

## Filosofi och religion

Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift har flera gånger haft förmånen att få publicera artiklar som uppmärksammat det ökade filosofiska intresset för religion och religiösa frågeställningar. Som Arne Grøn påpekar i sin artikel nedan var det på 1970-talet brukligt att tala om religion i relation till irreligiositet. Sedan dess har det religiösa klimatet förändras. Olika religioner har de senaste decennierna blivit en alltmer påtaglig närvaro inom kulturella, sociala, politiska och ekonomiska sfärer världen runt. Denna «religionens återkomst» har också inneburit nya sätt för filosofin att närma sig religion och religioner. Religion diskuteras inte bara i förhållande till irreligiositet, och religion är inte blott ett objekt för filosofiskt studium, utan en utmaning för det filosofiska tänkandet.

Den 6–8 juni 2002 arrangerade filosofinstitutionen på Södertörns Högskola, Stockholm, det fjortonde internordiska filosofiska symposiet som behandlade just filosofi och religion. Dessa internordiska filosofiska symposier äger rum vart annat år, och arrangeras på uppdrag av Nordiskt institut för filosofi (NIFF). NIFF är en sammanslutning som grundades 1976 av nordiska forskare som ville finna ett medium för att diskutera filosofi bortom de gränser som sattes av skilda traditioner och skolbildningar. Syftet med konferensen var flera. Ett var att uppmärksamma det ökade intresset för religion bland filosofer i allmänhet. Ett annat var att stärka ett samtal som i Sverige fört en tynande tillvaro de senaste decennierna, nämligen samtalet mellan filosofer, religionsfilosofer och teologer. Strävan här var inte att hitta tillbaka till någon slags harmonisk relation mellan dessa klassiska akademiska discipliner, utan snarare att stimulera till en ömsesidigt kritisk dialog där nya perspektiv blir möjliga för samtliga deltagare.

Ett sådant samtal vill STK gärna vara med och bidra till. I detta temanummer sker det genom att vi i samarbete med Södertörns filosofinstitution publicerar fyra av de föredrag som hölls vid konferensen plus responser. Därigenom kan läsaren själv skapa sig en bild av det samtal som konferensen ville initiera. Valet att publicera bidragen på engelska kan synas märkligt när det gäller en svensk tidskrifts rapport om en nordisk konferens. Engelska har på gott och ont blivit vår tids *lingua franca*, inte minst på vetenskapliga konferenser. Det goda det för med sig är att inte bara nordiska konferensdeltagare och STK-läsare med skandinaviskt modersmål kan ta del av en diskussion som är internationell snarare än blott nordisk.

STK:s redaktion är glad och tacksam för det samarbete som gjort detta nummer möjligt. Docent Hans Ruin, docent Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback och konferenssekreterare Jonna Bornemark från Södertörns Högskola har arrangerat konferensen såväl som deltagit i planeringen av detta temanummer. Författarna har ställt sina bidrag till STK:s förfogande och Birgit och Sven Håkan Ohlssons fond har bidragit med medel till ett utökat nummer.

För övrigt rapporteras att STK:s redaktion har bytt sammansättning (se redaktionsrutan) samt att konferensen «Contemporary French Theology and Philosophy» har avhållits i Lund den 12–14 september. Denna konferens arrangerades av STK i samarbete med Teologiska fakulteten, Lund och sponsrades av Stiftelsen för internationalisering av högre utbildning och forskning (STINT), Kungliga Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Lund samt Krook-ska fonden, Lund. Artiklar från konferensen — av stort intresse för detta nummers läsare — kommer att publiceras under 2003.

# Philosophy and Religion

MARCIA SA CAVALCANTE SCHUBACK

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*Thinking about god, we disobey god*  
Fernando Pessoa

The theme that gathers us today — philosophy and religion — already says a lot and yet too little. It says a lot because, pronouncing the connective «and», it affirms that something joins and disjoins philosophy and religion, evoking a long tradition of discussions about this theme.<sup>1</sup> But it says little because it says nothing about what makes us think *today* about the relationship between philosophy and religion.

Instead of trying to trace a history of ideas and positions about this relationship, I would like to propose a reflective *disposition*, that should be called a disposition of the fugue, in the very musical sense of «searching» and «escaping», *ricercare e fuga*. Religion and philosophy will be here treated as theme and counter-theme, as subject and counter-subject in a fugue.<sup>2</sup>

In the last years, it has been common to talk about the return of the religious and the turn to

religion.<sup>3</sup> To return is only possible when something or someone has once left a place. To return means also that time has passed and that what returns cannot be the same. In every discourse about the returns and the turns is implicit an interpretation of time and history. To talk about a return of the religious or about a turn to religion implies assuming a construction of the history of philosophy and of the history of religions guided by a philosophy of religion. But talking like this we take the risk of neglecting the question about the position assumed by philosophy. In other words: we assume implicitly that philosophy is the correct place to talk and think religion and the religious. But which is this philosophical position and how can we legitimate its correctness? Is our question here only the one of thinking religion or is it even the one of how religion can think philosophy, that is, thinking as such? Is philosophy, that is, a certain way of thinking developed by Western culture under the sign of metaphysics, the only way to think?

The discourse about the return and turn of and to religion is anchored in the modern world. The modern world can be defined as the world in which philosophy loses its place to science. According to the modern primacy of science, religion is to philosophy what philosophy is to science. This mean (proportion) operates out from an idea of time and from an ideal of knowledge. According to this mean (proportion), time is said to be progression and progress

<sup>1</sup> The theme «Philosophy and Religion» is dictionaryed. See William L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*. Humanity Press, Atlantic Highlands N.J. 1996. See also the account of the great number of theses on this subject made by Irene Butt and Monika Eichler in *Bibliographie Philosophie und Religion*. Saur Verlag, München 1992.

<sup>2</sup> The technical terms used to describe the structure of a fugue are subject and counter-subject and not theme and counter-theme. Because this lecture will discuss the concept of subject in modernity I preferred to use «theme» and «counter-theme» in order to make my discussion more easily understood.

<sup>3</sup> See Gianni Vattimo, «La trace de la trace», in *La Religion*. Edition du Seuil, Paris, 1996, and Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1999.

— in such a way that it assumes that at the beginning was religion, then philosophy and at last, that is, now, there is science; and knowledge is said to be the power of objectifying everything in a cognition. The modern world is such that not only religion but also philosophy in a sense is shown as figures of a past. That is why we have become such antiquarians when doing philosophy today. It means that, in the age of modern science, not only religion but also philosophy is out of place and in the need of justifications. If we can only talk about returns and turns when something is out of place, then philosophy, put out from its place by science, can also be discussed in terms of turns and returns. To talk about a return of and to religion could then also imply to talk about a return of and to philosophy. To a world unidimensionalized by the technical ideal of a scientific knowledge, what Heidegger conceptualized as *Gestell*, both religion and philosophy and the relation between both become suspicious. Philosophy and religion are always under suspicion because it seems that they still insist on the meaning of searching for a meaning for human life.

The modern world has left behind every explanation of the world that presupposes a divine and transcendental cause, that is, a cause that should be found outside the world. If the question about the ultimate meaning of human life and about the reality of things can only be answered in terms of a transcendent principle, modern world has showed that there is no meaning in asking about ultimate meanings. The technical-scientific rationality that structures the modern world lives out from a central paradox. Defined as a world that gravitates around the autonomy and supremacy of human reason, the modern world is, at the same time, the world that became indifferent to the fact of the human. The world that only considers things out from the point of view of the human is, at the same time, the world that lost from its view the human in its concrete existentiality.

According to a modern conception, the human is self-consciousness, the untiring transformations of things into facts for a system of consciousness, a system constituted by reason, intuition and feeling. But in its existential fact, the human is, however, the impossibility of

transforming itself into a fact for the system of consciousness. This paradox has been exposed with deep intensity and under multiple angles by, for instance, Schelling, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoevski, Freud, Marx and Heidegger, that is, at the turn to the century of the two world wars. This paradox can be described as the paradox of the construction of subjectivity. The last short story written by Kafka has the title «The Construction», «*Der Bau*». Here we can find a penetrating because crystalline image of this paradox. In its paradoxical construction, the individual ego of consciousness appears in the untiring work of digging a fortress under the ground, completely isolated from every outside where the ego could be completely closed inside itself. The paradox here described is that the individual ego of modern consciousness does not accept the world as it is at the same time that it cannot leave this world. The result of this paradox is that the individual ego of modern consciousness means a world that builds a world by means of excluding the world as world.

In the paradox of the construction of a world that can neither be accepted nor left behind, Kafka shows that the powerful impotence of consciousness in the matter of making itself objective for itself appears when consciousness exposes the impotent power of its omni-objectivation. The paradox in this construction says that the limit of modern rationality is to be found right in the very rationalization of all limits and differences. Taking as a starting point the paradox of the construction of subjectivity, I would like to assume here not really a position but rather a disposition that is quite distinct from the major part of the discourses about the return and turn of and to religion.

Vattimo proposes the theme of a return of the religious out from the presupposition that the religious returns when the big systems disestablish and the metaphysics of grounds disappears. He means that from the point of view of common consciousness, religion returns because people still cannot deal with the lack of systems and fundamentals; from the point of view of the enlightened consciousness, the return of the religious confirms the impossibility of great systems and the disappearing of a rhetoric of foundations (and grounds). As far as I can see, this

assumption has two big problems. On the one hand, the problem of admitting a distinction between a common consciousness and a more enlightened or proper consciousness. The problem lies in the fact that it assumes that understanding is a progression from not-knowing to knowing; on the other hand, it seems to be a mistake to identify our hermeneutical situation as the one in which systems are dissolved and foundations disappear. I think that this so called return of and to religion shows on the contrary the fundamentalism of several post-metaphysics of the non-foundation and that quite far from dissolving the idea of systems we assist a continuous generation of mini-systems, in an unfinished process. Perhaps the image of a return and turn of and to religion is only an illusion. My disposition is that religion can neither return nor turn because it has no place to stay and therefore to leave. My disposition is the one that, in the lack of place for religion that characterizes the modern world, we can find the placeless place of religion. Reminding some verses of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, I would say that in the same way that «the mystery of things is that things have no mystery», also the place of religion is not to have a place. This disposition can even be expressed by means of affirmation. In the same way that the mystery of things is in everything, also religion is everywhere.

How should religion be nowhere as well as everywhere? How do we meet this thing called religion? Different theories and philosophies of religion define religion as the relationship between the human and the absolutely transcendent. What is presupposed is the relationship between two entities — the human and the divine. This presupposition implies therefore a metaphysics of essences and a theism of the divine. In most theories and philosophies of religion, these implications are not sufficiently discussed. The discussion privilege the problems about the modalities of this relationship out from the standpoint of these admitted opposed essences. Much has been said about the abandonment of the individual will to the will of god, about the vision of god, about the mystical union with god, about the intellectual intuition of the infinite in the finite, and so on. Those various positions develop the idea that religion is the relation

(*re-ligare*) between two orders — an order of the universe independent of man and an order of man that is dependent on the universe. Religion is presupposed in connection with an idea of order. To love god means thereby to love the world order created by god. God is mixed with a natural rational order of the universe. That is why when science is able to explain with such clarity the order of the universe a god is no longer necessary. But the question we have to ask is if god, if that which we maybe should name the sacred, is the same as a natural rational order of the universe. The question is if religion really has to do with a cosmological idea of the world and with an idea of order.<sup>4</sup>

But there is still a question beyond this historiographical strategy of approaching religion.

<sup>4</sup> According with history of religions and specifically the history of Western religions, the identification of an idea of religion with an idea of order is generally asserted as a character of the Indo-European peoples and of their celestial religions. The best examples for it seem to be Greece and India (Upanishads). In the Greek horizon, Pythagoras and Plato seem to represent its most fully expression. But, at least in relation to Greece, this identification is more problematic than evident, above all when we remember that the Greek language had no word for what we call religion. Derrida remarked accurately that when we say religion we talk Latin and not Greek. The word religion can be said to be one of the questions that separate in an irreconcilable way, the Greek and the Latin worlds. Cicero defined the word *religio* opposing it to *superstitio*, seeding the religious semantics in the lexical key of separation, difference, distinction, election and even elegance. The absence of a Greek term for expressing the religious experience points out that the experience of the sacred is not defined essentially with the idea of order. The Greek language has the words *eusebeia* and *threskeia*, which lead us to the gesture of devotion, of wonder and veneration. They are words that grow in the soil of the care, they take care of the deaths, they take care of the mystery, and they take care of the unknown. These words do not send us directly to the difference or separation between two distinct orders. Plato affirms that the animal differs from man because it does not adore god, because it is not a *theosebés* (Protagoras, 322a 3-6, Laws, X, 902b5). And even the figure of the demiurge in the *Timaeus*, so present in the Western imaginary as the image of god as a god of the order, speaks rather of the beauty of the world than of

It is the question of how do we meet today this phenomenon called religion.

Today, in a world where the dominant orders have no need of the religious order, how do we meet religion? We meet religion today as *impurity*, to recall a crystalline expression of Paul Valéry. Religion meets us as a mix and combination of elements. It is «a mixture of history, of legends, of logic, of police, of poetry, of justice, of feeling, of the social and the personal».<sup>5</sup> This impurity and mixture makes possible that religion reaches the most different people in the most different ways. Religion reaches us as orthodoxy of positions, as cultural and civilisatory history, as tension between the personal and the collective, as myth and symbol, as a past without future and a future that is already past, as control

the order of the world. Plato's demiurge does not create but realizes the most beautiful world as possible. When Plato defines the demiurge as the one who orders in a world the original disorder or chaos, he insists that he realizes the possible beauty. The demiurge order is in fact a taking care of chaos, preserving and obeying the *khôra*. This means that order comes from the beauty of the possible and not the other way around. That is why Plato defines the world as the life of totality and the totality of live (*talla zoa*). This means that both the aspect of life and the aspect of death are equally real. As the demiurge of the world, god is what appears both as life and as death. Plato's cosmological order emerges from *eusébeia*, from the devotive care of the world's beauty. That is why it is not very adequate to talk of a religion of Plato. (About the religion of Plato see P. E. More. *The Religion of Plato*. Princeton. 1928. Victor Goldschmidt, *La religion de Platon*. Paris, 1949. James K. Feibleman, *Religious Platonism: The Influence of Religion on Plato and the Influence of Plato on Religion*. London. 1959). Discussing the immediate identification between the phenomenon of religion and the idea of order and considering for instance the Greek testimony of other semantic keys, it is not very difficult to accept that the word religion brings an idea of religion that does not correspond to the religious experience.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*. Vol 1. Bibliothèque de La Pléiade. Paris, 1980, p. 413. «ce qui me frappe le plus dans la religion c'est l'impureté. Mélange et plus que mélange d'histoire, des légendes, de logique, de police, de poésie, et de justice, et de sentiment, de social et de personnel ...»

and domination, as fanaticism and passivity, as conservatism and hope. Simone Weil, though not using the word impurity, understood the impurity of religion as «social imitation of faith» and affirmed, «in the present circumstances, to abandon the social imitation of faith is perhaps for faith a question of life and death».<sup>6</sup> In these words, Simone Weil indicates the disposition which today seems to me necessary in order to face the relation between philosophy and religion. It is the disposition to understand that to abandon religion is a decisive question for faith, for the religious experience itself and not for the anti-religious or a-religious positions.

To abandon religion is to be considered a religious task, and not a laic one. It is a sacred task and not a profane one. In this passage of Simone Weil we meet the spirit of the Christian mystics, the spirit of a negative theology. My issue to discuss the theme philosophy and religion is to consider the necessity of thinking in the placeless place of the in-between philosophy and religion, in this uncomfortable place of the connective «and» where we are neither in philosophy nor in religion, being both and at the same time in philosophy and in religion. This uncomfortable placeless place of the in-between characterizes the positionless disposition of the negative theology in the mystical tradition. Even if the distinction between theology and mystics is not a religious distinction but a quite modern and philosophical, it can be said that from the point of view of contemporary philosophy, mystics has been talking in-between philosophy and theology, having been condemned by both sides. I propose the disposition of being for a while in this condemned place without place.

Out from this disposition, the task of thematizing philosophy and religion can be defined as the religious task of abandoning god, religion and hope. For the spirit of Christian mystics «thinking about god we disobey god»,<sup>7</sup> to search god means to loose him and to loose means to find him, recalling a recurrent formulation in the

<sup>6</sup> Simone Weil, *Attente de Dieu*. Edition du Vieux Colombier, Paris, 1957, p.152. «Dans les circonstances présentes, repousser l'imitation sociale est peut-être pour la foi une question de vie et de mort».

<sup>7</sup> Fernando Pessoa, *O guardador de rebanhos*, VI.

Gospels of Luke, Matthews and John that became a central motivation for the late Schelling.<sup>8</sup> In her spiritual auto-biography, Simone Weil also says that «dans toute ma vie je n'ai jamais, à aucun moment, cherché Dieu». Meister Eckhart prays to god to help him «to escape from god» because god, that is, the personal character of godhead (of the sacred) is nothing else than a social imitation of faith. The theme of «god is dead», which was pronounced by Hegel and deepened intensively by Nietzsche, insists again and again on the central theme of the Christian mystics: religious experience is the experience of such an intensive and radical abandonment that it includes even the abandonment of god itself.

The distinct mark of Eckhart's mystics is the distinction between god and godhead. The decisive difference between Nietzsche's «Gott ist tot» and Eckhart's distinction between god and godhead is that, for the mystics, it is not sufficient to bring transcendence into the realm of immanence. Abandon every hope, as Dante wrote at the door of the hell, does not mean for the mystics to revindicate an immanent god. The distinction made by Eckhart between god and godhead consists in abandoning the distinction between immanence and transcendence. If it can be argued that the mystical position is hyper-essentialist because it affirms god as what *is* beyond being, it is important to admit that this «is» ruins the metaphysics of essences. Meister Eckhart's sermon *Quasi stella matutina in medio nebulae* gives us an important testimony on this point. To abandon religion, god and hope means finally the religious task of abandoning the transcendence of immanence as well as the immanence of transcendence.

The difference between god and godhead can even be exposed as the difference between religion and religiosity (the sacred) and the difference between hope and the non-duality of life and death. In this sense, to abandon god, religion and hope is not the same as leaving the church, changing the cult and religion, or expulsing reli-

gion from this human world. To abandon god, religion and hope is a religious task not because so many atrocities have been committed in the name and sake of god, in the name and sake of religion and hope. Atrocities continue to be committed in the name of non-religion, non-god and non-hope. The sacred task of this tripple abandonment consists in discovering that the impurity of religion is at the same time the force of religiosity, the force of the sacred. Impurity has an extraordinary force because it shows that at the very place in which we suppose that religion should be pure, religiosity looses its place. In other words: *if religion cannot correspond to the experience of religiosity it is because religiosity is the very experience that no religion can correspond completely to religiosity*. Here we even meet a paradox: at the same time that religion is not religiosity, religiosity can be within religion.

The difference between religion and religiosity here discussed intends to signal that the religious experience is not an answer but an affirmation that can only be pronounced when the human becomes a *real* question to herself. That is why the abandonment of religion is the most religious task. That is why religion cannot be thought outside the religious.<sup>9</sup> The abandonment of religion does not happen when the presence of the evil inflicts doubt about the power of god. Thus to credit to god the power of deciding the good and the evil means to accept as divine law a metaphysical, that is, philosophical (and not sacred) distinction between good and evil. To blame god or to look for god in order to cure and solve difficulties and sufferings of a life means to keep the philosophical issue of an individual-subjective order of consciousness. It means to stay prisoner of the paradox of the construction of subjectivity, described by Kafka, where religiosity can only meet us in the impurity of religion. Religious experience means, however, the discovery of the nothingness of the self. This is the heart of negative theology that guides the Christian mystical tradition. To abandon god, religion and hope defines the religious experience as the abandonment of subjectivity,

<sup>8</sup> Lk. 17:33: «*hos ean zetese ten psychen autou peripoiésasthai apolései auten, hos d' an apolései auten, dsoogonesei auten*». Similar formulations in Lk. 9:24f., Mt. 10:39 and Jh. 12:25.

<sup>9</sup> Eugenio Trias, «Penser la religion», in *La religion*, op.cit., p. 109.

not only of the individual human ego, but even of god. The abandonment of the subjectivity of god and of the individual can be called the beginning of the nothingness of the self.

The religious theme of the nothingness of the self touches the fundamental theme of modernity, the construction and deconstruction of subjectivity. Around the question of overcoming the point of view of the construction of subjectivity, philosophy and religion, strictly separated from each other by the presuppositions of modern scientific rationality, discover each other, however, in a modern «sacred community», to recall an expression of Schelling.<sup>10</sup> The several attempts to appropriate the East by means of an occidentalization and to reappropriate the Western by means of an orientalization give, in their sane impurity, a testimony that this strange sacred community between philosophy and religion takes place precisely at the place in which they seem separated. Here what unites is precisely what separates and vice-versa. The sanity of this mixture or impurity is that it makes evident that overcoming the point of view of the subject does not mean interior conversion or illumination in the sense of an ego dissolved into an alienated totality. A certain rhetoric of selflessness can still mean selfishness. The paradox of the construction of subjectivity cannot be solved by means of changing the bad consciousness of self-consciousness to the better consciousness of an intuition, of an unconsciousness or subconsciousness. In our present situation, the better is not to talk in terms of conversion or illumination. Perhaps it is better to talk, following the inspiration of a nietzschean Eckhart, in terms of the increasing of the desert of the self. To abandon the subjectivity of god and of the individual ego means not only to break through the point of view of the duality of subject and object, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, inside and outside, transcendence and immanence, but even to break forth into what Eckhart called the desert of godhead. The desert of godhead was also called by the Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani the self-awareness of reality.<sup>11</sup> The expression self-

awareness of reality says that our ability to perceive reality is the very way in which reality realizes itself in us and that it is only in our perception of reality that we can perceive that reality realizes itself in us. Nishitani's expression was also inspired by Meister Eckhart when Eckhart affirms for instance the following: «When I break through and stand emptied [ledig stehen] of my own will, of the will of God, of all the works of God, and of God himself, I am beyond all creatures, and I am neither God nor creature but am what I was and what I should remain now and forever more». <sup>12</sup> To break through the perspective of creatures, in Eckhart's terminology, is to break through what we would call the dichotomy of subject and object, that is, the perspective of things, the perspective of self in such a way that in this very break through it is possible to break forth into the self-awareness of reality. It means therefore that there is here no question of breaking through from something in order to come or reach another better state, a state of non-ego, or non-self. Reality becomes real in the «self» when the «self» realizes reality as being realizing by the self. In other words: reality becomes real in us even in the very dichotomy of subject and object, that is, appearing for us as unreal. But this can only receive transparency when the dichotomy of subject and object can be realized as a dichotomy. Realizing the dichotomy of this dichotomy it becomes possible to see that the mistake, the doubt, lies in the fact that we perceive too much of reality, that we know too much. This breaking (through) forth into the self-awareness of reality has nothing to do with a displacement from a place to another place, from a stage to another, because in this breaking forth we break out the duality of an inside and an outside, of immanence and transcendence. Trends of mysticism, today very disseminated, that shall not be confounded with the so called mystical tradition, never break through the perspective of the self when it seeks for ecological places to make experiments of a more

<sup>10</sup> F. W. J. von Schelling, «Philosophie und Religion», (1804), in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1985.

<sup>11</sup> Keiji Nishitani, «What is religion?», in *Religion and Nothingness*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1983, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Meister Eckhart. *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*, Diogenes Verlag, Zürich 1990.

pure reality. To break through the perspective of the construction of subjectivity means on the contrary to make existence real. It means to realize that reality already exists in us because it realizes us without «us». Existence becomes real when it «falls into reality» to translate literally a commonplace expression in my Portuguese mother tongue.<sup>13</sup> We are never within reality, but sometimes we can fall into it. In other words: only very rarely we become what we perceive. Only very rarely we make the experience of the necessity of actualizing existence in one practice and to realize experience. Existence does not become real because those rare moments become constants but because sometimes we perceive that only rarely existence becomes real.

