "cage", the next step is the "travel". Katjuša is sent to forced labor in Siberia and so the prince has to follow her if he wants to rescue himself, free her or at least make her journey less hard to stand. During this journey they have to face tons of difficulties: the weather is mean, people are even meaner.

The job of the consultant here is the one of the prince, and the counselee is now the poor condemned woman. She is the first to face all those issues while the prince doesn't experiences the half of them having a personal chariot and sleeping in motels instead of

sleeping piled in a train couch. He sees the difficulties of Katjuša and he tries to help her to stand and resist providing all the help he can, exactly as we do with our clients: of course we see the difficulties they have in facing problems but consultancy is about their life, not our one. So we travel aside of them trying to help but we never share the 100% of their worries and shivers. And we DO NOT have to. Otherwise with just one client per day we would lose completely our forces and we wouldn't be able to run properly the next consultancy.

But the metaphor here offers us even a look to a crucial but undervalued thing: not anyone gets by. Some people die in this journey. What does it mean to us, to our job? It's clear that this long and challenging trip is no joke. Not everyone engaging a philosophical practice path always reaches the aims he desired. Some people fall along the way.

Not always this fall is just a sweet stop of his philosophical research to come back to a dumb life. Sometimes it's even suicide. Until now to me it never happened but unfortunately I know some colleague that that to deal with such a tragedy. Philosophy is no joke and not always it's funny and sunny.

To be able to deal with failures is to us one of the main and biggest skills we have to grow. We don't sell flowers, we cope with the lack of sense in life. Hence when we succeed it's a high pitched victory but when we fail it can be really an epic and tragic fall.

4. Farewell

The last step of the path it's probably the most disorienting and controversial. In the novel too, the final is absolutely different from what we could expect. The prince and Katjuša do not live happily together forever after. Nehljudov is finally able to get a paper that do not set the girl free but at least transforms her condemn into a banishment. She is safe. She will stay away from the city life that changed her from a sweet country girl to an alcoholic prostitute and she will live a poor but decent life. The prince pre-

pires himself to marry her and live with her for the rest of his life, and readers are expecting the same ending but... the girl refuses. In the meanwhile she meets another man and she declares herself in love with him.

Tolstoj suggests that in reality she just don't want the prince to totally lose his dignity living the rest of his life in Siberia with a convicted former prostitute, and so behaving this way she gives back the favor to him. But let's try to think at this story as if it was real. Honestly thinking, the prince abandoned her pregnant and lived a life of perdition. He do not deserves the almost saint woman that Katjuša became. The other guy, instead, the one that Katjuša falls in love with, lived all his life fighting for his believes and helping other people, facing deprivations and jail. He absolutely deserves a good rest more than the prince. Katjuša, on the other hand, yes, became a different person, but she have been drinking, smoking, and prostituting herself and so many other morality horrible things for many decades. Does she really deserve to end her life as a princess? Divine justice is always debatable but writer's one is often cynical, cold and exact.

And what about our metaphor is? Coming back to our job once again the tale gives us a great and vivid image of a crucial event in philosophical consulting. And it's a complicated one this time. The majority of members of philosophical practice community indeed thinks that at one point the path has to stop. That once we set free from the "cage" our client we must be able to let go and finish our relations with him/her.

Personally I think that of course it normally happens this way but it's not the best possible way to do things. In my opinion, indeed, not only our clients but every human being including us always needs a bit of philosophy from time to time. And philosophy implies self-frankness. And the person we can best cheat is ourselves.

That's why I think that maybe the prince and the girl can still meet from time to time, to help each other walk a path that never ends. Because even death doesn't stop philosophy. It just makes pass the baton. No philosopher indeed ever dies without someone

retaking his thought and trying to develop it, carry it on to see where do it brings. Sometimes it's a son, a nephew or some other time it's a disciple, many disciples or someone discovering his papers.

Philosophy is a river that no stick or stone can block. Why should we try to stop it? And were would be the sense in trying it?

Sometimes I ask for no money if a client is in a bad stand but I never refuse a consultancy to anyone. And I think that it's a very bad idea to mark a finishing point. Do people stop going to the hair dresser? Do they stop ranging their shelves? So why do they have to stop taking care of and keeping well organized and functioning their minds?

Philosophy is a river that even the sea can't stop. Let's not deny its nature and nature.

References

Tolstoy, Leo, graf. *1828-1910: A Confession* (multiple formats at CCEL)

Tolstoy, Leo, graf. Trans. William E. Smith. *1828-1910: The Awakening*. (The Resurrection), (Gutenberg text and illustrated HTML)

Plato. 1892. Trans. B. Jowett. *The Dialogues of Plato*. Vol. 5. 3rd edition revised and corrected. London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press.

Date of the first draft received	September 13, 2015
Date of review completed	October12, 2015
Date of approval decided	October 15, 2015