

THE RESPECT OF PHILOSOPHY FOR RELIGION AND THEOLOGY IN EUROPE DURING THE END OF THE 17TH CENTURY AND THE BEGINNING OF THE 18TH CENTURY

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Abstract. The author argues that the philosophers from the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, regardless if they were empiricist or rationalist, showed respect for religion, as well by their admittance of God, as by the adoption of religious morality. Ontologically, the thinkers from the above mentioned period have identified God with the supreme substance, which, by the attribute of scope and that of thought, as Spinoza considered, or, by the extended or omnipresent substance and thoughtful or omniscient substance, as the Deists stated, makes God intrinsic to the world of things and, respectively, to the human souls. Ethically, the thinkers we consider here argued that, being created by God, human souls have enrooted in them the divine principles of moral conduct as well as the freedom of choice between good and evil. The philosophers of Enlightenment reaffirmed the above indicated correlations between philosophy and religion, merely criticizing the behavior of some of the members of clergy, but not exactly the Christian doctrine. The author argues that, at present, given the identified interferences between philosophy, on the one hand, and theology and religion, on the other hand, they could and should be cultivated as consistent and not conflicting forms, which would contribute to the affirmation of the unified and harmonious spirit of contemporary human being and to the revival or, even more, to the retrieval of her moral conduct.

Keywords: ontology, metaphysics, theology, religion, supreme substance, secondary substances, divine feelings, moral freedom.

1. Terminological clarifications

Religion is the belief in the existence of God, while theology is the theory about God and, first of all, the rational justification of God's existence. Philosophy, as the overall vision of the world and knowledge of the world seems to be the opposite of religion and theology, because it operates with reason and it

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usually seeks world unity not beyond, but closely related to the things that are composing it.

However, as we shall see, the two forms of culture are not separate. On the one hand, religion and theology share a belief in the existence of God, but both use reason, too. On the other hand, while secondary philosophy, i.e. metaphysics, is closely linked to knowledge of physics, ontology affirms that being as such transcends the physical world.

Thus, ontology, but also metaphysics, as they sustain the existence of the unity of the world, they allow the possibility to deify this unity. Incidentally, during the Renaissance, which was the overture modernity, the humanists in the Academy of Florence, Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, proposed a synthesis between Platonism and Christianity, while another great humanist, of the Academy of Padua, Pietro Pomponazzi, attempted a synthesis between Aristotelianism and Christianity.

2. The respect of philosophy for religion and theology

Modern philosophical spirit, which is already characteristic for thinkers of the seventeenth century, is not in opposition to theology and religion. In the problem of knowledge, the philosophers of this century are either empiricist, as the Englishman John Locke, the founder of empiricism, or rationalists, in the Cartesian spirit, which was continued by Spinoza and Leibniz.

In what concerns the problem of existence, they were either deist, as Locke, or pantheists, as Spinoza and Leibniz, but they have not ruled out the existence of God as the source of the world and, in particular, of morals. Thus, ontologically, both Deist and Pantheists admitted the existence of God as the supreme substance, in other words, as an entity that exists and acts by self-grounding and self-thrive.

The Deists claimed that the supreme substance or God is the creator of matter, the *substratum* of corporeal things and spirit, as fabric of the human soul. They added that God set His laws in the material world, without interfering with its later developments. Regarding the human soul, they claimed that God is present in human life through revealed moral and its role as guarantor of morality.

Thus, saying that God remains outside the physical nature, they have not ruled out his presence among men. The idea that Deists sustained a God outside the human world still persists among theologians, who accuse Deism, in general,

and the Enlightenment Deism, in particular, to be the spiritual cause for the weakening of religiousness in the contemporary era.

In reality, as we have already stated, Deism is not entirely culpable for the irreligious morality nowadays. In what concerns the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment thinkers of this era only criticized certain profane attitudes of certain priests, but not the idea of God or the necessity religious morality.

For the Pantheists, the being of God is confused with being the world because, as Spinoza said, “by God I understand the absolutely infinite existence, that is, the substance composed of an infinite number of attributes”¹.

From this infinity, the two which are fundamental, the extension and the thinking, constitute the essence of things and, respectively, of human souls. Consequently, the pantheistic God is entirely in the world, and this is the reason why Spinoza used the formula *Deus sive natura*.