To make existence become real, to make real what can be called the work of experience means to realize that reality becomes real in us when we realize reality as that which exists without us within us.<sup>14</sup> This realization is what I call the beginning of the nothingness of the self. It means further to discover that everything that gives meaning to our lives has no meaning. This disposition is not the same as the sceptical position that denies reality to reality, only admitting

<sup>13</sup> Husserl's phenomenology insisted on the fact that the naive attitude towards the world is a sedimented theoretical view. Heidegger deepened this issue of Husserl's, discussing the interconnection between *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*. The non-quotidian scientific knowledge and the non-scientific quotidian knowledge share the same point of view, the point of view of the paradox of the construction of subjectivity. From this point of view, we perceive things, the world, the others as a reality existing without us at the same time as we perceive reality as what exists within us, such as our idea of reality. Here we meet again the same kafkaesque paradox of the construction of the subject: we perceive reality as existing without us out from the reality existing with-in us but at this point we do not perceive the reality of our perception. The eyes cannot look at the eyes. In some Portuguese verses of Fernando Pessoa, this sounds as following: «The only mystery of the universe is the most and not the less./ We perceive too much the things — this is the mistake, this is the doubt./ What exists transcends for me what I admit that exists./ Reality is only real and not rationalized.

<sup>14</sup> See Keiji Nishitani, *op. cit.*

in the concepts of reality the reality of the concept. Neither does it have anything to do with the absurd position that transforms meaninglessness in the meaning of the absurd. Neither does it say that the ego no longer has a transcendent ground and foundation that is absolutely immanent.

To discover that what gives meaning to our lives has no meaning points to a viewing in double perspective, a viewing in the way of a fugue. From the point of view of our lives, what gives meaning to our lives is full of meaning but, at the same time, viewed from the point of view of our deaths, it has no meaning. The religious dimension of human being is usually described as the instant in which a human being discovers himself as nothingness faced with the totality of what he is not. The multiple dimensions of the word nothingness are related to what we call death. In one of the most impressive paintings of Goya, the skull writes above the tomb: nothingness. The nothingness of death has been culturally connected to the totality of god. Human beings want to be immortal because they know about being mortal. But on the other way around, the everythingness of god is for human being nothing, because, being mortal, human being cannot realize this everythingness that he attributes to god. The frontier between attributing everything to god and considering god as nothing is as thin as the frontier between day and night. Christianity introduced in Western culture a god that is at once everything and nothing. The philosophical-theological understanding of the Christian premise of a *creatio ex nihilo* affirms god as the cause of everything. The religious experience that god creates everything from nothing says that only in nothingness can god be found. This nothingness from which it is not possible to escape but in which it is impossible to remain, is the nothingness of god.

The difficulties we feel in following the religious experience of nothingness lies in our difficulty of distinguishing god from godhead, religion from religiosity, hope from the non-duality of life and death. Only in identifying them we can be theists, pantheists or atheists. The nothingness of god says further that when god does not mean anything to human life, when human life has no need of god, can human being realize



the godhead of god. We have always heard that god does not need humans and that only humans need gods. The late Heidegger talks about a coming god, saying that only a god could save us. Those statements have often been misinterpreted. Because for Heidegger if the modern world is the world that no longer needs god, it is in this world that it is possible to realize that god is nothing that can be the object for a need. I read Heidegger in the sense that the nothingness of god tells us about a beginning, the beginning of the nothingness of the self. It may be that Plato meant something like that, when he said that every beginning is a god.

The beginning of the nothingness of the self has nothing to do with a new religion, with a new theology or a new god, neither with a romantic mythological religion. It is on the contrary a kind of vision in which is fully viewed «the uncertain world of birth and death,»<sup>15</sup> as Nagarjuna is supposed to have affirmed. To see fully means to actualize in a practice and to realize in an experience the uncertain world of birth and death. In this sense, we could even say that the beginning of the nothingness of the self is the non-duality of life and death. The non-duality of life and death is still not the same as the indifference towards life and indifference towards death. When Gadamer reminded that only human beings bury their dead, i.e., that only humans plant death, he points out that only human beings cannot be indifferent to death. The different contemporary existentialisms have insisted on the point that this impossibility of being indifferent towards death constitute and edify human loneliness. But at the same time that human life cannot be indifferent to death, human life can be indifferent to the life of life. Human being is indifferent to the life of life when it lives indifferently with regard to the non-duality of life and death. This indifference expresses itself in the perception of life as

something contrary and opposed to death. In this perception, human life only admits the reality of life, assuming death as that which is opposed to the reality of life. In this sense, death is perceived as non-reality, as irreality, as nothing. It belongs to a linguistic common place in most languages to say: dying we become nothing. It says that dying we cease to be things; we cease to be something becoming nothing. But death is real, as real as life, because both life and death are not things but realization. The non-duality of life and death is further not the same as acceptance and resignation towards the fact of death but the understanding that reality appears as life as well as death. The modern world can even be characterized as the world of the indifference towards the fact that human life cannot be indifferent to life and to death. This indifference becomes transparent in the way modernity faces the non-duality of life and death as exclusion, difference, and opposition. Death is not the other of life, nor is life the other of death. I think that another Christian author, Nicolaus Cusanus, saw with precision that death is rather the non-other of life as well as life is the non-other of death. Saying non-other, *non aliud*,<sup>16</sup> he points out that the question is not that of becoming indifferent to the difference between life and death in order to overcome the indifference towards the fact that human life cannot be indifferent to life and death. The non-other, the non-duality of life and death says, on the contrary, that the difference between life and death is not a difference of opposition but the difference of a realization. Schelling defined it with the following words: go through everything, being in such way nothing, that it even could be another.<sup>17</sup> Only in this way begins the nothingness of the self.

The disposition of fugue treated here the relation between philosophy and religion as the disjunctive conjunction and the conjunctive disjunction of a theme and a counter-theme, of a

<sup>15</sup> According to a passage in «Guidelines for studying the way by Gakudo Yojin-shu», in Dogen, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of a Zen Master*, Kazuaki Tanashi (ed.). San Francisco, 1985, p. 31: «Ancestor Nagarjuna said: «The mind that fully sees into the uncertain world of birth and death is called the thought of enlightenment»».

<sup>16</sup> Nicolaus Cusanus, *Non aliud*. Edition Cerf, Paris 1998.

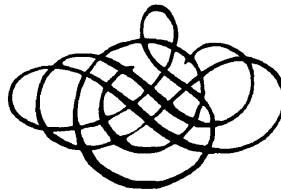
<sup>17</sup> F. W. J. von Schelling, *Initia Philosophiae Universae*. Erlanger Vorlesung WS 1820/21. Bouvier Verlag, Bonn 1969, p.18 «Durch alles durchgehen und nichts seyn, nämlich nichts so seyn, dass es nicht auch anderes seyn könnte — dies ist die Forderung».

subject and a counter-subject. The art of the fugue, the supreme art of Bach, is the art of keeping itself in the tension of a beginning in which the theme is not the counter-theme but neither the non-counter-theme. The theme is the non-other of the counter-theme. Proper to a fugue is the impossibility of hunting one's own shadow or of existing without shadows. Listening to a fugue, when we search the theme (the subject) we have already lost it, but loosing the theme (the subject) we have already found it. Only escaping can we be where we are. That is why the only possibility of listening to a fugue is to become one in the uncertain world of birth and death, it is to listen with full attention where we are. The historical opposition between philosophy and religion can be heard as a fugue (escaping) from reality but it can even be heard as the reality of the fugue. Those rhetorical figures of inversions may sound now as a relativism, but they intend to make transparent that the very presuppositions for the opposition between philosophy and religion are already the conditions for another relation between them. There is no place outside for a more pure beginning. There is no sense in trying to escape from escaping. The very presuppositions of modern philosophy of a dichotomy between subject and object, between life and death is the sacred place in which we can assume the sacred task of dis-

tinguishing god from godhead, religion from religiosity, hope from the non-duality of life and death. Because the theme (the subject) of the one is the counter-theme (counter-subject) of the other, we can further ask the question of how to think religion out from the perspective of how religion can make philosophy face thinking. When the abandonment of god, religion and hope becomes a religious task and not only a philosophical one, it is possible that we discover the philosophical task of abandoning philosophy and thereby to experience the difference between philosophy and thinking. Because, as Schelling said once, the liberty of philosophy only takes place when someone «has come to his own deepest abyss, has been aware of the profundity of life, has once abandoned everything and has been abandoned by everything and everyone, when one falls and face infinity in total solitude: this is a big step, that Plato once compared to death».<sup>18</sup>

In this abandonment we have to abandon perhaps even those very abandonments. Here begins nothingness, or perhaps, the fugue of the music of a beginning.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.



# On Ghosts and Bodies

## A Response to Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback

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I would like to thank Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback for this immensely rich and suggestive discussion of the relationship between philosophy and religion and of a religion without religiosity. As a kind of supplement, which picks up and perhaps challenges some of the themes of Schuback's paper, I would like to say something about ghosts and bodies. Maybe this also works as a way to show some of a theologian's hesitations in the face of the recently timed philosophical «return to religion».

### On Ghosts

First, ghosts. In the Danish Film-producer Lars von Trier's TV-series from 1994 and 1997, *The Kingdom*, part I and II, we meet, as one of the main characters in the plot, a hospital, *Rigshospitalet* in Copenhagen. *Rigshospitalet* as a building as well as an institution could be seen as an allegory of modern society. It is described, by a voice-over in the beginning of the series, as a bastion of modernity. *Rigshospitalet* is the place where human life is defined. Hospital doctors, researchers and «the finest brains using the most advanced technology» inhabit it. It should, moreover, be a scientific guard against superstition and ignorance. But, the voice-over continues, the basement and the walls of *Rigshospitalet* are starting to crack. Perhaps there has been a little too much pride and arrogance on behalf of the scientists, and the building is coming apart. «No living soul knows it yet, but the portals of the kingdom are reopening», and ghosts are starting to well in.

As in modern society, we find in the top floors of *Rigshospitalet* — according to von Trier — medical science and knowledge together with technology in an ongoing struggle against occultism, superstition, old tradition and pure stupidity. On the bottom floor, however, things are different. Here we meet all sorts of alternative medicine, superstition, religion, ghosts, demons, but also human pain, friendship and emotion. The trouble is that the ghosts are transgressing these borders between high and low, science and superstition, knowledge and sentiments, and thus, are taking over the hospital. What we see in this uncanny and hilarious TV-series is the spiritual war that has been declared by the doctors, a war between science and technology, on the one hand, and ghosts on the other. The doctors are struggling to keep the borders and the floors clean, neat and well defined, but the façade keeps cracking and the ghosts keep welling in, assisted by some of the patients. It is a battle that cannot be won, but in their frustration the doctors use every weapon conceivable, even if this means crossing some of the self-same borders they are defending, including occultism, secret (male) societies for the defence of science and outright lies and breaking of the Hippocratic oath.

Why is the battle not possible to win? To put it quite bluntly: I think the battle is not winnable, because modernity has always been haunted by its ghosts, by what it likes to repress from its consciousness, both historically and at present. Ghosts are ghosts just because they have resisted salvation and transcendence,

whether theological or scientific. The ghosts in von Trier's *The Kingdom* is the other of modernity, which keeps coming back, which it has always toyed with but, which might well strike back at it now when modernity's walls are tumbling down and its borders are being transgressed. One could well say that ghosts are a product of modernity; they are a kind of secular and parodic trace of a theological world that is lost to modernity's particular point of view. Thus, von Trier's *The Kingdom* is not really about the return of God or of religion, but about the malaise of modernity, perhaps even the insanity or the fall of modernity. As the voice-over says, no living being knows what there is to see when the portals of the kingdom swing open — no-one actually knows whose kingdom we are entering.

## On Bodies

Second, bodies. Let me here start with a question: What is a religion? Notice that my question is not «what is religion?» or «what is the religious?» Even though I don't want to deny the legitimacy of the second or the third question, I would like to suggest that my first question is the more primary. The question of what constitutes a religion is a question that seeks for a particular set of practices and discourses that is said to be necessary to identify a particular religion as this particular religion. These practices and discourses are the «body» of a religion, that is, its historical and social existence as an organized site.<sup>1</sup> However, the question for a religion has not always been put as a question for its body, but in modernity rather as a question for its spirit.

Since modernity there has been a search for the «essence» of the particular religions or of the religious in and of itself. The famous Lutheran German historian of dogma Adolf von Harnack held a series of lectures a hundred years ago published as *Das Wesen des Christentums*, which mainly considered Christianity's central essence, which, according to von Harnack, is not

what the creeds say about Christ, but the simple faith of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> In his lectures, von Harnack stressed the moral side of Christianity to the exclusion of all that is doctrinal. Von Harnack's thesis about the essence of Christianity was, not unexpectedly, severely criticized by his more theologically conservative colleagues. To make a long story short, the problem with both von Harnack and his conservative critics is the very modern tendency to interpret Christianity as a particular set of doctrines or moral principles rather than as a living body of practices and discourses. The question of faith often becomes a question of quantity of belief, where more liberally inclined theologians, as von Harnack, would choose the minimum, and more conservative theologians would choose the maximum.

Interesting here is not the half-truths uttered by both sides of the controversy, but rather the changing function of creeds and beliefs. Traditionally, faith was both a gift from God and a virtue to be cultivated in and through the body politics of the Church. Faith, of course, had its noetic aspects, but was not confined to the conscious adherence to a particular set of doctrines by the individual. It was more something like the whole human being's response — both as an «individual» person and as a social creature — to the divine, in his or her particular embodiment in space and time. In the modern Western world, however, faith becomes, more often than not, privatized. The gradual decomposition of the different bodies of faith meant at the same time the spiritualization of faith. Modernisation meant the marginalisation of particular spaces, bodies, practices and discourses; as a substitute for the marginalised religions, modernity invented religion, which, as modernity's other, always has returned to haunt modernity.<sup>3</sup>

Even «mysticism» could be said to be a child of modernity. The early modernity singled out a particular discourse of the mystics in distinction

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Michel de Certeau, «The Weakness of Believing: From the Body to Writing, a Christian Transit», *The Certeau Reader*. Graham Ward (ed.). Blackwells, Oxford 2000, 215.

<sup>2</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums*. 2. Aufl. Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, Gütersloh 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1993.

from theological discourses, and thus produced a particular form of being religious, namely as a mystic. In the sixteenth century, at the latest, the mystic self withdraws itself from the public space of Church and society into an inner citadel. The mystical discourse narrates an existential drama between God and the soul, rather than the redemption of the world, and thus, mystics is born as something separate from theology. This happens when, in Michel de Certeau's phrase, «the world is no longer perceived as *spoken* by God» but rather «has become opacified, objectified, and detached from its supposed speaker».<sup>4</sup> For Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Hildegard of Bingen or Julian of Norwich, the choice was not between theology and spirituality, between ecclesial exteriority and mystical interiority, between the body and the spirit. One could hardly have the one without the other. But even for the early modern mystics the interior mystical spirit was not autonomous from the exterior body; the existential drama of the modern mystics was still, if they were Christians, a particular Christian drama not reducible to the more universal or abstract category of «mysticism» (which does not rule out mutual influences between traditions). The idea of a mysticism transcending all doctrinal issues between different religions is a quite recent invention. (Although I sympathize with the concern for world peace that often is a corollary of this view, I wonder if this kind of global religion has not again surrendered the body, and thus a source of resistance towards global consumerism.) As one authority on the history of mysticism, Bernard McGinn, puts it: «No mystics (at least before the [twentieth] century) believed in or practiced mysticism.»<sup>5</sup>

To start with the question «What is *a* religion?» or perhaps even «What is *this* religion?» is to start with the question of the vanished body. If we could find our way back to some knowledge of the body, perhaps we could lay some

ghosts to rest. Even though, as I mentioned earlier, I would not wish to deny the importance of the modern question after the religious as such, I think it needs to be said that our abstractions are dependent on particular historical religious practices.<sup>6</sup> I would like to suggest that our question is not just a question of lack of place for religion in modernity, but also a question of the lack or uncertainties of bodies. Is it a ghostly body or the body of a real living faith that we are talking about when we are talking about religion? The investigation of historical traditions could perhaps let us treat the question of what it is that is returning or not in the return of religion with more precision. But this leaves us — theologians as well as philosophers — somewhere between sociology and speculation (not that these two are so far apart). At least we would then heed the warning of von Triers *The Kingdom*: «No living soul knows it yet, but the portals of the kingdom are reopening».



<sup>4</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: Volume One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992, 188.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*. The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism. New York: Crossroad, New York 1991, xvi.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*. Religion and Postmodernism. Mark C. Taylor (ed.). University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1995) and Thomas A. Carlson, «The Binds that Tie the Ethical and the Religious: Philosophy of Religion after Derrida», *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 74:3 (1998), 132-141.

# Between Life and Death

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There are many ways of approaching religion. There are those who approach it in a state of extreme necessity, in the hope of finding in it salvation and shelter for a bewildered soul. Such an approach is perfectly legitimate. Indeed, one could even say that this is the test whereby religion is converted into something necessary for the survival of humanity.

Perhaps this preemptory and up till now irreplaceable necessity explains the persistence, or insistence, with which religion, like the phoenix, is born and reborn, including during those historical periods which would appear to presage its inevitable decline. There are circumstances in life when all one can do is entrust oneself to some figure in the religious pantheon, a God or special numen, or possibly a friendly genius or daimon — to some figure from the Otherworld who can come to our rescue.

The great critics of religion, those who have known best how to diagnose its harmful effects, are also those who have best understood it. I am talking here, of course, about the greatest, of those thinkers who have attempted the titanic task of challenging religion from the standpoint of their powerful ideas concerning the human condition. And it is true to say that anyone who approaches our predicament with fear and trembling, cannot avoid crossing paths with this complex phenomenon which has accompanied man since he was first able to recognize what he still is: an inhabitant of the world who does not limit himself to productive interchanges with his environment through the agency of instruments and tools, but who also displays a surprising capacity for expressing, through complex symbols, his particular way of interpreting his sur-

roundings, and of understanding himself by means of them.

There are, as I have said, many ways of approaching religion — cautiously, circum-spectly, with apprehension. And the most obvious and transparent is, of course, where it appears as something completely irreplaceable. It is important to emphasize this aspect of religion, given that it alone leads us to the heart of the enigma within which lies the secret of religion's extra-ordinary power of persuasion.

I believe that no one has been better able to express this enigma than one of the most acerbic critics of the religious phenomenon: Karl Marx. Before delighting us with his brilliant characterization of religion as the opium of the people, this great thinker in an early text offers an authentic and truly crucial formulation, which strikes to the very heart of the matter. He says that every true religion expresses and manifests «the tears and groans of the oppressed creature». Rarely has anyone stated with such accuracy what religion is, in its essential nature.

What is it that above all oppresses man? Wherein lie the roots of this sentiment of oppression? Are we really entitled to discard the Marxist focus on the «social and historical conditions of existence»?

Many signs of the times urge us to pose the question in these terms again. Now as never before we are witnessing a host of indications and proofs which demand that we revisit this classic German Jew who has been so reviled, so precipitately written off as useless old lumber by the ruling neo-liberal orthodoxy. Apocalyptic wars overwhelm us at the very heart of Europe — wars which we ingenuously believed were

the patrimony of the lost continent of Africa. Today as never before, in the style of a Grand Casino, the transnational financial engine holds sway on a planetary scale, dictating, with the coldness of its technologized transactions and to the vertiginous rhythm of a lightning velocity, the peaks and troughs of the socio-economic concert of nations transformed into a huddled circle of afflicted spectators winning or losing with every turn of the Grand Roulette Wheel. Today as never before, along with unstoppable demographic advances in the production and reproduction of an infinite number of potential recruits for a «reserve army» which will never accede to the labour market, tragic pockets of impoverished humanity are accumulating. The world today can with all justice validate the Marxist causality which characterizes Capital as the «summum et compendium» of all our misfortunes — our greatest oppressor.

But perhaps it is possible to go beyond this diagnosis; or to penetrate deeper, and with greater consciousness, into the heart of Horror, «the heart of darkness». What is it which in its most nuclear form reveals the very secret of human oppression? Does there exist in human experience a Power of such a kind that it succeeds in equalizing with the same blade what in terms of political, economic and social power is irritatingly unequal — in levelling the despot and the serf, the capitalist and the worker, the Roman emperor and the slave?

The Roman emperors knew something about this. Though appearing to represent divinity here on earth, as they circulated in triumphal processions they would listen to that very servant behind them holding the laurel crown recite the cruel reminder of their true (and miserable) condition: remember that you are a man, remember that you must die. A medieval spiritual text, which Heidegger recalls in «Being and Time», points out that man from the moment of birth is already ripe for death. Death is the Power that oppresses us from the moment we are born. It is the root and foundation of our impotence.

We feel and know ourselves oppressed, recognizing our impotence before a greater power; a power so great we will never be able to subject it to our precarious convenience. It could be that the Lord of the World in one of his cus-

tomary historical aspects (be it as absolute monarch, Roman emperor, Great Dictator, or grand director of a transnational global state) might appear to us to be the Lord of Life and Death. But it would be truer to say that he is always his agent, secretary or administrator, and that Death rules over him.

Perhaps it is death that makes us human. It is said that intelligence constitutes our inheritance (a capital, certainly, which is not distributed with fairness). One of the great enigmas of the human condition is to be found precisely in this characteristic capacity of man and woman for understanding themselves and their surroundings. A capacity uniquely challenged, every step of the way, by a constant propensity for self-contradiction on account of the errors, blindness's and clouding-over of this same exquisite faculty.

I do not seek the biological or evolutionary origin of this human treasure (which could also, of course, be a poisoned gift). I seek the philosophical «raison d'être» of this faculty. I have believed for some time now that Death can come to our assistance on this point. By which I mean I believe that the understanding of our mortal condition constitutes the paradigm, model or pattern of all possible understanding. I believe we are intelligent because we know ourselves to be mortal — that consciousness of our mortal condition provokes our leap into that condition of intelligence that determines and defines us as human beings. In other words, that we have emerged from vegetable numbness and animal semi-consciousness by virtue of the provocation which the consciousness of death constitutes.

Death is here to assist and provoke us, as in Schubert's beautiful «lied» «Death and the Maiden». He is here, his hand extended as when he stands before the Maiden, awakening us from our condition of pure animality and raising us to (or perhaps grounding us in?) the human condition. Nor is there any mathematics or exact science without this truly Platonic Idea of Precision and Proof — of Certainty — that Death brings with it.

Death, then, is the paradigm of every limit (to our capacity, virtue, power). It is limit itself in its heavy and terrible character of an invincible wall against which all our force, intelligence and ingenuity is always shattered. But it is

also the spur to our capacity for understanding our mortal finite condition by means of symbolical forms.

Our most distant and archaic ancestors already had an understanding of our mortal nature: it is known that they buried their dead. Cemeteries have been unearthed which astound us with their astonishing antiquity. «Homo Faber» already knew what to do with his dead: bury them; offer them the piety of a sepulchre. But only «homo symbolicus» (whom we are accustomed to calling «homo sapiens sapiens»), only this species, our contemporary from more (though not much more) than thirty thousand years ago on the Cantabrican littoral or in the Valley of the Dordogne, in Perigord — only this «Cro-Magnon Man» was able to offer an authentic human response to this challenge or invitation which was the discovery of his mortal condition. It was the response of an authentically symbolic expression with which he invaded the most hidden and sacred zones of his habitat.

## At the Sources of Religious Experience

A short time ago I paid a visit to those regions neighbouring Perigord, in the Dordogne Valley, where we can discover the primal activity of our true ancestor, «homo symbolicus».

For the first time, we are aware of our own human condition, and of the mystery of a sensitive intelligence capable of shaping symbolical forms drawn from objects of natural perception, but surrounded by a halo of enigmatic signs, or hieroglyphs, which endow these familiar forms with the character of the sacred.

In the immense cathedral, which is the cavern at Peche-Merle, we are aware everywhere of signs that, like a secret alphabet, designate sexual differentiation: triangles which signify the vulva, a penis or feather designating the virile force. The grotto itself gives symbolic expression to the idea of the matrix, of the maternal or matricial womb, whence all life arises and bursts forth. Everything appears to be symbolically shaped in this maternal womb, like an embryo or foetus which can already glimpse the forms of life it will encounter in an outside

world governed by the exigencies of hunting and gathering.

To this concert of animals (especially horses and bison) weaving among themselves a mysterious language of superimpositions, is added the presence of the witness or officiating shaman, also decked with animal attributes, such as a goat's foot, horse's tail, antlered head or bird's beak. And near the animal is placed the supreme icon of fecundity: a sculpture, emerging from the very wall of the cave, of a female body, distinguished by its wide hips and large vulva and breasts; to the relative neglect of the head, which is merely a simple outline. Woman and the Great Animal seem to be the dominant symbols in this proto-historical sanctuary.

It is the walls of the inner sanctuary that awaken the greatest attention and sense of awe. One is fascinated to observe that the priest celebrating the mystery of the oldest of all the religions has left his own hand on the wall — or an ample scattering of such hands. Here and there one notices the amputation or occultation of a finger. Is this the first appearance of the sacrificial offering? Or are we dealing here with a linguistic sign, such as one finds in all mimetic or deaf-and-dumb languages? Although there is no agreement on these matters, it is generally accepted that with these symbolic forms, we are in the presence of a life-affirming response to the mystery of death. For death is mysterious insofar as it is the contra-revelation of the mystery of life.

To the power of death «homo symbolicus» can only oppose his inexhaustible capacity for the creation of significant symbols. In this lie the roots of his magic. Magic is the art of acquiring dominance over the sacred. Magic means power. The German word «macht», which is in such a special way part of the vocabulary of Nietzsche, proceeds from the same semantic field as the word «magic». So also «Mögen», which signifies power, or the Heideggerian «potentiality-to-be». From the same source comes the Sanskrit word «Maia». It is an Apollonian veil of Maya, or magic, that Shiva weaves in dancing his famous dance of fire, casting the spell of enchantment that creates what we call «the world». Magic is a creative power — whence the German expression «Machen», to make or cre-



ate — which conjures up what is nevertheless a veil of appearances.

Religion is, in relation to magic, its most complete refutation. Religion is born and arises from an advanced form of illuminated intelligence which is able to impose a limit on what Freud called «the omnipotence of ideas» — ideas which lead those who have fallen into the power of magical thinking to believe that the greater power of death will yield to them. Religion is born precisely from the awakened and lucid consciousness that this Greater Power, to which death is the supreme testimony, will not permit itself to be overcome by any expressive act on the part of humanity: there is no Symbol capable of confronting it or bringing it under its dominion.

Religion, instead of wishing to dominate the sacred, prostrates itself before the mystery in consternation. Religious man reveals, in his gestures of adoration, supplication, action of graces, of prayer and oration, the complete and radical acceptance of his extreme poverty and impotence before these superior powers. The special characteristic of religion, however, consists in keeping alive the expectation that, by means of this change of strategy towards the sacred, it should be possible, through the intercession of such figures as incarnate the Other-world, to achieve a preliminary victory over the powers of darkness, and especially over the most terrible of them all, Death.

Proto-historical religion, which finds its expression in the caves of Peche-Merle, Lascaux and Altamira, seems to offer a symbolic response to the disquiet the cycle of life-and-death-and-life evokes in the human being. It gives symbolic, indirect, analogical form and figure to the idea of a germinal matrix from which all life arises.

What seems to be revealed in this protean religion is the mystery of «live matter». Matter signifies mother and matrix. It is always the matricial, the maternal — that which must be ordered and organized so as to constitute a world, a «cosmos». It is deeply to be regretted that the concept of matter has become abstract and trivial through the fault of modern and contemporary «materialisms». It is necessary to recuperate an authentic «materialism» with a

new stamp, as vital as that of our prehistoric ancestors.

We must, therefore, go back to the Great Mother to encounter the genuine beginning of the life-adventure of «homo symbolicus». In the first aeon, which corresponds with the prehistoric sanctuary, whose wavelength extends to the mysteries of the megalithic culture, it is the mystery of life which seems to be revealed, with all its periodic cycles to accord with the rhythms of the moon; and which in mid-Neolithic times still finds ceremonial expression, in the divine procession of the figures of the pantheon: the Woman, in her rôle of fecund Female, and the Bull with his lunar horns. Woman and Animal still stand before the witness in their pre-eminence; and before them too the shaman, disguised with the attributes of an animal, prostrates himself with reverence and consternation. Not yet introduced is the inversion that makes of the animal the currency of sacrificial exchange (by means of destructive immolation) between the human witness and his mirror-image ideal, the god with the anthropomorphic characteristics.

It has been said, with considerable justification, that the «dramatis personae» of the religious drama are always the man, the animal and the god. In the first aeon animal and god preponderate, and the man prostrates himself in consternation before these eminences. Only the Woman (in her life-giving capacity of reproductive matrix and nurturing udder) seems to compete in status with the divinized eminence of the Great Animal that dominates the religious imagination of the protohistoric pantheon and sanctuary.

## The Creation of the World

I believe I will not be mistaken if I affirm that what is always expected of religion is salvation — that it should perpetuate or re-compose and re-establish one. Or that it should produce the change that transforms a state of exhausted existential firmness (infirmity) into one of health recovered. And I am referring to an existential health — a mutation from misfortune to good fortune by means of the religious institutions of myth, ritual and ceremony.

When all the technical, practical and ethical recourses of this world have ceased to be reliable, then it seems that all that remains is the recourse to what borders on them, which is religion. Religion is the promise of a message of salvation from the boundary limits. Except that the resource it disposes of to fulfil this promise is of a very peculiar nature. It is symbolic. Which means that the way religion manages to distribute its gift of salvation is always «indirect and analogical».

But the peculiarity of religion is that it provokes from the worshipping participant an act of confidence in the existential (and therefore real) nature of what the symbolic weft constitutes. Which is to say, one has to give credit to what occurs there in such a way as to attribute to it the character of reality — or, which is the same thing, indubitable relevance to one's existence. This requisite attitude of credence is called in some religions (especially the religions of the Book), faith.

The principal religious narrative or myth in the civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia — the cultures of the second aeon — is the Creation of the World. As nourishing source and guarantor of religious identity, this myth is memorialized and recreated in the cult, thereby assuring the perpetuation of a creative act that makes it possible that the world is as it is: a cosmos ordered by virtue of the creative act being renewed every day or every year or with the changes of the seasons.

The temple now is not the cavern or grotto under the mountain, but the mountain itself. This symbolizes perfectly the emergence of the «cosmos» from its subterranean cavernous depths towards the celestial heights. For the Egyptians, Creation is above all symbolized in an original or primal hillock emerging from the marsh waters. In Mesopotamia the mountain assumes the nature of a temple. The mountainside is bored so as to produce the graduations of a stairway — a model for the construction of the famous «ziggurat», prototype of the Tower of Babel. And in these cosmic religious myths, such as the «Poem of Gilgamesh», there is the attempt to dispel evil — an evil presented as disorganization and chaos, or desertification, or catastrophic inundation.

The religions are full of ideas that move us or stir our most radical needs for meaning. And one of the best-known ideas from the religions of the Book is that «God created the world out of nothing» («ex nihilo») we know, thanks to an excellent study by Gerhard Scholem, that this idea of creation «ex nihilo» emerged very late — in the Talmudic tradition at the beginning of the Christian Era. It was adopted by the Fathers of the Church and ended up transformed into one of the most characteristic dogmas of ecclesiastical Christianity. In the Book of Genesis, however, the Yahvist text (which is the oldest) speaks of the sterile earth that existed before the Creation. And the more recent Priestly text speaks of a Creation provoked by God's imperative word, before which the earth was «empty desert». In both narratives, there was something already there before the creative act.

«Nothingness» is a Greek concept foreign to Semitic tradition. It acquired a philosophical sense with the great poem of Parmenides. Plato distinguished between an absolute and innominable Nothingness and a relative Nothingness, which has certain relations of convenience with the concept of Being. Plato tells of a Creation by means of an intermediary divinity, the Demiurge, who attempts to construct a cosmic order patterned on ideal paradigms. To accomplish this task he is obliged to deal with a power who appears to offer resistance, whom Plato calls «chora» (usually translated as «space»). «Chora» is a relative «non-being» — in fact, a kind of «Wet-nurse of the Origins», a maternal power responsible for the survival of a principle of perpetual becoming ever opposed to the pure kingdom of ideal paradigms.

The concept of «chora» is a perhaps attractive antecedent to the Aristotelian concept of «hyle», that «matter» which however signifies «wood» in Greek. The stoics called this matter «silva», forest — the fierce and savage element not yet calmed and civilized by the «Creator of the Cosmos». The third aeon produces the symbolic revelation of the encounter, and subsequent meeting, of the witness with the sacred. It is exemplified in such theophanic scenes as that of the meeting of Moses and Yahweh on Mount Sinai.

## The Meeting

If I am asked what religion is, what it consists of, what are its nature and essence, I have to say: it is an encounter, a meeting, and a covenant. It is an encounter that augurs a covenant. Religion should be defined as the engagement of man with the sacred. The specifically religious act consists of this meeting between a sacred presence emerging from its occultation, and man, who offers it his testimony.

We have in this act all the elements which we recognize as those which make it possible that there should be such a thing as «religion»: sacred presence, witness, testimony ratified in stories, poems or reports (usually called «myth»), visual implantation of this mythic weft in ceremonial ritual, the consummation of this ritual in a sacrificial act (the exchange of gifts from both extremities of the religious correlation i.e. sacred presence and human witness). All these elements together compose the symbolic weft of the religious event.

It is also possible that at the same meeting-place a separation occurs — the fateful event that is the divorce between man and the sacred. When what occurs is fortunate, an act of conjunction, then one can speak of a symbolic event. Symbol («sym»-«bolon») signifies the conjunction («sym») of two fragments of an original unity (a medal or coin), which serves to seal a pact between two parties, each of which is in possession of one of the halves. On the occasion of a renewed meeting, the fragments are thrown forth («ballein» signifies to throw) as an indication of a possible conjunction. The contrary of «symbol» is «dia-bolon». The «diabolical» indicates the separation of two parts.

The religious event, then, can give occasion for what could properly speaking be called a «symbolic» meeting, or for a «diabolic» encounter. This ambivalence of the sacred is not alien to the general ambivalence running through all the activities and expressions we associate with the word religion.

Philosophy, now and always, is an exercise in wonder forever renewed before the mystery of the beginning or origins. And the beginning is this scene of the meeting-place with the predictable encounter between human witness and

sacred presence. But there is always something which precedes the actual beginning (as logic precedes argument), and which demands a narrative movement that goes backwards. There is always a past in relation to every beginning.

The present, it has been said, is the meeting-place of human and divine. But the meeting cannot take place without the anterior conditions that make it possible. Which presupposes a cosmic «ordination» of this «temple» which is the world (or city). And this ordainment or creation of the world presupposes, in its turn, a «vital matter» or fundamental matrix, which this cosmos orders and organizes.

It behoves us to establish those «conditions of possibility», or «categories», which make it possible for such a meeting to occur. The first category is matter, or the matrix; the second is the ordered, created cosmos, converted into a cosmic temple or city temple; the third is precisely that which validates the religious act properly speaking: the meeting between man (or witness) and the sacred. But — category of what? And in relation to what?

I believe religion manifests itself as symbolic act or event. In which case, this third category displays in an ostensible form the fearless throwing forth — the «flinging» — of the two parts of the medal or coin, the «sym-bolon» that validates a pact or alliance, a covenant such as that established by Moses and Yahweh on Mount Sinai.

## Religious Fragments

There are many attitudes one can assume towards the fact of religion. Before all else, there is what one usually means by the word «religion»: the attitude of the faithful believer who accepts the principles ruling a particular community of belief, or offers credence to its form and contents. But there is another possible attitude: that of one who approaches religion above all for the teachings it can offer him, without this approach signifying any profession of faith. And this is possible from a position of the most radical and naked agnosticism, as also from the religious position of one who nevertheless does not wish to accept the particular form of religion he finds in his «ethos».

Religion matters to me in the second sense; and I am interested in approaching it in the hope of finding there teachings which can be developed, without adulteration, into philosophical reflection.

In every great religion something existential is revealed, something relevant and necessary for the understanding of the vast mysteries surrounding human life. Religion sometimes hits on the symbolic code which, suitably elaborated by philosophical thinking, can act as the hermeneutic key to penetrating, however tentatively, those mysteries.

This revelation is symbolic. Which means it makes reference to Great Ideas, which stir us in the manner of enigmas concerning our essence and existence, but only (in accordance with the Kantian definition) indirectly and analogically. These are Ideas which, though not susceptible to scientific demonstration, impose themselves with an urgency which renders them indispensable to our survival; such as those relating to our mortal or immortal nature, to our liberty or lack of it, to the destiny, origin and predictable end of our world, to the mystery of the Principle of All Things (be it God or blind Fortune).

Confronted with the urgency of a rational intelligence that can only formulate these questions without succeeding in replying to them, religion manages to venture some responses, but only through symbolic expedients. And in this sense, the symbolism one finds in religion (as well as art) constitutes the necessary complement which reason (what I call «borderland reason») requires.

Every major religion is a fragment of Great Pan. «Great Pan is dead!» was the anguished cry in antiquity — which became for modern man, on the lips of Nietzsche, «God is dead!» But this death is not a recent event in the Modern Twilight, but the inaugural act itself of the human condition and its entrance into the symbolic dimension. The Great God has died, or the Grand All, and by virtue of this demise, the ever open possibility of restoring and cherishing some fragment of this shattered Truth has been established.

There is no «true religion». But the great historical and contemporary religions are all true religions. It is only that none of them can arro-

gate to itself the role of the religion that entirely realizes the very concept itself of religion, the essence of what it is that we wish to know. There is no «total» concept, only the partial and fragmentary; and in this characteristic diminishment every religion finds its true oblation, its «kenosis», the ascetic ordeal, which, saving it from its blindness and «hybris», reveals its true measure — its partial, but necessary and irreplaceable, truth.

My book *La edad del espíritu* («The Age of the Spirit») is a sort of Grand Narrative in which are assembled the different and successive symbolical revelations whereby the plural, multiple and diverse universe of the great historical religions (some of which still remain valid in our contemporary world) makes its appearance in the world. It is a philosophical account or narrative, pondered according to criteria that seemed to me rational (those proper to the «borderland reason» which I try to define in «Borderland Reason»).

In *La edad del espíritu* I tried to assign to each great (religious-symbolic) manifestation of the sacred, that partial, fragmentary but necessary truth it was responsible for giving birth to in the form of revelation. My idea is that this revelation, which in general constitutes what all religions attempt to display in the public domain (since, as the synoptic gospels say, it is not right that «one hides one's light under a bushel of grain»), is not something univocal flowing from this or that reputedly «true» religion, but rather, something multiply distributed in very diverse channels flowing back and forth from a Great River (or Grand Narrative) itself nourished by these partial revelations. My intention was to show, reflectively and philosophically, the outline of this story, or the milestones and principal stopping-places, which allow one to allow one to present it as a narrative journey.

In this way, I set about describing the emergence of these religions, from the oldest of them all, the probable protohistorical religion which took shape in the rock caves, until I reach the great religions of the first urban cultures (following the invention of writing) in the civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia; in order then to follow the diversification of revelation on four chosen fronts: the Vedic religion, with the reflec-

tions and dissidences it gave rise to (Buddhism appears here, in the form of necessary caesura); the Iranian religion reformed by Zarathustra; the Hebrew Biblical religion, which reaches its own caesura and crisis in the Prophetic Movement; and finally, the poetic religion of Greece, with its epic and its theogony, which finds its reflective beginnings in the primitive «Pre-Socratic» speculations — and its own moment of questioning in the Tragic Theatre.

The book then continues on to the great spiritual movements, syncretic by nature, of Late Antiquity (with special reference to the simultaneous birth of Early Christianity and Gnosticism), before penetrating afterwards into the Middle Ages, with the appearance of Islam and the establishment of the great communities of the Book — the Christian (Western and Eastern), the Moslem and the Jewish.

In the course of this narrative I show the different stages of symbolical revelation which, diversifying into multiple religious foundations, give expressive outlet to the sacred. But it is important to me to avoid letting one or other of them assume a preponderant rôle. If I do indeed

follow a route in the direction of my own religious and philosophical traditions, I make a strong effort not to privilege the perspective opened by religions nearest to our experience. In this sense, I do not attribute greater relevance, for example, to Christianity than to Islam (nor, when encompassing Antiquity, to Judaism or to Greek religion than to Oriental religions, those proceeding from India or the Persian world).

It was my intention to bring to completion an ecumenical outline that would allow all those approaching the religious fact in all its diversity to discover teachings springing from its own symbolical way of manifesting itself. Teachings that can be found throughout the whole constellation of religions analysed (which are not by any means the totality of those existing, the description of which would have been an impossible task; so that, finally, despite the considerable effort to which the book bears witness, it has large gaps, such as the religions of the Extreme Orient, the Pre-Columbian religions and, above all, the African religions.)

*Translation: Jonathan Boulting*



# Understanding Religious Symbols

## Comments on Eugenio Trías' paper

SÖREN STENLUND

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Professor Trías' talk gives a summary of results of an extensive and very impressive investigation of a great variety of religions and spiritual movements. His aim has been to join into narrative form some of the revealed messages in a great diversity of religious-symbolic manifestations. The motivating idea is that there is a revealed content, in what most religions display publicly, which is not uniquely tied to this or that allegedly true religion, but rather, as professor Trías puts it, «something multiply distributed in very diverse channels flowing back and forth from a Great River (or Grand Narrative)». Professor Trías has outlined this story philosophically as a narrative journey in his book «The Age of the Spirit» (which unfortunately I have not had access to), and I take it that it is some of the stopping-places of that journey we are presented with in his paper at this conference.

He takes his starting point in Karl Marx' statement that every true religion expresses «the tears and groans of the oppressed creature», which leads us to the questions «What is it that above all oppresses man? Wherein lie the roots of this sentiment of oppression?» Limiting ourselves to the present-day situation in the world, the author is inclined to agree with Marx that it is the socio-economic system that is the root of our misfortunes and that constitutes our greatest oppressor. But he urges us to go beyond this diagnosis and to raise the question of the secret of human oppression on a deeper level; a level where the serf, the capitalist and the worker are affected alike. His answer to this deeper question is that *Death* is the power which oppresses us from the moment we are born. Our consciousness of death, our knowledge of our mor-

tal condition, is a power so great that we will never be able to subject it to our control.

I would like to add something to the author's diagnosis of our present-day situation. As far as religious and existential matters are concerned, I am not sure that it is the Capital that is our greatest oppressor in our times. There is another (deeper) feature of our times that makes us in a sense *our own* oppressors, and which is, at the same time, closely related to death as our inevitable destiny. I am thinking of what Max Weber called *the disenchantment of the world*, and by which he meant a process of intellectualisation that has gone on for centuries in the Western culture, and of which science and technology of our times are central parts and motive forces.<sup>1</sup> Science and technology have made possible numerous practices and institutions in which we are involved; we use and are dependent on a great amount of instruments and technical innovations in our everyday life, although most of us have no knowledge of their construction, function and workings (think, for instance, of our computers, the aeroplanes with which we travel or the nuclear reactors that provide us with electricity). But our attitude is that *if we only wanted to we could find out at any time*, and in the disenchanted world we tend to think that this is how it is with the conditions of our living in general. There is quite a lot in our conditions that we do not understand but could find out about if we only wanted to. There are *in principle* no mys-

<sup>1</sup> Max Weber, «Science as a Vocation», (transl. by Michael John), in Lassman, P., Velody, I. Martins, H. (eds.): *Max Weber's «Science as a vocation»*. Unwinn Hyman, London 1989, pp. 3–31.

terious, magical or incalculable higher powers at work that set a definite limit to what we can understand. Even if we hit upon some phenomenon or event that cannot be explained, we tend to think that it is only a question of time before ongoing research has seen through it and made it amenable to calculation, because *progress* is an essential feature of this *Einstellung*; progress, not just as historical facts about actual events of progress, but as a sort of a priori condition of meaningfulness; progress as a form of understanding in which everything tends to become provisional, as just a stage in a pattern of progress with no final end.

And for this very reason, *death is not a meaningful event*.

As Weber puts it, «[...] the individual life, [...] inserted into <progress> and infinity, can in terms of its own immanent meaning have no end, for there is always a step further for him, which stands in the march of progress. Nobody who dies stands at his peak, which lies at infinity.»<sup>2</sup>

Weber also points out that in ancient times it was possible to die «old and satiated with life», because life had given what it had to offer. And Weber continues «... a civilized man, who is put in the midst of the continuing enrichment of civilization with thoughts, knowledge and problems, can become <tired of life>, but not <satiated with life>. He snatches only the tiniest part of what the life of the spirit constantly produces, and then only something provisional rather than final; thus death is for him only a meaningless occurrence.»<sup>3</sup>

So perhaps Death is a greater oppressor in our times than ever before.

I do not want to say that this is the attitude to death of all or even most individuals in our times, but it is *the official attitude* that is manifest in public life, in educational programs, social policies, etc.

Professor Trías points out that there are many attitudes that one can adopt towards the fact of religion. There is first of all the attitude of the faithful believer, to whom certain religious forms appear as completely irreplaceable, and

whose relation to these religious forms is characterized by *intimacy*. At the beginning of the paper, the author suggests that this attitude alone leads to the heart of the enigma of religion's extraordinary power of persuasion. But he also mentions another possible attitude to religion: that of one who approaches religion, without any profession of faith, but primarily for the teachings it can offer him or her, and in particular the teachings it can offer within philosophical reflection on existential issues. And this is the author's attitude.

I agree with the author that the latter attitude is a possible and legitimate way of approaching religion, but then only so long as one is aware of its limitations. I would like to raise some questions that concern such limitations. The two attitudes seem to me to involve certain methodological difficulties that I would like the author to comment on.

Isn't there a tension between these attitudes, a tension that comes close to incompatibility in certain respects? My main question could be stated as follows: What teaching, what philosophical wisdom, can the non-believer hope to acquire from religious symbols and expressions if the true content of these symbols is intimately connected to the individual's religious experience?

It has often been said by faithful religious believers that the true spiritual content of certain symbols and religious myths is revealed only to those who believe or to those who have had certain religious experiences. To others they are dead, without force and they can even appear foolish. For most inhabitants in the disenchanting world of our times, several religious symbols and myths that were once held sacred, appear dead and obsolete and have for that reason been withdrawn from public life. How can the dead symbolic expressions, the mere stuff from which the symbols and similes are made, nevertheless reveal some existential message? And can someone be open to that message even as a «radical and naked agnostic», as the author suggests?

Is the author's idea perhaps that there is a common religious tendency in all of us, and that some of the religious symbols — such as the ones that the author describes in the paper — were created and have their force as authentic

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, *ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Max Weber, *ibid.* p. 14.

manifestations of this common religious tendency of man?

It is of course possible to enjoy, appreciate and respect religious symbols and myths even if you are a non-believer. It is quite common today that people strongly appreciate and find aesthetic value in religious music, poetry and ceremonies without that being an expression of faith. Maybe I am mistaken, but it seems to me that the author could be said to approach religious symbols and myths, as though they were existential art and poetry rather than religious symbols. One thing that bothers me with that approach is something that was pointed out by C. S. Lewis, who was a professor of medieval literature at Cambridge but also a believing Christian. He remarked that the aesthetic enjoyment and value that a non-believer takes in religious symbols is essentially different from that of a believer, and the main reason he gives is that *the gravity and finality of the actual is itself an essential feature of the believer's attitude to the symbols*: The gravity and finality of the actual is itself an aesthetic stimulus for the believer. As Lewis puts it: «A believed idea *feels* different from an idea that is not believed.» He also points out that, conversely, you can spoil a myth or fairy-tale for imaginative and poetic purposes by believing in it.<sup>4</sup>

It appears to me that philosophical reflection approaching religious symbols as existential art in an attitude of disbelief, may differ in a similar way, from the faithful religious attitude towards the symbols. I would be inclined to say that the latter, the faithful attitude, is not just like the former with the addition of faith as a kind of supplement. It is a different attitude altogether, and that shows itself in faithful believers' ways of living, in what they are prepared to do and to risk for their faith. So to what extent will the religious symbols and myths betray their secrets in a disbelieving attitude of philosophical reflection?

The problems I have touched here also concern the notion symbol and symbolic. The author stresses several times the symbolic nature of religious expression, referring to Kant's conception of symbolic expression as indirect and ana-

logical. And it has often been stressed in our times by theologians and philosophers of religion, that religious language is symbolic. But I must confess that I have certain worries about this *philosophical (and theological)* use of the notion of <symbolic>. It should be remembered, for instance, that Kant uses this as well as other notions of his in the enlightenment spirit where the endeavour is to de-theologize philosophy.