In turn, Leibniz said that God, as supreme substance, the monad monads, created the three types of secondary monads, namely, the spiritual atoms, which form the three kingdoms of nature: things, the order of plants and animals, and the human kingdom. He added that God is reflected more or less clearly by his creations, but through conscience, only by people.

Spinozian or Leibnizian ethics are marked by the religious idea according to which knowledge of God ensures irreproachable moral conduct. Leibniz affirmed: “we should fulfil our duty in conformity with the reason given by God and with the rules prescribed by Him for us”.² He sustained, as well, that the spirits have the ability to enter “in a kind of society with God”³, so that the reunion of these spirits “constitute a moral world in the natural world”.⁴

At the end of the seventeenth century, in the Romanian Principalities, Dimitrie Cantemir was pronouncing himself for peace between soul and body, that is, for the conciliation between the two types of ethics: religious and profane. In his book *Divanul* (1698), he imagined a dispute between the Wiseman, spokesman for the religious moral, and the World, who is the representative of the commoner.

¹ Spinoza, *Etica demonstrată după metoda geometrică și împărțită în cinci părți*, Bucharest, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1981, p. 5 (Definitions, VI).

² G. W. Leibniz, *Eseuri de Teodicee*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 1997, p. 117 (Part One, & 58).

³ G. W. Leibniz, *Monadologia*, in *Opere filosofice*, vol. I, Bucharest, Editura Științifică, 1972, p. 525 (& 84).

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 526 (& 86).

According to the World, people have the right to enjoy themselves and to satisfy their pleasures during the weekend, while the Wiseman requests the perpetual cultivation of the religious spirit, saying that “man ... has a duty to show the truth with the light of faith.”⁵

In the third part of *Divanul*, Cantemir translated the book of a Polish Unitarian, Andreea Wissowatius, *Stimuli virtutum, fraena peccatorum*. In his book, Wissowatius exposed the Stoic moral doctrine, where the central idea is that the virtues come from rational knowledge, while the source of evil is ignorance.

Thus, in the Stoic vision, the virtue founded on reason does not exclude the virtue religious belief. Through the translation of his Polish contemporary writer, as well as through the dispute between the Wiseman and the World, Dimitrie Cantemir lets to be understood that he admits the agreement between reason and religious belief.

The Stoic idea of the conquest of virtue by rational knowledge will make a long career in the history of philosophy. Over the centuries, the Stoic and the Christian ethics have established a *modus vivendi*. Up to this day, they are also found in an amiable relationship.

3. The analogy between contemporary ontology and theology

Today, next to the spiritualist philosophical orientations, such as Thomism, personalism, religious existentialism etc., there are many other directions that are indifferent, or appear to be indifferent to religion and theology.

In reality, between ontology and religion there is a certain analogy because both forms of culture affirm that the being as being consists in a transcendent factor that exceeds the finite realities. Secular ontology does not define this factor neither as material nor as spiritual, but in this approach, it leaves open the prospect religion that treats this factor as a divine one.

Ultimately, any ontology, even when it is combined with materialistic ideas, states that the unity of the world consists in an non-corporeal entity, paving thus the way for both religion and theology, which originate this unity in God.

Consequently, religion and theology do not contradict the main idea of the ontology concerning the being the world because they do nothing else but deify the philosophical idea of being, saying that the being of the world is God himself.

⁵ Dimitrie Cantemir, *Divanul*, Bucharest, Editura pentru Literatură, 1969, p. 112 (& 77).

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, through the fact that there are correspondences between ontology and theology, starting with the terms of God and, respectively, of *being as being*, we believe that under the circumstances of the political and economic nearing of the European countries, Christian *religious values*, whether they are Catholic or Orthodox or Protestant, which dominate the space of the European Union, and the philosophical values, which have either a religious nature, or are inspired by science, will be cultivated in a spirit of dialogue and mutual respect both within their domains and in the relationship between the two domains of human culture and human creation.

Moreover, by their nature, the philosophical values and the religious values do not contradict each other. All the forms of culture and all the forms of value are complementary because the corresponding faculties of the soul – in our case, reason and faith – are not necessarily in conflict, but they are rather mutually reinforcing, or in any case, they are reconciled within the human soul.

Despite the differences between philosophy, on the one hand, and theology and religion, on the other hand, their closeness will allow a non-contradictory affirmation of the human individuals and even a resurrection of the moral life of the human being.

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