I am, though, in complete agreement with the author that there is something special about religious forms of expression; it is an extraordinary use of expressions connected with extraordinary human experiences, but usually the symbolic nature of religious expression is emphasized in order to contrast it with ordinary language, and even more with scientific language (which is supposed to be <literal>). It is sometimes stressed that religious symbols are not concepts, they are not arbitrary signs that could be exchanged with other signs, religious statements are not true or false and cannot be verified, etc. But such characterisations of religious language lean too heavily, it seems to me, on a schematic and oversimplified picture of non-religious language, and in particular of scientific language. And furthermore, it is a picture of language impressed by religious disbelief. So can we give a fair account of religious expression by means of a notion formed against that background?

If it is a defining feature of symbolic expression that it is indirect and analogical then it seems to me to be very difficult to use that notion to draw a boundary between religious and non-religious expression, because indirect and analogical expression is quite common even in scientific prose. Many scientific concepts have originated in pure fictions based on certain analogies. Conversely, I am quite sure that you could find faithful religious individuals who would deny the indirectness of certain religious symbols and expressions, and instead claim that they are the direct and literal expressions of certain decisive religious experiences (even if that makes no sense to non-believers).

So my question to the author is whether the Kantian notion of the symbolic really is important for what the author has to say in this paper? I cannot see that it is.

<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, «Is Theology Poetry?», in *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces*. Fontana Books, London and Glasgow 1965, p. 45–46.



# Possibilities of the Impossible

## Derrida's Idea of Justice and Negative Theology

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Before I begin my talk, properly speaking, I want to make a few preliminary remarks, or confessions, in view of giving an explanation of what is happening here — as I stand here in front of you, at this Inter-Nordic conference and speak under this heading <Philosophy and Religion>. The whole idea of my participating in this conference, as a representative of the University of Iceland, came about very quickly, and when I received an e-mail from the conference secretary, Jonna Bornemark, asking me for the title of my paper *immediately*, I was taken by complete surprise. Why? Well, because up to that moment, I had no idea that I would be giving a paper here. But there it was, and I did not have much time to think. However, it was clear to me right away that the topic would have to have something to do with my main philosophical preoccupation these days, which is also the topic of my doctoral thesis which I hope to complete this year: namely, Jacques Derrida's <philosophy> and his remarks about the place of the idea of *justice* inside this <philosophy>.

But what of the heading <philosophy and religion>, then — what should I make of that? Up to the moment when I received the fateful e-mail, I had been trying hard to separate the more explicitly *political* of Derrida's texts from the rest, and to focus my attention exclusively on the former; the object of my thesis is, after all, to extract some kind of *political thought*, or, which may be the same <thing>, a <thinking of the political>, from Derrida's notoriously difficult and substantial works. During this sifting-through, one of my most important rules of thumb had been to leave out questions of religion, of faith, of God, in Derrida's thought — questions to

which he has, nevertheless, devoted a lot of attention in numerous texts. After all, *one has to draw the line, one has to stop somewhere*. But now I was faced with the unavoidable necessity of giving a paper in Sweden where I would have to address, in one way or another, the relation of Derrida's <philosophy> to what is called <religion>.

Which throws us back to the urgent question of the title. Staring at the blank e-mail message created by pressing <reply> to the message from Jonna Bornemark, I was seized by a very insistent idea. I would have to deal with the question of negative theology. Why? Where did *that* come from? I did not know at the time. Of all the religious concepts or themes I had seen associated with Jacques Derrida, negative theology was probably the one that I had the *least* knowledge or understanding of. I can't say that I did not have a clue — because I did. For example, I was well aware that the literature on the issue of <Derrida and negative theology> is substantial and growing, and I knew that Derrida himself had even found it necessary to address the question of his relation to negative theology.

So that would be my topic, then; and once the topic had imposed itself on me in this way, the title materialized on the screen — and off went the e-mail to Jonna. Luckily for me, however, I have gradually come to realize, during my work on this lecture, that there is an intricate link between the topic of my ongoing thesis research — which we might summarize as <Derrida's idea of justice> — and his thought of religion in general and the way that he deals with the issue of negative theology in particular.

I will now, in a moment, start to present to you some of my discoveries in this regard. In the process, I will hopefully be able to offer you some insight into a number of aspects of Derrida's 'philosophy' — which, to be on the safe side and in accordance with what is now an established tradition, we should probably call by the name 'deconstruction'. Has deconstruction anything to do with negative theology? And has negative theology anything to do with Derrida's thinking of the political? And how does all this relate to that paradoxical heading, «Possibilities of the Impossible»? This is what I hope to be able to clear up in the next forty minutes or so, eventually by reference to Derrida's idea of justice.

More specifically, I will first give an indication of what this 'thing' called 'negative theology' is; second, I will present some characteristics and common traits of Derrida's peculiar 'concepts', especially the 'concept' of *différance* as well as the very concept of *deconstruction itself*; third, we will take a look at the way that Derrida *himself* addresses the question of the relation of his thought to negative theology; and lastly, we will try to establish in what way the whole issue of 'deconstruction and negative theology' can throw a light on Derrida's recent remarks about the place of justice inside his thought.

## I

What is negative theology?<sup>1</sup> Well, a general response could be that the term has been used for many centuries, especially or exclusively within the Christian tradition, to qualify a depiction of God as 'something' that is 'without being' or 'beyond being', something that is, in other words, absolutely transcendent and unknowable: beyond words, for example, in such a way that absolutely nothing can justly be said about God ('him', or 'her', or 'it' — or 'X'!?) — everything one would be tempted to say about God is by definition inadequate. Thus, negative

theology is, evidently, caught in apparently endless paradoxes right from the start. It is not even certain that we can so much as say the name of God — by calling God 'God' (instead of, for example, 'Gud', 'Dieu', 'Allah', etc.), are we not thereby reducing him to an inferior level which he has nothing to do with?

The negative conception of God that saturates negative theology is traditionally (at least in the *philosophical* tradition!) traced back to Plato and his well-known definition of the Good as 'beyond being' («*epekeina tês ousias*», *Republic* 509B). This idea was then taken up, and radicalized, by the neo-Platonists and has kept recurring through the centuries, for example in the writings of Christian theologians such as the so-called Pseudo-Dionysius (the Areopagite, c. AD 500), John Scottus Eriugena (c. 810–880), Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1327?) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464). Most recently, negative theology has found a representative in the French philosopher/theologian Jean-Luc Marion, who is the author of a number of books and articles that are all marked by a very strong conception of God as beyond, or without, being. As he writes in his introduction to his first major work, which is called, precisely, *God Without Being*: «I am attempting to bring out the absolute freedom of God with regard to all determinations, including, first of all, the basic condition that renders all other conditions possible and even necessary — for us, humans — the fact of Being».<sup>2</sup>

Now let us briefly remark that the principles of negative theology seem simple and unambiguous enough, even if they are at the same time very delimitative; and, further, it would seem that once the follower of negative theology

<sup>1</sup> The ensuing general discussion of negative theology is largely based on *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 15, ed. Mircea Eliade. Macmillan, New York 1987, pp. 252–254.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1991, p. xx. — One might add that according to Marion, God does not primarily *be*; rather, *love*, understood as Christian 'love of one's neighbour', *agapè*, is God's 'basic mode'. We should note, perhaps, that Marion has on a number of occasions criticized Derrida's handling of the question of negative theology, and Derrida has not failed to respond (notably in a very friendly and civilised way).

has discovered, established and accepted these principles, he (or she) is faced with two alternatives. (1) *Either* he accepts his own logic of negativity without, precisely, a word, doing his best from that moment on to say *nothing*, or, more precisely, to say *nothing about God*, who, nevertheless, is the very sun around which his existence revolves; the negative theologian thus condemns himself to a secret, to an existence in submission to the secret, so to speak, a secret which he is never to reveal to anyone and will remain forever his own, private secret; (2) *or* he attempts to make the secret public, to share it with others, to let those who wander the earth in ignorance see the light, and his manner of doing this will necessarily be that of attempting to formulate a discourse that would say the unsayable, to speak of that of which it is impossible to speak.

In any case, it would seem quite clear that the practitioner of negative theology dedicates himself to a *way of life* which is characterized by constant denials or negations of whatever may come to be presented as an attribute of God or a manifestation of God. This way of the negative theologian (or of the <practitioner of negative theology>) is ultimately oriented towards achieving a complete and eternal unity with God — a unity that Dionysius refers to under the name of «superessential darkness», whereas Nicholas of Cusa speaks of a «learned ignorance». The process of achieving this unity, this way of life dedicated to negating everything that is affirmed of God, is what the tradition calls, in a word, the *via negativa*: getting to know God, who is unknowable, by negating all we claim to know about him.

## II

What does negative theology, then, have to do with Jacques Derrida's thinking? Well, that story goes back to 1968 at least. That year, Derrida presented his essay «La différance» to the French Society of Philosophy — an essay that is, as the name indicates, a presentation of the term <différance> which no doubt will go down in history as one of Derrida's major inventions. Maybe some of you are already familiar with this term, but in any case it would seem appro-

priate to try and give an idea of what he means by it — which is, in fact, not all that easy! In his book *Of Grammatology*, Derrida describes *différance* as the «unnameable movement of *différence-itself*».<sup>3</sup> In other words, and no doubt much too simplistically, we might say, thus, that if we ask <what is it that accounts for the fact that *there is* difference, that there is a difference — for example, between A and B, between this chair and the next chair, between this moment and the next, between presence and absence, between the sensible and the intelligible, being and becoming, Being and beings, etc. etc.?> — or, even more concisely, <what makes the difference?>, <what makes a difference?> — then the answer would be <la différance>.

As you may have noticed, the examples that I have just given are not only spatial but also temporal; not only the difference between one chair and the next chair, but also the difference between «one moment and the next» has its roots in *différance*. In fact, Derrida justifies his choice of the word by simple reference to the two senses of the French verb *différer* (or the Latin *differre*): namely, on the one hand, the *temporal* sense of postponing, deferring to a <later date>; and, on the other hand, there is also the *spatial* sense of being non-identical, being other, etc.<sup>4</sup> The word «différance» is formed in a very straightforward way as a derivative form of the verb *différer*; the suffix *-ance* (with an <a>) serves to indicate a middle voice, much in the same

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1994, p. 93; Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie*. Minuit, Paris 1967, p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, «La différance», *Marges — de la philosophie*. Minuit, Paris 1972, p. 8. — The third sense would be that of «the delay or lateness that means that meaning is always anticipated or else reestablished after the event: [...] this third sense forbids us from thinking of language as identically present to itself in any synchronic <present>, [and] has therefore already introduced diachrony into synchrony [...]» (Geoffrey Bennington, «Derridabase», in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1993, pp. 71–73; Geoffrey Bennington, «Derridabase», in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*. Seuil, Paris 1991, pp. 71–72).

way that the French noun *«résonance»* (quite simply, *«resonance»*) is derived from the verb *«résonner»* which means *«to resonate»*. These *«nouns in the middle voice»*, then, *«différance»* and *«résonance»*, are, therefore, neither active nor passive — or, perhaps, *both* active and passive: a little bit of both.<sup>5</sup>

In any case, the reason why I am invoking these grammatical complexities related to the concept of *différance* is that during the discussion after his presentation of the paper on this term, Derrida was directly confronted with the *«accusation»*, as some commentators (and Derrida himself) put it, of his thought being *«merely»* a negative theology. The possibility of such a relation had, in fact, already been explicitly stated by Derrida himself in the early stages of his lecture, where he warns his reader (or his audience) that

the detours, locutions, and syntax in which I will often have to take recourse will resemble those of negative theology, occasionally even to the point of being indistinguishable from negative theology.<sup>6</sup>

Derrida then immediately proceeds, almost as if to illustrate his point, to a description of what he calls *la différance* in very negative terms:

[...] *différance* is not, does not exist, is not a present-being (*on*) in any form; and [later on] we will be led to delineate also everything *that it is not*, that is, *everything*; and consequently that it has neither existence nor essence. It derives from no category of being, whether present or absent.<sup>7</sup>

The similarities between these formulations and those of negative theology are unmistakable; to repeat, Derrida is saying that *«différance is not»* and *«everything that [différance] is not»* equals *«everything»*. And if we keep in mind Derrida's own insinuation of the parallels between his

mode of thinking and the procedures of negative theology (that we have just quoted), it is no wonder that a certain comparison of Derrida's thought and negative theology went on to haunt him through the decades — and, in fact, Derrida did nothing, to say the least, to fend off such phantoms or to put them down. Instead, he kept adding to his arsenal of *«negative» «concepts»* — which weren't even *«concepts»* properly speaking — terms, words, figures of speech that had a lot of things in common, but primary among those common characteristics was the fact that one could say very little *positive* about them. A few examples of these terms would be the *trace* and the *supplement*, both of which figure prominently in Derrida's early major work, *Of Grammatology*; Derrida's general idea of *writing* would also belong here, as well as rather more *«particular»* or *«context-specific»* textual phenomena such as the *pharmakon*, which Derrida locates in Plato's *Phaedrus*,<sup>8</sup> and the *parergon*, which he discovers in Kant,<sup>9</sup> the list could go on for some time, but let it suffice to name the remark, the margin, the undecidable, the parasitical, and finally what he calls iterability.<sup>10</sup> The first word and archetype in the series is undoubtedly the term that we started with: *différance*. But what would be the last word? Perhaps it would be *deconstruction* itself, for, after all, that term apparently shares some of the *«essential»* properties of the other elements of the series, as we shall now see.

What is deconstruction for Derrida? He gives a fairly concise idea of this in a short paper called *«Letter to a Japanese friend»* — an excerpt from a personal letter of advice regarding the question of how to translate the term *«deconstruction»* into Japanese. Derrida is concerned that the Japanese translation of the term

<sup>8</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *«La pharmacie de Platon»*, *La dissémination*. Seuil, Paris 1972.

<sup>9</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *«Parergon»*, *La vérité en peinture*. Aubier-Flammarion, Paris 1978.

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Bennington's list of such terms, which he characterizes by the way that they *«suspend, exceed, or precede [the] question «what is ...»»*, runs as follows: writing, literature, woman, appropriation, *Aufhebung*, the sign, the date, the *«yes»*, and, finally, art. Geoffrey Bennington, *«Derridabase»*, p. 77; p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Derrida, *«La différance»*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, *«Différance»*, *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass. University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1982, p. 6; Derrida, *«La différance»*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

should avoid certain significations or connotations, «if *possible*».<sup>11</sup> Therefore he writes at the beginning of the letter: «The question would be therefore what deconstruction is not, or rather *ought* not to be».<sup>12</sup> Derrida then goes on to evoke the traditional meaning of the term — for the fact is that the verb «*déconstruire*» and the noun «*déconstruction*» existed in the French language before Derrida «reinvented» them. The meaning of these terms comes down to something like what is called «disassembling» in English, as when one disassembles a machine in order to facilitate its transport, in view of assembling it again upon arrival.

The reason why Derrida came to choose this word for what he was trying to put into effect in his *Grammatology* is, apparently, two-fold: first, Derrida wanted to maintain a link to what Heidegger called *Destruktion* and what Husserl called *Abbau*, namely a thoroughgoing reconsideration of the history of metaphysics as a whole; the direct translation of Heidegger's term, «destruction», would, according to Derrida, have had far too negative connotations since what he was trying to do was precisely *not* altogether negative. Secondly, Derrida relates his choice of the word «deconstruction» to his response, or reaction, to structuralism which was more or less predominant in the French intellectual landscape at the time: there is an *active* part in the word «deconstruction» that relates specifically to «structure» and insinuates that the idea is to *do something with it*.<sup>13</sup>

Once he has got these references to the traditional meaning of the term out of the way, Derrida proceeds to his explicit discussion of what deconstruction is *not*. First of all, it is neither an *analysis* nor a *critique*.<sup>14</sup> It is not an analysis because it does not tend towards a simple ele-

ment or an indissoluble origin; and it is not a critique because the very notion that underlies all critique, designated by the Greek verb *krinein* or the noun *krisis*, meaning «decision, choice, judgement, discernment»,<sup>15</sup> is itself one of the main objects of deconstruction.

No more is it a *method*, «[e]specially if the technical and procedural significations of that word are stressed».<sup>16</sup> Deconstruction cannot be a mere procedure or a blind application of an established technique. Further, deconstruction is neither an *act* nor an *operation*; there is no individual or collective subject that would be the «agent» of deconstruction. While deconstruction is necessarily active in some sense, there is also something irreducibly passive in it, as expressed by the impersonal form «*ça se déconstruit*», «it deconstructs (itself)» or «*c'est en déconstruction*», «it is in deconstruction» (in the same way that we say (in English — and in most other languages if I am not mistaken) «it rains».)<sup>17</sup>

So, the bottom line is that «deconstruction is neither this nor that», or, as Derrida puts it towards the end of his letter:

What deconstruction is not? everything of course!  
What is deconstruction? nothing of course!<sup>18</sup>

There we have it, then, from the horse's mouth, as it were: Derrida's thought, deconstruction as it is called, is *nothing*. (Of course it is nothing!) More precisely, or conversely, *everything* is «what deconstruction is not». And at this stage a certain very simple, and possibly simplistic, question cannot fail to impose itself: *why*, then, deconstruction? What is deconstruction — what is Derrida — on about, then? We know that he hasn't failed to speak — or, more precisely, to write. But has he all along been *writing nothing* or *writing about nothing*?

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, «Letter to a Japanese Friend», translated by David Wood and Andrew Benjamin, in Peggy Kamuf (ed.), *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*. Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York 1991, p. 270; Jacques Derrida, «Lettre à un ami japonais», *Psyché: Invention de l'autre*. Galilée, Paris 1987, p. 387.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270; p. 387.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 270-273; pp. 388-390.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273; p. 390.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273; p. 390.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273 (translation altered); p. 390.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 273-274; p. 391.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275; p. 392.

## III

Let us now move to an exposition of the way in which Derrida addresses the question of negative theology. In 1986, he finally decided to tackle this issue directly and at length — at a conference in Jerusalem under the heading «Absence and negativity» in a lecture entitled «How to avoid speaking: Denials».

At the very beginning of this lecture, Derrida describes the choice of his topic in terms of a *duty* which he relates to the fact of the conference taking place in Jerusalem. When he received the invitation to speak in Jerusalem under this heading, «Absence and negativity», Derrida seems to have thought that «this was it», that now he could no longer avoid speaking to, and about, the issue of negative theology. Hence, in part, the title of his lecture, which, as he gives us to understand, he had to conjure up at short notice, in any case before he had had the time to start thinking about the lecture *itself*.

Having made these confessions, Derrida goes on to raise the question of the unity or coherence of the «concept» of negative theology. Is there such a «thing» as «one negative theology, the negative theology?», he asks.<sup>19</sup> There is an essential evasiveness at work here; as Derrida remarks, «for essential reasons one is never certain of being able to attribute to anyone a project of negative theology *as such*».<sup>20</sup> For these reasons, it clearly becomes difficult to speak of negative theology *as if* one knew exactly what it is — and what it is *not*. Nevertheless, Derrida proposes a «provisional hypothesis» as to the essence of negative theology, and then proceeds to offer a fairly unreserved acknowledgement of a certain affinity between his writing and negative theology. «The family resemblance of negative theology», he writes, will no doubt be recognized «in every discourse that seems to return in a regular and insistent manner to [the]

rhetoric of negative determination», or, in other words, to a discourse dominated by formulas of the type «X is neither this nor that». As examples of such an X, Derrida names a number of concepts which, as he puts it, are «close and [...] familiar» to him, namely: «text, writing, the trace, différance, the hymen, the supplement, the pharmakon, the parergon, etc».<sup>21</sup>

In this manner, then, we find Derrida once more drawing attention to the way that his «concepts» invite a comparison with the procedures of negative theology. He then goes on to formulate three «criticisms» (or accusations, or charges) of negative theology — criticisms which he refers to as the «automatic, ritualistic, and «doxic» exercise of the suspicion brought against everything that resembles negative theology».<sup>22</sup> Here's the first charge:

You prefer to deny; you affirm nothing; you are fundamentally a nihilist, or even an obscurantist; neither knowledge nor even the science of theology will progress in this way.<sup>23</sup>

And the second one is as follows:

You are abusing a simple technique; all you have to do is repeat: «X is no more this than that», «X seems to exceed all discourse or predication», and so on. This comes down to speaking in order to say nothing. You speak only for the sake of speaking, in order to experiment with speech.<sup>24</sup>

With regard to this second criticism, Derrida remarks that it «already appears more interesting and more lucid than the first»,<sup>25</sup> especially in view of the fact that «speaking in order to say *nothing* is not the same as not speaking. Above all, it is not the same as speaking to no one».<sup>26</sup>

The third criticism is, in Derrida's words, «less evident but no doubt [even!] more interesting» than the first two. What it boils down to is,

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida, «How to avoid speaking: Denials», translated by Ken Frieden, in Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (eds.), *Derrida and Negative Theology*. SUNY Press, Albany 1992, p. 73; Jacques Derrida, «Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations», *Psyché: Invention de l'autre*. Galilée, Paris 1987, p. 535.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74; pp. 535-536.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74; p. 536.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75; p. 537.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75 (translation altered); p. 537.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75 (translation altered); p. 537.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75; p. 537.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76 (translation altered); p. 538.

quite simply, the possibility of regarding *any* negation as an invocation of the name of God:

Every time I say: X is neither this nor that, neither the contrary of this nor that, neither the simple neutralization of this nor that with which it *has nothing in common*, [...] I would start to speak of God, under this name or another. [...] God's name would suit everything that may not be broached, approached, or designated, except in an indirect and negative manner. Every negative sentence would already be haunted by God or by the name of God [...].<sup>27</sup>

In this way, then, God would emerge as «the truth of all negativity», or, in other words, ««God» would name *that without which* one would not know how to account for any negativity: grammatical or logical negation, illness, evil, and finally neurosis [...].<sup>28</sup>

Now it is quite clear that these three criticisms of negative theology described by Derrida can — and *should* — ultimately be read as representative of the «traditional» critique of Derrida's own theorizing. With reference to the third accusation, that of any negative discourse being implicitly theological through and through, he writes that

[...] those who would like to consider «deconstruction» a symptom of modern or postmodern nihilism could indeed, if they wished, recognize in it the last testimony — not to say the martyrdom — of faith in the present *fin de siècle*.<sup>29</sup>

Deconstruction as the relentless negative discourse of «postmodernity» would thus be revealed as being, in the final reckoning, nothing but the «last sigh of faith»; in its very iconoclastic and disrespectful attitude towards everything, including God, deconstruction would be the end of religion, or, in other words, it would be the most *truly* religious manifestation of the death, not only of God but of religion in general. In this manner, then, deconstruction would be at the same time «more religious than religion» and

«no more religion»: in one word, deconstruction would be *hyperreligious*, given the essential ambiguity of the prefix *hyper-*, which means «both beyond and more», as Derrida points out.<sup>30</sup> But does Derrida approve of such an interpretation of deconstruction and the «state of the world» «in the present *fin de siècle*»? Well, he seems at least to *allow* for such a reading, for, as he writes, it «will always be possible». *Possible*, yes, but is it «necessary» or «true»? Derrida does not close that question there and then; rather, he opens it up even further and writes: «Who could prohibit it [*viz.*, this interpretation]? In the name of what?»<sup>31</sup>

Derrida's opponents, real or imaginary, find their voice again later on in the lecture, where Derrida introduces them as «those who still denounce «deconstruction» [...] as a bastardized resurgence of negative theology» and adds that these people «are also those who readily suspect those they call the «deconstructionists» of forming a sect, a brotherhood, an esoteric corporation, or more vulgarly, a clique, a gang, or [...] a «mafia»».<sup>32</sup> Another triad of «charges» follows. Here's a brief summary of them:

1. Those people, adepts of negative theology or of deconstruction (the difference matters little to the accusers), must indeed have a secret.<sup>33</sup>
2. But since this secret obviously cannot be determined and is nothing, as these people themselves recognize, they have no secret.<sup>34</sup>
3. If you know how to question them, they will finish by admitting: «The secret is that there is no secret, but there are at least two ways of thinking or proving this proposition», and so on. Experts in the art of evasion, they know better how to negate or deny than how to say anything.<sup>35</sup>

Let us retain this image for a while: that of the adepts of deconstruction gathered around their

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76; p. 538.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77; p. 538.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77; p. 539.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90; p. 552.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77; p. 539.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88; p. 551.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88; p. 551.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89; p. 551.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89; p. 551.

secret — which is no secret, and we know it. Do they know *our* secret — do they know that we know? I am afraid they do — or, at the very least, and as we have seen, Derrida does.

#### IV

What, then, of Derrida's relation to negative theology? What have we been doing so far? Well, we have, apparently, made a strong case for considering Derrida's thinking as being, to say the least, *very closely related* to negative theology. The strength of our case rests among other things, and not least, on *Derrida's own* explicit admissions with regard to the affinity of his thinking with negative theology. But just *how close* is the relation? And what sort of relation is it?

Let us go back to the beginning — that is, to the 1968 lecture on *différance*, in which we saw Derrida describing this <concept without concept> by means of a series of negations. As it turns out, I have to admit, we should have read a little further. Immediately after the declaration to the effect that *différance* «has neither existence nor essence» and that it «derives from no category of being, whether present or absent», Derrida adds:

And yet those aspects of *différance* which are thereby delineated are not theological, not even in the order of the most negative of negative theologies, which are always concerned with disengaging a superessentiality beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, and always hastening to recall that God is refused the predicate of existence, only in order to acknowledge his superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being.<sup>36</sup>

Let us make this a little clearer. *Différance*, Derrida says, is not a theological concept, «not even in the order of the most negative of negative theologies», because it is not a «superessentiality»; indeed, Derrida resembles the negative theologian when he proclaims that *différance* *does not exist*, but, apparently, he parts company with negative theology by going *one step further*

down the *via negativa* insofar as he also refuses to attribute a «superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being» to his term (or his terms). Derrida returns to this point in «How to avoid speaking», where he declares that «*différance*, the *trace*, and so on» do not arise «from Being, from presence or from the presence of the present, nor even from absence, and even less from some hyperessentiality».<sup>37</sup>

Thus, what it comes down to would seem to be the following: in spite of its simple and recurrent slogan of <God beyond or without being>, negative theology always seems to attribute to God *some* kind of being when all is said and done — for, after all, if God *is* beyond being (in the sense of <beyond essence and existence>), then, surely, he *is* in some sense — even if not in the same way that <ordinary> beings are (or exist). At issue here is, for example, the very fine line separating negative theology from atheism. It would seem that in order to escape charges of atheism, the negative theologian would have to accept that, after all and in spite of everything, God *is* — *in some (higher) sense*, or, in other words, that God is, precisely, an hyperessentiality rather than a <non-being>. Faced with the question <is there a God?>, the negative theologian would *surely* reply <yes, there is a God>.<sup>38</sup> In addition, the negative theologian will surely continue to adhere, no matter what, to his *dream* of finally arriving at his destination; but in doing so, he quite simply separates himself from Derrida.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Derrida, «How to avoid speaking», p. 79; p. 542 (emphasis added on the last six words).

<sup>38</sup> Thus, we find Jean-Luc Marion writing in his preface to the English edition of *God Without Being* (while reflecting on the way the book was received when it was originally published in France some nine years earlier, in 1982): «The whole book suffered from the inevitable and assumed equivocation of its title: was it insinuating that the God <without being> is not, or does not exist? Let me repeat now the answer I gave then: no, definitely not. God is, exists, and that is the least of things. At issue here is not the possibility of God's attaining Being, but, quite the opposite, the possibility of Being's attaining to God» (Marion, *God Without Being*, pp. xix-xx).

<sup>36</sup> Derrida, «Différance», p. 6.



But Derrida also has another objection to negative theology, namely that it

belongs to the predicative [...] space of discourse, to its strictly propositional form, and privileges not only the indestructible unity of the word but also the authority of the name — such axioms as a «deconstruction» must start by reconsidering.<sup>40</sup>

In Derridean terms, this second complaint would seem to amount to the claim that the language of negative theology is, when all is said and done, still onto-theological — whereas Derrida's «non-concepts» are specifically, and essentially, «built to resist» any appropriation by onto-theology (or by strictly predicative discourse). But that does not mean that they are capable of neutralizing the risk of such an appropriation once and for all; rather, this risk is constant and recurring, and the resistance against it is an enduring task. Thus, Derrida writes:

[...] the onto-theological reappropriation is always possible — and doubtless *inevitable* insofar as one speaks, precisely, in the element of onto-theological logic and grammar.

But he then goes on to add an important qualification: «If the movement of this reappropriation appears in fact irrepressible, its ultimate failure is no less necessary». There is, thus, a double necessity at work here. First of all, the «movement of [...] reappropriation» is «inevitable» and «irrepressible», but all the while «its ultimate failure is [...] necessary». Why is it necessary? What is the sense of this second necessity? Well, it is quite clear from Derrida's text that this necessity is to be understood in the double sense of «it *should* happen» and «it *will* happen». In other words, and in very Derridean terms, this necessity is *at the same time an injunction and a promise*: a promise of the ulti-

mate failure of onto-theological reappropriation *and* an injunction, a directive or an order, to us, the *us* of the «here and now», to do our best to insure that this reappropriation will not ultimately succeed. However, the *question* — the question *shared* by deconstruction and negative theology, namely the question of onto-theological reappropriation — remains, as Derrida admits:

[...] I concede that this question remains at the heart of a thinking of difference [...]. It remains as a question, and this is why I keep returning to it.<sup>41</sup>

This question is precisely the reason why Derrida — *and* the negative theologian — keep speaking, or writing, in face of the unavoidable failure of their speech, or writing. But in doing so, their work is not entirely useless — far from it, in fact; for their work is a continuing contribution to the ultimate (and *ongoing*) failure of onto-theology — which, among other things, can be understood as the project of an overarching, closed and ultimate explanation of reality, a final and exclusive understanding of God.

Thus, to summarize a little, we seem to have arrived at the point where the difference between Derrida's thinking and negative theology has been established and isolated: it all comes down to a certain relatively harmless *theoretical* disagreement about the hyperessential: should one dream of achieving its «higher» mode of being or not? Should one speak (or write) as if it was *possible* to achieve this *impossible* unity with the divine? This would be the difference between Derrida and the negative theologian, then — but, surely, this difference does not amount to very much *in practice*: the difference, we are tempted to say, is hardly any — if it's there, then at least it is nothing to speak of.

In their insatiable penchant for nothingness, negativity and denial, Derrida and the negative theologian thus seem to join hands and form a closed (but tiny) circle; their secret is there for all to see, and there really is not any; we, who stand outside, with our feet firmly on the ground,

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Derrida's remark to the effect that he has always been uneasy with regard to «the promise of [God's] presence given to intuition and vision» (Derrida, «How to avoid speaking», p. 79; p. 542). This promise, or this «possibility», must surely be essential to negative theology.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77; p. 540.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79 (translation altered); p. 542.

realize that they are only dancing — around nothing. Nothing good will come of this, we may think, and hopefully nothing bad. Are we justified in that belief? Perhaps not, as I will now attempt to show.

## V

Three years after the presentation of the paper «How to avoid speaking» in Jerusalem, Derrida gave a lecture in New York at a conference on the topic «Deconstruction and the possibility of justice». This lecture, which was later published as a book entitled *Force de loi* («Force of law»), marks the beginning of a certain explicit engagement of Derrida's with regard to political concepts such as the idea of justice and its relation to law and judicial systems.

Let us now, in conclusion, and very briefly, take a look at some of the major issues of this text. Derrida's inaugural move is to distinguish between justice and law (in the sense of the French *droit*, German *Recht*, Danish *ret*). Thus, he writes: «I want to insist right away on reserving the possibility of a justice [...] that [...] exceeds or contradicts «law» (*droit*)». <sup>42</sup> It then emerges that this «idea» of justice, of which Derrida wants to uphold the possibility, stands in an intimate relation to «deconstruction». Indeed, Derrida defines the objective of his lecture as showing «why and how what is now called Deconstruction, while seeming not to «address» the problem of justice, has done nothing but address it, if only *obliquely*, unable to do so directly». <sup>43</sup>

Derrida then goes on to describe the difference between law (*droit*) and justice in terms of the fact that law is «founded, constructed on interpretable and transformable textual strata» and that it is, therefore, «essentially decon-

structible» <sup>44</sup> whereas «[j]ustice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible». <sup>45</sup> These definitions give rise to a new way of describing the *locus* of deconstruction:

[...] deconstruction takes place in the interval that separates the undeconstructibility of justice from the deconstructibility of *droit* [...]. It is possible as an experience of the impossible, there where, even if it does not exist (or does not yet exist, or never does exist), *there is* justice. Wherever one can replace, translate, determine the x of justice, one should say: deconstruction is possible, as impossible [...]. <sup>46</sup>

In other words: between law (*droit*) and justice, the «deconstructible» and the «undeconstructible», deconstruction finds its place. Wherever justice has been determined objectively, as law, deconstruction is possible as an operation dedicated to the call of (or the call *for*) a justice which does not yet exist. In this manner, then, deconstruction essentially occupies itself with *making the impossible possible*. This endeavour is also what Derrida names the experience of *aporia* (that is, of «something that does not allow passage» <sup>47</sup>). He writes:

[...] I think that there is no justice without this experience, however impossible it may be, of *aporia*. Justice is an experience of the impossible. <sup>48</sup>

The structure in which justice is inscribed would thus appear to be in many ways analogous to the general characteristics of Derrida's «non-concepts». Just like *différance*, for example, justice cannot be said to «exist», presently and fully — it disappears as soon as it appears, leaving only a trace of itself in what remains, that is, in the body of the law. But this does not mean that justice is *beyond* reality and temporality, or that its mode of being is entirely and «purely» transcendent and ineffable. Rather, justice participates in

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Derrida, «Force of law: The «Mystical foundation of authority», translated by Mary Quaintance, in Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson (eds.), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. Routledge, New York and London 1992, p. 5; Jacques Derrida, *Force de loi: Le «Fondement mystique de l'autorité»*. Galilée, Paris 1994, p. 17.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10; p. 26.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14; p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14; p. 35.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15; pp. 35-36.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16; pp. 37-38.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16; p. 38.

our world here and now — on the one hand as law, which is its <concrete> and inadequate manifestation, *and*, on the other hand, as an <infinite idea> that enjoins us to work towards its realization. There is a very strong *desire* for justice inherent in deconstruction, as Derrida proclaims in lively terms:

[...] deconstruction is mad about this kind of justice. Mad about this desire for justice. This kind of justice, which is not law, is the very movement of deconstruction at work in law and the history of law, in political history and history itself [...].<sup>49</sup>

The desire for justice is what compels deconstruction to start meddling in mundane affairs, or, in other words, to descend into the world of decision, calculation, strategy and exchange — the world of politics and ethics. And unlike the God of negative theology, deconstruction — which, as Derrida puts it, «*is*» justice<sup>50</sup> — is not to be <left alone>, even if this entails a very serious and persistent risk:

Left to itself, the incalculable [...] idea of justice is always very close to the bad, even to the worst for it can always be reappropriated by the most perverse calculation. That is always possible. And so incalculable justice *requires* us to calculate. [...] Not only *must* we calculate, negotiate the

relation between the calculable and the incalculable [...] ; but we *must* take it as far as possible, beyond the place we find ourselves and beyond the already identifiable zones of morality or politics or law, beyond the distinction between national and international, public and private, and so on.<sup>51</sup>

This we must — but where does this «*must*», this «*il faut*», come from? What is its place — and why does it take place? Well, Derrida proclaims that it «does not *properly* belong either to justice or law».<sup>52</sup> What is it then?

My time is up, I am afraid; but let us not regret — or forget — the fact that the question remains.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 25; p. 56.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 15; p. 35.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 28 (translation altered); pp. 61–62.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 28 (italics added in accord with the French text); p. 62.

<sup>53</sup> Thanks are due to Sigrún Sigurdardóttir, Davíð Kristinsson, Páll Skúlason and Róbert Haraldsson for their amicable and precious assistance in the preparation of this paper; and to Jayne Svenungsson for her thorough and constructive comments at the NIFF conference at Södertörns högskola.



# Response to *Possibilities of the Impossible: Derrida's Idea of Justice and Negative Theology*

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I first would like to thank Björn Thorsteinsson for a very eloquent and interesting lecture — lectures on Derrida often tend to be the former, but not always the latter. But I very much enjoyed his paper, and also found it quite persuasive — to the point even that I had difficulties finding something to oppose in it. I shall therefore limit my response to two basic questions concerning the core of his lecture, the core being the relationship between Derrida's own thought and negative theology.

Thorsteinsson approaches this subject in two different ways in his paper, as far as I can read. His first point is that the difference between deconstruction and negative theology comes down to a certain *theoretical* disagreement about the hyperessential, whereas *in practice*, he argues, there is hardly any difference to be found at all. And in his longer text he continues: «In their all-consuming penchant for the *via negativa*, Derrida and the negative theologian seem to join hands and form a closed circle; their secret is there for all to see, and there is not any; they are only dancing — around nothing. There's nothing between them — there is no fire and no Christmas tree and, above all, there is no God.»

Now, I agree with Thorsteinsson that there is indeed a difference between deconstruction and negative theology. My question, however, is whether it is not rather the other way around, in other words, that there is very little difference *in theory*, but quite an important difference *in practice*. Let me quickly elaborate on this. The difference in theory, I would argue,

amounts to different ways of viewing what «beyond being» implies. In *Sauf le nom*, for instance, Derrida seems quite clear about the fact that his own non-concepts — in this case *Khôra* — and the God of negative theology *both* are beyond being. The only thing is, they are beyond being in different ways. Whereas the God of negative theology is beyond being in an excessive manner, by being *more* than being, more than real or even sur-real, following a kind of hyper-logic — Derrida's non-concepts rather follow a minimalistic logic: they are beyond being by being *less* than being, less than real or even non-real, or as Derrida himself puts it, they are desert-like places without properties or genus.

Still, I would say, it is not here, on the theoretical level, that the important difference between deconstruction and negative theology is to be found. In theory it only seems to be a matter of slight divergences as how best to articulate something beyond being, something that escapes the grasp of human thought. The essential difference, I would argue, is instead to be found on the practical level. I would not agree that Derrida *as well as* the negative theologian end up dancing around nothing, singing the *Requiem aeternam deo*, as Nietzsche would have it. By stating this, I think one misses the point of negative theology, which is precisely what Jean-Luc Marion has been stressing for some decades now. As Marion has tried to demonstrate, referring to the negative theology of Dionysus the Areopagite, the withdrawal of God from being should not be seen as an attempt to do away with God *as such*,

but rather as an attempt to extract God from a certain kind of metaphysical discourse that tends to diminish God into a conceptual idol.

It is against this background that I would hesitate to say that both Derrida and the negative theologian — *in practice* — are dancing around nothing. *In theory* they might well be doing that, since both deconstruction and negative theology share the same problem, namely a lack of adequate concepts in order to speak about the unspeakable — they end up being able to say nothing. But, as Marion would have it, for negative theology this is not a practical but precisely a theoretical shortcoming, which results from a lack of utterable signification, not from a lack of intuition. In short, God remains incomprehensible, but not necessarily imperceptible.

To try to make my point on a more basic level, let me put it like this, still using the example of Marion. *In theory* Marion would argue that God *is* not, that God could never be caught up in a philosophical concept, because then we would no longer be dealing with God. *In theory*, still, this is exactly the same as Derrida would say about *différance* or *Khôra*. But this does not prevent Marion — as a Catholic believer and to some extent even a mystic — to say his prayer, and still claim a strong intuition of God — in the very phenomenological sense of the word *intuition*. And I believe the same could not be said about Derrida's relation to *Khôra* — *in practice* — and Derrida of course never intended that it should be so either.

Now, let me quickly move to Thorsteinsson's second point, which aims not at the general difference between negative theology and deconstruction, but rather at the specific difference between negative theology and Derrida's idea of justice. The difference according to Derrida, as

Thorsteinsson states it, is that negative theology remains a secret discourse, while the discourse on justice must always be made public. My question, though, is whether Derrida's aim or point in both cases is not actually the same, namely that both discourses *ought to* be made public.

As Thorsteinsson himself points out, there are two concurrent desires that Derrida ascribes to negative theology in *Sauf le nom*: On the one hand this esoteric impulse to keep the secret within a small community of elected people, yet on the other hand an inclusive impulse, a desire to be understood by all. Derrida's endeavor in *Sauf le nom*, as I read it, is precisely to stress this second impulse, in other words to argue for a kind of general apophasis, a mysticism that cannot be restricted to any particular revelation or religious community. And I believe this is precisely what Derrida on other occasions has expressed as *messianism* versus *messianicity*, that is, on the one hand the particular historical religions tied to a tradition and often to the notion of an elected people, on the other hand a more general structure, where central themes of the determinate forms of religion — such as hope, the promise, justice, etc. — are repeated on a more general level, *independently* of the historical revelations.

Derrida has elsewhere described this as a way of repeating the *possibilities* of religion without religion, of making a non-dogmatic duplicate of dogma. And I believe that precisely this gesture explains why Derrida's works are so attractive to scholars of theology and religion today. Derrida's notion of a «religion without religion» points at a possibility to repeat the resources of religion on a level that transcends religion in the strict sense of the word



# Religion as a Philosophical Challenge

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## Return of Religion?

The climate and the agenda of the philosophy of religion seem to have changed significantly during the last two decades. While in the seventies, religion was still discussed primarily in relation to irreligiosity,<sup>1</sup> we now face a return to or revival of religion or religions.<sup>2</sup> The revival implies a rediscovery inasmuch as we have once more begun to realize how religion can form human culture. This also means that the issue of religion and modernity has changed in that religion returns as a challenge to modernity.

With this change of climate, the focus lies on the *revival* of religion. What are the consequences of the return of religion on the public agenda? The question, however, must also be reversed: in what form does *religion* return? How does the return of religion affect religion itself? On the one hand, we are confronted with the revival of fundamentalist interpretations of religion; on the other hand, religion returns in forms which might be called aesthetic in the sense that religion is turned into an instrument for forming the image of who we are. In the latter case, religion is a matter of choice. The complexity of the situation might give rise to the suspicion that fundamentalism can also be a (post)modern possibility in that it is itself chosen among other possibilities in order to gain some

identity in a world of change. The classic problem of authority and choice is thus repeated in new forms.

This change of climate — with religion returning to the agenda — calls for a philosophical rethinking of *religion*. In the following, however, I would like to shift the focus once more. I will be speaking not so much of the philosophy of *religion* as of the *philosophy* of religion. Let me briefly explain what is meant by this shift of emphasis.

## A Philosophical Challenge

Emphasizing *philosophy* in philosophy of religion means emphasizing religion as a philosophical challenge. My point will be that when we approach the issue this way, we deal exactly with the significance of *religion*. When religion is considered as a philosophical challenge, it is no longer placed in a sphere of its own.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the critical question becomes: what does religion mean for the way we look upon the world? We will only be able to understand what religion can

<sup>1</sup> Cf., for example, the work of the Danish philosopher of religion, K.E. Løgstrup: *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse*, Gyldendal, Copenhagen 1976, esp. the preface.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., for example, Martin Riesebrodt, *Die Rückkehr der Religionen*, C.H. Beck, München 2000.

<sup>3</sup> A prevalent model for thinking about religion suggests that we are either inside or outside religion. This model simplifies what it means to have presuppositions. We can have presuppositions in different ways. Presuppositions can question the one having them. We can have presuppositions so that they constitute a problem for us. This is evident in the fact that religious traditions are not monolithic, but are interpretations of presuppositions (which they themselves might try to cover up). This way of dealing with the question of presupposition could already be a philosophical challenge.

mean if we ask what it would mean for the way we see the world in which we live.

This second shift of emphasis will also affect the way we do philosophy of religion. Philosophy of religion often proceeds according to a model whereby we begin with a philosophy and then transfer it to the area of religion. Transferring Heidegger's *Daseinsanalytik* or Wittgenstein's philosophy of language to philosophy of religion could be cited as examples. Philosophy of religion could be cited as examples. Philosophy of religion is thus carried out as a sort of applied philosophy — namely, philosophy applied to the area of religion. Religion, however, is not an area of human life, at least not if it is considered as a *philosophical* challenge.

In what sense then can religion be a challenge to philosophy? As a point of departure we only need to reflect upon the complex history of the relation of religion and philosophy. Religion has been a companion and a rival of philosophy throughout its history. Philosophy would not be what it is without its relation to religion. What is at stake in this relation is human rationality, which is the business of philosophy. Religion has been the <other> for philosophy by challenging rationality. My point is that religion, as the <other> for philosophy, makes it possible for philosophy to reflect upon its own rationality. Religion is a *philosophical* challenge inasmuch as the meaning of rationality is at stake in the relation between religion and philosophy. In this sense, religion makes it possible to ask the question of philosophy itself.

What I will argue for, then, is the *philosophical* ambitions of a philosophy of religion. Religion should not be viewed as an interesting phenomenon which we might eventually reflect upon philosophically, but as a challenge to philosophy itself. Philosophy is not self-contained but, as reflection, is related to sources outside itself.

## Rationality: Self-accountability

The very concept of rationality is what is challenged by religion. But how is it challenged? Traditionally, the challenge to rationality has been understood *via* the alternative between a rational and an irrational position. The alternative between rationality and irrationalism, how-

ever, is not a genuine one. We cannot chose irrationalism as an alternative to rationality; or if we do, it is a position we chose from outside. If irrationalism is a position we take, we are already placed in a sphere where we can argue for or against this position. This points in fact to a more basic concept of rationality.

I will argue for a concept of rationality which is tied to the obligation to account for ourselves. The rationality implied in self-accountability is what makes us human. This means that rationality in this sense is not a matter of choice. If we would chose not to be rational, we would have to take a double position: we would know on the one hand what we were doing, while on the other hand we would pretend not to be aware of it. The possibility of asking ourselves what we are doing implies the obligation to do so. Of course, this does not mean that we cannot behave irrationally. To be human implies asking what we are as humans. Rationality implied in the demand of self-accountability has to do with the fact that we are already relating to ourselves — also when we might feel attracted by forms of irrationalism.

If we take a look from the other side, it should be clear that in order to understand religion itself, we need a stronger concept of rationality than the one yielded by the schematic opposition of the rational and irrational. We do so because religion itself makes truth claims. The interpretation of religion is only possible because religion itself is thinking (in metaphorical forms) and as such, challenges us to think. Using a phrase borrowed from Paul Ricoeur: religion gives to think (*donne à penser*).

Up to now I have described the philosophy of religion as a classic discipline dealing with the relation between philosophy and religion. Historically, religion has been a challenge to philosophy. The task now is to reformulate this challenge. My suggestion will be that religion as a philosophical challenge has to do with the question of the perspectival nature of human rationality. A prevalent feature of modern philosophy is that it takes finitude as *conditio humana*, even if it does not take the form of an explicit philosophy of human finitude. Finitude means that we as humans are bound by our own perspective. This also seems to apply to human

rationality which itself becomes a matter of perspective. Religion, however, raises precisely the problem of human perspective.

How, then, is the task of philosophy of religion to be reformulated? In the following, I will reformulate it through two connected *leitmotifs*: First, the philosophy of religion is characterized by a «redoubling of perspective». Its object, religion, is in itself a perspective on human reality. Second, through the «optics» of religion, the philosophy of religion deals with the question of the limits of human understanding and action. These two motifs — the redoubling of perspective and the question of the limit — point to religion as a philosophical challenge. First, not only philosophy but also religion itself presents, or claims to present, a perspective on human reality as such, the claim of religion being that it deals with what is ultimate or of ultimate concern. Second, religion challenges the concept of rationality in that its optics gives significance to limit situations in which humans face their own limits of understanding and action. This reformulation of the philosophy of religion points to the modern problem of perspective and subjectivity. In order to unfold and substantiate this programmatic outline, let me start by explaining the significance of the idea that the philosophy of religion deals with a «redoubling of perspective».<sup>4</sup>

## Redoubling of Perspective: the Optics of Religion

I have been arguing that religion ought to be considered as a philosophical challenge. But why take *religion* as a challenge to philosophy? The answer is that religion itself is not only part of human reality but itself an interpretation of this reality, and what is more, it is an interpretation which claims to deal with this reality as such. Religion claims to give a total, maybe even ultimate, perspective on human reality. This is

why religion and philosophy can be rivals at the same level. Two qualifications, however, are needed which reflect the condition of finitude. First, philosophy can claim to deal with the *question of reality* as such, without giving some sort of total perspective. Second, religion can by contrast claim that it is an interpretation of a final perspective which is not human, but given to humans. The claim of dealing with human reality as such can thus be problematic in both cases.

It is crucial to see that religion is not an area or region of human existence. It can be viewed this way, but then one misses the point that religion itself is an interpretation of human existence, and an interpretation of a peculiar kind, inasmuch as religion addresses itself to us — it changes our way of seeing the world. Thus, we do not understand what religion is about if we do not ask what the optics of religion means for the way we look upon the world.

Consequently, philosophy of religion is not a regional philosophy, it is philosophy challenged by religion. It is not philosophy applied to one region of human reality; through the optics of religion, philosophy of religion deals with the question of human reality as such. This means the perspective is redoubled. Philosophy itself deals with the question of human reality, but this question is reflected through the optics of religion.

The next question then is: what characterizes the optics of religion? In what sense is it a challenge to philosophy? My answer — much too brief — is that the optics of religion is characterized by a displacement. Religion speaks of the world by speaking of something *other* than the world: God or the sacred in contrast to the worldly or profane. What does this displacement mean for the way we see the world in which we live? What can we get to see through this optics of religion?

## Transcendence and Limit

The difference between philosophy and religion seems to turn on this peculiar feature of religion: that it speaks of something *other* than the world. This feature should then account for the «otherness» of religion. However, claiming a tran-

<sup>4</sup> This (the concept of the redoubling of perspective) can be seen as a reinterpretation of Hegel's foundation of philosophy of religion: absolute spirit means that spirit deals with its own interpretations of reality.



scendent reality is also a philosophical option. And second, religion can speak of the world in speaking of what is other *than* the world. A more challenging question might then be the following one: how is it possible to speak of the world if not through a movement transcending the world?

The critical question is how the «other» than the world is to be understood. If it is conceived as another world, the critique of a two-world-thinking obtains. In Hegel, we can read the following argument: if the infinite is conceived or imagined as a world next to or beyond this world of finitude in which we live, the infinite itself becomes finite. Instead, the infinite is the truth of finitude making it possible to understand what is finite. And in Nietzsche, the argument reads: if religion posits another world beyond this one, the other world being the true one, then this world in which we live is emptied of truth. And this is nihilism.<sup>5</sup>

This critique affects a religious or metaphysical thinking operating with two worlds. Now, if the «other» is not to be understood as another world, how then is it possible to make sense of it?

My suggestion will be to introduce the second *leitmotif*: the question of the limit. Philosophy of religion not only deals with the borderline between philosophy and religion, the issue of borderline or limit is its basic theme. First in limit situations, with death and birth as primary examples, religion reflects the experience of life as already being marked by «otherness». Second, the limit is to be understood as the limit of our own understanding and action. When we relate to the limits of our existence, we relate to ourselves.

Thus, we only understand what transcendence means through experiencing the limit of our existence. This is not only a limit from outside, but a limit challenging our self-understanding. In order to substantiate this claim, I will briefly read the motif of what I call the dia-

lectics of the limit from Kant, through Hegel to Kierkegaard. This line of thought can be seen as a foundation for a philosophy of religion.

## Dialectics of the Limit: the Other

Kant's critical project was to draw the limit of reason as the limit of human understanding, but this turns out to be a limit *for* reason in the (dialectical) sense that it can only be drawn through reason itself. The significance of Kant's critique for the philosophy of religion not only consists in the conditions set up for the attempt to think transcendence. The critical project itself pertains to philosophy of religion in the sense that it draws the limit of a reason which is the reason of a finite being. This finitude of a human being can only be understood by way of a counterpoint, namely the idea of an infinitude which is not human.

Hegel's criticism of Kant in the «Introduction» to *Phänomenologie des Geistes* unfolds the dialectics of the limit: to draw a limit presupposes that one has an idea of what is beyond the limit. In order to meet this difficulty, Hegel translates the dialectics of the limit into a dialectics of experience: when we experience something, we are ourselves changed. Experience thus implies self-transcendence, though *not* in the sense of transcending the limits of experience (and thus returning to some sort of dogmatism), but in the sense of transcending our world-view and self-understanding by seeing the world and ourselves anew or once again. The great methodological *novum* of Hegel's *Phänomenologie* consists in this relation of world-views and self-understanding, with the implication that in this relation, a self-transcendence can take place.

The dialectics of the limit is intensified in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, chapter III, on the absolute paradox. Kierkegaard begins with the paradox of self-knowledge. Socrates, famous for his knowledge of what it is to be a human being, was himself in doubt as to whether he was a monstrous being or simple being. Kierkegaard then points to the paradox of thought: to think what it cannot think. The point is that the experience of the limit can mean self-fulfillment. As a model for this self-fulfillment,

<sup>5</sup> For Nietzsche's criticism of the conception of two worlds, cf. e.g. the short reductio: «Wie die «wahre Welt» endlich zur Fabel wurde» (in *Götzen-Dämmerung, Werke* (ed. Schlechta) III, Hanser, München 1969, p. 963).

Kierkegaard refers to the experience of love that is fulfilled in a meeting with what is other than the self. We come to ourselves as humans in the encounter with <the other>. But how is it possible to think what is, in this sense, other than human? This is the dialectics of the limit in an intensified mode. Kierkegaard points out that every attempt to think the absolute other, God, is ambiguous: is it not our own *Vorstellung* or projection? The answer indicated in the chapter on the absolute paradox is that we can only relate to what is absolutely other when we understand ourselves as determined or defined as other: in the consciousness of sin. This is a broken form of self-understanding, thus intensifying the initial paradox of self-knowledge.

I have given this brief outline of a complex story in order to show, first, how the question of transcendence is a question of limit, but also, second, that the question of transcendence turns out to be more complicated. This will be relevant in understanding the challenge made by religion.

## Perspective and Transcendence

In order to reformulate the task of the philosophy of religion, I have pointed to the issue of perspective and finitude. The problem of transcendence is to be reformulated along this line: if finitude means that we as humans are bound by our own perspective, how is transcendence to be understood?

As indicated, however, the problem of transcendence should also be reversed. We are not only facing transcendence as a problem within religion, maybe even as the problem of religion. As humans we can seek to transcend the human condition, not only by asking questions which cannot be answered, but also by idealizing and idolizing, e.g. by forming ideas of perfection, thereby providing a counter-image of ourselves. Examples of this can be seen in conceptions of the reconstruction of what is to be a human being through bio-technologies. The problem of such an enterprise is also recognizing that we as humans are subjects, both in the sense of forming — maybe even seeking to reconstruct — our own history, but also in the sense of having a history where we are subjected to what we are

doing. It is thus a problem to recognize our own finitude. If transcendence in this sense is already a *human* problem, a revised criticism of religion is needed. Religion is also a philosophical challenge in the sense that it brings the problem of human transcendence to the fore. This has to do with the ambiguity of religion.

## The Ambiguity of Religion

Religion is an ambiguous phenomenon. On the one hand, it confronts us with the limits of our lives, and the limits of our understanding and action, and in this, it questions our self-understanding. On the other hand, religion can be much too human in its mastery of what is other — including others. As indicated, we still need a criticism of religion. It is a critical issue whether religion itself is able to open up interpretations and, indeed, open up a critique of human religiosity.

Religion, however, also gives us the possibility of reflecting on our own ambiguity. What we can come to see through the optics of religion is exactly this ambiguity — the ambiguity of our own subjectivity. Religion challenges the way we see ourselves. To conclude, let me briefly try to substantiate this claim.

## Subjectivity: Activity and Passivity

With the *leitmotif* of the <redoubling of perspective>, the guiding question is: what is the implication of the optics of religion? Religion is about vision, it aims at transforming our way of seeing the world. What then can be seen through the optics of religion?

My argument was that religion is not only an ambiguous phenomenon, it also gives us the possibility of seeing our own ambiguity. Let me take two issues, first the problem of the will. Through the optics of religion, the problem of the will turns out to be complicated with regard to the relationship of activity and passivity. If we do something which we choose to do, we do it *ourselves*. We are, in an emphatic sense, the subject of our doing. But in what sense is our will something of our own doing? In doing what we choose to do, we can also be captured by ourselves, captured, for example, by our ambitions.

This means that the will can be a problem for us. It is a problem also in the sense that we ourselves can suffer from what we do when we do what we choose to do. The relation between activity (doing) and passivity (suffering) is thus complicated: we are subjects, not only as subjects of what we do, but also as subjected to what we do.

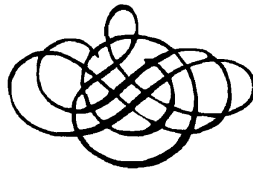
The optics of religion not only reflects this complicated relation of activity and passivity. It does so by maintaining an infinite dimension in which, for example, the phenomenon of guilt and conscience is reflected. Is conscience something we <do>? Are we subjects of our conscience? In what sense is guilt something of our own doing? Definitely in the sense that guilt concerns what we have done, but it adds a dimension. We do not ourselves master the significance of what we do. There is a transcendence which appears precisely with respect to our own actions.

As the second issue, let me — as the opposite of our own doing — take the experience of

something irrevocable. When we experience a loss that cannot be replaced or reversed, especially a loss of love, it is reflected in an infinite dimension. The problem of sorrow can be exactly how one limits the significance of the loss. The experience of the irrevocable also bears on the first issue: we can experience the significance of our doing as irrevocable. This is reflected through the optics of religion inasmuch as religion maintains a dimension of infinitude.

The <otherness> of religion must therefore be sought in a reflected transcendence: it pertains to the limits of our own understanding and action. And it points to a transformation of vision through the interplay of cognitive, volitional and affective attitudes.

Interpreted along this line, the optics of religion is a philosophical challenge as it makes stronger demands on a theory of subjectivity. The rationality implied in the obligation of self-accountability is challenged, not by a position of irrationalism, but by a reflective interpretation of human existence.



# Theology and the Limits of Philosophical Reason

ELENA NAMLI

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The revival of philosophical interest in the phenomenon of religion is an interesting aspect of contemporary culture. As with any revival, it carries within itself both classical themes and the potential for a new reading of them. In connection with this, Arne Grøn's thesis on the possibility of an approach to the philosophy of religion as the *philosophy* of religion seems to me to be extremely timely and fruitful. It contains at least two theoretically significant nuances: firstly, the idea of the presence of philosophically interesting aspects within the phenomenon (of religion); and secondly the thesis that religion is or can be a theoretical challenge in relation to philosophy as a whole or to a particular philosophical paradigm.

One of the serious problems in this context is the question of the definition and localization of religion. Grøn proposes an approach, emphasizing that «religion speaks of the world by speaking of something *other* than the world». This approach is highly useful, for it provides a theoretical paradigm for analysis in which the degree of abstraction satisfies a philosopher's taste. At the same time, the complexity of localizing the phenomenon under analysis arises: it is difficult to conceive of every religion challenging every philosophy in the same way, even if it is described in philosophical and abstract terms. Is there an alternative, harmonizing advantage of an abstract level with the possibility of historical recognition? In his analysis of the philosophically significant aspects of religion, Grøn draws on an interpretation of the history of philosophy in its relation to the phenomenon of religion.

Would it not be more fruitful to speak instead of the relationship between philosophical and theological tradition? I believe that the potential of Grøn's thesis will be expanded if the analysis is defined as one of the relationship between (Western) philosophy and (Western) theology, in which both phenomena are examined as theoretical developments within the framework of a single dialectical process.

In his analysis of the relationship between religion and philosophy, Grøn places emphasis on the problem of rationality – the issue that has been historically relevant in almost every philosophically interesting encounter with religion. The author defines «challenge» entirely correctly as «the question of the perspective nature of human rationality». Grøn also emphasizes the necessity of reformulating this challenge with an account of the current level of scientific knowledge and diversity of experience of our time. The question regarding the limits, or absence of limits, of the human perspective is an «eternal» one. How can we formulate it today?

I agree with Grøn that «a prevalent feature of modern philosophy is that it takes finitude as *conditio humana*, maybe itself becoming a direct philosophy of finitude». Is there a theologically inspired alternative to this philosophy of finitude? Can it stand up to serious philosophical criticism?

In the example of «the line of thought from Kant, through Hegel to Kierkegaard», Grøn demonstrates how philosophical models of subjectivity (limited perspective) are enriched by entering into contact with a religious paradigm

that presupposes the possibility of removing all limitation. The usefulness of these models may be evaluated on the basis of philosophical study, which exceeds the framework of our discussion. My argument for the necessity of such a discussion is founded on the telling resonance of Grøn's ideas with certain aspects of the Russian religious-philosophical tradition, within which the problem of the limits of philosophical rationality occupies a central place. Russian philosophical thought (of the 19th century) aimed at a study of the so-called «transrational» model in direct dialogue with two players: classical German philosophy and Christian theology. It is interesting that the result of this «dialogue» was precisely that displacement of accents that is noted in Grøn's analysis. In accordance with the Russian tradition, we should speak not of rationalism and irrationalism, but of the limits of rationality and of overcoming these limits. The dependence of the Russian discussion on this philosophical line, analysed by Grøn, is obvious. At the same time it should be noted that the Russian philosophical project, which is sometimes called the «Eros of the impossible», comprises a certain originality. This originality consists in the fact that the critique of philosophical rationality is above all a critique of a moral-theological character: the Russian philosopher locates the roots of philosophical rationalism as well as its organic nature not in epistemology, but in normativity.

Kant's philosophy is often identified with the essence of Western philosophical rationalism and becomes the object of the Russian critique. Within the framework of the Russian religious-philosophical tradition, Kant's primary contribution is considered to be his tireless attention to differentiating the spheres of theoretical and practical reason and his thesis that «the ought is a category of consciousness, a form that cannot be derived from some particular «material» content».<sup>1</sup> But Kant later destroys the potential of his own idea when he describes the ought in his categorical imperative, subordinating it to the theoretical criteria of universal applicability. Mikhail Bakhtin pointed out that within the con-

text of Kant's paradigm, only a theoretical transcription of the act, i.e. a description of its content abstracted from the volitional tone, is possible. Philosophical rationalism, understood in this way, contains a number of shortcomings. For example, it cannot grasp such an important aspect of the normative tension of individual subjectivity (the will) as its direction in/toward the future. The theoretical transcription (transcription into content) lacks a language for conveying future time: the future disappears or becomes the past when described in the grammar of rationalistic philosophy. Does theology contain an alternative to the theoretical limitation of philosophical language?

In Russian theology Christian symbols are interpreted as a means of expression of the difference in levels between reason and morality.<sup>2</sup> Reason is the paradigm of the possible, morality the paradigm of the demand (the willed and the ought). Christian symbols witness not of an opposition between reason and faith, but of the tension of the relationship between the possible (given) and the demand. The philosophy of young Bakhtin was an attempt to find an adequate philosophical language for this intuition. From this point of view, the opposition of reason and will must be described as the architectonics of individual subjectivity: the relationship between «myself for myself» and «myself for others». Within the framework of this architectonics, the supratheoreticality of normativity is perceptible – in its very radicalness, consisting not in the content of the act but in the character of the demand.

The figures of Ivan and Aleksei Karamazov are a kind of icon of (the) two paradigms of rationality. Ivan rejects God because he cannot understand (through reason) and accept his world; Aleksei experiences his faith as a form of paradoxical responsibility for the world. This paradox consists in the experience of responsibility beyond the possibility for control. Prince Myshkin is another well-known figure of the very same paradigm of *responsibility for all*.

<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. University of Texas Press, Austin 1993, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> The most interesting works in this field are those of Nikolai Lossky (1870-1965) and Boris Vysheslavtsev (1877-1954).

The search for a philosophical language capable of conveying the experience of responsibility of a radical nature is in no way an exclusively Russian project. The overcoming of the possible, and of the limits of every human per-

spective, is a theme in many philosophical traditions. In the history of European thought, this theme is one of the encounter between the philosophy of reason and the theology of the Christian church.

## LITTERATUR

Olle Larsson och Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre: *Reformationstiden — Kultur och samhällsliv i Luthers Europa*. 264 sid. Studentlitteratur, Lund 2001. — Berndt T. Oftestad: *Tro og politikk — En reformasjonshistorie*. 240 sid. Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 2001.

Denna anmälan avser två böcker om reformationstiden. Om den första säger baksidestexten: «Boken riktar sig främst till studenter vid universitet och högskolor i ämnen som historia, idéhistoria, religion och tyska, men är givande för alla med intresse för denna tid». Om man bortser från forskare inom fältet tror jag detta stämmer. Boken är lättläst och populärt hållen. Ingen av författarna är teolog. Olle Larsson är historiker och Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre germanist (språkvetare som sysslar med tyska). Detta märks på framställningen. Inte så att felet är fler men frågeställningarna är delvis andra. Ett av de grövsta felet är f.ö. rent historiskt: det är sammanblandningen av Maria Tudor och Maria Stuart (s. 62). Den förra var drottning av England 1553–1558, den senare drottning av Skottland 1542–1567. Båda var romerska katoliker och alltså motståndare till reformationen, men i övrigt hade de inte mycket mer än namn och kön gemensamt. Felet återkommer i den kronologiska översikten ss. 74–77, som annars ger en god bild av aktörerna i skeendet under trehundra år (c:a 1320–1633).

Halva boken består av en historisk genomgång av den europeiska och svenska reformationen. Också motreformationen eller den katolska reformen behandlas. På Harvard University Press utkom nyligen: *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era*, ett värdefullt bidrag till diskussionen om hur man rätteligen bör benämna denna fas i kyrkans historia. Vilket namn man väljer vittnar ofta om en bedömning av företeelsen. Författaren, John W O'Malley, förespråkar «tidigmodern katolicism», då det innefattar alla aspekter: motreformation, katolsk reform, tridentinsk era och konfessionell era. Mötet i Trient var inte bara en reaktion på reformationen utan också på det kyrkliga förfallet. Därför kan det vara bra att

använda en mer neutral term. Jag instämmer i detta och accepterar termen. Tyvärr har boken inte beaktats här, trots att tre av O'Malleys böcker finns med bland lästipsen. En stor förtjänst med boken är annars just dessa lästips till varje avsnitt. Dessutom avslutas boken med en tredje del, tjugofem sidor källor och litteratur. Den intresserade får alltså god hjälp att söka sig vidare, trots att boken saknar notapparater. Del 2 är en samling texter från 1500-talet av blandad karaktär. Där finns avsnitt ur reformatorn Bucers skrifter, delar av 1571 års kyrkoordning och en visitationsordning för Växjö stift från 1596 (tryckt 1605) samt folkläsnings som «Boken för resor med vagn» och «Historien om doktor Johann Faust». Dessa texter ökar bokens värde avsevärt.

Berndt T. Oftestad, den nyligen till katolicismen konverterade kyrkohistorieprofessorn vid Menighetsfakultetet, har skrivit en bok av helt annat slag. Det går inte att ta miste på att det är en teolog som för pennan. I sitt förord tackar Oftestad sina inspiratörer. Bland dessa spelar Bengt Hägglund en framträdande roll. Boken är tillägnad Oftestads tidigare kollega Åge Holter, som också tackas i förordet. I sin inledning tecknar Oftestad kortfattat händelseförloppet och ger därefter en forskningsöversikt i populär form (namnen finns i noterna längst bak i boken). Kapitel 2 behandlar «Reformasjonen — budskap och förändring». Oftestad påminner om att ropen om reformation ljöd från många håll vid den nya tidens ingång. Att återvända till det ursprungliga uppfattades som en nödvändig förnyelse. Redan tiggardomarnas framväxt på 1200-talet med det «apostoliska» fattigdomsidealet var ett uttryck för detta. När Luther framträdde strax före 1520 blev frågorna om auktoritet och legitimitet brännande. Alla försök att återupprätta enheten misslyckades och Västeuropa hade inte längre en «religion» utan flera, som bekämpade varandra. Konfessionalismens tid var inne. Det är vägen dit som Oftestad skildrar. Framställningen är i huvudsak kronologisk. Oftestad betonar genomgående att reformatörerna med Luther i spetsen inte menade sig komma med något nytt. För Luther var det lika viktigt att distansera sig från den

radikala reformationen som från påvedömet. Avgörande för reformationens legitimitet blir därför Skriftens auktoritet och uppfattningen att den lutherska tolkningen av Skriften är den som framgår av själva texten. Att hävda Skriftens klarhet är därför viktigt. I generationen efter Luther blir lutherdomen en konfession, liksom påvekyrkan blev det vid Trientkonsiliet.

Oftestad sammanfattar i bokens sista mening: «Reformasjonen blir på den måten en radikal konsentrasjon (og reduksjon) av kristendommen til et spørsmål om den enkeltes frelse og dens så vel eskatologiske som konkrete dennesidige forankring i den historiske gitte bibeltekst». Han betonar den obestämda formen i bokens titel, att han presenterar en reformationshistoria, inte reformationshistorien. Framställningen är täckande, men inte heltäckande. I det kan man bara instämma. På tvåhundra sidor är något annat inte möjligt — för det skulle krävas ett livsverk, om det vore nog. I den bokflod som sköljer över oss av reformationshistoriska framställningar kan denna knappast betecknas som epokgörande. Så är det inte heller en detaljundersökning som bygger på noggrann källforskning. Som en god, personligt skriven översikt på ett skandinaviskt språk förtjänar boken också svenska läsare. Något standardverk som ersätter andra framställningar är den inte. Men noter och litteraturförteckning gör den till mer än en rent populär bok. Själv föredrar jag att få noterna serverade på samma sida, men det är en smaksak. Gör placeringen längst bak boken mer lättläst för lekt eller lärd överväger givetvis fördelarna. Kanske lockas någon att gå vidare och då fyller de sitt syfte.

K. F. Fernbom

*Peter Brown: Augustine of Hippo: A Biography (A New Edition with an Epilogue). XIII+548 sid. Faber and Faber, London 2000. — Trond Berg Eriksen: Augustin — Det urolige hjerte. 350 sid. Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 2000.*

Peter Browns redan klassiska verk om Augustinus från 1967 har präglat bilden av den nordafrikanske kyrkofadern under ett tredjedels sekel. När den nu utkommit i ny upplaga har själva huvudtexten klokt nog inte reviderats. Uppdateringen har skett i form av en omfattande epilög (ss 441–520). Denna anmälan gäller enbart denna del. Knappt hälften av epilögen upptas av «New evidence». Här presenteras Divjakbrevet, upptäckta 1975, och Dolbeau-predikningarna, upptäckta 1990. Anledningen till att dessa dokument upphört att kopieras vid den tid då boktryckarkonsten kom till Europa och bara är bevarade i vardera ett exemplar diskuteras. Brown menar att detta beror på att de är alltför jordnära och tidsbundna för

att passa in i den bild av Augustinus som växte fram. De var helt enkelt inte intressanta för eftervärlden. Det är först i vår tid vi kan läsa dem med förnyat intresse. Genom dem lär vi känna en mindre auktoritär figur än den Brown presenterade på 1960-talet.

Det andra avsnittet av epilögen behandlar «New directions». Här redogör Brown för den forskning som gjorts sedan första upplagan av hans bok kom ut. När han började arbeta med sin biografi 1961 gick han till böcker från 1600-talet, närmare bestämt Augustinus samlade verk, utgivna av munkarna i Saint-Maur 1679-1700, och Lenain Tillemonts «Mémoires pour servir á l'histoire ecclésiastique», från 1693–1712. Om den senare säger han: «If he was good enough for Gibbon, he was good enough for me». Tillvägagångssättet var ingalunda antikverat på sextioalet, men vid sekelskiftet finns helt andra möjligheter att nalkas kyrkofadern. Han börjar med att nämna A. M. La Bonnardières omdatering av dennes predikningar och Othmar Perlers redogörelse för dennes resor. Därefter berättar han ingående hur han själv tänkte under utarbetandet av sin biografi, den av Henry Chadwick kallats en «biography without the theology», ett omdöme som Brown själv kallar «a fair judgement». Han menar dock själv att den största bristen i hans bok är avsaknaden av de vidare vyerna, av den bakgrunds- och omvärldsteckning som nu är möjlig. Av tradition har man ställt in Augustinus i raden av de stora andarna. Man har jämfört hans tänkande med tidigare kyrkofäder eller med hedniska filosofer, men hans samtida biskopskolleger och församlingsmedlemmar eller meningsmotståndare har knappast alls beaktats. De nyupptäckta dokumenten kan, tillsammans med senare årtiondens forskning, ge en ny belysning av Augustinus i sin samtid. Peter Brown hjälper i sin epilög läsaren att upptäcka detta. Denna klassiker har alltså fått ett ännu högre värde i den nya upplagan och recensenten kan inte säga något annat än: «Tolle, lege!» (Tag och läs!).

Idéhistorikern Trond Berg Eriksen inleder med en tidsbild: «Konstantin den stores århundre». Om någon enskild man satt sin prägel på 300-talet är det just kejsar Konstantin. Men också Julianus Apostata förändrade historien under sina korta år som kejsare. Eriksen menar att det först efter hans tid var möjligt att som Ambrosius hävda att kejsaren som kristen var underställd biskopens myndighet. Theodosius tvangs be om förlåtelse för sin grymma hämnd och detta fick långt större efterverkningar än Canossavandringen. Kapitel 2 handlar om «Kirken i Nord-Afrika» och tar bl. a. upp donatismens framväxt. Först i det tredje kapitlet blir Augustinus huvudperson. Hans liv kan inte återges här men Eriksen gör hela tiden värdefulla randanmärkningar, utan att förlora huvudinriktningen. När han skriver om Augustinus skoltid tar han

t.ex. opp dennes aversion mot det grekiska språket. Han menar att efter Augustinus var det inte längre nödvändigt för en teolog att förstå grekiska. De äldre kyrkofäderna behövde inte längre studeras. Allt fanns samlat hos Augustinus. Först när ropet «Ad fontes!» ljöd återvände man alltså till de friska källsprången i Nya Testamentet och hos fäderna. Hela Augustinus produktion presenteras på ett medryckande sätt. Eriksens slutkommentar är, att det som nutida läsare upplever som mest främmande hos Augustinus är hans övertygelse om evighetens «overmakt og bestandighet». Evigheten är mer verklig än det synliga och påtagliga. Så tänker få ens bland de troende idag. Viktigare för Eriksen är dock den respekt som Augustinus visar varje enskild människa, i ljuset av det oroliga hjärtat. En tidstavla, en kommenterad bibliografi samt ett register avslutar boken.

Eriksens bok är, enligt förlaget, den första norska introduktionen till Augustinus. Den förtjänar att uppmärksammas också i vårt land, liksom så mycken annan förbisedd litteratur från våra nordiska grannländer. Skandinaviska språk bereder inga större svårigheter för läsaren men desto större för översättaren. Alltför ofta förväntas dock svenskar kunna läsa engelska utan översättning medan danska och norska böcker eller artiklar översätts till vårt eget språk. Inte heller Eriksen är alltså teolog och det är därför frestande att ta till Chadwicks omdöme, men det vore i detta fall klart orättvist. En författare med så omfattande produktion med så skilda ämnen som Eriksen riskerar givetvis att förtyliga sin framställning men han undgår den fallgropen och ger i sin kronologiska framställning en god inblick i den store kyrkofaderns tankevärld. När man skriver om Augustinus kan man visserligen lägga tonvikten på hans teologi eller på hans filosofi. och här läggs den på den senare. men man kan aldrig helt skilja dem från varandra. I sitt förord ger Eriksen exempel på detta när det gäller treenighetsläran. Han skriver också: «Hva er det som kan trekkes ut av hans verker og presenteras som gyldig for vår tid? Fint lite. --- En av de få ting vi kan lære av ham, er å ta vår tids problemer like alvorlig som han tog sin tids problemer». Då är denna bok till god hjälp.

*K. F. Fernbom*

Johanna Gustafsson: *Kyrka och kön. Om könskonstruksjoner i Svenska kyrkan 1945–1985. 404 sid. Symposion, Stockholm 2001.*

Johanna Gustafssons (JGs) avhandling, som hun forsvarte for den teologiske doktorgraden i Lund høsten 2001, består av 4 store kapitler omsluttet av en innledning og en avslutning. I tillegg kommer et engelsk

summary, noter, litteraturfortegnelse og personregister, men ikke noe saksregister.

JG vil vise hvordan synet på mann og kvinne konstrueres i Svenska kyrkan i perioden 1945-85. Materialet omfatter offentlige utredninger, fagteologisk materiale, diverse rådgivningslitteratur og artikler i tidsskrifter og dagspresse. Dette analyseres med henblikk på tre temaområder: 1.Hvordan konstrueres seksualitet og kjønn? 2.Hvordan ser forfatterne på ekteskap og samliv? 3.Hvordan oppfatter og bedømmer forfatterne relasjonen mellom tradisjon og modernitet? (s. 26)

JG anvender en rekke forskjellige teorier og problemstillinger som særlig, men ikke utelukkende har bakgrunn i feministisk teori (kap 1). Sentralt i hennes teoretiske repertoar står motsetningen mellom et konstruktivistisk og et essensialistisk syn på kjønn, skillet mellom en diskursiv og en substansiell maktoppfatning (Foucault) og queerteori. Men JG vil også undersøke hvorvidt det i tekstene legges vekt på det enkelte individ eller på den sosiale struktur, på seksualitet som reproduksjon eller som nytelse og på en objektiv eller en subjektiv oppfatning av ekteskapet. Hun vil spørre etter kjønnsroller, etter seksualitetens plass i ekteskap og samliv og hvordan grensene trekkes mellom privat og offentlig.

Forholdet mellom tradisjon og modernitet vil JG analysere med henblikk på den endring subjektet gjennomgår, fra å være tradisjonsbunden til å bli autonomt i kraft av rasjonalitet, fornuft og vitenskapelighet. Søkelyset skal også rettes mot de verditradisjoner som kommer til syne i tekstene, mot spenningen mellom universalisme og partikularisme, mellom intimitet og offentlighet og, ikke minst, mellom emansipasjon og integrasjon.

I analysene går JG kronologisk til verks og tar først for seg 40- og 50-tallet (kap. 2), deretter 60-tallet (kap. 3) og til sist 70- og 80-tallet (kap. 4). Alle kapitlene innledes med en generell karakteristikk av perioden. I det lengste kapitlet peker hun på den sterke rollen som tanken om kjønnspolaritet spiller på 40- og 50-tallet. Menn og kvinner er forskjellige, men utfyller hverandre i sin kjønnslige forskjellighet. Seksuallivet konstrueres med ordening, kontroll og renhet som viktige markører. Det handler om reproduksjon, og kirken aksepterer bare nølende bruken av prevensjonsmidler. Biskopene avviser abort på sosiale, men ikke på medisinske indikasjoner og stiller seg heller ikke avvisende til sterilisering. JG konstaterer en ambivalens overfor det moderne. Det er et betydelig verdifelleskap mellom kirken og «folkhemsmoderniteten », og kirken forsyner seg med stor trygghet av den medisinsk-vitenskapelige diskursen.

Kjønnsrollemønstrene bygger i stor utstrekning på forestillingen om kvinnen som et naturvesen uten



særlig evne til å skille mellom kjærlighet og kjønnsdrift, mens mannen er et åndsvesen med evne til å holde kjønn og kjærlighet fra hverandre. JG konstaterer treffende at den idealiserte kvinnen fremstilles «bortom kompleksitet og verklighet» (s. 120).

Det objektive synet på ekteskapet dominerer i kirken. Biskopene vender seg eksplisitt mot en mer subjektiv oppfatning som de mener legger alt for stort ansvar på det enkelte individ. Kvinnens oppgave er å bli mor og føde barn. Den essensialistiske, biologiserende oppfatningen er iøynefallende, og provoserer fram motreaksjoner også innenfor kirken. Dominerende er de imidlertid ikke.

JG peker på et betydelig verdifelleskap mellom kirken og det moderne samfunn på basis av de integrerende trekkene, men konstaterer også at kirken står mer fremmed overfor det individualistiske og emansiperende draget. Men, sier hun, på samme måte som moderniteten er motsigelsesfull, er tradisjonen det også (s. 172).

På 60-tallet (kap. 3) utfordres den tradisjonelle oppfatningen av ekteskapet som objektiv ordning av ekteskapet som en individuell og privat kontrakt. Samfunnsvitenskapen overtar legevitenenskapens hegemoni som forståelsesnøkkel til seksualiteten. En romantisk ideologi kombinert med prevensjonsmidler skaper forutsetninger for en privatisering av seksuallivet. Biskopene holder riktignok fast på hevde vunne synspunkter, men opposisjonen innenfor kirken er tydeligere og fremfor alt mer radikal. Ikke ordningen, men den enkeltes opplevelse og holdninger stilles i sentrum. Likevel fortsetter verdifelleskap fra 50-tallet, for så vidt som ekteskapet fortsatt betraktes som den beste samlivsformen (s. 215).

60-tallet blir nærmest et mellomspill, en transportetappe for å komme fra 50-tallet til 70-tallet (kap. 4). Nå kommer feministteorien på banen og erstatter 60-tallets individorienterte perspektiv med et strukturelt perspektiv der kvinneundertrykkende strukturer fokuseres og kritiseres. Den mannlige dominansen i kirken skal brytes, ikke minst i det offentlige rom. Spesifikt kvinnelige erfaringer blir viktige, samtidig som den generaliserende talen om kvinner og kvinnelig erfaringer også blir problematisert. Kravet om autentisitet er en viktig drivkraft, og JG ser en forbindelse mellom feministteologien og den rolle selvrefleksjon i spiller i moderniteten (s. 259). I debatten om homoseksualitet splittes kirken i et ekskluderende og et inkluderende parti, der det avgjørende er om seksualiteten kobles sammen med reproduksjon eller med allmenne samlivsverdier. Vi ser at partikulære grupper utfordrer modernitetens store og altomfattende fortellinger. Samtidig er det nettopp modernitetens vekt på likhet og individualitet som skaper grobunn for et mindre enhetlig og mer pluralistisk samfunn (s. 295).

Avhandlingen er velskrevet, og JG skal ha ros for en god evne til å fremstille kompliserte teorier på en klar og lettforståelig måte. Hun er velinformert og velorientert når det gjelder det materiale hun undersøker og de teorier hun legger til grunn. JG er også flink til å gjengi andres synspunkter. Hun har organisert sitt stoff på en god måte og analysert det slik at resultatene ikke blir trivielle, selv om de slett ikke alltid er oppsiktsvekkende. Vi står overfor en viktig og vellykket avhandling som mange bør kunne lese med utbytte. De innvendinger som kan rettes mot den avkrefter ikke dette.

Flere steder blir fremstillingen blir litt for pedagogisk og omstendelig. Det blir sammenfatninger av det som allerede er sammenfattet og gjentakelser der JG heller burde ha utdypet sine synspunkter. Særlig avslutningen burde vært mer utfordrende og poengtert, med et tilbakeblikk som også reflekterte over betydningen av de funn som er gjort. Avhandlingens styrke, de mange teoretiske perspektivene, blir også en svakhet. Det blir mange parametre å holde styr på og ikke lett å gå i dybden. JG mister ikke grepet på sitt materiale, men det blir vanskelig for henne å holde fast en linje gjennom alle analysene. Hun må veksle mellom de forskjellige perspektivene, slik at ett perspektiv blir fremhevet i én sammenheng, et annet i en annen.

JG vil være konstruktivist, men hva betyr nå det? Som metodisk posisjon er konstruktivismen uproblematisk, for så vidt som den ikke tar noen påstand om kjønn for gitt, men undersøker dem alle som uttrykk for en bestemt, kulturelt betinget forståelse. Men som ontologisk og erkjennelsesteoretisk posisjon er den langt mer omstridt. Denne diskusjonen går JG ikke inn på, og det er kanskje årsaken til at de lesbiske spiller en så underordnet rolle i fremstillingen? Det må i alle fall være lov å spørre på modernitetens premisser, om ikke bruken av den generaliserende kategorien «homoseksualitet» også er en form for kvinneundertrykking? Skrikende umoderne ville det derimot vært om jeg etterlyste begrepet kjærlighet som analytisk kategori. Det har åpenbart gått av moten, til og med i Lund. Kanskje kan dét også være verd en ettertanke?

Svein Aage Christoffersen

Dominique Janicaud, Jean-Luc Marion, Paul Ricœur et al.: *Phenomenology and the «Theological Turn»: The French Debate*. 245 sid. Fordham University Press, New York 2000. — Ilse N. Bulhof and Laurens ten Kate (eds.): *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology*. 444 sid. Fordham University Press, New York 2000.

Den inom filosofin allt oftare förekommande termen «den teologiska vändningen» har minst två denotationer. Dels refererar den till en specifik utveckling inom den franska fenomenologin under de senaste trettio åren, dels till den vidare trend som visar på ett allt flitigare intresse för teologiska teman hos en avsevärd rad av samtidens ledande filosofer. För den som vill förkovra sig i dessa olika aspekter av den teologiska vändningen föreligger sedan ett drygt år tillbaka två verk att rekommendera, utgivna i skriftserien «Perspectives in Continental Philosophy» vid Fordham University Press. Bakom skriftserien står John Caputo, som under senare år gjort sig ett namn inte minst genom de uppmärksammade Religion and Postmodernity konferenserna vid Villanova University.

Den första boken, *Phenomenology and the «Theological Turn»*, utgör en översättning av två mycket uppmärksammade verk i den franska fenomenologiska debatten, Dominique Janicauds *Le tournant Théologique de la phénoménologie française* från 1991 och antologin *Phénoménologie et théologie* från 1992, där bland andra Paul Ricœur och Jean-Luc Marion medverkar. Dessa två verk ger en mycket god bild av de olika positionerna i den aktuella debatten. Å ena sidan har vi Janicauds kritiska invändning mot fenomenologins successiva teologisering; en fenomenologi trogen sitt ursprungliga program kan inte tillåta sig sådana transcendenta eller metafysiska utsvävningar. Å andra sidan har vi den röst som just ifrågasätter huruvida det är konstruktivt att dogmatiskt följa det program Husserl en gång formulerade; varför låta Husserls mycket tidstypiska avgränsningar av fenomenologin — vilka utesluter många av de fenomen som är av intresse ur ett teologiskt perspektiv — få råda för evigt?

Den andra boken, *Flight of the Gods*, belyser den teologiska vändningen i den mer vida betydelsen. Till de platser där det filosofiska intresset för teologiska frågeställningar varit mycket tydligt under senare år hör Beneluxländerna. Inte minst har Amsterdamfilosofen Hent de Vries bidragit till denna utveckling genom sitt uppmärksammade verk *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* från 1999. Även *Flight of the Gods* utgör sålunda en översättning, i det här fallet av en rad artiklar författade av framstående filosofer från Belgien och Nederländerna. Det övergripande temat är den starka affinitet som föreligger mellan den typ av postmodern filosofi som idag söker sig tillbaka till teologiska rötter och den negativa teologiska traditionen. I båda fallen har vi ytterst att göra med en skepsis mot människans förmåga att på ett uttömmande sätt fånga verkligheten i sina begrepp. Men detta är inte vägs ände. När man erkänt den radikala ändlighet som är människans lott, då och först då kan man börja

utforska andra vägar — bortom begrepp och vetande — för att sträcka sig mot det transcendentia.

Jayne Svenungsson

Serene Jones: *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology; Cartographies of Grace. Guides to Theological Inquiry*. 214 sid. Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2000.

Feminism har blivit ett modeord i svensk offentlig debatt, dock sällan begrundad som den utmaning det faktiskt innebär att ifrågasätta rådande könsordning. Med kristen teologi förhåller det sig delvis annorlunda. Teologiska grundbegrepp som synd och förlösning hör inte till modetermerna på kultursidorna, utan betraktas snarare som museala föremål, värda respekt som sådana, men knappast värda en reell innehållsdiskussion. Konsekvensen blir att teologin går ett öde till möte ganska likartat det som drabbar feminismen. De utmaningar kristen teologi potentiellt innebär mot det mänskliga livet på jorden försjunkar i glömska.

Mot bakgrund av dessa iakttagelser framstår feministisk teologi som ett förvånande och i högsta grad inopportunt tidsfenomen, långt ifrån nidsbilden av en tidsbunden teologisk dagslända. Feministiska teologer stannar sällan vid en politiskt korrekt jämställdhetspolitik, utan borrar på djupet i teoretiskt svåra frågor om könade maktmekanismer i kyrka och samhälle. Men feministiska teologer lämnar inte heller de teologiska grundfrågorna därhän. Ständigt brottas de med frågor om hur kvinnor kan erfara befrielse och finna styrka genom kristna traditioner som samtidigt är genomsyrade av patriarkala antaganden och praktiker. Vari ligger de befriande stråken? Kan kristen teologi befrias från sitt patriarkala arv och hur ska det i så fall gå till?

Serene Jones bok om feministisk teori och kristen teologi är ett exempel på den typ av feministisk teologi jag talar om. Jones är biträdande professor i systematisk teologi vid Yale Divinity School och har specialiserat sig på Calvins teologi, exempelvis genom boken *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety* (1995). I *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* ger hon sig med feministisk teori som arbetsredskap i kast med centrala teman i kristen teologi, som rättfärdiggörelse och helgelse, synd och ecklesiologi.

Till det sympatiska med boken hör de pedagogiska greppen. Jones skriver inifrån en kristen tradition för att bidra till den kyrkliga självreflektionen och hon gör det med hjälp av erfarenheter från både akademi och kyrka. I de teoretiska utläggningarna tar hon hjälp av de diskussioner hon som lärare i feministisk teori fört med sina studenter. Hela framställningen är

också förankrad i «the Tuesday-night Women's group», som möts månatligen i den lokala kyrkans församlingshem. Gruppen är fiktiv, säger Jones inledningsvis, men det glömmes man i läsningen. De personer och de erfarenheter Jones berättar är trovärdigt framställda och även om inte varje person finns i verkligheten förefaller karaktärerna rotade i en mångårig erfarenhet av kyrkligt kvinnoarbete.

Jones tänker sig det mänskliga livet som ett drama, där det finns ett manuskript och en roll som människan är lämnad att själv gestalta. Dogmerna kan förstås som en uppsättning regianvisningar som både pekar ut möjligheter och sätter gränser för det kristna livets rollgestaltningar (s. 20). Med en annan metafor kan dogmerna ses som landskap, bebodda av troende. Feministisk teologi blir med samma metafor, som också undertiteln antyder, en ny karta över terrängen, som visar nya perspektiv och markerar nya stigar och på så sätt kan öppna nya generationers ögon för nådens verkan.

Jones väljer i detta syfte tre områden av feministisk teori, nämligen teorier om kön, teorier om förtryck och teorier om gemenskap. De tre valda områdena av feministisk teori relaterar Jones i sin tur till teologiska grundteman i de reformatoriska traditionerna. Teorierna om kön och om «kvinnors natur» relateras till teologiska teman om rättfärdiggörelse och helgelse. Teorierna om förtryck relateras till teologiska förståelser av synd. Teorierna om gemenskap relateras till ecklesiologiska teman.

Det metodiska greppet blir särskilt spännande i de inledande kapitlen. Sammanfattningen av den feministiska diskussionen om «kvinnan» ger en överblick över en lång och komplicerad polarisering mellan «essentialism» och «konstruktivism». För den som är obekant med debatten blir Jones sammanfattning en god introduktion. Det riktigt intressanta kommer emellertid när hon drar egna slutsatser, som hon sedan relaterar till en kristet reformatorisk förståelse av rättfärdiggörelse och helgelse.

Karaktéristiskt för Jones är ett ständigt val av en medelväg. I detta fall betyder det valet av en «strategisk essentialism», som förmår integrera behovet av ett tydligt kvinnligt subjekt som kan utmana rådande könsordning, med behovet av att erkänna mångfalden i kvinnors olika erfarenheter. Med denna grundsyn ger sig Jones in i den kristna antropologin och den reformatoriska diskussionen om människan och Gud. Hon ansluter sig till den feministiska kritik som allt sedan 70-talet pekat på att kvinnors problem snarare handlar om avsaknad av tydlig identitet, snarare än om högmod och självförhärligande.

Problemet med den reformatoriska teologin för kvinnor i vår tid, menar Jones, är att den inte tillhandahåller en historia som initierar kvinnor i nåden.

Detta beror på att teologin valt det manliga perspektivet i könsordningen och börjat med domen, för att därefter berätta om nåden, medan kvinnor skulle vara mer betjänta av det omvända perspektivet, som börjar med Guds önskan om ett jag förankrat i nåden (63).

Startpunkten för diskussionen om relationen mellan feministiska teorier om förtryck och kristna teologier om synd tar Jones i Iris Youngs schema över könsförtryckets fem ansikten; utnyttjandet, marginaliseringen, maktlösheten, den kulturella imperialismen och våldet. Hon väljer otroheten (unfaithfulness), som rotmetafor för diskussionen och menar att kvinnan i helgelsen blir insvept i nåden så att hennes jag förmår hänga samman, på trots mot förtryckets mekanismer. Genom rättfärdiggörelsen förnyas hon och rustas för ett liv i relation till andra. När trohet beskrivs i dessa termer, menar Jones, får vi en glimt av «what it might mean, in faith, to be both enveloped in a grace that defines and invited into relation by a grace that forgives». (112).

I diskussionen om gemenskap refererar Jones den feministiska debatten om liberalism och kommunitarism. Även här söker hon en «tredje väg» som håller samman behovet av en avgränsad gemenskap präglad av normativa principer med en öppenhet för självkritik och förvandling.

Sammantaget framstår Jones bok som ett exempel på hur feministiska teologer i växande utsträckning tar steget vidare från kritik till konstruktion och ger sig i närkamp med traditionens fäder för att skilja användbart från oanvändbart, förtryckande från befriande. Man behöver inte dela alla hennes slutsatser för att uppskatta de kreativa infallsvinklarna. Som kurslitteratur erbjuder boken en god introduktion till aktuellt feministiskt tänkande. Den utförliga notapparaten är en skatt för den som vill se närmare på något av de vida geografiska områden Jones försöker kartlägga på nytt.

De problem jag ser har att göra med en viss ludlighet i Jones tänkande om kartan och geografin och vad feministisk teologi egentligen gör anspråk på att förändra. Frågan är om Jones inte i högre grad skulle vara tvungen att ifrågasätta sina kunskapsteoretiska förutsättningar om hon erkände de maktkonflikter som är inbyggda i det feministiska projektet. Jones är tydlig med att hon gör sanningsanspråk, samtidigt som hon inte egentligen diskuterar vilken grund hon har för dessa anspråk. Hon menar exempelvis att kvinnor behöver utveckla kollektiva ideal av «emancipated subjectivity» (s. 60), som hjälper dem att bli synliga och tydliga i sina behov. Teologiskt beskriver hon detta som «eskatologisk essentialism» (s 54), vilket hon förklarar som en position i spänning mellan ett givet innehåll och en mänsklig begränsning i att nå kunskap om detta innehåll.

«Kvinnors fulla människoblivande» som kriterium för feministisk teologi är en gammal tanke, som dock rymmer en inbyggd fråga om vem och vad som avgör innehållet i detta människoblivande. Här ställs relationen mellan makt och kunskap på sin spets. Min fråga till Jones blir därför hur hon menar att en emancipatorisk (och därmed sann?) eskatologi, kan skiljas från en patriarkal. Jones skyndar i sin konstruktiva ansats förbi sådana komplikationer. Hon vinner annat på vägen, men diskussionen återstår likväl att föra, av Jones likaväl som av andra teologer som vill utveckla befriande teologier för vår tid.

*Ninna Edgardh Beckmann*

Raymond Plant: *Politics, Theology and History*. xv + 380 sid. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 2001.

Vilka, om några, är de sociala och politiska konsekvenserna av kristen livsåskådning (*belief*)? För vilka delar, om några, av det moderna samhället får kristen livsåskådning konsekvenser? Vilken roll, om någon, bör kristen livsåskådning spela i ett modernt liberalt samhälle?

Raymond Plants senaste bok är indelad i tre delar som ägnas åt att bearbeta de tre frågorna ovan. Ett underliggande tema är frågan om vilka moraliska fundament, om några, som de liberala samhällena i väst vilar på och vilken roll kristen livsåskådning kan ha för dessa. Frågan om universalitet och partikularitet i etiken är alltså en huvudfråga i boken. Plant brottas med problematiken i spänningsförhållandet mellan storheterna teologi och politik, som haft så stor betydelse för varandra i västerlandets historia, och frågar hur dessa kan förstås och göras komplementära också i dag.

I den första delen avhandlas frågan om möjligheten att, sammanhållet och stabilt, relatera kristen livsåskådning till problem som rör det sociala, politiska och ekonomiska livets organisation. Först går frågan till profeterna och profetismen. Ska profeterna förstås så att de enbart talar för en bestämd publik i ett bestämt sammanhang eller från en position bortom tid och rum? Plant visar att frågan är svårlöst, men påtalar att profetismen utgör en viktig länk mellan universalitet och partikularitet (kap. 2). Frågan ställs sedan till Augustinus, Calvin och Hegel. Gemensamt för dessa är, enligt Plant, att de på olika sätt försökt hantera relationen mellan politik och teologi utifrån en syn på historien som rationell. Plant menar dock att idéerna knappast är oberoende av en vald absolut utgångspunkt eller gudsuppfattning och en bestämd rationalitet som aldrig är oomtvistad (kap. 3). I nära

anslutning ställs frågan till några, främst Wolfhart Pannenberg, som menar att kristen livsåskådning måste hålla fast vid det universella i samtalet om Gud, samtidigt som Hegels anspråk på att tala från historiens slut avvisas. Även denna position problematiseras dock av Plant utifrån dess antagande om en yttersta grund (kap. 4). Plant ställer sedan frågan till de narrativa teologer, såsom Stanley Hauerwas och George Lindbeck, som givit upp frågan om det universella och menar att teologin bara kan och bör verka inom ramen för en bestämd kommunitet. Plant slår fast att denna kritik slår hårt mot försöket att formulera ett moraliskt fundament för det moderna samhället, liksom den starkt problematiserar alla försök att utsträcka den kristna livsåskådningen utanför den egna kyrkan (kap. 5). Det sista område som avsågs av Raymond Plant är traditionen kring naturlig lag och naturlig ordning. Om denna kunde vara en grund för politisk teologi skulle det finnas en nära koppling mellan det universella och partikulära, mellan teologi och politik. Problemet med naturlig lag är dock att den förutsätter en yttersta garant som kan anses giltig av alla, kristna såväl som icke-kristna, vilket är mycket omstritt. Inom ramen för en kristen kommunitet är teorin om naturlig lag användbar, men bristfällig om den har universella anspråk, enligt Plant (kap. 6).

I bokens andra del relateras några av svaren i del ett till några centrala problem i det moderna samhället. Konkreta ställningstaganden är det inte tal om. Den som söker efter ett svar på frågan om vårdnadsbidrag ska inte vända sig till Plant. Däremot diskuterar han marknadsekonomins förment neutrala status och öppnar upp för kritik av de i vissa stycken normativa marknadsmekanismerna (kap. 7). Vidare visar han på hur de som argumenterar för att samhället inte ska ingripa för att skapa rättvisa också bygger upp sina argument utifrån bestämda uppfattningar om vad det goda livet och samhället är. Detta öppnar upp för diskussion mellan olika normativa livsåskådningar, där kristen livsåskådning också kan spela en roll (kap. 8). Han diskuterar på samma sätt mänskliga rättigheter, mänsklig värdighet och ansvarets räckvidd. Plant visar att de grundläggande moraliska värden som vårt moderna samhälle utgår ifrån vilar på bräcklig grund vad gäller möjligheten att förankra dem fundamentalt (kap. 9). I relation till detta diskuterar han slutligen frågan om självet eller jagets förhållande till gemenskapen och visar här ytterligare på det moderna, liberala samhällets problem att utforma ett fundament att vila på. Det liberala samhällets fokusering på individens autonomi bygger på antaganden som irte tillräckligt problematiserar individens ömsesidiga beroende av andra (kap. 10).

Inte helt överraskande blir slutsatsen av de två första delarna av boken att det är svårt, om inte omöj-

ligt, att finna en gemensam grund för såväl politisk teologi som för de liberala samhällena i väst. Båda kan sägas vila på fundament som är svåra att artikulera och uppnå total enighet kring. Detta grundläggande problem är alltså gemensamt för politik och teologi. Raymond Plant framhåller att uppgiften på många sätt är tröstlös och svår, vilket mycket av modern politisk filosofi och teologi vittnar om, men han lyckas inte desto mindre i de två avslutande kapitlen av boken föra ett mycket intressant och viktigt samtal kring frågan om vilken roll politisk teologi kan ha för den allmänpolitiska debatten i samhället. Han ger dock slutligen upp inför uppgiften att finna en gemensam minimal moral som är bortom tid och rum. Istället ställer han sitt hopp till den öppna dialogen och det nyfikna sökandet efter gemensamheter. I detta sammanhang är det kanske inte så märkligt att sista ordet i boken går till Jürgen Habermas (kap. 11 & 12).

Boken lägger man ifrån sig utan att egentligen ha fått några svar alls och detta föranleder till en början ett visst missnöje. I det lite längre perspektivet ger dock boken med sin breda, gedigna och lärda genomgång av olika teologiska förhållningssätt till det politiska och av modernt politiskt tänkande, samt hur dessa traditioner kan relateras till varandra, en mycket god eftersmak.

Dan-Erik Andersson

*Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft. Vierte, völlig neu bearb. Aufl., herausgeg. von H. D. Betz, D. S. Browning, B. Janowski, E. Jüngel. Band 3: F–H. Lxix + 992 sid. J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 2000.*

Band tre av fjärde upplagan av *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* omfattar bokstäverna F, G och H. Som vanligt när det gäller RGG är det hög klass på artiklarna. Ofta är de författade av ledande företrädare inom just det område artikeln handlar om. Det finns några grundläggande artiklar i det här bandet om teologiska metodfrågor, «Fundamentaltheologie» och «Hermeneutik», som är skrivna av flera författare och som tillsammans ger en god och användbar överblick över såväl historia som det samtida forskningsläget. Om teologins innehåll kan man läsa utförligt t. ex. i artiklar om filioque, bön, ande, församling, tro, nåd, himmel och helvete. Samtidigt finns det gott om samtidsrelaterade artiklar om film, flyktingproblem, genderforskning, globalisering och homosexualitet.

En huvudartikel för ett teologiskt uppslagsverk måste emellertid vara artikeln om Gud. «Gott» i RGG omfattar drygt 43 spalter uppdelade på tio områden

och elva författare. Inom ramen för dessa spalter finner man förutom de mer traditionella aspekterna — religionsvetenskapliga, bibliska, filosofiska, systematiska-teologiska, praktiska — på gudsfrågan inom de tre monoteistiska religionerna med tonvikt på kristendomen, också ett avsnitt där Niels Henrik Gregersen diskuterar fem olika synsätt på Guds handling i dialog med naturvetenskap och ett där Markus Vinzent ger konsthistoriska aspekter på Gudsrepresentationer i bild. Till de 43 spalterna kommer dessutom ytterligare artiklar om Gud Anden, Gud Sonen och Gud Fadern samt gudsbilder i olika kulturer.

Det man skulle kunna invända mot RGG:s annars tämligen innehållsrika artiklar om Gud är att de ägnar lite utrymme åt den senaste tidens diskussion om Gud i postmodern teologi och filosofi. Det finns exempelvis en hel Jacques Derrida- och Emmanuel Lévinasinspirerad gudsdiskussion kring sådana filosofer/teologer som John Caputo och Richard Kearney, med flera, men därom upplyses vi inte. Denna framväxande rörelse har en hel del att säga om den traditionella förståelsen av Gud som aktualitet till förmån för ett gudsbegrepp som tänker Gud mer som «möjlighet». Den som letar efter information om denna diskussion eller någon annan gudsdiskussion aktuell just nu letar förgäves i RGG. Lévinas nämns endast i förbifarten i artikeln om teologi i Frankrike.

Förmodligen rör det sig om en avvägning om vad som skall tas med. Ett uppslagsverk som försöker vara hyperaktuellt i dag riskerar att vara inaktuellt i morgon. RGG har valt en slags mellanväg mellan det helt aktuella och det historiskt viktiga. Hur stor del som beror på en medveten avvägning från redaktörernas sida och hur stor del som skall tillskrivas ett begränsat perspektiv är svårt att säga.

I tredje bandet är det fem svenskar som figurerar i kortare artiklar: Birger Forell, Anton Fridrichsen, Gustaf II. Adolf, Dag Hammarskjöld och Ingemar Hedenius. Intressant att notera är att Hedenius föräras med en egen artikel, men att Axel Hägerström, vars påverkan på svensk teologi förmodligen var av minst lika stor betydelse som Hedenius, inte nämns. Inte heller omtalas Erik Gustaf Geijer som till skillnad från Hägerström haft en reception utanför Sveriges gränser (bl. a. Karl Marx läste Geijer). Den mer samtida teolog jag saknar i sammanhanget är Per Frostin som spelat en viktig roll för befrielseteologin både i Sverige och internationellt.

RGG i dess fjärde upplaga och tredje band uppfyller nästan alla de höga förväntningar man kan hysa. Samtidsaktualiteten är inte alltid hög, men man vänder sig sällan förgäves till RGG i centrala teologiska frågor.

Ola Sigurdson

Patricia A. Williams: *Doing without Adam and Eve. Sociobiology and Original Sin. 201 sid. samt ordlista och index. Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis 2001.*

Fortress Press serie *Theology and the Sciences* behandlar teologiska frågor i dialog med naturvetenskap. Bidragen är genomgående av hög kvalitet och vetenskapsfilosofen Patricia Williams bok är inget undantag. Den ger ett nytt perspektiv på den filosofiska och teologiska frågan om människans natur. Är vi onda eller goda och kan vi förändras? Teologin måste diskutera detta i termer av syndafall och arv synd, det onda och försoningen, men Williams visar att det idag också är nödvändigt att förhålla sig till biologiska teorier kring den natur som formats av det naturliga urvalet. Hennes metod är att tillämpa samma filosofiska kriterier för sanning på bibeltexter, dogmer och naturvetenskap. Naturvetenskapliga teorier måste dessutom vara i samstämmighet med andra teorier för att kunna göra anspråk på att vara sanna. Till dessa krav lägger Williams tesen att vi bör förhålla oss skeptiska till förklaringsmodeller som verkar vara kanaliserade, det vill säga följer fastlagda mönster som är kontextberoende.

Syftet med boken är att förena kristendom med naturvetenskap i frågor kring människans natur. Hon förespråkar en dialogmodell, som lämnar de centrala delarna inom varje disciplin intakta, men samtidigt tillåter mötet att få konsekvenser.

Boken har två delar som för fram ett negativt och ett positivt argument, «The Demise of Adam and Eve» och «The Unification of Science and Christianity». Den första delen (kap 1–6) behandlar bibeltexter (speciellt Gen 2–3), Augustinus tolkning av syndafallet samt tre dogmatiska framställningar kring arv synden. Williams visar hur kristendomen utformade en lära kring fallet och människans natur som inte finns i bibeltexterna och som därför kan ifrågasättas. En av förklaringarna för dessa tolkningar finner Williams i den kanaliserade reaktionen på Jesus katastrofala förmedling och död. Efter en diskussion kring sanningskriterierna pekar hon på att berättelsen kring Adam och Eva varken handlar om historiska personer eller kan tolkas som en myt kring mänsklighetens villkor (istället handlar den om den sociala situationen i en jordbrukskultur och om de biologiska villkoren för alla levande varelser). Williams slutsats blir att vi måste göra oss av med Adam och Eva.

I bokens andra del (kap 7–11) redogörs först för evolutionsteorin och sociobiologins förståelse av levande organismers beteende. I kapitel nio kommer Williams omformulering av begreppen frihet, synd, kärlek och straff, en tolkning bestämd av synen att vi inte är fördärvade utan flexibla och fria, benägna till kärlek, men också till sådant som nepotism och folk-

mord. För att förhålla oss fria till våra biologiska dispositioner att inskränka vår omsorg till de närmaste behöver vi vägledning genom etik och förebilder. I bokens avslutande kapitel diskuterar Williams ondskans problem och försoningstanken. Gud har skapat ett universum som utvecklas alltmer mot variation, struktur och autonomi. En följd av detta är utvecklingen av varelser med ett medvetande som kan uppfatta delar av själva villkoren för denna utveckling (död, smärta och dispositionen att kämpa för att bevara de egna genererna), som ondska. Men Gud har strukturerat tillvaron så att det sker mer gott än ont och så att ondskans konsekvenser kan mildras genom oss. En konsekvens av denna syn är att vi inte kan vara målet med hela Guds skapelse, men vi har, med en tanke från teologen Philip Hefner, en roll som «created co-creator» i den. Guds särskilda nåd i försoningen diskuteras avslutningsvis. Williams argumenterar för att försoningsläroarna har överbetonat offertanken och hon förespråkar istället tanken på Guds längtan efter gemenskap med oss, visad i Jesu liv och verk.

Williams beskrivning av biologin är föredömlig och särskilt lovvärt är hennes påpekande att sociobiologin, som andra beteendevetenskaper, är en statistisk vetenskap, som inte kan göra förutsägelser om individer (vi är inte styrda av själviska gener!). Hennes argumentation är tydlig och hon behandlar ett försummat fält inom ämnet naturvetenskap och religion. För en läsare som inte är bekant med den moderna biologins utmaningar blir boken också en nyttig påminnelse om hur vetenskapliga teorier har förändrat livstolkningens villkor. Men självklart är det oundvikligt i en bok som spänner över områden från kosmologi till teologi, att vissa delar får en begränsad behandling. När Williams diskuterar kärlek som uttryck för en omsorg motiverad av den andre, så identifierar hon kärleken med agapetanken och dess innehåll av självförnekelse. Detta ställs i kontrast mot den biologiska altruismen som kan sägas relatera till självbevarandet (jaget eller avkomman). Men förhållandet dem emellan är mer komplext än så och det råder numera ingen enighet kring tanken på att agape innebär ett krav på självförnekelse. I anslutning till detta skulle jag också önska en mer genomgående diskussion kring Williams vision av en förändrad mänsklig natur. Hon menar att denna förändring är nödvändig, eftersom vi är disponerade till att överbetona fördelarna för vår egen släkt och grupp. Förändringen möjliggör kärlek i agapes betydelse. Hur förhåller sig denna vision till teologiska argument för att vår natur istället måste nyskapas, eller till modern primatforskning, som påvisar kärleksfullt och moraliskt beteende hos djur? Hon anger vägar till förändring; förnuft, symboler, ömsesidighet, altruism,

erotisk kärlek och agape, men diskuterar inte deras inbördes förhållande eller sätter dessa i relation till teologin.

«Doing without Adam and Eve» innehåller något för varje läsare och den är ett värdefullt bidrag i en diskussion som kommer att bli allt viktigare i takt med att naturvetenskapliga teorier vinner inflytande över vår världsbild. Williams söker efter sanning i ett ämne som är historiskt belastat med argument som ger uttryck för hierarkiska strukturer, sexism och determinism. Hennes resultat är befriande men utmanande. Vi är inte onda, men inte så goda heller.

*Eva-Lotta Grantén*

*Brian Davies (red.): Philosophy of Religion. A Guide and Anthology. xxiv + 754 sid. Blackwell, Oxford 2000.*

Den analytiska religionsfilosofin, dvs. religionsfilosofi som bedrivs inom den analytiska filosofins domän, har under de senaste 25 åren fått ett enormt uppsving. Det finns flera orsaker till denna utveckling, som sammanhänger med den analytiska filosofins utveckling i stort. För från att under 1950- och 1960-talen mestadels ha varit en ganska sektliknande verksamhet för specialister, så har den analytiska filosofin idag en enorm bredd, både i val av perspektiv och grader av allmän läsbarhet.

Detta gäller också utvecklingen av den analytiska religionsfilosofin. En följd av den explosionsartade utvecklingen inom fältet är att det varje år kommer en eller flera antologier som ska försöka ge en bild av diskussionsläget och dess historiska bakrund, dvs. västerlandets filosofi. Emfasen i texturvalet, om den ligger på historik eller nutid, eller på kritik eller apologi, skiftar dock starkt. Denna emfas tycks av allt att döma ofta bero på redaktörens egen filosofiska hemvist.

Brian Davies nyligen utgivna antologi är härvidlag inget undantag. Davies är nog mest känd som författaren till en av de bättre introduktionerna till religionsfilosofi av ett tämligen traditionellt, analytiskt-filosofiskt snitt. Han är professor vid Fordham University, New York och är tillika dominikansk munk. Davies konfessionstillhörighet präglar avgjort hans antologi: Jag har nog aldrig sett ett urval med religionsfilosofiska texter som består av så opropor­tionerligt många texter av Thomas av Aquino. Antologin är mycket traditionellt upplagd, och äldre textmaterial dominerar starkt. Nyare texter, liksom de äldre, är i regel författade av de mest kända religionsfilosoferna, till exempel storheter som Alvin Plantinga och Richard Swinburne.

Texterna är indelade i sju huvudavdelningar. Dessa är rubricerade efter standarddebatterna i traditionell analytisk religionsfilosofi, dvs. vad religiös tro är, hur religiös diskurs ska tolkas, vad Guds egenskaper möjligen kan vara, teodicéproblemet, frågan om etikens förhållande till religionen, och om de finns argument för Guds existens samt för ett liv efter döden. Varje avdelning inleds med en kort introduktion av Davies, samt avslutas med diskussionsfrågor och litteraturlista rörande ämnet under lupp. De i särklass mest omfattande avdelningarna är argumenten för Guds existens och analysen av de egenskaper som av den kristna traditionen tillskrivs Gud. Dessa två avdelningar utgör sammanlagt nära 400 sidor av totalt cirka 700 för hela antologin.

Trots att antologin av ovan anförda orsaker är starkt traditionell och att upplägget har en klar kristet doktrinär slagsida, så måste man ändå säga att den ger en god och förhållandevis lättillgänglig bild av ämnets bärande stomme i internationell diskussion. Men den är att se ett slags partsinlaga. Nyare perspektiv är inte representerade i någon högre utsträckning. Idag centrala diskussioner, som till exempel den heta debatten om hur religiös mångfald kan tolkas, finns överhuvudtaget inte med.

*Johan Modée*

*Elena Namli: Etikens ontologiska grund. En analys av Lev Karsavins personalism. 318 sid. Norma, Skellefteå 2000.*

Detta är en avhandling i etik, framlagd vid Teologiska institutionen i Uppsala. Elena Namli är till börden ryska men har skrivit sin avhandling på svenska (utmärkt sådan). Med valet av ämne vill hon göra den inte bara i Sverige utan i Västerlandet överhuvud tämligen okände etikern och filosofen Lev Karsavin känd som representant för en rysk mellangeneration. Syftet är att bana väg för en dialog.

Karsavin är inte lättillgänglig, men Namli har dock lyckats ge den ontologiska grunden för hans tänkande dess rättmätiga plats. I hela den ortodoxa världen — det gäller både grekisk och rysk teologi — är det för övrigt naturligt att anlägga ett ontologiskt helhetsperspektiv. Här kan jag bara ta upp en begränsad del av Karsavins tänkande.

Lev Platonovitj Karsavin föddes 1882 och hörde till dem, som skapade den stora renässansen för rysk filosofi och teologi från 1800-talets slut och decennier framöver. Han verkade först i S:t Petersburg och bodde senare i Tyskland och Frankrike. 1927 fick Karsavin ett erbjudande att flytta till Litauen och blev professor vid Kaunas universitet. Under denna tid utkom

den för Namli centrala boken *Om personligheten* samt verket *Poem om döden*. 1940 ockuperades Litauen av Sovjetunionen, och till slut hamnade Karsavin i ett läger för handikappade (han led av tuberkulos). Han dog där 1952 och begravs på lägre kyrkogård.

Den bästa vägen att nalkas Karsavins filosofi är kanske via hans bedömning av Immanuel Kant. Karsavin tolkar Kant utifrån sin egen syn på «Allenhetsfilosofin», som var hans huvudaspekt, till vilken han fogade en *kristen personalism*. Han är dock ingalunda ensam om sin allenhetsfilosofi. Den var gemensam för en rad av de mest betydelsefulla ryska skolorna. Gemensamt för allenhetsfilosofin är att se *människan* i hennes relation till Gud och hela den skapade världen på ett ontologiskt sätt. Mot Kant invänder så Karsavin, att denne inte ser hela skapelsen som teofani. Därför blev Kant aldrig riktigt accepterad i den ryska (kristna) skolan.

Karsavin hade dock stark dragning till också andra filosofer i den västliga traditionen. Så studerade han ingående Giordano Bruno, vilken han kombinerar med Nicolaus Cusanus. Båda dessa framstår som «allenhetsfilosofer» genom att de sammanför två teser: 1) världen är Gud och 2) världen är en skapelse ur intet. Den motsägelse, som ligger i dessa två teser, är själva sanningen. Cusanus leder oss till principen: *coincidentia oppositorum*. Mot Bruno har Karsavin flera invändningar: han sammanblandar det absoluta med det transfinita. Han finner dock hos honom en etisk drift och säger sammanfattande om honom: «För honom är världen allenhetsfilosofi».

Viktigare än dessa var dock Henri Bergson, som han också studerat ingående. Men inte heller denne har, enligt Karsavin, nått helt fram till «allenhetsfilosofin» men är på rätt spår. En väsentlig punkt är att Bergson hävdar att «nuflödet» innebär att man aldrig kan gå tillbaka till det förflutna. Karsavins uppfattning är en annan: vi måste kunna förflytta oss till det ögonblick i vår förflutna tillvaro, då vi träffat ett betydelsefullt avgörande. I det konkreta nuflödet kan människan försätta sig i handlingens ögonblick i förfluten tid.

Till en del kan man nu söka sammanfatta Karsavins syn. Namli har själv betecknat den som «kristen personalism inom ramen för allenhetsfilosofin». Beteckningen är riktig. De tre grundelementen finns med och är likvärdiga: kristen (här bygger Karsavin på relativ fast ortodox grund), personalism (trots att ontologin har överhanden) samt allenhetsfilosofin (utan någon inskränkning).

«Alltidslighet» och de enskilda momenten är lika mycket värda. Ändå finns det en hierarki: de enskilda momenten uppgår i ett högre moment, familjen, det sociala och kollektivet (t. ex. nationen). Här

kommer också teologin in. Högst i hierarkin står Tre-enigheten, grunden för och nyckeln till hela det personliga varat. Här skiljer sig dock Karsavin från den ortodoxa tron. Han ger inte hypostasens verklighet i Kristus dess rättmätiga plats. Det är inte Kristus som försonar genom sin kamp mot det onda, utan vi som med Kristus som förebild, i lidande, medverkar till den allt större enheten med Triniteten som hierarkins sammanfattning.

I likhet med platonismen hävdar Karsavin, att *det onda inte finns*. Denna uppfattning delar han också med andra ryssar. Men samtidigt går Karsavin inte så långt, utan anser att det onda är *det godas ofullständiga yttring*. Och inte mer. Det onda övervinnes genom att jag offerar mig själv.

Här efterlyser Namli ett *kriterium* med vars hjälp man kan skilja mellan det goda, det sköna, det sanna etc. Karsavins spekulation om självutgivelse och självhävdelse uppfattar hon som ett försök att finna ett filosofiskt språk för att beskriva dialektiska relationer mellan individ och kollektiv. «Kollektivism» och «individualism» är enligt Karsavin två sidor av samma sak.

Karsavins etik handlar, säger Namli i en av sina sammanfattningar, om den moral, som alltid är situationerad i (personlighetens) tid, en tid vars karaktär är ytterst viktig för förståelsen av moralen. Karsavin utgår från sin «intuitionism», samtidigt som han radikalt avvisar den post-kantianska etikens tolkning av normativiteten. Skillnaden ligger på det ontologiska planet. Enligt Karsavins antagande måste det finnas något i varat, som gör att vi erfar moralen på ett visst sätt.

När Elena Namli tagit sig an uppgiften att analysera den filosofi som Lev Karsavin företräder, vill hon därmed också öppna för en transkontextuell dialog mellan olika filosofiska skolor. Förmågan att vara med i en «monopolfri dialog» framstår som «ett kriterium på en rimlig moralfilosofisk konstruktion». Namli har lyft fram en tänkare, som utmanar också vår egen teologiska och filosofiska reflexion. Är denna «vid» nog för en gränsöverskridande dialog.

Lars Thunberg



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